

## 25 June 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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## B. GS 2 Related

### Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

#### 1. In contact with stakeholders on Afghanistan, says India

##### Context:

The government of India has said that it was **in contact with various stakeholders in and around Afghanistan.**

##### Background:

- The **National Security Adviser** addressed a meeting of his counterparts of the **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)** in Dushanbe.
- The confirmation came in the backdrop of this meeting.

##### Details:

- India has confirmed that it has adopted a **broad-based approach to discuss the future of Afghanistan** and the region around with various parties involved.
- Analysts say the use of the word “stakeholders” gives it an air of ambiguity which could include the Taliban.
- There have been **questions about whether India has established contact with the Taliban.**
  - The Taliban belong to the dominant Pashtun group which accounts for about 50% of Afghanistan’s population.
  - The Sunni rebel **Taliban** group has been fighting the internationally recognized **Ashraf Ghani** government.
- India’s confirmation that it is in contact with various stakeholders in and around Afghanistan **could refer to India being in touch with the Taliban as well as Uzbek, Tajik and Hazara origin leaders within Afghanistan.**
- The move marks a significant shift from **India’s long-standing position of not engaging with the Afghan Taliban.**
- It comes at a time when key world powers are veering round to the position that the **Taliban will play some part in any future dispensation in Kabul.**
- Also, earlier the external affairs minister had virtually participated in the inaugural ceremony for the **intra-Afghan talks in Doha.**
  - The intra-Afghan talks marked the **first time that Indian officials were present in the same venue as a Taliban delegation.**
- However, some analysts are also of the view that **given that Pakistan is the main backer of the Taliban** and that Islamabad has tried to ensure a Taliban takeover in Kabul to keep Indian influence to a minimum, it is unlikely that New Delhi would have had contacts with Taliban leaders.

##### Afghan Peace Process:

- The Afghanistan Peace Process is a **series of compromises and negotiations** bid to end the **ongoing war in Afghanistan** that first began in 2001.
- As a neighbour, **India is concerned about peace and security in Afghanistan and the region.**
- **India has made massive investments** in the war-ravaged country.
- **Rising terror attacks in Afghanistan** is a worry for India as well because such a phenomenon will have a **spillover impact across Afghan boundaries.**

Read more: [Afghanistan Peace Process: Developments and Overview](#)

## 2. Ethiopian army confirms Tigray airstrike

### Context:

Ethiopia's military confirmed it was responsible for a deadly airstrike on a busy marketplace in the Tigray region.

Read on the conflict between the Ethiopian government and Tigray rebels, covered in [17<sup>th</sup> November 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis.](#)

## Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

### 1. PM backs delimitation exercise, grassroots democracy in J&K

### Context:

In the **first outreach meeting between the Union government and mainstream political leaders of Jammu and Kashmir**, the Prime Minister met 14 leaders of eight mainstream political parties in the Union Territory.

### Details:

- At the meeting, the PM reiterated the **government's commitment to fostering grassroots democracy in Jammu and Kashmir.**
  - In the backdrop of the establishment of a **three-tier Panchayati Raj System** with the election and **constitution of Block and District Development Councils**, there were detailed deliberations on how to give further fillip to the democratic process in Jammu & Kashmir.
- Cooperation was sought in completing the **delimitation exercise for Assembly seats in the Union Territory.**
  - Elections will be held after the delimitation process, and an Assembly constituted once again.
  - Delimitation will be conducted in the rest of the country in 2026.

### Issues raised by the parties:

- Every party spoke about the **restoration of statehood in Jammu and Kashmir.**
- The contentious issue of **special status to Jammu and Kashmir, which was removed by the abrogation of Article 370, was also raised.**
  - Most of them did not demand its restoration since the **matter is in the Supreme Court.**

- Suggestions were made to include a special provision to **secure jobs and land for locals under Article 371**.

## C. GS 3 Related

### Category: SECURITY

#### 1. NCB arrests key accused in Pak.-based drug ring

##### Context:

The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) arrested an alleged key member of a Pakistan-based drug trafficking syndicate.

##### Issue:

- The international community has long regarded **Pakistan as a transit point for narcotics trafficking**.
- **Pakistan is geographically vulnerable to drug trafficking as it shares a long porous border with Afghanistan.**
  - Afghanistan is the world's largest producer of illicit opium.
  - Also, Cannabis is produced in large quantities in the sub-region. Most of the cannabis trafficked in the region also originates from Afghanistan.
- The free flow of drugs has abetted terrorism in Pakistan as this generates quick money without paperwork.
- The **Line of Control (LoC)** which is around 700 kilometres in length witnesses **constant infiltration** by terrorists and Pakistan army regulars.
- India-Pakistan border in the **Kutch sector** which has **not been demarcated** also facilitates intrusion and infiltration.

##### Note:

- Due to its **proximity to the Golden Crescent and Golden Triangle**, India faces the menace of drug trafficking.
  - Golden Crescent and Golden Triangle are the major opium production regions in the world.
- Drugs arrive in India from Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, Thailand, Myanmar, Bhutan **through its shared borders with these countries**.

### Category: ECONOMY

#### 1. NHAI seeks Odisha govt.'s nod for coastal highway

##### Context:

The **National Highway Authority of India** has sought the Odisha government's consent for an ambitious coastal highway project.

##### Details:

- The 348 Km long coastal highway project was first proposed six years ago under Bharatmala Pariyojana.
- It will connect **Odisha's Tangi with West Bengal's Digha**.
- **It is a greenfield project.**

**Issue:**

- The major hurdle has been **environmental concerns**.
- The road was initially planned through **ecologically sensitive Chilika, Balukhanda Konark Wildlife Sanctuary, Bhitarkanika Sanctuary Area** and some of the important **Olive Ridley turtle nesting sites**.
- After environmentalists raised an alarm, **Chilika was struck off from the plan**.
- Some portions of the highway project will require **approval under coastal regulation zone guidelines**.

Read more on [Bharatmala Pariyojana – Features, Challenges, Project Costs & Benefits](#)

## D. GS 4 Related

*Nothing here for today!!!*

## E. Editorials

### Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

#### 1. Staging a comeback, re-energising India's Africa policy

**Context:**

- The article analyzes the **India-Africa bilateral relations** and carries out a critical review of India's Africa foreign policy implementation.

**India-Africa relations:**

- The relations between India and Africa have long **historical roots**. For many centuries, the peoples of the two parts of the world have interacted at the levels of economics, politics, and socio-cultural practices.
- After independence, India rapidly built up political ties with the newly independent countries and freedom movements in sub-Saharan Africa as well as with the countries in northern Africa. In the 1950s, 60s and 70s, India enjoyed strong political and brotherly bonds with many of the African nations.
  - India was one of the key organizers of the **Asian-African Conference, held in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955**.
- India's ties with Africa have been stepped up in the last two decades both bilaterally and with the regional economic communities, initially with the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and Team-9 and continentally through the **African Union (AU)**.

- A structured engagement with Africa took shape in 2008 with the First **India Africa Forum Summit (IAFS-I)**. The Third India Africa Forum Summit (IAFS-III) of 2015 was a landmark event with delegations representing all African countries.
- **The 'Delhi Declaration 2015-Partners in Progress: Towards a Dynamic and Transformative Development Agenda'** was adopted at the conclusion of IAFS-III and so was the **India-Africa Framework for Strategic Cooperation**.
- The current administration too has designed a forward-looking strategy to deepen relations with African countries and has backed it with the requisite political will in expanding the **multi-faceted engagement with African nations**.

#### Significance of Africa for India:

- Africa is considered a foreign policy priority by India for the following reasons.

#### **Economic aspects:**

- Africa today is definitely a 'happening continent'.
- **Africa is home to over half a dozen of the fastest-growing countries of this decade** which has led to some referring to **Africa as the future growth pole of the world**. Africa has witnessed rapid expansion in sectors like tourism, banking, telecommunications, manufacturing and agriculture.
- Most of Africa is experiencing moderate to healthy economic growth rates, which is fuelling the growth of its middle class and demand for more goods and services. **Africa's growing middle class**, already expected to be bigger than India's, continues to boost consumption, construction and private investment.
- Thus Africa will be a **high priority area for India in the economic and commercial sphere**.
- Indian exports to Africa of manufactured products like medicines, automobiles, two-wheelers, iron and steel products, plastics, machinery and engineering processes, etc. as well as refined petroleum products are quite substantial and growing. Africa provides an alternate destination to such manufactures from India whose exports to traditional destinations in Europe and North America are on the decline, and helps to **prop up the 'Make in India' campaign**.
- India is among Africa's largest trading partners. **India's exposure in terms of investments in Africa is also considerable**. Thus bilateral trade and investment compel India to pay attention to the African market.
  - The bilateral trade is valued at \$55.9 billion in 2020-21.
  - India's top five markets today are South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt, Kenya and Togo. The countries from which India imports the most are South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt, Angola and Guinea.
  - India's top three exports to Africa are mineral fuels and oils (processed petroleum products), pharmaceutical products and vehicles.
  - Mineral fuels and oils (essentially crude oil) and pearls, precious or semi-precious stones are the top two imports accounting for over 77% of our imports from Africa.

#### **Geographical aspects:**



- India and Africa share a millennial old connection given the geographic proximity of India and Africa. In that sense, **Africa is a neighbour and both share large coastal areas along the strategic Indian Ocean region.**

#### **Substantial Diaspora population:**

- A significant number of people of Indian origin have, over two centuries of outward migration, made large parts of southern and eastern Africa their home.
- Members of the Indian diaspora reside in around 46 countries of Africa. **Indians in Africa account for 12.37% of the total diaspora in India over time.**
- The large populations of Indians within Africa could be the cause of the political support Africa is seeing from India now.

#### **Source of critical commodities:**

- Africa supplies a vast basket of goods to India which is dominated by commodities, particularly **crude oil, gas, pulses and lentils, leather, gold** and other metals, all of which India lacks in sufficient quantities.
- **The diverse sources in Africa** provide some protection against the vulnerability of depending on just one or two regions for their supply.

#### **Geopolitical aspects:**

- African countries tend to take a unified stand on such multilateral issues after discussions and deliberations at the African Union consisting of 55 members. **Africa's support would be inevitable for India's policy agenda** of UN reforms and India's bid for a permanent [UN Security Council](#) seat.
  - India and Africa have often held common positions in global platforms and worked together to guard the interests of other developing countries.
- A robust relationship with Africa constitutes an important part of **India's South-South Cooperation platform.**

#### **China factor:**

- Trade between China and Africa has been increasing at an exponential pace and China is currently Africa's largest trading partner.
- The increasing economic heft of China has resulted in China enjoying critical political support among the political classes of Africa.
- China enjoys a significant military presence in the region.
  - In July 2017, China set up its first overseas **military base in Djibouti** as a logistics facility for peacekeeping missions on the continent.
- There have been increasing **international concerns over the significant political, economic, and military roles that China is playing in the African continent**, more so for India given the increasing Chinese presence on the coastline of the strategic Indian Ocean.
  - Various security analysts have described the increasing presence of China as part of its **"String of Pearls" geopolitical and military strategy in the Indian Ocean.**

- Thus cultivating good relations with African nations is an inevitable need for India to counter the Chinese plans in the Indian Ocean region.

### Significance of India for Africa:

#### Developmental aid:

- Through its **Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme** India has been providing technical assistance through human resource development to other developing countries, with African countries being the greatest beneficiaries of it.
- India has been aiding development in Africa by contributing to African institutions through **training and capacity-enhancing assistance**.
  - India has invested substantial amounts to establish educational institutions and training programs in several African countries.
  - In 2006, India launched its flagship aid initiative in Africa by constructing the \$125 million **Pan-African e-Network**, the continent's largest tele-education and telemedicine initiative. The network links 47 African countries with schools and hospitals in India through satellite and fibre-optic links.
- The values that steer India's development cooperation — **demand-driven, conditionality free and based on the principle of partnership among equals** — are appreciated in Africa.

#### Aiding economic growth:

- India has been a major aid contributor to economic development in the African continent through **grants and concessional lines of credit**.

#### Medical aid:

- The availability of **Indian-manufactured drugs** has also been essential in the fight against the **HIV** and AIDS pandemic in Africa.
- Even as the COVID-19 era began in March 2020, New Delhi took new initiatives to assist Africa through prompt despatch of medicines and later vaccines.

#### Security aspects:

- In security matters, India has also assisted African countries to fight against terrorism through the **provision of arms and training of military personnel**.
- India also participates in **UN-led peacekeeping missions across Africa**.

### Concerns:

- Following are some of the concerns with regard to India-Africa relations.

#### Bilateral economic relations:

- **India-Africa trade is on a decline**. According to the Confederation of Indian Industry, bilateral trade in 2020-21 has fallen by \$10.8 billion compared to 2019-20, and \$15.5 billion compared to the peak year of 2014-15.



- The composition of the India-Africa trade has not changed much over the two decades thus indicating the **failure to diversify the bilateral trade relations**.
- **India's investments in Africa too have witnessed a decline** from \$3.2 billion in 2019-20 to \$2.9 billion in 2020-21. Total investments from India into Africa over the last 25 years account for only about one-third of China's investment in Africa.

#### **Global competition for Africa and India found lagging:**

- Africa has experienced a sharpened international competition, known as **'the third scramble'**, in the first two decades of the 21st century.
- A dozen nations from the Americas, Europe and Asia especially the United States, the European Union (EU), China, Japan and India have striven to assist Africa in resolving the continent's political and social challenges and, in turn, to benefit from Africa's markets, minerals, hydrocarbons and oceanic resources, and thereby to expand their geopolitical influence.
- Africans have been deeply affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and remain ill-equipped to tackle it.
- While China has successfully used the pandemic to expand its footprint by increasing the outflow of its vaccines, unfortunately, **India's 'vaccination diplomacy' has suffered** during the devastating second wave of the pandemic in India. India which has traditionally ensured the flow of aid to Africa has been found wanting as it has been caught up in coping with the novel coronavirus pandemic.

#### **India's changed foreign policy priorities:**

- **Geopolitical tensions in Asia** and the imperative to consolidate its position in the Indo-Pacific region have compelled India to concentrate on its ties with the United Kingdom, the EU, and the Quad powers, particularly the U.S. Consequently, the **attention being paid to Africa is on the wane**.

#### **Way forward:**

- For mutual benefit, Africa and India should **remain engaged at all levels – political and economic**.
- The future engagement must recognize and acknowledge the historical and current context of relations between India and Africa and the effect of cross-cutting multilateral issues between the two as envisaged in the Delhi Declaration.
- India should focus on according Africa an important place in its diplomacy and economic engagement.
  - The third India-Africa Forum Summit was held in 2015. The **pending fourth summit of the India-Africa Forum Summit should be held as soon as possible**.
  - **Fresh financial resources for grants and concessional loans** to Africa must be allocated.
  - India should seek to improve the economic relations with emphasis on developing and deepening **collaborations in health, space and digital technologies**.
- To overcome the China challenge in Africa, **increased cooperation between India and its international allies seems inevitable**.
  - Just like the recent **India-EU Summit where Africa has been identified as a region for a partnership-based approach**, similarly, India should propose a robust partnership plan for Africa in the Quad deliberations.

## Category: ECONOMY

### 1. The rural economy can jump-start a revival

#### Context:

- The second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic impact

#### Details:

- As against the official claims of an ongoing economic recovery, the **article argues that the economic recovery post the second wave of the pandemic would be difficult** based on the following arguments.

#### **Flaws in official estimates:**

- Though the GDP growth has been better than estimated in the previous fiscal year, this is attributable to the **methodological issue of underestimation of the economic distress in the unorganised sector observed in the official estimates** like Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth from the National Statistical Office (NSO).
- The article also warns that given that the economy has already suffered last year, any economic recovery will largely be driven by the **base effect** rather than a real recovery.
  - The base effect refers to the effect that the choice of a basis of comparison or reference can have on the result of the comparison between data points.

#### **Continued trend of economic slowdown:**

- What makes economic recovery challenging is that the current decline **follows three years of a sharp decline in GDP** even before the novel coronavirus pandemic hit India. This could be **indicative of the structural issues** that could be plaguing the Indian economy.
- The pandemic has only worsened an already fragile economic situation. The sharp decline in GDP was partly a result of the trend of a slowdown in economic activity since 2016-17.

#### **Impact on incomes:**

- The economic impact of the pandemic has **resulted in lost jobs and incomes for the households** which have **depressed demand** in the economy which is so very important for economic recovery.

#### **Insufficient response from the government:**

- The less than **adequate response from the Government in terms of increased fiscal support** will undermine economic recovery.
- The article argues that the government interventions to help small and medium enterprises as well as the large unorganised sector which bore the brunt of the restrictions in economic activity are insufficient.

#### **Impact on rural areas:**

- As compared to the first wave of the pandemic, when the agriculture sector remained a key driver of the Indian economy, **in the second wave the rural areas have been severely impacted both in terms of health and livelihoods.**
- The loss of earning members to the pandemic and the expenditure of large sums on private healthcare could have pushed a **large proportion of the rural population into indebtedness from non-institutional sources.** Thus the rural areas are under considerable economic distress.

**Inflation threat:**

- **The rising inflation threatens to reduce the purchasing power** of the rural economy already struggling with declining incomes and job losses.
- The increased input costs of raw materials into agricultural activities could **adversely impact the profit margins in the sector** which will, in turn, have an impact on the incomes of the rural population.

**Way forward:**

- The rural economy including the **agricultural economy continues to remain crucial for any strategy of economic revival.**
- The government will have to focus on the following measures.
  - **Speed up vaccination** coverage in rural areas.
  - Provide **greater fiscal support** to rural areas in terms of **direct income support** to revive demand in the economy and also through **subsidies.**

## F. Prelims Facts

*Nothing here for today!!!*

## G. Tidbits

### 1. 'Pandemic hikes narcotics sale over web'

**What's in News?**

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's World Drug Report 2021, the lockdown restrictions during COVID-19 may have accelerated drug trafficking using the Internet.

- The **trend of using the dark web is on the rise**, with a **fourfold increase in annual sales** from the beginning of the 2010s to more recent years.
- In Asia, **China and India are the most frequently mentioned countries linked to the shipment of drugs sold on the 19 major darknet markets** analysed over 2011-2020.
- Major drug markets on the dark web are worth some \$315 million annually.
- Access to drugs has also become simpler than ever with online sales.
- Contactless transactions, such as through the mail, are also on the rise, a trend possibly accelerated by the pandemic.

**United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime:**

- It was formed in 1997 as the Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention by combining two UN offices.
- It was renamed to its current name in 2002.
- UNODC's mission is to contribute to global peace and security, human rights and development by **making the world safer from drugs, crime, corruption and terrorism.**
- UNODC also works to improve **crime prevention and to assist with criminal justice reform in a number of countries.**

Read more on [UNODC – United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.](#)

## 2. Russia, U.K. spar over Black Sea incident

### What's in News?

Russia has accused Britain of spreading lies over a warship confrontation in the Black Sea.

### Details:

- Russia has warned London that it would respond resolutely to any further provocative actions by the British Navy off the coast of Russia-annexed Crimea.
- Russia believes that a Britain warship breached its territorial waters (which Britain and most of the world say belong to Ukraine).
- Britain in its defence said that it **does not recognise the Russian annexation of Crimea.**
- Also, under **international law of the sea, innocent passage permits a vessel to pass through another state's territorial waters so long as this does not affect its security.**

### Note:

- Russia uses the **Black Sea to project its power in the Mediterranean.**
- The Black Sea has for centuries been a **flashpoint between Russia and its competitors such as Turkey, France, U.S. and the U.K.**
- **Russia seized and annexed the Crimea peninsula from Ukraine in 2014** and considers areas around its coast to be Russian waters.
- **Western countries deem Crimea to be part of Ukraine** and reject Russia's claim to the seas around it.

## H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Which of the following statements is/are correct about Mediterranean Climate?

1. They are confined to the western portion of continental masses, between 30 to 45 degree north and south of the equator.
2. The basic cause of this type of climate is the shifting of winds belts.
3. The Mediterranean lands receive most of their precipitation in Summer.

Options:

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. 1 and 3 only
- d. 1, 2 and 3

**Answer: a**

**Explanation:**

- Mediterranean climatic conditions are seen in and around the Mediterranean Sea and the western portion of continental masses, roughly between 30 to 45 degree north and south of the equator.
- The climate receives its name from the Mediterranean Basin, where this climate type is most common.
- The basic cause of this type of climate is the shifting of winds belts.
- Mediterranean Climate is characterized by dry summers and mild, wet winters.

**Q2. Which of the following countries border Black Sea?**

- 1. Bulgaria
- 2. Ukraine
- 3. Russia
- 4. Kazakhstan
- 5. Turkmenistan

**Options:**

- a. 1, 2 and 3 only
- b. 1, 2, 3 and 4 only
- c. 2, 3, 4 and 5 only
- d. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

**Answer: a**

**Explanation:**

- Ukraine, Russia, Bulgaria, Romania, Georgia and Turkey border the Black Sea.





Q3. Consider the following pairs:

**Region in News**

- Tokara Islands
- Tigray region
- Dzukou Valley

**Country**

- Philippines
- Nigeria
- Afghanistan

Which of the above pairs is/are correct?

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 2 only
- c. 2 and 3 only
- d. None

**Answer: d**

**Explanation:**



**Region in News****Country**

Tokara Islands

Japan

Tigray region

Ethiopia

Dzukou Valley

India (located at the border of Manipur and Nagaland)

**Q4. Consider the following statements about Kabir:**

1. Kabir was the most famous disciple of Ramananda.
2. He was brought up by a Muslim couple who were weavers by profession.
3. He criticized all forms of worship of idols.

**Which of the above statements is/are correct?**

- a. 1 only
- b. 1 and 2 only
- c. 3 only
- d. 1, 2 and 3

**Answer: d****Explanation:**

- Kabir Das was a 15th-century Indian mystic poet and saint, whose writings influenced Hinduism's Bhakti movement.
- Kabir was the most famous disciple of Ramananda.
- He was brought up by a Muslim couple who were weavers by profession.
- He criticized all forms of worship of idols.
- He aided the common people to shed age old superstitions and attain salvation through Bhakti or pure devotion.

**Q5. With reference to the 'Gram Nyayalaya Act', which of the following statements is/are correct?**

1. As per the Act, Gram Nyayalayas can hear only civil cases and not criminal cases.
2. The Act allows local social activists as mediators/reconciliators.

**Select the correct answer using the code given below.**

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

**Answer: b**

**Explanation:**

- Gram Nyayalayas Act, 2008 is an Act of Parliament of India enacted for establishment of Gram Nyayalayas or village courts for speedy and easy access to justice system in the rural areas of India.
- Gram Nyayalayas can hear both criminal and civil cases.
- The Gram Nyayalayas are presided over by a Nyayadhikari, who will have the same power, enjoy same salary and benefits of a Judicial Magistrate of First Class. Such Nyayadhikari are to be appointed by the State Government in consultation with the respective High Court.
- Gram Nyayalayas allow for conciliation of the dispute and settlement of the same in the first instance.
- The Act allows local social activists as mediators/reconciliators.

## I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. India's Africa policy needs to be re-energized. Discuss. (250 words; 15 marks) [GS-2, International Relations].
2. Examine the contribution of the rural sector to the Indian economy. In the midst of the pandemic, how can the rural economy jump-start an overall revival in the economy? (250 words; 15 marks) [GS-3, Economy].