

15 Sep 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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A. GS 1 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

B. GS 2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. India, U.K. to begin trade talks from November 1

Context:

- The Union government has announced that **formal negotiations for a proposed India-United Kingdom Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** will begin on November 1.

Details:

Early harvest agreement:

- The first step in the India-United Kingdom Free Trade Agreement (FTA) would be an **interim “early harvest” agreement** to ensure early progress in trade talks. This agreement is to be completed by March 2022.
- It would involve the constitution of trade working groups to help both sides better understand each other’s position on issues like tariffs, standards, IP and data regulation. The interim trade pact would **involve early tariff or market access concessions on certain high priority products and services.**

Issues to be addressed:

- India seeks **better access for its service trade to the U.K.** given its strength in the services sector. India has also pitched for **curbing non-tariff barriers to goods trade** by aligning standards and simplifying burdensome customs procedures and steps such as IP protection and alignment of data protection rules to ease the trade of goods.
- **The U.K. is seeking lower tariffs on alcoholic spirits, automotives and medical devices,** among other items.

Conclusion:

- **India and the UK enjoy high complementarities in trade,** and an early trade deal serves the **geopolitical and economic interests** of the two countries.
- Given that the proposed trade agreement between India and U.K. would help **unlock business opportunities and generate jobs,** there is the need to strike a fine balance between the interest of the two countries through appropriate concessions in goods and services trade.

Also read: [India – UK relations](#)

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. No firm commitment from India on ‘net zero’: Kerry

Background:

- The U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Climate was on an official visit to India.
- The visit was aimed at helping **raise global climate ambition** at the upcoming COP26 summit in the U.K. The U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Climate was making a pitch for India to announce a pledge to **reduce emissions to “net zero” (carbon-neutral) by 2050** — to ensure that global warming is held at 1.5 degrees Celsius, instead of the 2 degrees announced at the Paris summit in 2015.

Details:

- The U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Climate has stated that he had **not received a firm pledge from New Delhi on the issue of carbon neutrality** as yet.
- The Indian government has stated that it does not consider the “net zero” goal its only priority at present and is **focused on the “key issues” of climate justice and sustainable lifestyles**.
 - Climate justice is a term used to frame climate change as an ethical and political issue, rather than one that is purely environmental or physical in nature. Climate justice examines concepts such as equality, human rights, collective rights, and the historical responsibilities for climate change.
- India has argued that the **emphasis on net zero leads to inequality between the demands of developed societies from developing countries on emissions cuts** and has called upon the developed world to do more on the issue of climate action.

For more related information on India’s stand on the net zero emission calls, refer to the following article:

[UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis of 8th Apr 2021](#)

Category: ECONOMY

1. ‘Banks’ gross NPAs will exceed Rs. 10 lakh crore in March 2022’

Context:

- **Assocham and Crisil’s joint report** on gross **NPAs** in the Indian economy.

Details:

- The **gross non-performing assets (GNPAs) of commercial banks are expected to exceed Rs. 10 lakh crore by March 2022**. NPAs are expected to rise to **5-9% by March 2022**.
- The high GNPAs are being **attributed mainly to fresh slippages in retail, micro, small and medium enterprise (MSME) accounts**, besides some restructured assets.
 - The current asset quality stress cycle will be different from that witnessed a few years back. NPAs then came primarily from bigger, chunkier accounts.
 - According to the study, this time, smaller accounts, especially the MSME and retail segments, are expected to be more vulnerable than large corporates, as the latter have consolidated and deleveraged their balance sheets considerably in the past year.

- Notably, however, the GNPA's of banks had declined from the peak seen in March 2018 and were lower as of March 2021 vis-à-vis March 2020 on account of supportive measures, including the six-month debt moratorium, [emergency credit line guarantee scheme \(ECLGS\)](#) loans and restructuring measures.

Concerns:

- There would be a **potential spike in NPAs** as the standstill on initiation of fresh insolvency cases for a year has ended in March 2021 and most of the pandemic-induced policies or measures are unlikely to be continued further.
- A large NPA would adversely **impact the financial viability of the Indian financial system** which could prove to be detrimental to India's economic prospects.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Behind the great Indian Internet shutdown

Issue:

India's tag of the world's 'Internet shutdown capital' has come about from a lack of compliance with [Supreme Court](#) guidelines.

Background:

- In *Anuradha Bhasin vs Union of India* (Jan 2020), the Supreme Court of India held that access to information via the Internet is a [fundamental right](#) under the Indian Constitution.
- It also ruled that any restriction on Internet access by the Government must be temporary, limited in scope, lawful, necessary and proportionate.
- The Court reiterated that the Government's orders restricting Internet access are subject to review by Courts.
- Public emergency or a threat to public safety is the legislatively mandated prerequisites for restricting Internet access.

Issue:

- India remains infamous as the Internet shutdown capital of the world.
- While the expectation was that this decision would limit the instances of Internet suspension to exceptional situations only, these promises have remained unfulfilled.
- The year following the decision, India saw more instances of Internet shutdown than the year preceding it.
- India's Internet restrictions also accounted for more than 70% of the total loss to the global economy in 2020.

Recent restrictions:

- The Government of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) has restricted access to mobile data in the Valley of Kashmir. It has also faced complete internet services shut down.
 - Restrictions were issued in the wake of the death of hardline separatist leader Syed Ali Shah Geelani.
- Similar restrictions have been ordered by the government of Haryana in five different districts following farmers' protests that were organised there.
- While in these instances, the governments have published the orders restricting access, such publication remains an exception and not the rule.
- In a few instances, the suspension orders have not been uploaded on the government's websites.
- Compliance with the Anuradha Bhasin judgement remains low in other parts of India as well.

Concerns:

- Publication of Internet suspension orders is important as those aggrieved with the restriction cannot approach a court of law to question an order's legality in the absence of the order.
- Non-publication of orders also undermines public confidence in the Government.
 - The Internet is a necessity in this day and age, and restrictions without publicly disclosed reasons create a trust deficit.
- The Union Government has not done enough to give statutory recognition to the directions in Anuradha Bhasin.
 - In 2020, it amended the Telecom Suspension Rules 2017 to limit Internet suspension orders to a maximum of 15 days.
 - However, the amendment did not include an obligation on the Government to publish orders nor did it include the Supreme Court's direction to undertake periodic review of these orders.
- As a result, the governmental non-compliance with the law is difficult to comprehend.
- If Supreme Court decisions are not statutorily recognised, the officials enforce the law incorrectly simply because of a lack of awareness.
 - The experience with Section 66A of the [Information Technology Act](#) is a case in point.
 - The State of Meghalaya in reply to an RTI application stated that it was not even aware of the judgment in Anuradha Bhasin.
- Internet suspension also remains a problem independent of non-compliance with the directions of the Supreme Court.
- In 2020, the Indian economy suffered losses to the tune of \$2.8 billion due to 129 separate instances of Internet suspension, which affected 10.3 million individuals.
- Internet restrictions are often justified on the ground that they are limited to mobile data services.
 - But, according to a 2019 [Telecom Regulatory Authority of India \(TRAI\)](#) report on Indian Telecom Services Performance Indicators, mobile device users (dongle and phone) constituted 97.02% of total Internet users. Only 3% of users have access to broadband Internet.

- It follows from this that Internet restrictions adversely affect those from lower socio-economic backgrounds more.

Way Forward:

- The Internet is a source of information, entertainment, health care, education, livelihood and a platform for the members of Indian society to interact with each other and the world at large.
- The economic, psychological, social, and journalistic harm caused by such suspensions outweighs any speculative benefits.
- Internet suspensions must be imposed in times of emergency and not to stifle the democratic exercise of the right to protest.
- Furthermore, the internet must be seen as also a tool to verify rumours, and enables individuals and the Government to disseminate the truth.

Internet restrictions are much more common than desirable and cannot be challenged because of a lack of transparency. More faithful compliance with the Supreme Court guidelines on the part of the executive government is needed to rid India of the tag of the “internet shutdown capital” of the world and fulfil Digital India’s potential.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Partners in the Indo-Pacific

Context:

- Recently, India’s Defence Minister and External Affairs Minister held the inaugural ‘2+2’ talks with their Australian counterparts.
- Both countries are taking several steps to implement their vision of a peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific region.

Deepening India-Australia partnership:

- Prime Ministers of both countries elevated the bilateral strategic partnership to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in June 2020 and the bond is deepening.
- Their personal connection is providing the political framework and impetus to this partnership.
- There is a growing convergence of views on geo-strategic and geo-economic issues backed by a robust people-to-people connection.
- Collaborations have been stepped up through institutions and organisations on many issues in bilateral, trilateral, plurilateral and multilateral formats.
- Further, the elevation of ‘2+2’ Foreign and Defence Secretaries’ Dialogue to the ministerial level emphasises the positive trajectory of deepening relations.
- Both countries have an interest in a free, open, inclusive and rule-based Indo-Pacific region.
 - It includes stability and freedom of navigation for all nations in the region.
- Given their common security challenges and in order to enhance regional security architecture, both countries have intensified bilateral security cooperation.

- They have also stepped up security dialogue with key partner countries to deepen coordination in areas where security interests are mutual.
 - The Malabar naval exercise by the [Quad](#) (Australia, India, Japan, the U.S.) is a step in this direction.
 - While [exercise Malabar](#) signals deeper engagement and cooperation between the Quad countries at the strategic level, at the tactical level, it also allows the navies to develop and enhance advanced warfare tactics.

Trade Relations:

- Trading between India and Australia has seen remarkable growth in recent years.
 - Two-way trade was valued at \$24.4 billion in 2020.
- The Indian economy is not only one of the largest economies in the world, but it is also going through a tectonic economic transformation. In this attempt, Australia is a valued partner as both countries draw their congruence from a rule-based international order, believe in inclusive economic integration in the Indo-Pacific region, and face challenges from China.
- Trade is rapidly growing and encompasses agribusiness, infrastructure, healthcare, energy and mining, education, artificial intelligence, big data and fintech.
- Both countries are working to build a long-term sustainable economic relation.
- In a joint communique in August 2021, India's Commerce and Industry Minister and the Australian Trade Minister announced that an early harvest agreement shortly will pave the way for an early conclusion of a bilateral Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement between both countries.

Way Forward:

- Despite the growth in trade, both countries must resolve old issues that pose a barrier to deeper economic integration.
 - India has a high tariff for agriculture and dairy products which makes it difficult for Australian exporters to export these items to India.
 - At the same time, India faces non-tariff barriers and its skilled professionals in the Australian labour market face discrimination.
- [India-Australia relations](#) have deepened in the last few decades owing to the alignment of strategic interests driven by a common value system. Both are vibrant democracies which have respect for international laws and a belief in the equality of all nations irrespective of their size and strength.
- It is expected that the '2+2' dialogue will provide substance to this partnership.
- Expected meetings between the two Prime Ministers will further deepen political understanding and open more avenues for collaborations.
- Additionally, both countries are also entering into partnerships with like-minded countries, including Indonesia, Japan and France, in a trilateral framework.
- As Quad has gained momentum in recent months, the time is ripe for these countries to deliberate on a 'Quad+' framework.

The geopolitical and geo-economic developments in international affairs make it imperative for India and Australia to develop a partnership guided by principles with a humane approach.

2. Afghanistan — the shape of things to come

As the efforts to control the situation in Afghanistan from the outside have failed invariably, the article explains how India's game plan will have to evolve as the situation unfolds.

This issue has been covered in [Aug 27th, 2021 CNA](#), [Aug 28th, 2021 CNA](#).

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Positive climate

Context:

India and the United States have jointly launched the Climate Action and Finance Mobilization Dialogue (CAFMD) of the Agenda 2030 Partnership.

Climate Action and Finance Mobilization Dialogue (CAFMD):

- CAFMD will provide both countries with an opportunity to renew collaborations on climate change.
- It will strengthen India-US bilateral cooperation on climate and environment.
- It will help in addressing the financing aspects and deliver climate finance primarily as grants and concessional finance, as envisaged under [Paris Agreement](#) to strengthen climate action.
- Engagement with the U.S. would help India expand mitigation, adaptation action.

Focus on India for Prevention of Climate Change:

- India is the third highest emitter of greenhouse gases.
- This has sharpened focus on its course of future policy to mitigate carbon emissions under the Paris Agreement.
- While India has an indisputable claim to a big part of the remaining global carbon budget, along with other smaller nations with low historical emissions, there is less scope for this as the world is facing record temperatures and calamitous weather events.
- As Net Zero goals have been set by the U.S. and the European Union for mid-century, and 2060 by China, there is an increasing pressure on India to commit itself to a date when it can achieve net zero.

The US Support:

- Declaring a net zero plan under the Paris pact is a worrisome prospect for India as it would impose expensive choices for India, particularly in energy production.
 - This concern has been addressed to an extent by the visiting U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Climate who has promised finances and technology to make renewable energy the core of future development in India.

Note:

- At the end of 2020, the Environment Ministry declared that India had achieved 21% of its 33%-35% target to cut emissions intensity of GDP by 2030, and was generating 37.9% of the 40% of power from renewables.

Way Forward:

- Specific areas of cooperation to bring down emissions in fields such as the expansion of transport, buildings and industry and facilitating funding for 450 GW of renewable energy by 2030 can advance the India-U.S. Climate and Clean Energy Agenda 2030 Partnership.
- India needs to get all States to mitigate emissions and help them adapt to climate-linked extreme weather and atmospheric pollution caused by fossil fuels.
- India's immediate challenge lies in coming up with an adaptation framework to help those at highest risk due to climate change (cyclone-prone areas, coastal areas, heat stress have been causing higher mortality among the vulnerable elderly).
 - This requires planning, funding and political commitment.
- Making low-cost insurance available for houses against climate-related losses is the need of the hour.
 - It will raise resilience, and lead to audits, encouraging governments to reduce risks.
- The Paris Agreement can easily fund much-needed urban retrofitting and boost employment.

There lies an opportunity to steer post-COVID-19 policies towards green development. For a low-emissions future, policies must put nature at the centre.

F. Prelims Facts

1. Coronavirus variants Mu, C.1.2 not detected in India: INSACOG

- **The Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG)** in its latest weekly update has noted that neither of the two coronavirus variants – Mu nor C.1.2 has been seen in India.
 - **WHO added B.1.621 (including B.1.621.1) to its list of variants of interest and named it “Mu”.** Mu has mutations that potentially allow it to evade the protection conferred by vaccines.
 - **WHO has declared C.1.2 as a new variant of concern.** The C.1.2 variant contains mutations of all the three types known to increase transmissibility and aid immune escape. C.1.2 is a sub-lineage of the C.1 variant identified in South Africa.

2. Finally, J&K tribal population to get their due

Gujjar-Bakerwals:

- Gujjars and Bakerwals are listed as Scheduled Tribes in Jammu and Kashmir.
- They inhabit the high mountain ranges of Jammu and Kashmir. They are a **nomadic tribe and seasonally migrate from one place to another** with their sheep and goat herds. They travel higher up the mountains and lower down to plains according to seasonal variation.

Gaddi-Sippis:

- Gaddis and Sippis communities are **semi-nomadic tribes having a special characteristic feature of living in dhoks (meadows)** in the last inhabited areas of the five districts of Udhampur, Doda, Kathua, Reasi and Ramban of Jammu and Kashmir.

Context:

- The Jammu and Kashmir government has decided to implement the **Forest Rights Act, 2006**. This is expected to benefit the tribals and nomadic communities, including Gujjar-Bakerwals and Gaddi-Sippis in the Union Territory.

G. Tidbits

1. Council may consider bringing petrol, diesel under GST purview

- The GST Council might consider **bringing petrol, diesel and other petroleum products within the goods and services tax (GST) ambit** in the upcoming meeting in Lucknow.
 - Five petroleum goods — **petrol, diesel, ATF, natural gas and crude oil** — have been kept out of the purview of the GST regime.
- GST is being seen as a solution to the problem of record high petrol and diesel rates in the country, as it would **end the cascading effect of tax on tax** (State VAT being levied not just on the cost of production but also on the excise duty charged by the Centre on such output).

2. 'Hindi a friend of all Indian languages'

Measures taken for the protection and promotion of regional languages:

- The **new education policy** stressed the **use of the mother tongue for imparting education till the fifth standard**.
- Regional languages are also being promoted for higher education. **14 colleges in eight States were to start their technical courses in five languages:** Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Bengali and Marathi.

Context:

- Speaking at the Hindi Divas Samaroh, Union Home Minister has reiterated the fact that there was no conflict between Hindi and other regional Indian languages and has called for **complementary coexistence**.
 - Hindi is the official language of India.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. *Aedes aegypti* mosquito transmits which of the following viral disease/s?

1. Malaria
2. Dengue
3. Zika
4. Lymphatic filariasis
5. Yellow Fever

Options:

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- *Aedes aegypti* is known to transmit the dengue virus, yellow fever virus, chikungunya virus, and Zika virus.
- Malaria is transmitted to humans by female mosquitoes of the genus Anopheles.
- Lymphatic filariasis, considered globally as a neglected tropical disease (NTD), is a parasitic disease caused by microscopic, thread-like worms. The adult worms only live in the human lymph system. Lymphatic filariasis is spread by infected mosquitoes.
 - A wide range of mosquitoes can transmit the parasite, depending on the geographic area. In Africa, the most common vector is Anopheles and in the Americas, it is Culex quinquefasciatus. Aedes and Mansonia can transmit the infection in the Pacific and in Asia.

Q2. Which of the given statements with respect to Microfinance Institutions Network (MFIN) is/are correct?

1. It is an association of Micro Finance Institutions operating as non-banking financial companies (NBFCs).
2. It is recognized by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).
3. It is the first association in the business of micro-lending to be given the self-regulatory organization (SRO) status by RBI.

Options:

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Microfinance Institutions Network (MFIN) is a self-regulatory organization of NBFC MFIs that aims to work with regulators to promote microfinance to achieve larger financial inclusion goals.
- It is recognized by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).
- It is the first association in the business of micro-lending to be given the self-regulatory organization (SRO) status by RBI.

Q3. He established a “Provisional Government of India” in Kabul in the middle of World War I in 1915, which served as the Indian Government in exile. He is popularly known as “Aryan Peshwa”. He was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1932.

The Indian freedom fighter being talked about is:

- a. Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III of Baroda
- b. Raja Mahendra Pratap Singh
- c. Shyamji Krishna Varma
- d. Manabendra Nath Roy

Answer: b

Explanation:

- Raja Mahendra Pratap Singh was an Indian freedom fighter, journalist, writer, revolutionary, President in the Provisional Government of India, which served as the Indian Government in exile during World War I from Kabul in 1915.
- He is popularly known as “Aryan Peshwa”.
- He was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1932.

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

1. India and United Kingdom have a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with a zero-tariff regime.
2. The countries recently signed Mutual Recognition Agreements in selective services like nursing and architecture services.

Options:

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- The Union government has announced that formal negotiations for a proposed India-United Kingdom Free Trade Agreement (FTA) will begin on November 1, 2021.
- India and the U.K. are still exploring signing a few mutual recognition agreements in selective services like nursing and architecture services

Q5. The Vital-Vidhvansak, the first monthly journal to have the untouchable people as its target audience was published by: (UPSC-2014)

- a. Gopal Baba Walangkar
- b. Jyotiba Phule
- c. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi
- d. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar

Answer: a

Explanation:

- In 1888, Gopal Baba Walangkar began publishing the monthly journal titled Vital-Vidhvansak (Destroyer of Brahmanical or Ceremonial Pollution), which was the first to have the untouchable people as its target audience.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. There is escalating pressure for India to commit itself to a date when it can achieve net zero emissions. In this context, examine how engagement with the U.S. can help India expand mitigation and adaptation action. (15 marks, 250 words)[GS-3, Environment and Ecology]
2. The '2+2' dialogue between India and Australia will provide substance to an already meaningful partnership. Analyse. (15 marks, 250 words)[GS-2, International Relations]