

03 Sep 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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B. GS 2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. India keeping a watch on ties between Taliban and Pakistan

Background:

- Taliban after having taken over Afghanistan, has been reaching out to several countries for establishing ties, India being one of them. In this regard, the **head of the Taliban's Political Office in Doha met India's envoy to Qatar.**
- The meeting gains significance in the context that this happens to be the **first such formal communication between India and Afghanistan.**
- Despite some hope of the normalization of ties between India and a Taliban controlled Afghanistan, the **future of this relationship will depend upon the ties between the Taliban and Pakistan.**

Details:

Pakistan – Taliban ties:

- **Pakistan had offered the Taliban support** in terms of shelter and resources when it was ousted from power post the U.S. attack on Afghanistan. In this regard, Pakistan has long been asserting the special bond between Pakistan and the Taliban. **Pakistan's establishment has unparalleled leverage over the Taliban.**
- Intelligence sources have pointed out the strong support offered by Pakistan to the Taliban in its offensive against the elected civilian government and subsequent takeover of power in Afghanistan.
- The closeness between Pakistan and Afghanistan does not augur well for India, given that **Pakistan might use its influence with the Taliban to undermine India's strategic depth in Afghanistan** and also use Afghanistan as a base for launching anti-India terror operations.

For more information on this topic, refer to the following article:

[UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis of 18th Aug 2021](#)

Areas of differences between Pakistan and Taliban:

- **The Durand line** which remains contested between Pakistan and Afghanistan is a sensitive issue for the Pashtun community that resides in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Taliban has several times stated that it will work towards protecting Afghanistan's interests in this regard.
 - The Durand Line is the international land border between Afghanistan and Pakistan.
 - It demarcates Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan and Gilgit-Baltistan of northern and western Pakistan from the northeastern, eastern, and southern provinces of Afghanistan.
 - The Durand Line divides ethnic Pashtuns, who live on both sides of the border.
- Also, the **rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan may influence the restive Pashtun population in Pakistani territory** which could find some support from the Taliban. This could become a sore point between Pakistan and the Taliban.

Kashmir issue:

- In what would be comforting for India, the Taliban's spokesperson recently stated that **Kashmir is an issue between India and Pakistan and it would not interfere** in this regard. This gains all the more significance amidst fears that anti-India terror organizations might use Afghanistan as a base to launch attacks on India's Jammu and Kashmir.

Conclusion:

- The Taliban has adopted sophisticated messaging for **independently reaching out to major countries**, which constitutes a major departure from its earlier approach. This explains the **Taliban's attempts to project itself as a free player** and not be seen as completely dependent on countries like Pakistan. This development augurs well for India.

Category: POLITY

1. Long wait for a Deputy Speaker for Lok Sabha

Context:

- The Delhi High Court has asked the Union government to explain its stand on a petition that challenges the **government's reluctance to conduct the elections to the post of Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha**.

Details:

- The petition argues that keeping the post of Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha vacant is a violation of **Article 93 of the Indian Constitution**.
 - Article 93 states that "The Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the House of the People shall, as soon as may be, choose two members of the House to be respectively Speaker and Deputy Speaker thereof and, so often as the office of Speaker or Deputy Speaker becomes vacant, the House shall choose another member to be Speaker or Deputy Speaker, as the case may be".
 - It states that the **office of the Deputy Speaker should never be empty**.

Deputy Speaker:

- The position of Deputy Speaker is a Constitutional post.
- The Deputy Speaker is **elected by the Lok Sabha from amongst its members** right after the election of the Speaker has taken place.
- The Deputy Speaker **enjoys the same legislative powers as the Speaker**. And in the absence of the Speaker because of death, illness or any other reason, the Deputy Speaker assumes the administrative powers of the speaker.

Panel of chairpersons:

- There is also a **panel of 10 chairpersons for the Lok Sabha nominated by the Speaker from amongst Lok Sabha MPs** to preside if both the Speaker and Deputy Speaker are absent.
- The panel can't preside over the house when the office of the speaker or deputy speaker is vacant; in such cases, the president decides who shall preside over the house from amongst its members.

- When even these panelists are absent, any member of the house, as determined by the house acts as the presiding officer.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. Exports rose 45% to \$33 bn in August

Context:

- Preliminary estimates of **India's foreign trade data for the month of August.**

Details:

Exports:

- India's merchandise exports in August touched \$33.14 billion. This marks a **significant rise as compared to even the pre-pandemic phase as well.**
- In the first five months of 2021-22, India's merchandise exports have now touched \$163.67 billion, nearly 67% higher than that of the corresponding period last year and 22.9% higher than 2019. **The steady recovery in global trade seems to be aiding the uptick in exports from India.**
- Among the **major commodity groups**, excluding petroleum, and gems and jewellery, **engineering goods, cotton yarn, fabrics and handloom products have recorded impressive export growths.**
- Notably, the employment-intensive readymade garments sector has recorded relatively lower levels of growth.

Imports:

- Notably, the imports too have risen aided by a **sharp uptick in gold imports.**
- **Net oil imports have remained largely stable.** The moderation in crude oil prices has helped in this regard.

Trade deficit:

- The larger uptick in imports has **widened the trade deficit to a four-month high.**

Recommendations:

- The government has set a **target of merchandise exports worth \$400 billion for the current fiscal year.** Subsequently, the government also aims to reach a merchandise exports target of \$500 billion for FY23 and \$1 trillion in 2027-28.
- The government is aiming to target \$2 trillion exports by 2030, with \$1 trillion from merchandise exports and \$1 trillion from services exports.
- In order to meet these stiff targets, the following measures may be necessary.

- The government should try and **curtail the increasing freight rates and rampant container shortages** as this could adversely impact the price competitiveness of Indian goods in the international markets.
- The government should prioritize the **release of pending benefits under earlier export incentive schemes**. Also, the timely and efficient implementation of the [RoDTEP scheme](#) should be a top priority to incentivize exports.

For more related information on this topic, refer to the following article:

[UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis of 18th Aug 2021](#)

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Noble intentions

Context:

India completed its month-long presidency of the [UN Security Council \(UNSC\)](#).

Details:

- The Indian Government claimed a victory of sorts for chairing a session that resulted in the adoption of UNSC Resolution 2593.
 - The resolution condemns terrorism and urges the Taliban to ensure human rights in Afghanistan.
- The passage of the resolution was timely, practically coinciding with the exit of the last U.S. troops from Kabul, and the Taliban's declaration of complete victory.
- The Government has said that the resolution sponsored by the U.S., the U.K. and France addressed India's key concerns, calling for the Taliban to:
 - Ensure safe evacuations of Afghans wishing to leave.
 - Not allowing Afghan soil to be used for terrorist activities.
- It also followed on three discussions held under India's chairmanship that have set out the expectations from the new regime in Afghanistan:
 - the importance of upholding rights
 - to push for an inclusive, negotiated political settlement for government,
 - condemning all acts of terror, including the recent attack on Kabul airport; preventing any future attacks, and combating the presence of UN-designated entities.

Shortcomings in the resolution:

- It is disappointing that the India-chaired resolution does not contain language that would hold the new regime more accountable.
- The resolution did not contain any consequential language that would give the UNSC's stated intentions any real power.
- It appears to accept the Taliban regime as the default force in Afghanistan.
- The watered-down language was probably because of severe opposition from Russia and China, who later decided to abstain.

Way Forward:

- It is early to consider more punitive action against the Taliban for violating their commitments by using the UN Charter's "Chapter 7" mandate empowering the UNSC to maintain peace.
- The divide in the P-5 nations will only prove to be counterproductive if the UNSC wants to take control of the situation, as affirmed by the resolution.
- The UN system must acknowledge the powerful leverage it has in Afghanistan's future and make use of all mechanisms in its mandate to monitor the progress of government formation.
 - A major tool is the India-chaired 1988 (Taliban) Sanctions Committee which needs to ensure that no designated leader of the Taliban and their associates are given recourse to funds, arms or travel permission unless they show a commitment to international principles.
 - Another tool is the renewal of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.
- As a concerned neighbour of Afghanistan and a believer in the UN-led multilateral order, India still has a role in Afghan's future. India must continue to play that role.

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. Breakthrough challenge

The article calls for the Vaccine makers to move towards making vaccines for the Delta variants. Read more on [coronavirus variants](#) in the linked article.

Context:

- Over 66 crore COVID-19 vaccines have been administered since the vaccination drive commenced.
- India has now inoculated at least half its adult population with at least one dose, and 16% with two.

Concerns:

- Kerala, which contributes the bulk of infections, also has among the highest proportions of the population who are double vaccinated.
 - This underlies concerns about the rise in breakthrough infections.
 - Breakthrough infections are confirmed infections in those who have been inoculated with both doses.
- Studies have reported between 1%-10% of fully vaccinated healthcare workers as having been infected.

- However, less than 5% of them have required hospitalisation and no deaths have been confirmed.
- This indicates the effectiveness of vaccines in preventing severe sickness and death.
- A similar trend is observed internationally too.
 - Israel and the U.S., in spite of high vaccination coverage, continue to report new cases.
- Vaccines in controlled clinical trials had demonstrated 70%-90% efficacy but lost considerable ability to reduce symptomatic infections when confronted with the Delta variants.
 - This makes a certain fraction of those fully vaccinated still vulnerable.
 - The Delta variant has reduced vaccine efficacy against symptomatic illness and transmission.

Way Forward:

- The prime suspects, internationally as well as in India, are the Delta variants and related sub-lineages that are believed to form the bulk of coronavirus infections.
 - However, the [Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium \(INSACOG\)](#) that tracks mutations in coronavirus strains has said that the breakthrough infections reported so far are within expected numbers.
- It is a fact of evolution that viruses would mutate to be able to avoid antibodies and vaccines would have to be upgraded accordingly.
- While it is suggested that even a booster of the original vaccine is likely to help improve immunity against delta variant, its ability to infect the fully vaccinated raises questions about the best strategy going forward.
- Also, there are no reports anywhere in the world where vaccine makers have specified a timeline for vaccines that are tuned to the Delta variants.
- Vaccine developers must work on the question of whether future COVID-19 shots will need to be tweaked for the delta variant, or other new variants.
- Vaccine makers who may have got emergency-use authorisations but have not yet launched the vaccines must move to making vaccines for the Delta variants.

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. A hydro onslaught the Himalayas cannot take

The article talks about the need for the cancellation of the many upcoming and approved hydel projects in the fragile Himalayan region.

Context:

- Policymakers have permitted projects and large-scale infrastructure in the already fragile and vulnerable Ganga-Himalayan basin.
- Seven Himalayan hydel projects have been allowed to complete construction primarily on the grounds that they are over 50% complete.

This topic has been covered in [Aug 28th, 2021 CNA.](#)

Concerns:

- The recent approval for 7 hydel projects essentially goes against the core mandate of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) which is to conserve the country's natural environment.
- Approvals have been given despite the dire warnings of climate change threats and environmental challenges these projects could pose.
- The proliferation of dams is not restricted to Uttarakhand.
 - By 2007, Sikkim had entered a contract with private-public sector players for the development of 5,000 MW.
 - Arunachal Pradesh signed memoranda of understanding in 2010 for 40,000 MW.
 - These agreements thrived on speculative investments and political brokering and had minimal accountability or experience in the courier and logistics, real estate, steel fabrication, and tourism sectors.

Evidences:

- The study and analysis of recurrent disasters in the last decade in the state of Uttarakhand point towards the anthropogenic pressure being a direct or an indirect contributor.
 - A recent example is the Rishi-Ganga valley disaster in which the river turned into a flood carrying a heavy load of silt and debris and demolishing hydropower projects along its course.
- Post the 2013 Kedarnath tragedy, in suo motu cognisance by the Supreme Court, an expert body (EB-I) was constituted to investigate the link between hydro-power projects in Uttarakhand and the recurring disaster.
 - In its findings, EB-I said there was a direct and indirect impact of these dams in aggravating the disaster.
 - However, to get approvals for these projects, multiple committees were formed with some design changes to finally get approvals.
- Besides, the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report has special significance in the context of fragile mountainous ecological regimes.

Read more on the Sixth Assessment Report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) covered in [Aug 10th, 2021 CNA](#).

- The sustainability of the dams in the long term is highly questionable as hydropower solely relies on the excess availability of water.
 - Climate change models are clear about the cascading impacts of global warming trends on the [glaciers](#) of the Himalayas — the main source of water in the region.
 - Temperatures across the region are projected to rise by about 1°C to 2°C on average by 2050.
 - Retreating glaciers and the alternating phases of floods and drought will impact the seasonal flows of rivers.

- Evidences suggest that about 15% of the great earthquakes (of magnitudes greater than 8) of the 20th century took place in the Himalayas and many of its segments are likely to see a period of intense earthquake activity in the future.
 - The 2015 Nepal earthquake is a case in point.
 - Several dams were damaged in that event destroying a third of Nepal's hydropower.

Issue:

- The conclusions of EB-I that had flagged the incalculable environmental risks of such structures have been conveniently sidelined and overwritten by EB-II.
- EB-II has paved way for all projects through some design change modifications.
- Recent affidavit reveals that the Government is inclined towards the construction of 26 other projects, as in the recommendation of the expert body (EB-II; B.P. Das committee).
- The affidavit submitted by the MoEFCC conceals its own observations and admissions given in its earlier affidavit of 2014 which admitted that hydroelectric projects did aggravate the 2013 flood.
- It also conceals the minutes of the meeting and decision taken by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) in 2019 in this regard which mentions that there would be "no new hydropower projects" on the [Ganga](#) along with the cancellation of those that have not reached 50% of its construction.
- A huge amount of money is being wasted in the construction of hydel dams that will function much below their efficiency, cause the loss of water and forests, and render the area fragile.
- By the time they are constructed, the cost of electricity generated will also be phenomenally high and would have no buyers.

Way Forward:

- Science and logic press on the need for conservation and protection in these sensitive areas.
- These are the projects that have been approved by the Government with no science backing them but with several scientific truths demanding their cancellation.
- Considering the environmental and cultural significance of these areas, it is imperative that the Government refrains from the economically challenged rapacious construction of hydroelectric projects and declares the upper reaches of all the headstreams of the Ganga as [eco-sensitive zones](#). It must allow the river to flow unfettered and free.
- Additionally, the MoEFCC must formulate a written position on climate change adaptation with respect to the hydropower sector, after a thorough public discourse.

F. Prelims Facts

1. Indian biologist wins global award for turtle conservation

Context:

- Indian biologist Shailendra Singh has been awarded the **Behler Turtle Conservation Award** for his contribution in reviving the status of three critically endangered turtle species.
 - The **red-crowned roofed turtle** (*Batagur kachuga*)

- The red-crowned roofed turtle or Bengal roof turtle is a species of **freshwater turtle endemic to South Asia**.
- The large Batagur turtles are probably the **most threatened freshwater turtles in India**. Their populations have now been drastically reduced due to poaching for their meat and shells, accidental drowning in fishing gear, water pollution, hydroelectric infrastructure projects, habitat destruction by sand mining, and egg predation by jackals.
- **Northern river terrapin (*Batagur baska*)**
 - The northern river terrapin (*Batagur baska*) is a species of riverine turtle native to Southeast Asia. It is considered extinct in much of its former range.
 - The northern river terrapin is one of Asia's largest freshwater and brack water turtles.
- **Black softshell turtle (*Nilssonina nigricans*)**
 - The black softshell turtle or Bostami turtle (*Nilssonina nigricans*), previously placed in genus *Aspideretes*, is a species of freshwater turtle found in India (Assam) and Bangladesh. It shares some degree of similarity with the Indian peacock softshell turtle. Believed to have **developed through inbreeding** in this species.
 - Consumption of turtle meat and eggs, silt mining, encroachment of wetlands and change in flooding pattern are some of the major threats to this species.

G. Tidbits

1. TOD highlighted in draft regional plan 2041

- As a part of urban regeneration, **Transit Oriented Development (TOD) and planned housing along TOD corridors** have been highlighted in the draft Regional Plan-2041 for the National Capital Region.
 - In urban planning, a transit-oriented development (TOD) is a type of urban development that maximizes the amount of residential, business and leisure space within walking distance of public transport.
- The policy proposes to have **residential, commercial, civic, institutional units in close proximity to transport corridors**.
- The policy focuses on enhancing walkability and last-mile connectivity through a higher dependence on public transport.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Which of the following statements with respect to Controller General of Accounts is/are correct?

1. CGA is an independent constitutional body that derives its mandate from the constitution of India.
2. CGA is the Principal Advisor on Accounting matters to the Union Government.
3. CGA is responsible for the disbursement of Pension in respect of Central Civil Pensioners, Freedom Fighters, High Court Judges, Eg-M.P.s and Eg-Presidents.

Options:

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Controller General of Accounts is not a Constitutional body. It comes under the Department of Expenditure in the Finance Ministry.
- It is the Principal Accounting Adviser to the Government of India.

Q2. Which of the given statements is/are correct?

- 1. India accounts for over 50% of the global production of coconuts.
- 2. The World Coconut Germplasm Centre is located in Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
- 3. The secretariat of the International Coconut Community under the aegis of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN-ESCAP) is headquartered in Tamil Nadu in India.
- 4. De-husked coconut and Copra are covered under the government's Minimum Support Price (MSP) scheme.

Options:

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

- India accounts for around 34% of the global production of coconuts.
- The secretariat of the International Coconut Community under the aegis of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN-ESCAP) is headquartered in Jakarta.

Q3. Which of the following are correctly matched?

Turtle

- 1. Red-crowned roofed turtle
- 2. Northern River terrapin

Conservation status

- Endangered
- Extinct in the Wild

3. Black softshell turtle Critically Endangered

Options:

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- Red-crowned roofed turtle, Northern River terrapin and Black softshell turtle are critically endangered as per IUCN classification.

Q4. Which of the given statements is/are INCORRECT?

- 1. Durand Line is an important international boundary line, running between Pakistan and Afghanistan.
- 2. The Durand line was slightly modified by the Anglo-Afghan Treaty of 1919, meant to be for 100 years and was renewed in 1999.
- 3. Afghanistan was the only country to vote against Pakistan joining the United Nations in 1947.

Options:

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 1 and 3 only
- c. 2 only
- d. None of the above

Answer: c

Explanation:

- The Durand line was slightly modified by the Anglo-Afghan Treaty of 1919, meant to be for 100 years but was never renewed.

Q5. With reference to two non-conventional energy sources called 'coal bed methane' and 'shale gas', consider the following 'statements':

- 1. Coal bed methane is the pure methane gas extracted from coal seams, while shale gas is a mixture of propane and butane only that can be extracted from fine-grained sedimentary rocks.
- 2. In India abundant coal bed methane sources exist, but so far no shale gas sources have been found.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct? [UPSC 2014]

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Shale gas has some proportion of methane as well.
- In India, both coal bed methane and shale gas sources have been found.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. How should India look at the dispute between Afghanistan and Pakistan in the context of Durand Line? (10 Marks, 150 Words)[GS-2, International Relations]
2. What do you understand by 'breakthrough infections'? Evaluate the protection offered by the existing vaccines and suggest measures to reduce further COVID- 19 spread. (10 Marks, 150 Words)[GS-2, Health]

Read the previous CNA [here](#).