

07 Aug 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A. GS 1 Related

B. GS 2 Related

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. [Biden govt. non-committal on support for India's UNSC bid](#)
2. [India, Sri Lanka and Maldives to collaborate on security](#)

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. [SC asks govt. if it wants tribunals closed](#)

C. GS 3 Related

ECONOMY

1. [RBI holds rates, MPC splits on stance](#)

D. GS 4 Related

E. Editorials

EDUCATION

1. [India's schoolchildren need their childhood back](#)

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. [South Asia's emerging digital transformation](#)

F. Prelims Facts

1. [PAC to tour Kargil, Leh and Srinagar](#)
2. [Celebrations begin to mark 150 years of iconic artist Abanindranath Tagore](#)

G. Tidbits

1. [Post talks, India, China pull back troops from Gogra](#)

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

A. GS 1 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

B. GS 2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Biden govt. non-committal on support for India's UNSC bid

Context:

- The U.S. position on reforms of the [United Nations Security Council \(UNSC\)](#).

Background:

For information on the **need for UNSC reforms and India's stand on the issue** refer to the following article:

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

Details:

- The previous U.S. administrations in the past have backed India's bid for a permanent seat at the UNSC. However, the **current Biden administration has continued to remain non-committal on the issue.**
- While the **U.S. has offered qualified support for the enlargement of the UNSC**, in terms of permanent and non-permanent members, it **does not support the expansion of veto power** beyond the permanent members or its alteration.
 - The veto power in the UNSC is exclusive to the five permanent members: China, France, Russia, the U.K and the U.S.
- The U.S. has also refrained from saying the U.S. supported India and other members of the **G4** for a permanent UNSC seat.
 - The **G4 nations comprising Brazil, Germany, India, and Japan** are four countries that support each other's bids for permanent seats on the United Nations Security Council.
- The U.S. has attributed this stance to regional disagreements on who should get the seat. The **Uniting for Consensus (UFC) group consisting of Pakistan, South Korea, Italy and Argentina** oppose the bid by the G4 group for a permanent seat at the UNSC.

For more related information refer to the following article:

[UNSC & Permanent Seat for India: RSTV – Big Picture](#)

2. India, Sri Lanka and Maldives to collaborate on security

Context:

- Deputy NSA-level meeting** of India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

Details:

- India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives have identified **“four pillars” of security cooperation.**
 - Marine Safety and Security
 - Counter-terrorism and Deradicalization
 - Human trafficking and Organised Crime

- Cyber security
- Specific proposals for cooperation in each area, including **joint exercises and training** were also discussed in the meeting.
- In the previous NSA level talks between the three countries, they agreed to expand the scope of **intelligence sharing**.

Significance for India:

Maritime security in the strategic Indian Ocean Region:

- This meeting marked the revival of NSA-level trilateral talks on maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region after a gap of six years and will help build on the '**Colombo Security Conclave**' **architecture** which seeks to promote maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region.

Boost to India's image as a net security provider in the region:

- **Sri Lanka and the Maldives have a strategic location in the Indian Ocean region** and their cooperation will be inevitable for India in the region.
- The initiative will also **help India build on its image as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean Region**.

China factor:

- The initiative, grounded in military and security collaboration, assumes all the more significance in the wake of the **current geostrategic dynamic that India shares with Sri Lanka and the Maldives**.
 - India has aired security concerns over China being awarded development projects in Sri Lanka's northern province close to India's border. India has also strongly criticized Sri Lanka's moves to allow **Chinese submarines** to dock in its ports. India is wary of **increasing Chinese presence and influence in the neighbouring island nation of Sri Lanka**.
 - Maldives's engagement with members of the Quad including India, the United States, Japan and Australia has been growing over time, especially in the area of defence cooperation. The **Quad** is itself viewed as an alliance to counter the increasing assertiveness of the Chinese in the region.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. SC asks govt. if it wants tribunals closed

Context:

- The Supreme Court has criticized the Central government for its reluctance to ensure timely filling up of the vacancies in tribunals across the country.

Details:

- Chief Justice of India read out the details of **over 240 vacancies in key tribunals** with some tribunals even lacking presiding officers.

- The tribunals included some critical ones like the [National Green Tribunal](#), **Income Tax Appellate Tribunal** and **Central Administrative Tribunal** among others.
- The bench also lamented the fact that recommendations to the tribunals by the **selection committees led by sitting Supreme Court judges** have been largely ignored by the government.

Concerns:

- The large vacancies have **made the tribunals ineffective and redundant**.
- The large vacancies mainly attributable to the delay in appointments have rendered the tribunals defunct and with High Courts having no jurisdiction over the areas of law wielded by tribunals, litigants have nowhere to go for justice and this would **adversely impact the right of the people to access justice**.

For related information on the issue of reforms in the tribunal system of India, refer to the following article:

[UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis of 17th May 2021](#)

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. RBI holds rates, MPC splits on stance

Context:

- **Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting.**

Details:

Accommodative stance:

- The Reserve Bank of India's [Monetary Policy Committee \(MPC\)](#) has voted unanimously to keep the **repo rate unchanged at 4%**.
- The majority of the members of the MPC agreed to retain the **accommodative stance** as long as necessary to revive and sustain growth on a durable basis in a bid to **help the economy recover from the economic shock of the COVID-19 pandemic**.
 - Accommodative monetary policy, also known as **loose credit or easy monetary policy**, occurs when a central bank attempts to expand the overall money supply to boost the economy when growth is slowing.
 - An accommodative stance means a **central bank will cut rates to inject money into the financial system** whenever needed.

Projections:

- RBI has projected 9.5% real GDP growth in the current fiscal year.
- The MPC has **raised its forecast for retail inflation to 5.7%**, from the previous 5.1% estimate.

Concerns:

- The **rising input prices across manufacturing and services sectors, weak demand** and the higher-than-expected **CPI** inflation could dampen economic recovery.
- There is the **possibility of a third wave**, especially in the background of rising infections in certain parts of the country.
- **Aggregate supply is also lagging** below pre-pandemic levels possibly due to supply chain constraints and poor investor confidence.

Recommendations:

- With crude oil prices at elevated levels, a **calibrated reduction of the indirect tax component of pump prices** by the Centre and States can help lessen inflation pressure to a great extent.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: EDUCATION

1. India's schoolchildren need their childhood back

The article highlights the importance of in-person school in their development. It argues for ensuring in-person learning suggesting that there already is evidence of the negative impacts on children because of school closures due to the pandemic.

- Academic results in the higher grades are important to determine colleges and professions, and for many Indians to get a chance at a better life.

Impact of school closure:

- Costs of isolation and online learning for young children are significant.
- For many children, particularly those who do not have educated parents or cannot afford home tutors, the denial of education results in learning losses and, ultimately, denial of a chance to earn a livelihood.
- For parents, school closures have added to childcare and teaching duties. Additionally, household incomes are reducing amidst rising inflation as parents (mainly mothers) have quit their jobs.
- Education, like oxygen and medicines, is becoming the privilege of economically well-off citizens.

Importance of education in the younger years and the overall purpose of education:

- In-person school education teaches children to share, wait for their turn, negotiate, and compromise.
- By depriving them of social contact, children are being deprived of essential learning and development.
- For children from economically weak backgrounds, schools are a key source of nutrition.
- For some, schools serve as safe spaces from the chaos of their homes.

On re-opening schools:

- Researchers opine that children are at low risk of developing severe COVID-19 compared to adults.
- The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) believes that all support staff need to be vaccinated as primary and secondary schools open up.
- As per the World Health Organization-All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) serosurvey, sero surveillance among children less than 18 years of age group, it was found that more than 50 per cent of children and in some areas, more than 80 per cent of children from both urban and rural areas had antibodies.
 - This means they were already infected and developed antibodies.
- The ICMR recently released results of the Fourth National Sero-Prevalence Survey which showed that more than half of the children (6-17 years) were seropositive and sero-prevalence was similar in rural and urban areas.
- Considering this, it is possible to think about starting schools in areas where the community level of infection is low.

Way Forward:

- A one-size-fits-all approach across India cannot be followed.
- While the schools can remain closed in States such as Kerala or Maharashtra, where COVID-19 cases could be surging again, frameworks can be developed to open up schools in other parts of the country. However, there is a need for a large amount of preparation.
- As immediate measures, governments should:
 - Call for lists of school staff and procure full vaccination for them.
 - Scientists should confirm if the gap between doses can be made shorter akin to healthcare workers.
 - Formulate and issue guidance on COVID-19 protocols to be adopted by schools — distancing to the extent possible, outdoor classes weather-permitting, masking, hand hygiene, and proper ventilation.
 - Engage relevant experts to undertake public campaigns to make school staff and parents aware of the low risk of transmission in schools and low severity in children.
 - Issue guidelines for staggered re-opening of primary schools.
 - Upgrade school infrastructure to facilitate a hybrid system of learning where parents who do not wish to send their children to school have the choice to continue with online learning.
 - Train school teachers in hybrid learning.
 - Finalise logistics such as packed meals and transport.
 - Ensure availability of medical consultation so that staff and parents need not worry about assistance if need be.
 - Risk must be managed with mitigation strategies.
- Long-term measures would need adequate funding, time, and effort, include greater investment in healthcare facilities, particularly paediatric facilities, and implementation of systems to track local levels of infections.
- There is a need to build mutual trust among governments, schools, and citizens.

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. South Asia's emerging digital transformation

The article discusses how South Asia's post-pandemic adoption to digital life will shape its future prosperity.

Need for digitalisation:

- Digital transformation is of paramount importance globally. Adoption of advanced technologies such as cloud computing, artificial intelligence, the [Internet of things](#), Big Data, etc., is the key to success.
- From banking to manufacturing and retails, the role of digital technology is too important to be overlooked.
- Many countries are embracing the digital revolution to further their development agenda.
- E-commerce could drive the post-pandemic growth in South Asia, providing new business opportunities and access to larger markets.
- In India, e-commerce could create a million jobs by 2030 and be worth \$200 billion by 2026.
- Fintech could drive significant growth and reduce poverty by building financial inclusion.
- A timely, inclusive, and sustainable digital transformation can not only improve productivity and growth but also serve as a panacea for some of the region's socio-economic divides.

Pandemic facilitated leap in digitalisation in Asia:

COVID-19 has forced South Asia to take a quantum leap in digitalisation.

- The shift to remote work and education has propelled an unprecedented spike in Internet penetration.
- At the forefront of Asian digitalisation are countries such as Singapore, Japan, and South Korea recognised as global technological hubs.
- Owing to increased smartphone and Internet penetration, coupled with the availability of trusted digital payment platforms, China's e-commerce industry is said to reach \$3 trillion in 2024.
- The digital boom in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) economies is pushing for a common market initiative.
 - Such a move would foster regional economic integration and enhance global competitiveness.
- The pandemic has spurred South Asia's embrace of e-commerce, boosted by digital payment systems.
 - Bangladesh alone witnessed an increase of 70-80% in online sales in 2020, generating \$708.46 million in revenues.
- South Asia has also made significant strides in the adoption of digital technologies.
 - The Digital Bangladesh Vision 2021 includes transforming Bangladesh into a prosperous, digital society.
 - India's biometric identification systems intend to improve the efficiency of welfare programmes through digital innovation.

- Even in smaller nations such as Nepal, there is almost an 11% increase in broadband Internet users.
 - For a region with limited public health infrastructure, the digitisation of healthcare services was a watershed moment.
- In India, COVID-19 accelerated the launch of the [National Digital Health Mission](#).
 - It enhances the accessibility and efficiency of healthcare services by creating a unique health ID for every citizen.

However, the region still has a long way to go.

Impacts of Digital Divide:

As one of the world's poorest regions, a wide digital divide persists in access and affordability, between and within the countries of South Asia. For instance, despite having the world's second-largest online market, 50% of India's population are without the Internet with 59% for Bangladesh and 65% for Pakistan.

- With monetary and health assistance schemes distributed online, 51% of South Asian women were excluded from social protection measures during the pandemic.
- 88% of children lacked access to Internet-powered homeschooling. This disruption could:
 - Permanently put children out of school
 - Place girls at risk of early marriage
 - Push poor children into child labour
- The [digital divide](#) might end up costing economies billions of dollars in future earnings.
- Businesses too have paid a heavy price for the gap in digital solutions.
 - Many South Asian firms failed to embrace e-commerce or other cloud-based technologies to survive the chaos.
 - The region recorded a 64% decline in sales, with small and women-led firms performing the worst.
- As COVID-19 has transformed work life, the acute skills gap among youth will continue, creating unemployment.

Way Forward:

- To reap the dividends of digital transformation, South Asia needs to address legal, regulatory and policy gaps as well as boost digital skills.
- A robust digital infrastructure is of utmost importance but there exists a huge financing gap.
 - India alone needs an annual investment of \$35 billion to be in the top five global digital economy and public-private partnership needs to be leveraged for the region's digital infrastructure financing.
- Regulatory roadblocks need to be addressed as e-commerce regulations are weak in South Asia.
- There is a need for stringent cybersecurity measures.
- Issues such as customer protection, digital and market access regulation, etc need to be addressed.
- The education system must be revamped to meet the demand for digital skills and online platforms. Digital revolution is not possible without universal digital literacy.

Conclusion:

In South Asia, only a third of the inter-regional trade potential has been exploited, losing out \$23 billion in revenue. By addressing issues such as regulatory barriers on currency flows inhibiting online payment to transport-related constraints for cross-border e-commerce activities, South Asia can reproduce the European Union's Digital Single Market Proposal. With the right framework, the eight nations' (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) partnership for a successful digital revolution is plausible. A shared "digital vision" could place the region on the right track towards the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

F. Prelims Facts

1. PAC to tour Kargil, Leh and Srinagar

Public Accounts Committee:

- The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) examines the **audit reports submitted by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India** before the President who lays it before each house of the Indian Parliament.
- The Public Accounts Committee examines public expenditure. That public expenditure is not only examined from a legal and formal point of view to discover technical irregularities but also from the point of view of the economy, prudence, wisdom, and propriety.
- The committee has **22 members, 15 from Lok Sabha (Lower House) and 7 members from Rajya Sabha**.
- The members of PAC are elected from the Parliament every year with proportional representation by means of a single transferable vote. The **Speaker appoints the chairperson from amongst the members**. As a convention, the chairperson has been from the opposition party.

Context:

- The Public Accounts Committee's scheduled tour of Srinagar, Kargil, Leh and Drass.

2. Celebrations begin to mark 150 years of iconic artist Abanindranath Tagore

Abanindranath Tagore:

- Abanindranath, a nephew of Rabindranath Tagore, is considered the leading light of the **Bengal School of Art**.
- Abanindranath Tagore was the principal artist and creator of the "**Indian Society of Oriental Art**". His famous paintings include the iconic 'Bharat Mata' painting.
- Abanindranath Tagore sought to modernise the Mughal and the Rajput styles in order to counter the influence of Western models of art under the colonial regime.
- He was also the **first major exponent of Swadeshi values in Indian art**. His unique interpretation of swadeshi themes created a new awakening and heralded a revival of Indian art.
- He was also a **noted writer**, particularly for children. **Popularly known as 'Aban Thakur'**, his books Rajkahini, Buro Angla, Nalak, and Khirer Putul were landmarks in Bengali language children's literature.

Context:

- Year-long celebrations marking 150 years of Abanindranath Tagore.

G. Tidbits

1. Post talks, India, China pull back troops from Gogra

- India and China have undertaken **disengagement from the Gogra area** of eastern Ladakh following an agreement at the 12th round of Corps Commander talks.
- This is the second such disengagement as part of efforts for overall **disengagement and de-escalation along the Line of Actual Control** in eastern Ladakh

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Which of the given statements with respect to the UN World Food Programme is/are correct?

1. It was founded at the United Nations World Humanitarian Summit (WHS).
2. It is headquartered in Rome, Italy.
3. It has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize twice.
4. Its priority is to achieve SDG-2 by 2030.

Options:

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- The World Food Programme (WFP) is an international organization that works in the field of hunger alleviation and food security.
- UN World Food Programme was launched in 1961.
- It is headquartered in Rome, Italy.
- It was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2020.
- Its priority is to achieve Sustainable Development Goal -2 i.e, Zero Hunger by 2030.

Read more [World Food Programme \(WFP\) Wins Nobel Peace Prize 2020](#)

Q2. Consider the following statements with respect to Abanindranath Tagore:

1. He founded the 'Indian Society of Oriental Art'.
2. Victory of Buddha is among his famous paintings.
3. He wrote 'Amar Shonar Bangla' which helped ignite a feeling of nationalism amongst people.

Which of the given statements is/are correct?

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Abanindranath Tagore and Gaganendranath Tagore founded the 'Indian Society of Oriental Art'.
- Victory of Buddha, My Mother, Bharatmata are among his famous paintings.
- 'Amar Shonar Bangla' was written by Abanindranath Tagore's uncle Rabindranath Tagore during the partition of Bengal in 1905.

Q3. The "Tigray Region" recently in news, borders which of these countries?

1. Eritrea
2. South Sudan
3. Sudan
4. Djibouti

Options:

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

The Tigray Region in Ethiopia borders Sudan and Eritrea.



Q4. Which of the given statements with respect to PMGDISHA Scheme is/are correct?

1. Its objective is to enhance institutional mechanisms for skills development and increase access to quality and market-relevant training for the work force.
2. The scheme is applicable only for rural areas of the country.
3. The scheme is implemented by the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship.
4. All households where none of the family member is digitally literate will be considered as eligible households under the Scheme.

Options:

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA), initiated under Digital India Programme, would cover 6 crore households in rural areas to make them digitally literate.
- This would empower the citizens by providing them access to information, knowledge and skills for operating computers/digital access devices.
- The scheme is applicable only for rural areas of the country.
- The scheme is implemented by the Ministry of Electronics, Information and Technology.
- All households where none of the family members is digitally literate will be considered eligible households under the Scheme. One member in the age group between 14-60 years from such a household can enroll himself/herself as a beneficiary under the scheme.

Q5. The terms 'Wanna Cry, Petya and Eternal Blue' sometimes mentioned in the news recently are related to

- a. Exo-planets
- b. Crypto-currency
- c. Cyber attacks
- d. Mini satellites

Answer: c

Explanation:

Wanna Cry, Petya and Eternal Blue are related to cyber-attacks.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Should schools be reopened amidst the pandemic? Critically Examine. (10 Marks, 150 Words)[GS-2, Education]
2. A timely, inclusive, and sustainable digital transformation can serve as a panacea for socio-economic divides. Explain. (10 Marks, 150 Words)[GS-2, Governance]