

## 20 Aug 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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*Nothing here for today!!!*

## B. GS 2 Related

### Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

#### 1. U.S. not interested in trade pact: Goyal

##### Context:

- India's Commerce and Industry Minister's statement on the **proposed India-U.S. trade agreement**.

##### Details:

- Unlike the previous U.S. administration under President Donald Trump, the **current administration under President Biden is not very interested in a free trade agreement with India**.
- Despite the hopes of an India-U.S. trade not effectuating, the Indian Commerce and Industry Minister has expressed keenness to **resolve trade and market access issues with the U.S.**
  - Non-tariff barriers and mutual recognition of standards agreements** are some of the issues to be addressed.
- The resolution of market access issues even without a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement would be enough to boost India's outbound trade to the U.S. **A robust India-U.S. trade relationship could provide the necessary impetus for economic recovery.**

##### Additional information:

- India's FTA with countries such as Bangladesh, Australia, U.K, U.A.E, Canada and the European Union is at various levels of discussion and implementation.

### Category: VULNERABLE SECTIONS

#### 1. Activists flay exemption to disability quota rule

##### Context:

- Social Justice Ministry's recent notification.

##### Details:

- The notification states that **Section 34 of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, which provides for 4% reservation in jobs for persons with disabilities (PwD) in government establishments**, would not apply to all categories of posts of IPS, the Indian Railway Protection Force Service and the police forces of Delhi, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep and Daman and Diu and Dadra and Nagar Haveli.
- Another notification from the Ministry has also exempted all combat posts in the Border Security Force, the Central Reserve Police Force, the Central Industrial Security Force, the Indo-Tibetan

Border Police, the Sashastra Seema Bal and the Assam Rifles from the reservation provisions of the RPD Act.

**Concerns:**

- Various rights groups have argued that the notification in question **goes against the spirit of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, which calls for non-discrimination against the PwD and the safeguarding of their rights and their empowerment.**
- Their line of argument has been that exemptions should be granted only in cases of combat roles and have called for a withdrawal of the notification regarding the police forces.

## C. GS 3 Related

### Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

#### 1. CM to inaugurate city's first smog tower

**Context:**

- Delhi will soon inaugurate its first smog tower.

**Smog Tower:**

- A smog tower is a structure designed to work as a **large-scale air purifier**, fitted with multiple layers of filters which trap fine dust particles suspended in the air as it passes through them.
- Smog towers have been experimented with in recent years in **cities in the Netherlands, China, South Korea and Poland.**

**Details:**

- The smog tower is being built as a pilot study following Supreme Court orders.

**Functioning:**

- The fans at the bottom of the tower will suck in polluted air from the top and it will pass through 5,000 filters installed at the bottom and finally release purified air near the ground.

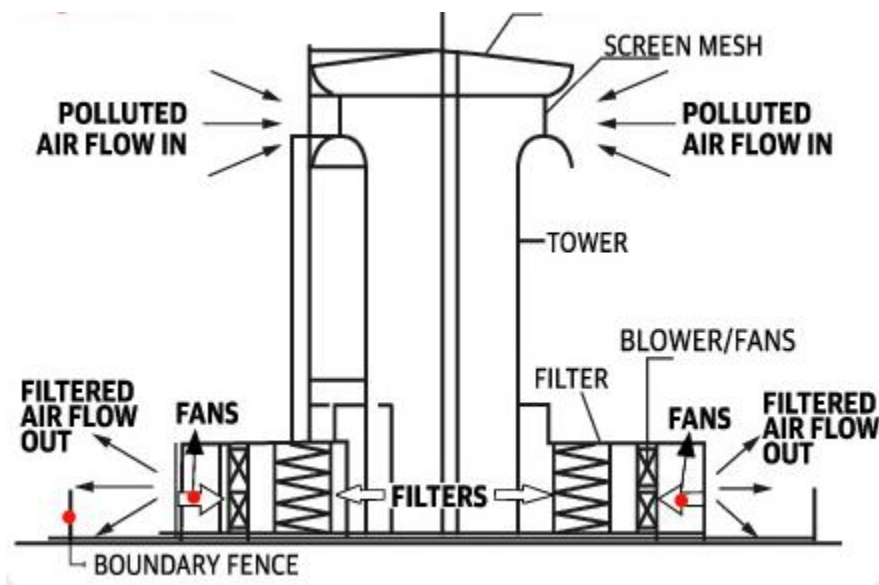


Image Courtesy: The Hindu

- The **filters contain electrostatically charged filter media** and can capture particles as small as 0.3-10 microns in size.
  - An electrostatic air filter uses static electricity to give particles a positive charge as they enter the filter. This charge is released as the air continues through subsequent layers of the filter, and results in the particle ultimately getting trapped.
- 1000 cubic metre of air per second could be purified by the tower.
- The smog tower is expected to influence the air quality of more than 1 km in the downwind direction.

#### Significance:

- The smog tower by **helping purify polluted air will help control air pollution in Delhi**.
  - Air pollution in the national capital has been an issue of concern of late. **Pollution levels in Delhi increase dramatically during winter** posing a serious risk to vulnerable and also healthy populations.
  - **Construction work, industrial and vehicular pollution** are the major sources of air pollution. The smoke from **stubble-burning** in neighbouring states, coupled with unfavourable meteorological conditions, such as calm winds and low temperatures only further aggravate the air pollution in Delhi.

## Category: **ECONOMY**

### 1. Record sugar exports help reduce cane dues

#### Context:

- The article analyzes the impact of allowing **sugar exports from India**.

#### Governmental measures to enhance sugar exports:

- The Union government had set an **export target of 60 lakh tonnes of sugar** for the current year.
- The Union government also provides **assistance to the tune of ₹6,000 per tonne** to facilitate sugar exports.

#### Record sugar exports from India:

- Sugar mills have surpassed their 60 lakh tonne export target.
- **Sugar exports have increased more than 10 times compared to 2017-18.**
- **Forward contracts** of about 70 lakh tonnes have been signed for sugar exports.

#### Positive impact of high volume of sugar exports:

- The allowing of exports has let the **sugar mills realize better price discovery in the international markets**. The export revenue has **allowed mills to partially pay off their dues to cane farmers** and reduce arrears to less than Rs. 9,000 crore.
  - Given the sugar surplus status of India, the sugar mills experience very low prices in the domestic markets. This in turn has an adverse impact on their revenues and their ability to pay the sugarcane farmers.
  - **Pending payments to sugarcane farmers from sugarcane mills remain a thorny issue in several States**, provoking protests in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Maharashtra – the major sugarcane growing states in India.

#### Additional information:

- Along with encouraging exports, the government has also been encouraging the diversion of sugarcane for ethanol production, which the government sees as a more permanent solution to the problem of surplus stocks in India.

## D. GS 4 Related

*Nothing here for today!!!*

## E. Editorials

### Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

#### 1. The Abraham Accords as India's West Asia bridge

The article analyses how the signing of the Abraham Accords has helped remove strategic obstacles for India and has aided defence cooperation.

#### What are Abraham Accords?

- The Abraham Accords are a joint statement made between Israel, the United States and the United Arab Emirates on August 13, 2020.
- It is the first Arab-Israeli peace deal in 26 years.
- The United Arab Emirates and Bahrain agreed to establish full diplomatic ties with Israel as part of a deal to halt the annexation of occupied land sought by the Palestinians for their future state.

- It was brokered by US President Donald Trump.
- It was initially agreed to in a joint statement by the United States, Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in 2020.
- Through this, the UAE became the third Arab country, after Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994, to agree to formally normalize its relationship with Israel as well as the first Persian Gulf country to do so.

Know more about the [Abraham Accords](#) in the linked article.

#### **Significance of the Abraham Accords for India:**

- India welcomed the Abraham Accords since it shares a cordial relationship with all the signatories of the accord.
- It was believed then, that India could gain unprecedented benefits as a result of the accords which would offer peace and stability in the region.
- The signing of the Accords has removed a significant strategic obstacle for New Delhi.

Read more on this topic covered in [September 22nd, 2020 CNA](#)

#### **Deepening cooperation in West Asia:**

- India's efforts towards increasing its strategic footprint in West Asia has been in the development phase.
- In December 2020, the Indian Army chief visited the UAE and Saudi Arabia, becoming the first chief of the Indian Army to do so.
  - The foundation for these visits had been laid in 2017, when a deal was concluded with Muscat for access to Duqm Port, including dry dock use by the Indian Navy.
- India recently conducted the 'Zayed Talwar' naval exercises with the UAE off the coast of Abu Dhabi.
  - This signals a further deepening of the fast-developing strategic cooperation between the two countries.
- These examples show the developments on the defence front between India and the West Asian region.
- The Arabian Sea and the extended Indian Ocean Region (IOR) has taken a position of power in Indian strategic thinking, considering developments such as the IAF's visit to Saudi Arabia in 2015, hosting visiting Iranian naval warships in 2018, defence of the critical waterways in and around the Persian Gulf.

#### **The Iran Link:**

- Recent, multiple visits by India's External Affairs Minister and Defence Minister followed by the Iranian Defence Minister's visit to India highlight a revitalised strategic cooperation between the two countries.
- In the backdrop of the deepening Afghanistan crisis, Iran, as part of India's West Asia strategy will play a significant part in India's outreach in the months to come.



- Connectivity projects such as [Chabahar Port](#) and Chabahar-Zahedan rail project remain critical.

### **Challenges:**

- Not all Arab States have been on board with the geopolitical shifts resulting from the Accords.
- Despite a lot of effort from Israel, Saudi Arabia has maintained a distance from this arrangement.
- While Riyadh has praised the Accords, its focus is on the resolution of the [Palestinian issue](#).
- Despite India's arguable successes in a 'non-alignment' approach in West Asia, it has taken one-sided decisions in the past.
  - It trained Iraqi Air Force cadets on MiG aircraft in Tikrit between 1958 and 1989 and also maintained good relations with former President Saddam Hussein.
  - This can be seen as a critical part of India's energy security thinking.
  - The rationale behind such thinking has not seen a significant change as India still imports more than 80% of its annual oil requirements, much of it from Iraq and Saudi Arabia.
- There are multiple obstacles to the India-Iran bilateral relations led by U.S. sanctions against Iran and the general tensions between Israel, the Gulf and Iran via proxy battles in theatres such as Yemen, Syria and beyond.

### **Conclusion:**

India's strategic role in West Asia will be reflective of its increasingly important place in the global order. From its presidency in the [UN Security Council](#) to its role in the Indo-Pacific, India is expected to be more assertive, diplomatically and militarily, in its posturing.

## **Category: SOCIAL ISSUES**

### **1. Arms and the women**

The article talks about gender parity in Army.

### **Supreme Court Judgement on Ensuring Gender Parity in the Indian Army:**

- In a landmark judgment in February 2020, the Supreme Court asked the Government to abide by its own policy and
  - Grant permanent commission to women in the Short Service Commission and
  - Give them command postings in all services other than combat.
- In the Secretary, Ministry of Defence vs Babita Puniya & Others, the SC pointed out that women had played a significant role in the army since their induction in 1992 and extending permanent commission to women SSC officers is a step forward in recognising and realising the right of women to equality of opportunity in the Army.
- When the Court was told that it was a policy decision not to allow women to take the NDA exam, the SC Bench directed the Centre and the Army to take a constructive view.
  - The writ petition had argued that Articles 14, 15, 16 and 19 of the Constitution, which uphold the values of equality and allow equal, non-discriminatory opportunities at work, were being violated by denying eligible women the opportunity.

- The Bench pointed out that closing a route of entry for women to join the Army was discriminatory.
- The Court has now passed an interim order allowing women to appear for the National Defence Academy entrance exam.
  - So far, women could join the Army through the Indian Military Academy and the Officers Training Academy.
  - The directive allows girls who clear the exam to study at the NDA and then at the IMA or the naval and air force academies and become commissioned officers.
  - This is another step towards ensuring that women get an equal opportunity, as laid down by the Constitution.

#### **Issue:**

- In India, women have been struggling for equal opportunities in the Army.
- Despite the stringent verdict, systemic issues remain in the Army, and women have gone back to court to sort out the issues.
- Continued instances of women being denied equality of opportunity in the Indian Army is glaring.

#### **Way Forward:**

- At present, women in the Army are an integral part of the organisation and are doing an outstanding job, but there are many hurdles to achieving gender integration.
- The token inclusion of women in various arms will not automatically result in gender equality. There is a need to focus on systems and policies that give rise to disadvantages by treating gender as the reason for various exclusions.
- The attention must be shifted to gender mainstreaming in the Army.
- Though the legal route has helped overcome some of the hurdles, many more concrete steps are needed to ensure that gender parity is fully achieved in the Army.
- The Prime Minister's Independence Day announcement that girls will be granted admission in the Sainik Schools is a welcome move towards preparing them for an equal role and life in the military.

## **Category: EDUCATION**

### **1. Back to basics**

The article suggests that India must take steps to strengthen the foundational education for children.

#### **Issue:**

- According to various estimates, the pandemic and lockdowns have led to an alarming drop-out rate from schools, migration of children from private to government schools due to inability to pay fees, increased abuse at home, inadequate nutrition, etc.
- Experts claim that for adults to unlearn and relearn is a very expensive and time-consuming process. Thus, if the foundation of education is weak, any effort at a later stage to strengthen it will only yield sub-optimal results.



Read more on a related issue covered in [Aug 13th, 2021 CNA](#).

**What are the major factors that need to be addressed at the foundational level?**

- UNICEF has raised the issue of nutrition stating that children, depending on their age group and gender, need to consume 1,000-3,200 calories per day.
  - Through the [mid-day meal scheme](#), India should try to address the nutritional needs of children.
- Ensuring that the students have acquired foundational skills before being promoted to the next grade is imperative.
  - The issue with India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is that it proposes pedagogical freedom to the teacher.
  - The content-heavy curriculum forces instructionist rather than constructivist engagements. As a result, students simply consume what they are taught.
  - The focus should be on supporting slower foundational development that allows deeper and more meaningful learning.
- There is a need for skilled teachers.
- The status of the teacher reflects the socio-cultural ethos of the society; it is said that "no people can rise above the level of its teachers".
  - NEP 2020 has entrusted the intellectual development of kindergarten children from underprivileged sections to matriculation-pass Anganwadi teachers and helpers.
  - Anganwadi teachers will not be able to fulfil the task of developing underprivileged kindergarten students into creators simply because they lack the expertise to do so.
  - The proposal to upgrade their skills using online methods is grossly inadequate.
  - More steps are needed to skill the teachers to equip them to encourage and foster critical thinking in students.
- Ensuring the reach of quality education to rural areas.
  - To fulfil the 2030 Sustainable Development Goal for Education, India needs to undertake efficient interventions and work on a war footing.
  - It must be acknowledged that EdTech is a resource of the privileged and learning higher-order cognitive skills calls for personal support.
  - Students in higher education could be mandated to contribute three to six months in government-sponsored programmes by working in the most remote and underdeveloped areas to educate children and teachers.
  - Private companies could also sponsor mentorship programmes where employees spend about a month on the field.
  - This will have a transformative effect.

The ability to successfully achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 will depend on the priority afforded to school education, primarily by strengthening foundational education.

## F. Prelims Facts

## 1. Rajnath opens Defence Startup Challenge 5.0

### iDEX:

- **The Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) framework** aims at the creation of an ecosystem to foster innovation and technology development in Defence and Aerospace by engaging industries including MSMEs, start-ups, individual innovators, R&D institutes & academia.
- It provides them grants/funding and other support to carry out R&D which has good potential for future adoption for Indian defence and aerospace needs.
- iDEX will be funded and managed by the '**Defence Innovation Organization (DIO)**'.
- The programme is meant to **foster innovation and technology development in the domestic defence and aerospace sectors of India and achieve self-reliance.**

### Context:

- Defence Minister launched the **5th edition of the Defence India Start-up Challenge (DISC)** under **Innovations for Defence Excellence – Defence Innovation Organisation (iDEX-DIO).**

Also read: [Innovation for Defence Excellence – iDEX](#)

## 2. DRDO's chaff technology to safeguard jets

### Chaff technology:

- Chaff are strips of **metal foil released in the air.**
- A chaff is primarily an **electronic counter-measure technology** used by militaries worldwide to protect high-value targets such as fighter jets or naval ships from radars and radio frequency (RF) guiding mechanisms of the enemy missiles.
- The chaff deployed in the air reflects as multiple targets for the missile guidance systems, thus **misleading the enemy radars or deflecting adversary missiles.**
- Chaff is a critical defence technology and its importance lies in the fact that very less quantity of chaff material deployed in the air acts as a decoy to deflect enemy's missiles for ensuring the safety of the fighter aircraft.

### Context:

- Development of the chaff technology by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).

## 1. Ind-Ra raises growth forecast to 9.4%, flags rising inequality

- India Ratings & Research (Ind-Ra) has revised upwards its GDP growth forecast for India for the current fiscal year.
- It has attributed the upward revision to the **faster recovery after the second wave of COVID-19, relatively good global markets driving higher exports and sufficient southwest monsoon rainfalls.**

- However, it needs to be noted that high growth was driven by a low base and there are **concerns over rising inequality** as the pandemic had pushed a large number of people into poverty and there is the growing likelihood of a **'k-shaped' recovery**.
  - A K-shaped recovery is when different communities experience different rates of recovery after a recession.

## 2. 'Terror groups continue to work with impunity'

- The Indian External Affairs Minister while chairing a high-level United Nations Security Council meeting on **'Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts'**, has expressed concerns over the **terror groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed operating with impunity and receiving support from countries like Pakistan**.
- The minister has also warned of the **events unfolding in Afghanistan having implications for both regional and international security**.

## H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

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

1. In India, sugarcane is grown as a Kharif Crop.
2. Sugarcane prices are determined by both the Centre as well as States.
3. The Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) of sugarcane is approved by the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP).
4. India produces more sugar than it consumes.

Options:

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

- In India, sugarcane is grown as a Kharif Crop. A hot and humid climate is favourable for sugarcane cultivation.
- Sugarcane prices are determined by the Centre as well as States.
  - The Centre announces Fair and Remunerative Prices (FRP) which are determined on the recommendation of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) and are announced by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, which is chaired by the Prime Minister.
  - The State Advised Prices (SAP) are announced by key sugarcane producing states which are generally higher than FRP.

- India is a sugar surplus nation i.e., it produces more sugar than it consumes.

**Q2. Which of the following is/are the schemes launched under National Mission for Enhanced Energy Efficiency (NMEEE)?**

1. Energy Efficiency Financing Platform (EEFP)
2. Perform Achieve and Trade Scheme (PAT)
3. Ujjwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana (UDAY)
4. Market Transformation for Energy Efficiency (MTEE)
5. Framework for Energy Efficient Economic Development (FEEED)

**Options:**

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

**Answer: d**

**Explanation:**

- National Mission for Enhanced Energy Efficiency (NMEEE) is one of the eight missions under the National Action Plan for Climate Change taken by the Indian government to promote the market for energy efficiency by fostering innovative policies and effective market instruments.
- NMEEE includes the following four specific energy efficiency initiatives.
  - Perform Achieve and Trade (PAT): Assigning energy reduction targets to large energy-intensive industries and distributing Energy Saving Certificates (ESCerts) on achievement of the targets. These ESCerts can then be traded.
  - Market Transformation for Energy Efficiency (MTEE): Promoting the adoption of energy-efficient equipment and appliances through innovative business models.
  - Energy Efficiency Financing Platform (EEFP): Increasing the confidence of financial institutions and investors to support energy efficiency initiatives.
  - Framework for Energy Efficiency Economic Development (FEEED): Promoting energy efficiency initiatives by hedging against investment risks.

**Q3. The Indian Navy undertook bilateral exercise 'Zayed Talwar 2021' with**

- a. Saudi Arabia
- b. United Arab Emirates
- c. Qatar
- d. Bahrain

**Answer: b**

**Explanation:**

- Indian Navy recently undertook bilateral exercise 'Zayed Talwar 2021' with UAE Navy off the coast of Abu Dhabi.

**Q4.** This port is strategically located on South Eastern coastline of Oman. It straddles along critical sea lanes in Arabian Sea and Gulf of Aden. In 2018, India secured access to this Port for military use and logistical support.

**The port being talked about is:**

- a. Port of Khasab
- b. Chabahar Port
- c. Duqm Port
- d. Bandar Abbas Port

**CHECK ANSWERS:-**

**Answer: c**

**Explanation:**

- Al Duqm Port is a seaport located in Oman. The Port of Duqm is situated on the southeastern seaboard of Oman, overlooking the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean.



- In a strategic move to expand its footprint in the Indian Ocean region, India has secured access to the key Port of Duqm in Oman for military use and logistical support. This is part of India's maritime strategy to counter Chinese influence and activities in the region.

- With the Assumption Island being developed in Seychelles and Agalega in Mauritius, Duqm fits into India's proactive maritime security roadmap.

**Q5. Which of the following is/are famous for Sun temples?**

1. Arasavalli
2. Amarakantak
3. Omkareshwar

**Select the correct answer using the code given below: [UPSC 2017]**

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

**Answer: a**

**Explanation:**

- Arasavalli in the Srikakulam district of the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh is famous for its Suryanarayana temple dedicated to Lord Surya (sun god).
- Amarkantak is a well-frequented Hindu pilgrimage centre that is popularly known as "Teerthraj" – "the king of pilgrimages". It is popular for its ancient temples of Kalachuri and the Sarvodaya Jain temple. Three rivers – the holy Narmada, the Sone and the Johila emerge here from the womb of Amarkantak. A rising stream of Narmada can be seen at the Narmada Udgam Temple which is the most visited place in Amarkantak.
- Omkareshwar is a Hindu temple dedicated to God Shiva.

## **I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions**

1. The signing of the Abraham Accords has helped India remove strategic obstacles and has aided defence cooperation. Analyse. (10 Marks, 150 Words)[GS-2, International Relations]
2. Gender parity in the Army is happening at a slow pace, and is mostly led by the courts. Explain the statement with the help of relevant examples. (10 Marks, 150 Words)[GS-1, Social issues]