

04 July 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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B. GS 2 Related

Category: HEALTH

1. China goes malaria-free with multi-pronged health strategy

Context:

- In the context of the World Health Organization (WHO) declaring China “malaria-free”, the article analyses China’s health strategy vis-à-vis malaria and the lessons it can offer India’s own efforts against malaria.
 - The “malaria-free” certification from the WHO requires four consecutive years of reporting no local cases.
 - China is the first country in the Western Pacific region to be declared malaria-free in more than 30 years.

Background:

Malaria:

- **Malaria is a mosquito-borne disease caused by a parasite.**
 - It is typically transmitted through the bite of an infected **Anopheles mosquito**. Infected mosquitoes carry the **Plasmodium parasite (Plasmodium vivax)** When this mosquito bites a human, the parasite is released into the bloodstream.
- Malaria is typically found in tropical and subtropical climates where the parasites can live. It is **most prevalent in Africa, followed by Asia and Latin America**. It also affects people in the Middle East and Europe albeit to a much smaller degree.
- The number of malaria cases worldwide in 2019 was around 229 million, according to the World Malaria Report in 2020, with 409,000 lives lost to the mosquito-borne disease.
- The 2020 report said the majority of cases were reported in Africa, while **India and Southeast Asia recorded a significant drop**. Cases in India fell from approximately 20 million to 6 million, according to the report.

For more information on the World Malaria report of 2020 refer to:

[PIB Summary and Analysis of 02nd Dec 2020](#)

Details:

- China followed a **multi-pronged health strategy** that was able to entirely eliminate indigenous cases of malaria that once a major public health problem in China with millions of cases reported annually.
- Some of the major aspects of this strategy involved the following:

Mosquito control:

- **Targeting mosquito breeding grounds and using of insecticide spraying** have been a major aspects of China’s mosquito control efforts.

Robust surveillance:

- The WHO has attributed a lot of credit to **China's '1-3-7 strategy'** for its success in tackling malaria.
 - "1-3-7 strategy" refers to a one-day deadline to report a malaria diagnosis, confirming a case and determining the spread by the third day, and measures taken to stop the spread by the seventh day, along with continued surveillance in high-risk areas.
- China has also **strengthened its laboratory networks** with quality laboratory equipment, which has let it detect cases of malaria in a fast and effective manner.
- This approach has allowed China to **detect cases early and prevent its spread**.

Robust public health system:

- Strong political commitment to strengthen the national health systems has been a major factor of strength in the fight against the disease.
- China's public health system offering **free of charge diagnosis and treatment of malaria** has played a major role in bringing down cases drastically.

Anti-malarial medicines:

- **The discovery of artemisinin under "the 523 project"** and its use in artemisinin-based combination therapies has provided one of the most effective antimalarial drugs.

Human resources:

- With assistance from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria starting in 2003, China **stepped up training, staffing** to deal with the handling of the malaria disease. This has ensured the required human resources for the fight against Malaria.

Other interventions:

- China has been using **insecticide-treated nets** widely and distributed them free of cost to people living in vulnerable areas.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. OPEC+ seeks consensus on oil output

Context:

- OPEC+ deliberations on oil output policy.

Background:

- Responding to oil demand destruction caused by the COVID crisis, OPEC+ had agreed in 2020 to cut output with plans to phase out the curbs by the end of April 2022.

OPEC+:

- The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and its allies as a grouping are known as OPEC+.

- It is a **grouping of oil-producing nations, made up of the OPEC members and 10 other non-OPEC members** including Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Brunei, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Mexico, Oman, Russia, South Sudan and Sudan.

Details:

- While top producers like Saudi Arabia and Russia have been pushing to increase output, The United Arab Emirates has been blocking some aspects of the proposals.
- This has resulted in a failure to reach a deal on oil output policy.

Concerns:

- Without a deal, the OPEC+ could **limit supply even as rising oil prices are slowing economic recovery from the novel coronavirus crisis**.
 - The restrained production will not help bring down oil prices that have soared to 2-1/2 year highs up 40% compared to last year.
- The rise in oil prices is also **contributing to global inflation** which could dampen demand in the economy, thus slowing the economic recovery process.

For more related information refer to:

[Oil Price War & Implications](#)

C. GS 3 Related

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. New source of gravitational waves detected

Context:

- Scientists have for the first time detected gravitational waves produced by the **collision of a neutron star and a black hole**.

Background:

Neutron star:

- A neutron star is the **collapsed core of a massive supergiant star**. They result from the supernova explosion of a massive star, combined with gravitational collapse.
- Neutron star, are thought to be **composed primarily of neutrons**.
- Apart for black holes, neutron stars are the **smallest and densest currently known class of stellar objects**. Despite their small diameters—about 12.5 miles (20 kilometers)—neutron stars boast nearly 1.5 times the mass of our sun, and are thus incredibly dense.
- Once formed, they no longer actively generate heat, and cool over time; however, they may still evolve further through collision or accretion.

Details:

- The bursts of energy from the collisions were discovered when detectors on Earth spotted the mergers' **gravitational waves, cosmic energetic ripples soaring through space and time** as first theorized by Albert Einstein.
 - The reverberations from the happening was picked up from the **LIGO network of gravitational wave detectors**.
- While astronomers had seen gravitational waves from two black holes colliding with each other and two neutron stars colliding with each other, this is the first time they saw one of each crashing together.

Significance:

- The study of the neutron star-black hole systems would help answer many questions about star formation and calculating the expansion rate of our universe.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. What lies ahead for Afghanistan after U.S. exit?

Context:

- As part of the U.S.'s plan to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan by September 11, **the U.S. troops departed from the Bagram Air Base** that had helped coordinate its long drawn war in Afghanistan. This effectively **marks the end of their military operations in the country**.

Background:

The U.S.-Taliban deal:

- In a bid to end its war in Afghanistan, the **US reached a deal with the Taliban in February 2020**.
- The deal dealt with four aspects of the conflict — violence, foreign troops, intra-Afghan peace talks and the use of Afghan soil by terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State.
- While the **Taliban promised to reduce violence, join intra-Afghan peace talks and cut all ties with foreign terrorist groups**, the U.S. pledged to withdraw all its troops.

For more information on this deal refer to the following article:

[UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis of 02nd Mar 2020](#)

Concerns:

Stalemate between Taliban and Afghan government:

- The envisaged **intra Afghan peace talks haven't made any breakthrough** and the peace process has reached a stalemate.

Continuing violence:

- The Taliban though reduced hostilities against foreign troops, but have continued to **attack Afghan forces**.
- Afghanistan has also witnessed a series of **targeted killings** of journalists, activists and other civil society figures over the past many months.

For related information refer to:

[UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis of 23rd June 2021](#)

Increasing Taliban influence:

- Ever since the U.S. troops began pulling out on May 1, the **Taliban have made rapid territorial advances**. The number of districts under its control has increased.
- The American withdrawal has turned the balance of power in the battleground in favour of the Taliban.
- As per the American intelligence community has concluded, Kabul could fall within six months to the Taliban.

India's stakes:

- The article welcomes **India's changed stance in engaging with the Taliban** given the most likely probability of Taliban playing a critical role in Afghanistan in the coming years.
- The three areas of interest in engaging with the Taliban include:
 - Protecting **India's investments** in Afghanistan
 - Preventing a future Taliban regime from being **used by Pakistan to suppress India's strategic reach in Afghanistan**
 - To thwart the **threat of Pakistan-backed anti-India terrorist groups** getting support from the Taliban.

2. EU's 'Green Passport'

Context:

- **EU Digital COVID Certificate (EUDCC) or the "Green Passport"** system proposed by the European Union.

For related information refer to:

[UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis of 01st July 2021](#)

Details:

- The EUDCC, or the Green Passport which would basically be a digital QR code, **would attest a person as being vaccinated against COVID-19**. It also attests if the person has had a recent negative test and/or is considered immune having previously contracted the illness and having recovered.

- This EUDCC has been recognised by **all 27 EU countries, as well as Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Iceland and Norway for intra-EU travel.**
 - Although not members of the EU, countries like Norway, Iceland, Switzerland and Liechtenstein are also part of what is referred to as the Schengen zone.
 - **Schengen Area** signifies a zone where 26 European countries, abolished their internal borders, for the free and unrestricted movement of people, in harmony with common rules for controlling external borders.

Concerns:

- The recognized list of vaccines **excludes Indian-made Covishield and Covaxin**, among others. This could adversely impact the prospects of Indian travellers to Europe.
- The move to implement the EUDCC has also given rise to concerns that these vaccine passports would be tantamount to **discriminating against travellers from developing countries with limited access to vaccines.**
 - Covishield has been distributed to 95 countries, mainly low- and middle-income countries of the global South.

India's response:

- The Indian government has warned that **India would initiate reciprocal harsh quarantine measures against countries** that discriminated against Indians.
- India has suggested that **all Indian-approved vaccines should be given recognition worldwide**, and has recommended certifying of such passengers via the Co-WIN website.

WHO's stand:

- In the recently published '**Policy considerations for implementing a risk-based approach to travel in the context of COVID-19**', the WHO categorically states that vaccine passports should not be made mandatory for travel and should be optional.

Recent developments:

- Following India's criticism, some nations have agreed to accept Indian vaccines also.

For more information on this topic refer to:

UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis of 02nd July 2021

Category: ECONOMY

1. Can reducing cess levies ease high fuel prices?

Context:

- Ratings agency ICRA recently suggested cut cess levies on retail prices of petrol and diesel to ease price pressure on the fuels.

Background:

Historic high of retail prices of fuels:

- Though the base price of fuels have decreased over the years, **the share of taxes on the retail price has increased at a very high pace**. This has resulted in a scenario of historic high of retail prices of petrol and diesel.
- Experts attribute the current high fuel prices to higher **cesses being imposed by the Centre** and an **increase in Value Added Tax (VAT) rates by more than three-fourths of the State governments**.

Details:

- The ICRA anticipates an increase in the mobility of the population and economic recovery after the easing of curbs. It forecasts the consumption of petrol and diesel to grow in the financial year 2021-22. This it argues will help ensure sufficient revenues for the government pegged at about ₹3.6 lakh crore, about ₹40,000 crore more than in the last financial year.
- The forgo of this additional revenue itself could help cut up to ₹4.50 per litre for petrol and diesel each.

Significance:

Cool inflation level:

- Lower fuel prices will likely help cool inflation levels.
- Retail inflation based on the consumer price index (CPI) has been persistently higher than the RBI's medium-term target of 4%. **For May 2021, the provisional inflation reading was 6.3%**, owing to persistent price pressures in the transport and communication category, which includes the automotive fuels of petrol and diesel.

Allow RBI balance growth and inflation levels in the economy:

- The lower fuel prices will help ease retail inflation and thus allow the RBI to maintain a growth-supportive stance. It will allow the RBI to **retain its accommodative monetary stance** that includes **keeping benchmark borrowing interest rates substantially low**. This would incentivize demand for credit to both consume and invest in new business activity, thus spurring economic growth.

Counter arguments:

- A reduction in fuel cesses could **adversely affect the government's ability to pay interest and principal on oil bonds** issued to public oil marketing companies (OMCs) as compensation for subsidies.

Oil Bonds:

- Oil bonds are special types of bonds that were issued to oil marketing companies (OMCs) like Indian Oil, Hindustan Petroleum and Bharat Petroleum. These companies received oil bonds from the government in place of cash subsidies.
 - OMCs were earlier receiving cash subsidies, as earlier these companies were not free to fix their own prices for petrol (before 2010) and diesel (before 2015). This meant that OMCs were often selling fuel far below the international market price, often at significant expenditure to themselves.

- The Oil bonds are interest-bearing, having a fixed coupon rate and paid on a half-yearly basis.

F. Prelims Facts

1. Why did Tirath Singh Rawat have to resign?

- As per the Constitution, even a non MLA can be made the Chief Minister, but such a member must become a member of the assembly before six months in order to continue in the post.
- The **Representation of the People Act, 1951**, mandates that a **bypoll for any vacancy should be held within six months** of that vacancy arising, **provided the remainder of the term is not less than one year** or the EC and the Centre do not certify that holding the bypoll in that time frame is difficult.

Context:

- Resignation of Uttarakhand Chief Minister Tirath Singh Rawat.

2. Goldilocks Supernova

- Supernovae are usually categorized into two main types: **thermonuclear and iron-core collapse**. A thermonuclear supernova is the explosion of a white dwarf star after it gains matter in a binary star system. An iron core-collapse supernova occurs when a massive star—one more than about ten times the sun's mass—runs out of nuclear fuel, and its iron core collapses, creating a black hole or neutron star.
- Between these two main types of supernovae are **electron-capture supernovae**. When the star is not light enough to avoid collapsing under its own core mass, and not heavy enough to prolong its life and die in some other way later, it forms an electron-capture supernova.
 - These stars stop fusion when their cores are made of oxygen, neon and magnesium; they aren't massive enough to create iron.

Context:

- Scientists have discovered the first convincing evidence for **electron-capture supernova- a new type of stellar explosion**.
 - Electron-capture supernovae have been theorized for four decades, but their real-world examples remained elusive.

G. Tidbits

1. Beggars should also work for country: Bombay High Court

- The Bombay High Court while hearing a **public interest litigation (PIL) petition** seeking directions to the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation to **provide nutritious meals, potable water along with sanitation for homeless persons, beggars and poor people in the city**, has stated that homeless people and beggars should also work as everything cannot be provided to them by the state.
- While disposing of the petition, the court cautioned that granting all the prayers sought in the petition would be akin to incentivizing people not to work.

2. Pipeline rupture causes fire in Gulf of Mexico

- A rupture in an undersea gas pipeline of Mexico's state owned oil company in the offshore **Ku-Maloob-Zaap field in Gulf of Mexico** has sent flames boiling to the surface in the Gulf waters.
- Though the company has claimed that the gas leak has been brought under control, it remains unclear how much **environmental damage** the gas leak and oceanic fireball had caused.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statement with respect to Asian Elephant Specialist Group (AsESG):

1. AsESG is a part of the Species Survival Commission (SSC) of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).
2. It acts as the Red List Authority for the Asian Elephant.
3. It operates and manages Elephant Trade Information System.

Options:

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

- The Asian Elephant Specialist Group (AsESG) is a part of the Species Survival Commission (SSC) of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). It acts as the Red List Authority for the Asian Elephant.
- Elephant Trade Information System (ETIS) is managed and coordinated by TRAFFIC in consultation with the MIKE and ETIS Technical Advisory Group (TAG) and in collaboration with the CITES Secretariat.

Q2. Consumer Price Index can be used for which of the following?

1. Identifying periods of inflation or deflation
2. Inspecting price stability
3. Tool for inflation targeting
4. Understanding the real value of salaries, wages, and pensions

Options:

- a. 1 only

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- The Consumer Price Index (CPI) is a measure that examines the weighted average of prices of a basket of consumer goods and services, such as transportation, food, and medical care. It is calculated by taking price changes for each item in the predetermined basket of goods and averaging them.
- It can be useful for the following purposes:
 - Identifying periods of inflation or deflation
 - Inspecting price stability
 - Tool for inflation targeting (Indian uses CPI as a benchmark for inflation targeting)
 - Understanding the real value of salaries, wages, and pensions

Q3. Which of the given statements with respect to Supernova is/are correct?

1. Massive stars, towards the end of their lifetimes form supernovas.
2. Supernova can happen in systems where two stars orbit one another and at least one of those stars is an Earth-sized white dwarf.
3. Study of supernova can help measure distances in space.

Options:

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- A supernova is a powerful and luminous stellar explosion. This transient astronomical event occurs during the last evolutionary stages of a massive star or when a white dwarf is triggered into runaway nuclear fusion.
- Supernova can happen in systems where two stars orbit one another and at least one of those stars is an Earth-sized white dwarf.
- The study of supernova is beneficial in better understanding of our universe as they can help measure distances in space.

Q4. Which of the given statements with respect to Jagannath Temple in Puri is/are INCORRECT?

1. The temple famous for its annual Rath Yatra is dedicated to Lord Vishnu.
2. Located in coastal Odisha, it is also called the Black Pagoda.
3. It is one of the Char Dham.

Options:

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

- The Jagannath temple in Puri is famous for its annual Rath Yatra, dedicated to Jagannath, a form of Lord Vishnu.
- It is the Sun Temple at Konark, Odisha which is referred to as the Black Pagoda.
- Puri Jagannath Mandir is one four great 'Char Dham' pilgrimage sites

Q5. With reference to 'Changpa' community of India, consider the following statement:

1. They live mainly in the State of Uttarakhand.
2. They rear the Pashmina goats that yield a fine wool.
3. They are kept in the category of Scheduled Tribes.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- The Changpa or Champa are a semi-nomadic tribe found mainly in the Changtang region of Ladakh.
- The Changpas rear the highly pedigreed and prized Changra goats that yield the rare Pashmina (Cashmere) fibre. The pashmina fibre is the finest fibre of all goat hair.

- As of 2001, the Changpa were classified as a Scheduled Tribe under the Indian government's reservation program of affirmative action.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. What do you understand by Green Passport? Is this initiative discriminatory? Critically Examine. (10 Marks, 150 Words)[GS-2, International Relations]
2. The American withdrawal from Afghanistan has turned the balance of power in the battle ground in favour of the Taliban. Substantiate. (10 Marks, 150 Words)[GS-2, International Relations]

