

18 Sep 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A. GS 1 Related

B. GS 2 Related

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. [SC Collegium on mission mode to fill vacancies](#)

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. [Australia shrugs off China anger on nuclear subs](#)

C. GS 3 Related

ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. [Biden unveils plan to cut methane emissions](#)

ECONOMY

1. [GST Council not for inclusion of petroleum products: FinMin](#)
2. [Major restructuring of Railways on anvil](#)

D. GS 4 Related

E. Editorials

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. [Picking up the threads from the Afghan rubble](#)

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. [Act and friction](#)

F. Prelims Facts

G. Tidbits

1. [‘Political change in Afghanistan not inclusive’](#)

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

A. GS 1 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

B. GS 2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. [SC Collegium on mission mode to fill vacancies](#)

Context:

The [Supreme Court Collegium](#), led by Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana, is proceeding with staggering speed to fill vacancies and strengthen the judiciary.

Details:

- The past month has seen the Collegium recommend over 100 judicial appointments, several transfers and elevations of judges, advocates and Chief Justices.
- The Collegium began its work on a historic note with the successful recommendation of nine new judges to the Supreme Court that were quickly approved by the government. The nine new judges named for the Supreme Court have already taken oath.

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

- Eight new Chief Justices for the High Courts have been recommended.
- Transfer of five High Court Chief Justices has been recommended.
- Initiating one of the largest shuffles in the higher judiciary in recent times, the Supreme Court Collegium has recommended the transfer of judges across 14 of a total 25 High Courts in the country.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**1. Australia shrugs off China anger on nuclear subs****Context:**

Australia has brushed aside Chinese anger over its decision to acquire U.S. nuclear-powered submarines. However, Australia has vowed to defend the rule of law in airspace and waters where Beijing has staked hotly contested claims.

Background:

- The U.S. President announced the new Australia-U.S.-Britain defence alliance, extending U.S. nuclear submarine technology to Australia as well as cyber defence, applied [artificial intelligence](#) and undersea capabilities.
- AUKUS is a trilateral security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

- The United States and the United Kingdom will help Australia to develop and deploy nuclear-powered submarines, adding to the Western military presence in the Pacific region.

This issue has been covered in [Sep 17th, 2021 CNA](#).

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Biden unveils plan to cut methane emissions

Context:

U.S. President Joe Biden has announced the Global Methane Pledge.

Details:

- Global Methane Pledge is a U.S.–European Union led effort to cut methane emissions by a third by the end of this decade.
- Methane, a greenhouse gas, is 80 times more potent than carbon dioxide in terms of its global warming capacity.
- Approximately 40% of methane emitted is from natural sources and about 60% comes from human-influenced sources, including livestock farming, rice agriculture, biomass burning and so forth.

Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate (MEF):

- The announcement was made at the Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate (MEF).
- The Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate was launched in 2009.
- The MEF is intended to facilitate a candid dialogue among major developed and developing economies, help generate the political leadership necessary to achieve a successful outcome on climate change and advance the exploration of concrete initiatives and joint ventures that increase the supply of clean energy while cutting [greenhouse gas](#) emissions.

Note:

- India has announced a renewable energy capacity goal of 450 GW by 2030.
- Indian Railways has committed to achieving 'net zero' emissions by 2030.
- However, India as a whole has not committed to a time frame for reaching 'net zero' target.

- Some 130 countries are considering a net zero emissions target by 2050.

Category: ECONOMY

1. GST Council not for inclusion of petroleum products: FinMin

Context:

The 45th Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council meet.

Key Highlights:

- The [GST council](#) has decided to keep petroleum products out of the GST regime.
 - Five petroleum goods — petrol, diesel, ATF, natural gas and crude oil — have been kept out of the purview of the GST regime.
- Consumers will have to keep paying the Compensation Cess levied on products like automobiles till March 2026 instead of July 2022 as originally decided at the time of rolling out GST.
- Some States have demanded to extend the five-year period for which they have been assured a 14% revenue growth for giving up several taxation powers to pave the way for implementing the GST regime.
 - The finance minister indicated that the Union government is not inclined to consider these demands as the compensation was to be paid for five years only till July 2022 with an assured level of revenue for the States.
- Import of leased aircraft exempted from I-GST.
- Food delivery apps to collect and remit GST on food orders instead of restaurants.
- Tax on fortified rice kernels under the [Integrated Child Development Services scheme](#) has been reduced from 18% to 5%.
- GST on cancer drug Keytruda brought down from 12% to 5%.
- GST on footwear costing less than ₹1,000 as well as readymade garments and fabrics has been increased from 5% to 12%.
- It approved a special composition scheme for brick kilns with a turnover threshold of ₹20 lakh, from April 1, 2022.
 - Under the scheme, GST for bricks would be 6% without input tax credits or 12% with input credits.

Issue:

- Originally, the GST regime was premised on a revenue-neutral tax rate of 15.5%. But, due to changes made in the tax rates on various goods and services over the last few years, the actual GST revenues had been going down with the effective tax rate slipping to 11.6%.

What next?

- To bring up GST revenues, the Council has decided to form two groups of ministers (GoMs) that have to recommend measures within two months.
 - One has been tasked with reviewing tax rate rationalisation issues to correct anomalies in the rate structure.
 - The other will look to tap technology to improve compliance and monitoring. This will look at e-way bills, [Fastags](#), compliance and composition schemes to plug loopholes.
- The Compensation Cess levied on automobiles, tobacco products and aerated water, over and above the basic GST rate, was to be tapped for covering the gap between States' actual revenues and the 14% annual revenue growth for five years they were assured for adopting GST.
 - The Council had decided in 2020 that the Compensation Cess levy will be extended to repay the principal amount as well as the interest payable on these borrowings.

2. Major restructuring of Railways on anvil

Context:

The Indian Railways is heading for a major restructuring plan. The restructuring could lead to the closure of key establishments, merger of decades-old organisations and private participation in the running of its schools and hospitals.

Recommendations:

- The recommendations of the Principal Economic Adviser Sanjeev Sanyal for Rationalisation of Government Bodies and Proposal for the Ministry of Railways calls for winding up:
 - the Central Organisation for Railway Electrification (CORE),
 - the Central Organisation for Modernisation Of Workshops (COFMOW),
 - the Centre for Railway Information Systems (CRIS) and
 - CRIS develops software capacity in the railways that includes passenger ticketing, freight invoicing, passenger train operations, management of train crew and management of fixed/rolling assets.
 - the Indian Railways Organisation for Alternative Fuel (IROAF) (already closed).
- The closure of the IROAF has sent out a signal that the proposal could be implemented partly or wholly in due course of time.

- RailTel, one of the largest telecom infrastructure providers in the country that focuses on modernising operations and safety systems through optic fibre networks that exist along railway tracks, would be merged with the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC).
- Among other recommendations were the merger of the Rail Vikas Nigam Ltd. (RVNL) which implements projects relating to the creation and augmentation of railway infrastructure, with the Indian Railway Construction Limited (IRCON), a specialised infrastructure construction organisation.
 - The panel said both the RVNL and the IRCON had similar functions and hence could be merged.
- The merger of railway schools with Kendriya Vidyalayas or handing them over to the respective State governments has been recommended as operating the railway schools takes up a large amount of time of the railway management.
- The establishment of Central Public Sector Enterprises to bring eight production units under its fold has been recommended.
 - This would mean that the assets, infrastructure and employees of three coach factories, three locomotive manufacturing units and two Rail Wheel Units would be transferred to the proposed CPSE.
- The merger of the Central Training Institutes with the National Rail and Transportation Institute has been recommended.
 - Prior to the merger, National Rail and Transportation Institute would be upgraded into a Central University and an Institute of National Importance, roping in private participation.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Picking up the threads from the Afghan rubble

With the recent developments in Afghanistan, the article highlights that among all the countries involved in Afghanistan, India possibly has the best credentials to enable the country's neutrality.

Recent Developments in Afghanistan:

- Several thousands of Afghanistan's population is displaced and many thousands are being forced to flee the country.
- There is a continued presence of many newer terrorist outfits, such as Daesh, ISIS-K, al Qaeda, Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), ETIM-K (a militant group from China's Xinjiang), the Fidayeen mahas, all of which have legacies of 20 years of foreign occupation.
- The Taliban has announced the setting up of a 33-member interim government, headed by Mullah Mohammad Hasan Akhund as the acting Prime Minister.
- The government is solely a [Taliban](#) construct and overwhelmingly Pashtun in character.
- Pakistan holds certain key cards given the prominent role assigned to its trainees.
- Quite a few members of the interim government are on various terror lists, including that of the United Nations and the United States.

Details:

- It is widely believed that despite two decades of U.S. and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) occupation, their exit from the Afghan soil has proved to be disastrous.
 - Destruction of the terror network — essentially al Qaeda network – was an objective which was far from achieved.
 - Terror networks were driven underground for a time, but many new variants such as the Islamic State and many offshoots thrive not only in Afghanistan but also in many different parts of the world.
- It is apparent that the mistake was the U.S. Agreement with the Taliban, which conferred on the group a degree of international recognition.

India's engagement:

- India's efforts regarding the economic development of Afghanistan have been rendered pointless, and its reputation has suffered lasting damage.
- India's relations with the new Taliban leadership remain strained due to its association, earlier with the Northern Alliance, and with the Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani administrations.
- While China and Russia's embassies stay put in Afghanistan, India has landed in a different category.
- The hasty withdrawal of the U.S. from Afghanistan is not merely a setback for the U.S., but for all those who sided with it.

Pakistan's Role:

- Pakistan clearly falls into a category as the 'patron saint' of the new regime in Afghanistan.
- The Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) which, while pretending to be an ally, outsmarted the U.S.

- Safe havens of the Taliban for the past two decades have been in Pakistan and these were not only well known to the ISI, but also nurtured by it.

Implications:

- The outreach of the Taliban regime to Pakistan, China, Russia, and to an extent even Iran, is likely to set in a chain of developments that could alter the geopolitics of the region.
- Russia is currently seeking to enlarge its influence in Eurasia, and Afghanistan gives it an opportunity.
- China sees Afghanistan as an opportunity both from a geo-economic and geopolitical standpoint.
- Many West Asian countries are, meanwhile, assessing the situation in Afghanistan to see how best to take advantage of the fluid situation.
- The U.S., Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan have agreed in principle to establish a new quadrilateral diplomatic platform focused on enhancing regional connectivity.
 - The U.S.'s plans to enhance regional security/connectivity through a new Quadrilateral diplomatic platform might not prove to be effective.

Way Forward for India:

- India's major concerns with respect to Afghanistan's situation is its proximity to India.
 - Afghanistan becoming a crucible for pro-terror forces could impact India's security.
- India must plan to overcome the adverse situation.
- It is critically important for India to ensure the unity and the integrity of Afghanistan, and in turn, achieve an agreement in principle to maintain Afghanistan's neutrality.
 - India can take up a mediating role among the different nations anxious to involve themselves in Afghanistan, and produce a formula that would help maintain Afghanistan's neutrality.
 - India should ensure that Afghanistan remains a buffer zone to prevent further Chinese expansionism towards South Asia.
- Of all the countries currently involved in Afghanistan, India possibly has the best credentials to act as an honest broker; India should act to ensure peace in the region and prevent any major turmoil in South Asia, containing both Pakistan and China's influence.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Act and friction

The article talks about the need for a national commission to make appointments to tribunals.

Issues:

- Recent developments seem to undermine the autonomy of the various tribunals in the country.
- The Tribunals Reforms Act passed by the parliament contains provisions that had been struck down by the Supreme Court in an ordinance issued earlier.

Tribunal Reforms Bill 2021:

The parliament passed the [Tribunal Reforms Bill 2021](#) in August 2021.

- The bill replaces the Tribunals Reforms (Rationalisation and Conditions of Service) Ordinance, 2021.
- The bill has sought the abolishment of as many as nine appellate tribunals, including the Film Certificate Appellate Tribunal.
- It dissolves certain existing appellate bodies and transfers their functions to other existing judicial bodies.

Criticisms:

- The bill has been criticised saying that the legislation undermines the independence of the judiciary.
- Besides, the Bill has also revived provisions of tenure and service of members of tribunals which were earlier struck down by the Supreme Court in a judgment.
- Abolishing Tribunals may increase the disposal time for new cases, as High Courts already have a large number of cases awaiting judgement.
- The Supreme Court has also noted that the minimum age limit requirement of 50 years for the appointment of members may discourage young talent. It had earlier directed that advocates with 10 years of experience be made eligible to be appointed as judicial members.

Way Forward:

- The issue of tribunals has been a source of considerable friction between the Government and the Court.
- They have often disagreed on the eligibility criteria and conditions of service and a series of judgments have gone against the Government.
- Clauses introducing changes to the conditions of service of members of the various Tribunals have often been subjected to judicial view.
 - Courts want to ensure that a reasonable tenure was available to the appointees, and do not allow criteria related to age and experience to be used to undermine their independence.

Way Forward:

- There is wide agreement that administrative tribunals are required for quicker and more focused adjudication of cases that require specialisation and domain expertise.
- As several laws now provide for such adjudicative bodies, the executive does have an interest in retaining some leverage over their members.
- The Supreme Court has repeatedly called for the establishment of a national tribunals commission to make suitable appointments and evaluate the functioning of tribunals.

F. Prelims Facts

Nothing here for today!!!

G. Tidbits

1. 'Political change in Afghanistan not inclusive'

What's in News?

Prime Minister of India participated virtually in the 21st Meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), and through video-message in the Joint SCO-CSTO Outreach Session on Afghanistan. At Dushanbe, India was represented by External Affairs Minister.

- The 21st meeting of the SCO Council of Heads of State was held in Dushanbe in a hybrid format.
- The meeting was chaired by the President of Tajikistan.

Details:

- In his address, Prime Minister highlighted the problems caused by growing radicalisation and extremism in the broader SCO region, highlighting that the recent developments in Afghanistan could further exacerbate this trend towards extremism.
- He suggested that [SCO](#) could work on an agenda to promote moderation and scientific and rational thought, which would be especially relevant for the youth of the region.
- Prime Minister suggested that SCO could develop a code of conduct on 'zero tolerance' towards terrorism in the region, and highlighted the risks of drugs, arms and human trafficking from Afghanistan.

Read more on [Collective Security Treaty Organisation \(CSTO\): History, Objectives and Members.](#)

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. With reference to joint military exercises with India, which of the following is/are correctly matched?

1. Mitra Shakti - Nepal
2. Surya Kiran - Sri Lanka
3. Maitree - Thailand

Options:

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Mitra Shakti exercise is a bilateral joint military exercise between the armies of India and Sri Lanka. It is also called the India-Sri Lanka Joint Training exercise.
- Surya Kiran is a bilateral Joint Military Exercise between Indian and Nepal.
- Exercise Maitree is a bilateral exercise between the Indian Army and the Royal Thai Army, started off in 2006. It is an annual event between the troops of the armies of both countries. It is also called Indo-Thailand Joint Exercise.

Q2. Which of the following is/are the advantages of millet production?

1. Millets are termed as the 'crops of the future' as they can not only grow under harsh circumstances but are drought-resistant crops.
2. Millets help in curbing obesity.
3. Millets contribute to mitigating climate change as it helps reduce the atmospheric carbon.

Options:

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Millets are nutritionally superior to wheat and rice owing to their higher levels of protein with a more balanced amino acid profile, crude fibre and minerals such as Iron, Zinc, and Phosphorous.
- Millets provide nutritional security and act as a shield against nutritional deficiency, especially among children and women.
- Millets are termed as the 'crops of the future' as they can not only grow under harsh circumstances but are drought-resistant crops.
- Millets help in curbing obesity.
- Millets contribute to mitigating climate change as it helps reduce the atmospheric carbon.

Q3. Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) which serves to promote cooperation of member states against terrorism is an organ of

- a. CSTO
- b. SCO
- c. African Union
- d. ASEAN

Answer: b

Explanation:

The Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), headquartered in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, is a permanent organ of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation which serves to promote cooperation of member states against the three evils of terrorism, separatism and extremism.

Q4. Which of the following countries are part of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO)?

1. Armenia
2. Belarus
3. Kazakhstan
4. Russian Federation
5. Tajikistan
6. Uzbekistan

Options:

- a. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 only
- b. 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 only
- c. 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6 only
- d. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6

Answer: a

Explanation:

Country	Year of Entry into CSTO
Armenia	1994
Belarus	1994
Kazakhstan	1994
Kyrgyzstan	1994
Russia	1994
Tajikistan	1994

Uzbekistan was formerly a member of CSTO but withdrew in 2012.

Q5. With reference to Indian history, which of the following is/are the essential element/elements of the feudal system? (UPSC 2015)

- 1. A very strong centralized political authority and a very weak provincial or local political authority.
- 2. Emergence of administrative structure based on control and possession of land.
- 3. Creation of lord-vassal relationship between the feudal lord and his overlord.

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

Following are the essential elements of the feudal system:

- The emergence of an administrative structure based on control and possession of land.
- Creation of lord-vassal relationship between the feudal lord and his overlord.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Of all the countries involved in Afghanistan, India possibly has the best credentials to enable Kabul's neutrality. Substantiate. (10 Marks, 150 Words) (GS 2 International Relations)
2. Friction between Judiciary and Government on appointments to the Tribunals calls for establishing a national commission. Analyse. (10 Marks, 150 Words) (GS 2 Polity and Governance).

