

27 July 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Nothing here for today!!!

B. GS 2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Bengal forms panel to look into snooping allegations

Context:

The West Bengal government **set up an inquiry commission to look into the allegations of snooping** on politicians, activists and journalists using the [Israeli spyware Pegasus](#).

For more information on the modus operandi of the Pegasus spyware refer to [UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis of 08th July 2021](#)

Details:

- The inquiry commission comprises of retired Supreme Court judge Madan B. Lokur and former Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court Jyotirmoy Bhattacharya.
- The West Bengal government issued a notification for setting up the commission under the **Commissions of Inquiry Act, 1952 (60 of 1952)**.

Terms of Reference of the commission:

- To enquire into and report on the reported interception and the possession, storage and use of such **information collected through interception, in the hands of state actors and non-state actors**.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. India 'engages Taliban' but questions Pakistan's support

Context:

India's multi-track strategy in engaging all stakeholders in Afghanistan.

Issue:

- Taliban insurgents in Afghanistan have capitalised on the **last stages of the withdrawal of the US and NATO troops to launch offensives**.
- The Taliban is attempting to acquire territory to the south and border posts of Afghanistan.
- It is expected to accelerate its efforts to take major cities once the U.S. completes its pull-out of troops.
- Assessments have found that while the Taliban holds territory considerably less than media speculation of "85%".
 - Its hold is believed to be about "45-50%".
 - However the major cause of concern is that Taliban in a position to establish control of one or more of the southern provinces including Kandahar, Helmand, Ghazni and Paktia.

Details:

- The coming months would be crucial to decide Afghanistan's future. India as a neighbour is concerned about the situation in Afghanistan and has participated in the talks in **Doha, Dushanbe, Moscow, Tehran and Tashkent**, all of which focused on the situation in Afghanistan and India's concerns about Pakistan's role.
- In the backdrop of **advancement of the Taliban militants on the ground, India is engaging all stakeholders in Afghanistan, including some parts of the Taliban.**
- The talks with the militant signify that a **negotiated power-sharing agreement** is now seen as the best case scenario for Afghanistan.
- India believes that the **S. air support and international financial assistance would be necessary** to defend against the Taliban's onslaught. It believes that there is a need to keep a check on **Pakistan's continued support to the Taliban.**

India's concerns:

- It is not clear how much the U.S. is willing to criticise Pakistan publicly about its role in assistance to Taliban, given that it is deeply engaged with its military and political leadership on **pushing the Taliban towards a peace agreement before the U.S. pulls out all its troops.**
- Additionally, earlier this month, the U.S. also announced a **new connectivity 'Quad' comprising U.S.-Uzbekistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan.** The move is seen as part of the **U.S.'s search for a role in Afghanistan post-pullout.**

C. GS 3 Related

Category: SECURITY

1. 6 policemen killed in Assam-Mizoram border row

Context:

Six Assam police personnel were killed in an exchange of fire with their Mizoram counterparts after the extensive border row between the two northeastern States took a violent turn.

Background:

- The Mizoram Assam dispute dates back to the colonial area.
- The border row started after the **British demarcated Cachar plains and the Lushai Hills.**
- While the plains harboured growing British plantations, the Hills homed the Mizos. **In 1875, the Inner Line Reserve Forest demarcation was arrived upon** with the consultation of Mizo chiefs.
- After independence, **states such as Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, and Mizoram were carved out of Assam.**
- When the state of Manipur was demarcated in 1993, tensions emerged as its boundary began from the **Lushai Hills and Cachar district of Assam.**
 - This was not accepted by the Mizos.
 - Mizoram continued to demand that its borders with Assam be determined according to the British government's 1875 agreement.

- It claimed that several Mizo-speaking districts had become a part of Assam during the post-independence demarcation.

Details:

- At the heart of the dispute over the 165-km Assam-Mizoram boundary are **two border demarcations** that go back to the days of British colonial rule, and **disagreement over which demarcation to follow**.
- The latest clashes along the border lie near **Assam's Cachar district and Mizoram's Colasib district**.
- Fresh construction allegedly by Mizoram in the Inner Line Forest Reserve in the Lailapur area, **has become a flashpoint for the dispute**.

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Microbes from human, animal excreta found above desirable limits in Yamuna

Context:

As per a Delhi government report, levels of **fecal coliform (microbes from human and animal excreta)** is above desirable limits.

Details:

- Fecal coliform is **above desirable limits in all points tested in the Yamuna** in Delhi with an **exception at Palla** where the river enters the Capital.
- The report also stated that in the **absence of a minimum environmental flow** (flow of water) it is very difficult to achieve **even bathing quality standards of the river water**.
 - Minimum environmental flow for the dilution of the polluted water is required to meet the desired water quality levels in the river for bathing purpose.
- For bathing in a river, the desirable level of fecal coliform in the water is **500 MPN/100 ml or lesser**, as per the Central Pollution Control Board.
 - The level was as high as 1,40,000 MPN/100 ml (**280 times the desired level**) at **Okhla**.

Note:

According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature, an environmental flow is the water provided within a river, wetland or coastal zone to maintain ecosystems and their benefits where there are competing water uses and where flows are regulated.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Evaluating India's options in Afghanistan

Background:

India's chequered relations with Afghanistan:

- India has historically enjoyed good ties with Afghanistan right from ancient times. The **1950 Treaty of Friendship** between the Government of India and the Royal Government of Afghanistan was recognition of the historic ties.
- **Indian interests and influence in Afghanistan suffered a setback when the Taliban captured Kabul in 1996.** Given the close relationship between the Taliban and the Pakistani establishment, India's influence in Afghanistan invariably suffered. India never officially recognized the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and the **hijacking of IC flight 814** and its subsequent landing in Kandahar, Afghanistan only deepened India's doubts vis-a-vis the Taliban.
- **The U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and the ousting of Taliban helped India gain influence again in Afghanistan.** Since then India has made **huge investments** amounting to over \$3 billion, and has cultivated **strong economic and defence ties** with the Afghan government. India has been at the forefront of **developmental aid to Afghanistan**.
- The Pull back of foreign troops from Afghanistan and the rapid territorial gains being made by Taliban, threaten India's interests in Afghanistan.

Challenges to India's interest in Afghanistan:

- The American withdrawal from Afghanistan would leave **a vacuum in Afghanistan and continental Asia in general which is being filled by China**. This does not augur well for India's strategic interests in the longer run.
- The rise of the Taliban could make Afghanistan a **safe haven for anti-India terrorist groups**. This could lead to serious security concerns for India.
- A Taliban regime in Afghanistan will **allow Pakistan to deepen its influence in Kabul at the cost of India's strategic influence**.

Options for India:

Talking with the Taliban:

- Many experts have suggested India shedding its traditional approach of maintaining no ties with the Taliban and holding talks with the Taliban.
- This would **allow India to seek security guarantees from the insurgents** as well as explore the possibility of the Taliban's autonomy from Pakistan.
- Given the fact that even the Taliban is seeking recognition in the region, it would be open to considering some degree of relationship with India in exchange for recognition. India could also continue development assistance in return for security guarantee.

For more related information refer to the following article:

[UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis of 22nd July 2021](#)

Supporting Afghanistan government:

- Given the deep ties between Pakistan's security establishment and the Taliban, there is no guarantee that India's engagement with the Taliban would produce a desirable outcome for India. Hence India should **enhance aid to Afghanistan's elected government and Afghan National Defense and Security Forces**.
- India should urgently step up training Afghan forces and provide military hardware, intelligence and logistical and financial support to help the Afghan security forces defend the cities.

Engaging in regional multilateral efforts:

- There is a **convergence of interests between India and three key regional players — China, Russia and Iran** — in seeing a political settlement in Afghanistan. None of these countries would like to see the Taliban taking over Kabul militarily.
 - A Taliban regime in Afghanistan does not bode well for the neighbouring China given that the **restive Xinjiang province shares a border with Afghanistan**.
 - Russia fears that instability in Afghanistan would spill over into the former Soviet Republics and impact **Russia's interests in the Central Asian region**.
 - **For Iran, a Sunni Deobandi Taliban will be an ideological, sectarian and strategic challenge**.
- India should coordinate with these regional powers to support the Afghan government and help ensure for long-term stability in the country.

Recommendations:

A layered approach:

- India should take a layered approach.
 - Its **immediate goal should be the safety and security of its personnel and investments in Afghanistan** and in this regard opening up engagement with the Taliban may be inevitable.
 - The **long-term goal for India in Afghanistan should be finding a political solution** to the crisis and in this regard India should continue its support to the elected Afghan government and other non-Taliban stakeholders and collaborate with other regional powers in this direction.

Broad-based approach:

- India should shed its over reliance on any one option and should broad base its approach in Afghanistan.
- It should **engage with all stakeholders**— the Afghan government, the Taliban and the regional powers to protect its interests.
- If necessary India should also **seek non-conventional methods**, like what it did in the 1990s, to offer support to its allies within Afghanistan and retain some influence.

Focus on ties with regional powers:

- In the light of increasing strategic alignment of India with the U.S., the article suggests that India should instead carefully balance its ties with the U.S. and that with other countries like Russia, Iran and China.
- Given the immense **potential that Russia, Iran and China hold in helping India deal with the challenge of the rise of Taliban in Afghanistan**, India should desist from adopting a unilateral emphasis on its ties with the U.S. at the cost of its ties with Russia, Iran and China.
 - **Russia has cultivated links with the Taliban in recent years.** India would need Russia's support in any form of direct engagement with the Taliban.
 - **Iran has built contacts critical contacts with several stakeholders in Afghanistan.** Iran could also **provide India with a direct access to Afghanistan.** This could prove critical for India in situations where in India may have to move in supplies to Kabul in larger quantities, retain its presence in the event of a civil war or carry out covert operations if the Taliban take power by force.
 - China has lately built its own sphere of influence within Afghanistan with even the **Taliban recognizes China as a friend and ally.**
- Hence, India should focus on building strategic ties with Russia and Iran and issue based relation with China, irrespective of the U.S.'s policy towards these countries.
- India is bound to be impacted by the consequences of American withdrawal from Afghanistan and it will have to work with Eurasian powers to protect its interests and stabilize Afghanistan. This would have to be **balanced with India's strategic relationship with the U.S.**

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. An emigration Bill that does not go far enough

Context:

- **The Emigration Bill 2021** is likely to be introduced in Parliament.

Background:

Exploitative conditions:

- There has been growing number of **reports of exploitative practices** like large recruitment charges, contract substitution, deception, retention of passports, **non-payment or underpayment of wages, poor living conditions, discrimination and other forms of ill-treatment of the Indian migrant workers.**

Emigration act, 1983:

- **Labour migration is governed by the Emigration Act, 1983.** It prescribes a mechanism for hiring of Indians for work in foreign countries.
- The recruiting agents must be government-certified.
- It outlines certain **obligations for recruiting agents** like conducting due diligence of prospective employers.
- It also lays certain **regulations of the recruiting agents** like the setting of a cap on service fees.

Details:

- The Emigration Bill 2021 seeks to consolidate and amend the existing Emigration act of 1983.

Significance:

- The Emigration Bill 2021 marks some improvements over the 1983 Act.
 - It launches a **new emigration policy division in the Ministry of External Affairs**, establishes **help desks and welfare committees for migrant workers**.
 - It mandates manpower agencies to conduct pre-departure briefings for migrants.
 - It **increases accountability of brokers** and other intermediaries who are involved in labour hiring.

Lacunae:

Lacking a human rights framework:

- The Emigration Bill 2021 lacks a human rights framework as observed in progressive laws of countries like the Philippines and thus **may fail to secure the rights of migrants and their families**.

Worker service fees:

- A significant drawback in the Bill is that it permits manpower agencies to charge workers' service fees, and even allows agents to set their own limits.
- The allowing of workers' service fees **goes against International labour standards** such as International Labour Organization (ILO) Private Employment Agencies Convention No. 181 and the ILO general principles and operational guidelines for fair recruitment which emphasizes that the employers should bear recruitment payments like the costs of work visas, air travel, medical exams, and service charges to recruiters.
- The high worker services charge extracted from the workers **makes them vulnerable to indebtedness and exploitation** as the high recruitment fees eat into their small savings, forces them to take high-interest loans and makes them vulnerable to abuse and debt bondage.

Provisions of punishment:

- The Bill permits government authorities to punish workers by cancelling or suspending their passports and imposing fines up to Rs. 50,000 for violating any of the Bill's provisions.
- Such a provision overlooks scenarios where the migrant workers may be unaware of the law, may be under the influence of their recruiters, or simply desperate to find a decent job. This provision in fact **runs contradictory to the purpose of protecting migrants and their families, and violates international human rights standards**.
- This could also become a **tool in the hands of the recruiters to pressurize and exploit workers** who migrate through unregistered brokers or via irregular arrangements such as on tourist visas.

Unaddressed gender dimensions:

- Given the lack of any specific gender based provisions in the bill, the bill does not adequately reflect the gender dimensions of labour migration.
 - Women are more **likely to be employed in marginalised and informal sectors** and/or isolated occupations in which **labour, physical, psychological, and sexual abuse** are a possibility.

Lack of worker representation:

- The Bill provides limited space for worker representation or civil society engagement in the policy and welfare bodies that the new bill envisages.
- **This goes against the need for more representative bodies with relevant stakeholders** who could be more effective in upholding their own interests.

Conclusion:

- The new Bill though better than the Emigration Act 1983, more reforms are needed to protect Indian workers
- The new bill must explicitly recognize the contributions of Indian workers, the unique challenges they face, and uphold the dignity and human rights of migrants and their families.

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Wounded mountains

Context:

- **Landslip in Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh** has caused loss of lives and property.
 - The heavy rain in Himachal Pradesh had rendered the hill slopes unstable and caused the landslips.

Concerns:

- Environmental experts have warned Himalayan states like Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand may be entering a phase of irreversible decline because of **losses to their ecology**.
 - **The unregulated and unsustainable development** in the hills marked by **big hydroelectric projects and large-scale road construction activity** involving deforestation is causing irreversible changes in the region.
- This might lead to a scenario where **landslides may become more frequent and intense**.
- The unregulated and unsustainable developmental projects are rendering the region vulnerable to the effects of extreme events such as cloudbursts, flash floods, landslides and earthquakes.

Conclusion:

- The landslip is a pointer to the **fragility of the ecology of the Himalayan States** and indicates the **importance of preserving ecology**.

For more related information refer to:

[UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis of 14th July 2021](#)

F. Prelims Facts

1. Thane sanctuary proposed as MMR's Ramsar site

What's in News?

A proposal has been submitted to declare **Thane creek Flamingo Sanctuary** as a Ramsar site.

- Maharashtra Mangrove Cell has **submitted the proposal for approval to the State Wetland Authority.**
- With this, the Mumbai Metropolitan Region is **likely to get its first Ramsar site** at the Thane Creek Flamingo Sanctuary and third in the Maharashtra to be **designated as Wetlands of International Importance.**
- Nandur Madhameshwar became the first site designated from Maharashtra. The Lonar lake in Buldhana district was declared as the 41st Ramsar site of India and second in the state.

Ramsar Convention on Wetlands:

- A Ramsar site is a **wetland area designated to be of international importance** under the Ramsar Convention.
- Ramsar Convention is an intergovernmental **environmental treaty that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation** for the **conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.**
- **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Convention for the conservation of wetlands** was called the '**Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat**'.
- The convention got its name of Ramsar Convention from the city of Ramsar in Iran where it was signed in 1971 and came into force in 1975.
- India joined the convention in 1982 and since then 42 sites have been designated as Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites).

G. Tidbits

1. Puri becomes India's first city to provide quality drinking tap water

What's in News?

Puri's '**Drink from Tap project**'.

- Puri became the first city in India where **people can avail high quality drinking water directly from the tap on 24-hour basis.**
- Puri has enabled the people of the city to **collect quality drinking water directly from the tap.**
- Henceforth, people need not have to store or filter drinking water.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. With reference to Bhagat Singh, which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. He was against the non-cooperation movement from the very beginning
2. He established the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA) along with Sukhdev and Chandrashekhar Azad

Options:

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- Bhagat Singh was not against the non-cooperation movement since the very beginning. He supported Mahatma Gandhi in the Non-cooperation movement.
- But when the movement was called off by Mahatma Gandhi after the Chauri-Chaura incident, Bhagat Singh turned to revolutionary nationalism.
- In 1928 Bhagat Singh established the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA) along with Sukhdev, Chandrashekhar Azad and the others.

Q2. Which one among the following has recently received the Indian Green Building Council (IGBC) Green Cities Platinum Rating?

- a. Kandla Special Economic Zone (SEZ)
- b. Cochin Special Economic Zone (SEZ)
- c. Indore Special Economic Zone (SEZ)
- d. Noida Special Economic Zone (SEZ)

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Kandla SEZ (KASEZ) has become the First Green SEZ to achieve the IGBC Green Cities Platinum Rating for Existing Cities.
- KASEZ earlier known as the Kandla Free Trade Zone, is located at the port town Gandhidham in Gujarat.
- It is the first in Asia and the largest multi-product Special Economic Zone in India.
- IGBC Green Cities (Existing Cities) rating system is a voluntary and consensus-based programme.

Read more on this covered in [PIB Summary & Analysis for 26th July 2021](#).

Q3. Consider the following Statements:

1. Thane Creek Flamingo Sanctuary is designated as a 'Ramsar site'.
2. Wetlands include lakes and rivers, underground aquifers, swamps and marshes, rice paddies, and salt pans.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- A proposal has been submitted to declare Thane creek Flamingo Sanctuary as a Ramsar site. It is not yet included in the Ramsar Convention.
- Wetlands include lakes and rivers, underground aquifers, swamps and marshes, rice paddies, and salt pans.

Q4. Which of the following countries border the Mediterranean Sea?

1. Lebanon
2. Syria
3. Jordan
4. Montenegro
5. Iraq

Options:

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

Jordan and Iraq do not border the Mediterranean Sea.



Q5. Consider the following statements: (UPSC 2013)

1. An amendment to the Constitution of India can be initiated by an introduction of a bill in the Lok Sabha only.
2. If such an amendment seeks to make changes in the federal character of the Constitution, the amendment also requires to be ratified by the legislature of all the States of India.

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: d

Explanation:

- An amendment to the Constitution of India can be initiated by an introduction of a bill in both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha.
- If such an amendment seeks to make changes in the federal character of the Constitution, the amendment also requires to be ratified by the legislature of all the 50% of the States of India (half of the total states). That is with the consent of half of the state legislatures by a simple majority.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Explain the background to the Assam-Mizoram border dispute in detail. (250 words; 15 marks)[GS-3, Security]
2. Critically analyse the Emigration Bill 2021. Will it be sufficient to protect Indian workers abroad? (250 words; 15 marks)[GS-2, International Relations]

