

11 July 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Category: ECONOMY

1. Govt. infra spending dropped sharply in Q1

Context:

- **Projects Today's survey on project investments in India** for the first quarter of the 2021-22 fiscal.

Details:

- The **second wave of COVID-19 pandemic** has had a devastating impact on the Indian economy. The investments have been hard hit by the pandemic.

Public investment:

- There has been a steep decline in new investment projects from government agencies.
- The public infrastructure investments have almost halved compared with the January-March quarter, with critical sectors like irrigation suffering huge declines of about 96%.
- **Overall new investments from the Union and State governments fell 41.6% as compared to Q4 of 2020-21.**

Private investment:

- Private investments have done relatively better with a **mere 1.7% decline in the Q1 of 2021-22.**
- This could be attributed to the strong performance of the manufacturing sector which posted an impressive 45% increase in investments compared to previous quarter.

Foreign investment:

- **Foreign investment projects slipped 95.4% from the previous quarter**, with just 17 such projects.

Concerns:

Affect post pandemic economic revival:

- **Overall fresh investments have decreased by 18% in the first quarter of 2021-22**, compared with the previous quarter. This does **not augur well for government's stated push for capital spending to revive the pandemic ravaged economy.**
- The previous quarter had seen both private and public sector investments rebounding strongly for the first time since the pandemic hit India. The new dip in investments does not augur well for economic revival.

Result in infrastructural deficit:

- Public investments in services, including water and sewage projects have fallen significantly. Investments in sectors like electricity, roadways and railways has also been tepid.
- This will **hamper the infrastructural availability in the Indian economy** and it would have an adverse impact in the longer run and also **affect the quality of life for its citizens**.

Skewed pattern:

- Despite a relatively better performance from the private sector in terms of investment, a large chunk of these private investments are related to just four massive projects.
- There has also been marked skewedness in region wise investments with states like Gujarat and Maharashtra bagging a substantial proportion of all new investments. This **does not augur well for balanced regional or sectoral growth**.

Recommendations:

- The government agencies should try and **front load their capital expenditure plans**.
- The government should ensure **timely execution of projects listed in the National Infrastructure Pipeline**.
- These measures will not only revive the economy but also instil confidence in private companies to expedite their own new investment plans.

2. Services panel charts roadmap to double exports in five years

Context:

- The **Services Export Promotion Council (SEPC)** is preparing a roadmap to **achieve doubling of services exports in the next five years**.

Details:

- The SEPC has urged the government to include incentives for services exports under the upcoming new foreign trade policy.
- The council has tagged areas such as **tourism and hospitality, logistics and medical value travel as 'champion' sectors** meriting additional focus.

Conclusion:

- **Services sector accounts for a vital part of the Indian economy** and with proper support and policies it can play a **significant role in sustainable high economic growth of India**.

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Sikkim blossoms: State home to 27% of India's flowering plants

Context:

- Publication of the **Flora of Sikkim – A Pictorial Guide** by the Botanical Survey of India (BSI).

Background:

Sikkim's ecology:

- Sikkim is a part of the **Kanchenjunga biosphere landscape**.
- Sikkim is home to **different altitudinal ecosystems**, with the elevation varying from 300 metres to above 8500 metres above mean sea level.

Details:

- The publication lists **532 species of wild orchids (which is more than 40% of all orchid species found in India)**, 36 species of rhododendron and 20 species of oak, and more than 30 species of high-value medicinal plants, among other species.
- Despite being the smallest state in India with less than 1% of India's landmass, **Sikkim is home to 27% of all flowering plants found in India**.
- This presence of a **diverse set of ecosystems varying from the subalpine to the temperate to the tropical** is one of the reasons for high diversity of flora in Sikkim.

Concerns:

- **Developmental activities** such as the widening of roads to Nathu La and the hydel power plants in north Sikkim could have a negative impact on the rich biodiversity of Sikkim.

Additional information:

- The **Sikkim Forest Tree (Amity & Reverence) Rules, 2017** allows any person to associate with trees standing on his or her private land or on any public land by entering into a **Mith/Mit or Mitini relationship**.
- This is an acknowledgement of the unique cultural practice prevalent in Sikkim and is of significance given the global environmental conservational efforts underway.

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. Cuba develops the world's first conjugate vaccine for COVID-19

Context:

- **Cuba's indigenously produced vaccines-** Soberana 2 and Abdala have registered strong efficacy against the SARS-CoV-2.

Details:

- Both Soberana 2 and Abdala are **subunit vaccines**.
 - In Abdala the spike protein of the coronavirus is combined with a chemically manufactured adjuvant, whereas in **Soberana 2, the spike protein is chemically linked to the tetanus toxoid, making it a conjugate vaccine**.

Subunit vaccines:

- Rather than injecting a whole pathogen to trigger an immune response, subunit vaccines (sometimes called acellular vaccines) contain purified pieces of it, which have been specially selected for their ability to stimulate immune cells.

- In the case of these subunit vaccines, a part of the virus forms the antigen and is hitched on to another construct.

Advantages:

- Well established technology
- Relatively stable
- Suitable for people with compromised immune systems
- Because of the absence of live components, there is no risk of the vaccine triggering diseases and hence the subunit vaccines are considered very safe.

Disadvantages:

- Adjuvants and booster shots may be required.
- Determining the best antigen combination takes time
- Relatively complex to manufacture

Conjugate vaccines:

- A conjugate vaccine is a type of vaccine which combines a weak antigen with a strong antigen as a carrier so that the immune system has a stronger immunological response to the weak antigen.
 - The most common conjugate vaccines are those used for Haemophilus influenza type b and the pneumococcal bacteria.

Advantages:

- Major advantages of the conjugate vaccines are their ability to elicit immunological memory and to reduce asymptomatic carriage of the bacteria, resulting in marked herd immunity.
- Also conjugate vaccines have a very good safety record and have been associated with very few, serious adverse events following immunization (AEFIs) after more than 20 years of use.
- They give rise to improved immune memory and thus offer longer lasting protection.
- They help offer protection to infants and toddlers,

Significance of the Cuban vaccines:

- The design and manufacturing of the conjugate vaccines allows them to be **stored in regular refrigeration settings of 2–8 degree Celsius**
- The methodology involved is also one of the **most economical approaches to vaccine production.**

Challenges:

- Soberana and Abdala being **three-shot vaccines**, there could be “logistic” concerns with the vaccine administration.
- The subunit vaccines have been **generally used against bacteria and not viruses.**

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. What makes the UAPA so stringent?

Context:

- The death of Father Stan Swamy in judicial custody, has brought into focus **the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA)**.

Background:

Origin of the UAPA:

- In the light of the increasing calls for secession in the mid-1960s, **the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, was passed in 1967**.
- It was envisaged as a stringent law to provide for effective prevention of unlawful activities of individuals and associations.
 - The Act provided for declaring an association or a body of individuals “unlawful” if they indulged in any activity that included acts and words, spoken or written, or any sign or representation, that supported any claim to bring about “the cession of a part of the territory of India”, or its “secession”, or which questions or disclaims the country’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Amendments over the years:

- Subsequent to the repealing of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), 2002, **the UAPA was expanded to include aspects under terrorism through the 2004 amendments**.
- The 2012 amendments sought to bring the UAPA in line with various requirements of the Financial Action Task Force indulged in combating money laundering and terrorism financing.
- The 2013 amendment extended the ban on unlawful organisations to five years from the previous two year period
- In 2019, the Act was amended to empower the government to designate individuals as terrorists.
- Subsequent to the above amendments the **scope of the law has expanded over the years**. It now covers aspects such as punishment for terrorist acts and activities, acts threatening the country’s security, including its economic security and provisions to prevent the use of funds for terrorist purposes, including money laundering. It is now the **main Anti terrorism law in India**.

For detailed information on UAPA refer to the following article:

[Unlawful Activities \(Prevention\) Amendment Act](#)

Concerns:

Stringency of the law:

- The stringency of the law has raised **concerns over the right to life and liberty of the accused under the UAPA.**
 - The UAPA provisions differ considerably from the regular criminal laws. The UAPA modifies the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) to make it **more stringent**. It provides provisions for longer remand periods as well as judicial custody.
 - The law also makes it more difficult to obtain bail. Under Section 43D(5) of the Act, bail cannot be granted to a suspect if the court is of the opinion that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the charges are prima facie true. This provision is liable for misuse and could **render it almost impossible for anyone to obtain bail until the completion of the trial.**

Against individual rights:

- The provisions of the act give the state authority vague **powers to detain and arrest individuals** who it believes to be indulged in terrorist activities. This gives state more powers vis-a-vis **individual liberty guaranteed under Article 21 of the constitution.**

Increase in use:

- There has been a steep **increase in the use of the UAPA law.**
 - According to the data provided by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), there has been over 72% increase in the number of persons arrested under the UAPA (Unlawful Activities [Prevention] Act) in 2019 compared to the year 2015.

For related information refer to:

[UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis of 10th Mar 2021](#)

Potential for misuse:

- There has been **very low conviction rate** with respect to cases under UAPA. This is probably indicative of the misuse of the act.
 - According to data presented by the Union Home Ministry only 2.2 % of cases registered under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act between the years 2016 and 2019 ended in convictions by the court.

For related information refer to:

[UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis Of 16th June 2021](#)

2. Cauvery and the row over Mokedatu project

Context:

- Differences between the states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu over the proposed **Mokedatu project.**

Background:

Mokedatu project:

- The Karnataka state government has proposed the Mokedatu dam project in the **Cauvery Basin.**

- Originally proposed as a **hydropower project**, the revised Mokedatu dam project apart from **catering to the drinking water needs of the Bengaluru Metropolitan City and surrounding areas** will also **help regulate the flow to Tamil Nadu** on a monthly basis, as stipulated by the Tribunal and the Supreme Court.
 - The Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal, and the subsequent Supreme Court Judgement have made allocations of Cauvery waters to all the riparian States — Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, apart from the Union Territory of Puducherry. It has also stipulated “tentative monthly deliveries during a normal year” to be made available by Karnataka to Tamil Nadu.

For information related to the Mokedatu dam project refer to:

[UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis of 20th June 2021](#)

- Tamil Nadu has challenged this move by Karnataka in the Supreme Court and impressed upon the union government not to grant Centre's clearance for the project.
 - Tamil Nadu's argument is that the building of the proposed project as close as 4 kms to the border will **allow the Karnataka state to impound and divert flows from “uncontrolled catchments” to itself** and this it claims goes against the order of the water disputes tribunal verdict which had already considered this component of uncontrolled flows by making allocation of the river waters.

Recommendations:

- The Cauvery river water sharing has become an emotive and political issue over the years and any future interventions must be guided by pragmatism.
 - A possible solution to this new development would be to get **both states to agree to the idea of a joint execution, operation and maintenance of the project** or through a third party's participation.
 - The project if it is agreed to must be implemented after **addressing relevant environmental concerns**.

F. Prelims Facts

1. Life on Enceladus?

Enceladus:

- **Enceladus is one of Saturn's moons.**
- Enceladus is mostly covered by fresh, clean ice, making it one of the most reflective bodies of the Solar System.
- The **Cassini–Huygens space-research mission**, commonly called Cassini, involving a collaboration among NASA, the European Space Agency, and the Italian Space Agency involves a space probe to study the planet Saturn and its system, including its rings and natural satellites.

Context:

- The study of giant water plumes erupting from Enceladus have opened up the possibility of microbial life on Enceladus.

2. The 2020 Millennium Technology Prize goes to...

- **The 2020 Millennium Technology Prize**, has been awarded to Shankar Balasubramanian and David Klenerman, for their development of **revolutionary DNA sequencing techniques**.
 - The Millennium Prize is awarded by the Republic of Finland, along with top Finnish academic institutions and industries.
- Their “Next Generation Sequencing” (NGS) method could **enable faster and cheaper methods to genome sequencing**.

G. Tidbits

1. Tipping point

- As of 2016, **total emission of plastics into water bodies was between 9 and 23 million metric tonnes per year**. This is expected to double by 2025.
- Because plastic is such a persistent material, the **ecological, economic and eco-toxicological effects of plastic pollution** are all long-term. These include:
 - **Physical impact on marine life:** entanglement, ingestion, suffocation
 - **Chemical impact:** the **buildup of persistent organic pollutants** like PCBs and DDT
 - **Economic impact:** damage to fisheries, shipping, and tourism. Thus plastic pollution threatens food safety and quality and human health.

2. Interpol seeks joint fight against ransomware

- According to Chainalysis there has been a **311% increase in ransomware activities over the previous year** and is believed to have generated \$350 million in 2020

3. Are COVID-19 curbs telling on immune systems?

Context:

- Amid the gradual easing of lockdowns, some countries are reporting a **higher number of respiratory infections**, including unseasonal diseases such as influenza and the respiratory syncytial virus (RSV).

Immunity debt:

- Experts have attributed this spike in respiratory infections to what is being called the “immunity debt” brought on by **non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs)** put in place to reduce the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus.
 - The NPIs included measures such as social distancing, use of masks, and hand hygiene.
- **The constant exposure to infectious agents boosts the immune response in the human body.** In the absence of this, there is a possibility that there could be **unseasonal outbreaks with greater severity than usual**. This is a major concern for infant population in particular.

- Disruptions to the seasonal transmission patterns of these diseases may have consequences for the timing and severity of future outbreaks.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. The largest component of natural gas is methane
2. Sour gas is natural gas containing Hydrogen Sulfide (H₂S)
3. Sweet gas is the natural gas that contains very little or no hydrogen sulfide.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Natural gas is a combustible mixture of hydrocarbon gases. While natural gas is formed primarily of methane, it can also include ethane, propane, butane and pentane.
- Natural gas that contains larger amounts of hydrogen sulphide is termed sour gas. Before using it must be "sweetened" by removal of Hydrogen sulphide.

Q2. Which of the following Fundamental rights are available only to citizens and not to foreigners?

1. Article 15
2. Article 16
3. Article 19
4. Article 28
5. Article 30

Options:

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Under the Indian constitution, certain fundamental rights are available only to the citizens, namely: Right against discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth (Article 15); right to equality of opportunity in matter of public employment (Article 16); freedom of speech and expression, assembly, association, movement, residence and profession (Article 19); cultural and educational rights (Article 29 and 30); and right to vote and become members of the union and state legislatures.
- Equality before the law or equal protection of the laws within the territory of India (Article 14) and protection of life or personal liberty (Article 21) are applicable to non-citizens as well. The right to freedom of religion (article 25-28) is available to both citizens and foreigners except enemy aliens.

Q3. Which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. Article 23 protects an individual not only against the State but also against private persons
2. India has signed the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (UNTOC)

Options:

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both
- d. None

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Article 23 of the Indian Constitution explicitly prohibits and criminalises human trafficking and forced labour. Apart from protecting an individual against the State it also protects against private persons
- India signed the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (UNTOC) and its three Protocols in 2002
 - Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children;
 - Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air; and
 - Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing and Trafficking in firearms. Their Parts and Components and Ammunition.

Q4. Consider the following statements:

1. It is a country located at the intersection of Eastern Europe and Western Asia.
2. It is a part of the Caucasus region, bounded to the west by the Black Sea
3. It is bounded on the north and northeast by Russia

The above statements best describe:

- a. Turkey
- b. Azerbaijan
- c. Georgia
- d. Armenia

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Georgia is strategically located at the intersection of Eastern Europe and Western Asia.



Q5. What was the reason for Mahatma Gandhi to organize a satyagraha on behalf of the peasants of Kheda?

1. The administration did not suspend the land revenue collection in spite of a drought
2. The administration proposed to introduce permanent settlement in Gujarat

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

- The Kheda Satyagraha of 1918 during the period of the British Raj, is a Satyagraha movement organized in support of peasants of the Kheda district as they were unable to pay high taxes levied by the British due to crop failure and an epidemic plague.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Discuss the key contestations of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu over Mokedatu Project and highlight the ruling of Supreme Court on the Cauvery dispute. (10 Marks, 150 Words)[GS-2, Polity and Governance]
2. Has Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) tilted the balance in favour of the State violating the fundamental freedoms of citizens? Critically Examine. (15 Marks, 250 Words)[GS-2, Polity and Governance]