

20 Sep 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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B. GS 2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. [‘Taliban have responsibility to exercise good governance, to be inclusive’](#)

Context:

- Saudi Foreign Minister's visit to India.

Details:

- In the light of the official visit, the article analyzes some aspects of the **India-Saudi Arabia bilateral relationship**.

Co-operation and collaboration on the Afghanistan issue:

- A major aspect of the visit is based on the Afghanistan issue. India and Saudi Arabia have discussed the way forward in Afghanistan.
- **Peace, security and stability in Afghanistan** would be critical to the region including the countries of Saudi Arabia and India. The increasing probability of Afghanistan becoming a **source of transnational terrorism** poses grave threats to the internal security of both India and Saudi Arabia.
- Unlike in the earlier regime of the Taliban, Saudi Arabia has not maintained a diplomatic engagement with the Taliban regime this time, while its strategic rivals Qatar, Turkey and Iran have established contacts and ties with the new Taliban regime. Saudi Arabia fears that this development could place it in a strategically disadvantageous position in the region and beyond. In this light, **it is trying to co-operate on the Afghanistan issue with like-minded countries like India**.
 - Neither Saudi Arabia nor India actually has a diplomatic presence or any formal engagement with the Taliban government in Afghanistan.
- India faces the threat of infiltration attempts by armed militants along India's borders in Jammu and Kashmir. The **anti-India terror organizations** could find a base for their operations in Afghanistan under the new Taliban regime and renew their attacks against India. **Drug trafficking** emanating from Afghanistan also poses another major challenge for India's national security.
- India and Saudi Arabia can play a decisive role to make sure that the commitments made by the new Taliban regime are adhered to in areas of ensuring adequate rights for minorities and women, curbing the use of Afghan soil for **terrorism**, etc.

Economic co-operation:

- **Bilateral trade and investment** between the two countries have witnessed significant growth in recent years.
 - India remains one of the largest procurers of Saudi's oil outputs. **India is the third-largest trade partner for Saudi Arabia**.
 - Saudi Arabia had made an announcement of a **\$100 billion investment plan by the Saudi government and Aramco for India** in 2019.
 - ARAMCO, Saudi Arabia's state-run oil firm is planning a joint venture for an oil refinery in Ratnagiri, Maharashtra and the two countries are also cooperating in setting up strategic oil reserves in India.

Pakistan factor:

- Given that Saudi Arabia enjoys good relations with both India and Pakistan and enjoys some degree of influence over Pakistan, it can play a **decisive role in helping the two countries engage to resolve the outstanding issues between themselves** which can help bring in much-needed peace and security in the South Asian region.

Security aspects:

- India and Saudi Arabia have signed an MoU on cooperation in the **exchange of intelligence related to money laundering and terrorism financing**.

Indian Diaspora in Saudi Arabia:

- The **7 million-strong Indian community** is the largest expatriate group in Saudi Arabia. They send remittances of over US \$11 billion annually to India.

Irritants in the relationship:

- Saudi Arabia led **OPEC** has **overlooked India's repeated calls for rationalizing the oil prices**. This has not gone down well with India.
- Also, India has strongly condemned the **repeated statements by the Saudi Arabia-headquartered Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)** on Jammu and Kashmir, the status of Indian Muslims and incidents of communal violence in India as **gross interference in India's domestic affairs**.

Conclusion:

- The **Riyadh Declaration of 2010** had forged a **Strategic Partnership between India and Saudi Arabia**. Since then the two countries have **deepened their relationship in diverse sectors like investment, energy, trade, climate action and security cooperation**.
- Given the mutually beneficial partnership, the relationship is bound to only grow in the coming years.

Category: GOVERNANCE

1. Loading search results

Background:

- India has seen a **rapid deployment of Facial Recognition Systems (FRS) in recent years, both by the Centre and State governments**.
 - Currently, 18 FRSs are in active utilisation by the Centre and State governments for the purpose of surveillance, security and authentication of identity, and 49 more systems are in the process of being installed by different government agencies.
 - Delhi Police was the first law enforcement agency in the country to start using the technology in 2018.

Facial Recognition Systems:

- Facial recognition is a **biometric technology that uses distinctive features on the face to identify and distinguish an individual**.

Significance of FRS:

- FRS can play a huge **role in surveillance, security and authentication of identity** and **aid the police in their investigative and policing functions**. If not exactly pinpoint identity it can help the police filter down the number of suspects by a large margin.
- It can also help **cover up the large gap in per capita police availability in India and the ideal levels** by letting the police monitor a larger number of people and enforce **predictive policing**.
- The FRS system has been frequently used to **trace missing children and identify unclaimed dead bodies**.

Lacunae/limitations:

Only basic level of FRS available:

- The police in India currently use a “basic” level of FRS, which **does not function in real-time**.

Lack of access to metadata:

- The police are hamstrung by a lack of access to metadata which is essential to effectively use the FRS. **Important institutions like the Election Commission, UIDAI and other Ministries have been reluctant to share data with the police force.**

Not fool-proof/limited accuracy:

- The FRS has limited accuracy. **It is capable of giving only a 70-80% match** against the photo put in the system. Also given that the FRS **does not consider the age parameter**, this brings into question the efficiency of the FRS.

Concerns:

Liable to misuse and concerns over privacy:

- Experts have warned that **the unabated use of the Facial Recognition System without any legal framework** to regulate its use could lead to its misuse and can also contribute to privacy concerns given the potentially **invasive nature of this technology**. Experts warn that the technology poses a **huge threat to the fundamental rights to privacy and freedom of speech and expression of the citizens.**

Use beyond its intended purpose:

- There are rising concerns over the police gradually **using the technology beyond its intended purpose for wider security and surveillance and investigation purposes**.
 - In the case of ‘**Sadhan Haldar vs NCT of Delhi**’, the Delhi High Court had authorised the Delhi police to obtain facial recognition technology for the **purpose of tracking and reuniting missing children**.

For more related information, refer to the following article:

[UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis of 25th Aug 2021](#)

C. GS 3 Related

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D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. How the 9/11 wars changed the world

The article throws light upon how the war on terror post the 9/11 attack strengthened Islamist and Islamophobic politics.

Current Scenario:

- After the 9/11 attack in 2001, the U.S. went to Afghanistan to defeat al-Qaeda and topple the Taliban regime.
- Two decades later in 2021 as the U.S. exited Afghanistan, the Taliban (which never fully severed its ties with al-Qaeda) is back in power in Kabul.
- Afghanistan has emerged as the new base of the Islamic State.
 - The bombing by the Islamic State Khorasan Province outside Kabul airport is a testimony to the fact.

The Future of Wars on Terrorism:

- While the U.S. President asserts that the war on terror will continue, the options available to the U.S. are limited.
 - It has lost its base in Afghanistan.
 - Its alliance with Pakistan is over.
 - Afghanistan's neighbouring countries refuse to host an American base, which will impact intelligence operations.
- Considering that the U.S. couldn't defeat terrorism after fighting two decades in Afghanistan along with Pakistan, it would be difficult for it to fight a Taliban-controlled Afghanistan from bases in the Gulf.

Earlier Regime change wars:

- While the U.S. received global support and sympathy post the 9/11 attacks, the war that the U.S. launched wasn't strategically focused on defeating al-Qaeda. Instead, it was driven by the neoconservative pride of the Bush administration.
 - It launched regime change wars to remake the Muslim world.
- In 2001, the U.S. brought down the Taliban regime and destroyed al-Qaeda's base in Afghanistan. But instead of going after al-Qaeda networks, the U.S. initiated the next regime change war in Iraq.
 - The invasion of Iraq, based on false intelligence that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, not only diffused the U.S.'s focus in Afghanistan but also created conditions inside Iraq for al-Qaeda to establish a new branch.

- Al-Qaeda in Iraq, led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, rose from the ruins of post-war Iraq to become the deadliest branch of the global terrorist outfit.
- In 2011, [NATO](#) launched another regime change war in Libya.
- The U.S. believed that with its superior military force, it could topple regimes, reorder political systems and remake the world.
- It did bring down regimes in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, but it remained clueless about how to tackle the instability that followed.
 - If post-war Iraq provided a new base for al-Qaeda, Libya's collapse into anarchy allowed terrorists to spread to other parts of Africa.
 - In Syria, the U.S. backed armed rebels against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad. Islamic State rose from the ruins of Syria.

Concerns:

- Terrorists thrive amidst chaos and lawlessness.
- The regime change wars, which helped terrorist outfits proliferate in many countries, also led to the strengthening of both Islamist and Islamophobic politics across the world.
- The repeated attacks on Muslim-majority countries and the deaths of hundreds of thousands of locals, mostly Muslims, in these wars helped strengthen their narrative that the 'Christian West' is launching 'a crusade' against Muslims.
- The Islamic State repeatedly referred to all westerners as crusaders and broadcast videos of American strikes on social media with the aim of recruiting young Muslims.
- Anti-Americanism emerged as a dominant political theme across Muslim-majority countries, which Islamist hardliners sought to cash in on.
- The wars also triggered a massive outflow of refugees from the affected countries to neighbouring nations.
 - During the 2011-15 Libyan and Syrian crises, hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers took the perilous boat journey across the Mediterranean Sea to Europe.
 - The Islamic State-inspired terrorist attacks in the West during this period further strengthened this narrative.
 - In the end, the regime change wars, which failed to defeat terrorists, came back to divide and haunt the West in a different form.

Conclusion:

- The most unexpected setback that the U.S. suffered was in geopolitics. When the U.S. was busy in the Muslim world, China was steadily rising.
- America's withdrawal and the perception of its weakness will embolden its rivals like Iran, Russia and China.
- The U.S., which is seeking to return to realism from neoconservatism, might wait for its rivals, especially China, to commit blunders or it might grab other strategic opportunities.
- While the terrorist outfits continue to operate from the havens they have already found, the author believes that it is now the beginning of the new U.S.-China cold war.

2. Holding TNCs accountable

Context:

The UN working group on human rights, transnational corporations (TNCs) and other businesses has published a new report on human rights-compatible international investment agreements.

Details:

- The report urges states to ensure that their bilateral investment treaties (BITs) are compatible with international human rights obligations.
- It lays emphasis on investor obligations at the international level i.e., the accountability of TNCs in international law.

Issue:

- Given that the TNCs hold enormous power, questions have often been raised about their accountability.
- There have been instances where the misconduct of TNCs has come to light.
 - Example: the corruption scandal involving Siemens in Germany.
- In the last few years, states have started recalibrating their BITs by inserting provisions on investor accountability. However, these employ soft law language.
- They do not impose positive and binding obligations on foreign investors.
- They fall short of creating a framework to hold TNCs accountable under international law.

Efforts for Establishing Standards of Conduct for TNCs:

- In 1975, the need for articulating standards of conduct for TNCs by the international community had come up in the [UN General Assembly](#).
- Subsequently, an effort was made at the UN to develop a multilateral code of conduct on TNCs. However, due to differences between developed and developing countries, it was abandoned in 1992.
- An integral feature of the neoliberal project was to use international law to institutionalise the forces of economic globalisation, leading to the spread of BITs.
 - These treaties promised protection to foreign investors under international law by bestowing rights on them and imposing obligations on states.
 - This structural asymmetry in BITs, which confer rights on foreign investors but impose no obligations, downgraded the demand for investor accountability.
- In 2011 the issue of holding TNCs accountable gathered momentum again.
- In 2014, the [UN Human Rights Council](#) established an open-ended working group with the mandate to elaborate on an international legally binding instrument on TNCs and other businesses concerning human rights. Since then, efforts are being made towards developing a treaty and finding ways to make foreign corporations accountable.
- The latest UN report is a step in that direction.

Case – Urbaser v. Argentina:

- The issue of fixing accountability of foreign investors came up in an international law case, *Urbaser v. Argentina* (2016).
 - In this case, the tribunal held that corporations can be subjects of international law and are under a duty not to engage in activities that harm or destroy human rights.
 - With respect to the question of whether the foreign investor was under an international law obligation to provide drinking water and sanitation, the tribunal held that only states have a positive obligation to meet the human right to water; corporations only have a negative obligation in this regard unless specific human rights obligations are imposed on the foreign investor as part of the BIT.
- The case played an important role in bringing human rights norms to the fore in BIT disputes.
- It also opened up the possibility of using BITs to hold TNCs accountable provided the treaty imposes positive obligations on foreign investors.

Way Forward:

- BITs can be harnessed to hold TNCs accountable under international law.
- The recent UN report has important takeaways for India's ongoing reforms in BITs.
- India's new Model BIT of 2016 contains provisions on investor obligations. However, these exist as best endeavour clauses. They do not impose a binding obligation on the TNC.
- India should impose positive and binding obligations on foreign investors, not just for protecting human rights but also for imperative issues such as promoting public health.
 - The Nigeria-Morocco BIT, which imposes binding obligations on foreign investors such as making it mandatory for them to conduct an environmental impact assessment of their investment, is a good example.
- These reforms would help in harnessing BITs to ensure the accountability of foreign investors and creating a binding international legal framework to hold TNCs accountable.

Category: EDUCATION

1. Empathy through education

The article talks about the importance of social and emotional learning as an important goal in education.

What is Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)?

- SEL is the process of learning to recognise and manage emotions and navigate social situations effectively.
- SEL is foundational for human development, building healthy relationships, having self and social awareness, solving problems, making responsible decisions, and academic learning.
- SEL supports skills such as communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity.

Key Elements of SEL:

- Key elements of SEL include cultivating empathy and theory of mind.

- 'Empathy' is the ability to understand another person's emotions and be aware of why they might be feeling those emotions from their perspective.
- 'Theory of mind' is the ability to understand others' intentions, knowledge and beliefs and recognise that those might be different from your own.

Importance of SEL:

- According to research findings, students with greater social skills and emotional regulation are more likely to have success.
- SEL is rooted in physiology. Neurobiologically, various brain regions such as the prefrontal and frontal cortices, amygdala, and superior temporal sulcus are involved in the cognitive mechanisms of SEL.
- Scientists have proposed that the physiological and psychological factors of SEL are inherently linked.

Challenges Posed by the Pandemic:

- The pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges for SEL.
- School closures have reduced opportunities for students to deepen social relationships and learn collaboratively in shared physical spaces.
- Even with parental involvement, the challenge of an inadequate support system for SEL remains.

Way Forward:

- SEL is an important part of education as mentioned in India's [National Education Policy \(2020\)](#).
- While according to NEP, numeracy and literacy are listed as its central aims, SEL should be an equally important goal.
- Despite its importance to life, SEL is often added as a chapter in a larger curriculum rather than being integrated into it. It is vital to consider that the learning process is a social and emotional experience.
- SEL must be integrated into curricula through self-science classes, and must be placed centrally within the school culture.
- In the Indian context, the application of SEL practices should be based on students' socioeconomic backgrounds.
- SEL strategies of caretakers and educators must align with one another.
- Long-term success requires SEL to be based on scientific evidence.

As a sustainable development goal outlines, policymakers must ensure that future changes prioritise inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

F. Prelims Facts

1. Anti-tank missile completes all trials

- **Helina is a third-generation fire-and-forget class Nag Anti-Tank Guided Missile (ATGM)** mounted on an indigenous Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH), and has a minimum range of 500 metres and a maximum range of 7 kilometres.

Context:

- The helicopter-launched Nag Anti-Tank Guided Missile (ATGM), Helina, **being developed indigenously**, has completed all trials.

Read more on [anti-tank guided missiles](#) in the linked article.

G. Tidbits

1. 1.2 lakh deaths in road accidents in 2020: NCRB

- According to government data, **India recorded 1.2 lakh cases of “deaths due to negligence relating to road accidents” in 2020**, with 328 persons losing their lives every day on average.
- The [National Crime Records Bureau \(NCRB\)](#) in its annual ‘Crime India’ report for 2020 notes that as many as 3.92 lakh lives were lost in three years in deaths due to negligence related to road accidents.

2. Hindi gains due to demographic shift

- India has a large **linguistic diversity. India has 121 languages spoken by at least 10,000 people** — along with over a thousand more which have fewer speakers.
- According to the 2011 Census, **Hindi and its variants are the only major languages to have gained mother tongue adherents over the last 40 years**, growing from 36.99% of the population in 1971 to 43.63% by 2011. A large factor in this growth comes from demographic changes.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Which is the only country to have withdrawn from the Non-Proliferation Treaty?

- a. Iran
- b. North Korea
- c. Israel
- d. Pakistan

Answer: b

Explanation:

- The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, commonly known as the Non-Proliferation Treaty or NPT, is an international treaty whose objective is to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, to promote cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, and to further the goal of achieving nuclear disarmament and general and complete disarmament.
- Israel and Pakistan are non-signatories to the NPT.

- While North Korea acceded to the treaty in 1985, it gave notice of withdrawal from the treaty in 2003 following U.S. allegations that it had started an illegal enriched uranium weapons program.
- Iran is a party to the NPT since 1970 but was found in non-compliance with its NPT safeguards agreement, and the status of its nuclear program remains in dispute.

Q2. What best describes the term 'stablecoin', seen frequently in news?

- a. A new coin being minted by the RBI that uses a stable metal to prevent corrosion
- b. A debt instrument being introduced by the US Federal Reserve to help fund an economic stimulus package
- c. A type of cryptocurrency that is typically pegged to an existing government-backed currency
- d. None of the above

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Stablecoins are cryptocurrencies that are meant to be pegged to a reserve asset, such as gold or the U.S. dollar, to keep their value stable.
- A stablecoin is a new class of cryptocurrencies that attempts to offer price stability and are backed by a reserve asset. Stablecoins have gained traction as they attempt to offer the best of both worlds—the instant processing and security or privacy of payments of cryptocurrencies, and the volatility-free stable valuations of fiat currencies.

Q3. Which of the following statements are correct?

1. In 2020, India established the world's first sea cucumber conservation area.
2. In India, the commercial harvesting and transportation of sea cucumbers is banned.

Options:

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Sea cucumbers are echinoderms. They are marine animals with leathery skin and an elongated body containing a single, branched gonad. Sea cucumbers are found on the seafloor worldwide.
- In India, the commercial harvesting and transportation of sea cucumbers is banned.

- The Dr KK Mohammed Koya Sea Cucumber Conservation Reserve is the first sea cucumber conservation area in the world. It is located in the Cheriyanani Reef in the Indian Union Territory of Lakshadweep. It was formed in 2020. It covers an area of 239 km².

Q4. This migrant species of penguin is endemic to the Pacific coasts of Chile and Peru. It is named after a popular cold water oceanic current in the region. It grows to an average height of just over 2 feet and is listed as 'Vulnerable' on the IUCN Red List. This description refers to which species of Penguin?

- a. Magellanic Penguin
- b. Humboldt Penguin
- c. Emperor Penguin
- d. Galápagos Penguin

Answer: b

Explanation:

- The Humboldt penguin is a South American penguin living mainly in the Humboldt National Reserve in the North of Chile, although its habitat comprises most of coastal Peru and Chile.
- In South America, the Humboldt penguin is found only along the Pacific coast.
- It is named after the Humboldt oceanic current.
 - The Humboldt Current is a cold water ocean current that flows north from Antarctica along the west coast of South America, bringing nutrient-rich water to the Galapagos Islands and helping to sustain the island's rich biodiversity.
- Humboldt penguins are medium-sized penguins.
- It is listed as 'Vulnerable' on the IUCN Red List.

Q5. If another global financial crisis happens in the near future, which of the following actions/policies are most likely to give some immunity to India? (UPSC-2020)

1. Not depending on the short term foreign borrowing
2. Opening up to more foreign banks
3. Maintaining full capital account convertibility

Select the correct answer using the given code below-

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Opening up to more of the volatile short term foreign borrowing, opening up to more foreign banks or the full capital account convertibility will only increase India's vulnerability to any future global financial crisis as this will entail large scale withdrawal of foreign investments in India which will adversely impact its macro-economic stability.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Afghanistan is not the end of American power, it's the beginning of the new U.S. China cold war. Analyze. (10 Marks, 150 Words)[GS-2, International Relations]
2. Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs) should be made compatible with international human rights obligations. Discuss. (15 Marks, 250 Words)[GS-3, Economy]

