

22 Sep 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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B. GS 2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. No link between AUKUS and Quad: govt.

Context:

- Indian Prime Minister's scheduled visit to the U.S.

Details:

Quad summit:

- The Indian Prime Minister will be taking part in the Quadrilateral (Quad) summit.
- In the first such comments indicating that **India is distancing itself from the recently announced Australia-U.K.-U.S. (AUKUS) alliance**, the Foreign Secretary of India has stated that the new partnership is neither relevant to the Quad, nor will it have any impact on its functioning.

For detailed information on the AUKUS alliance refer to the following article:

UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis of 16th Sep 2021

- He further elaborated that while the **Quad meeting would deal with issues such as the pandemic, new and emerging technologies, climate change, infrastructure, maritime security, education, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief**, AUKUS was predominantly a “security alliance”.
- In a separate development, the Indian Prime Minister had a telephonic call with the French President in a show of solidarity with France that has protested against the U.S.-U.K.-Australia tripartite security alliance (AUKUS) that effectively killed France-Australia cooperation on submarines.

Bilateral talks with the U.S.:

- The Indian PM will **hold bilateral talks with U.S. Vice President and President**.
- The bilateral meeting will focus on **regional security** with a specific focus on the fast-paced developments in Afghanistan and its implications for the region and India.
- There is also likely to be discussions on the **reform of the multilateral system, including the UN Security Council**.
- Apart from reviewing the **India-U.S. comprehensive strategic global partnership**, the leaders of the two countries would also discuss **trade and investment ties, defence and security collaborations, and the “green” strategic clean energy partnership**.
 - In the domain of defence and security collaborations, the focus, in particular, would be on how to operationalize the **four foundational defence agreements** that India and the U.S. have signed in the recent past.

- These include the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement ([LEMOA](#)), the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) and Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement ([BECA](#)).

2. U.S. not seeking a new Cold War: Biden

Context:

- The U.S. President's address at the [UN General Assembly \(UNGA\)](#).

Background:

- Amid the **rising tensions between the U.S. and China**, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres had asked the two countries to mend their relationship. He had added that this would be essential to avoid a **cold war-like situation**.

Details:

- In what is being viewed as a reference to the tensions between the U.S. and China, the U.S. President stated that the U.S. was not seeking a “new Cold War” but was interested in renewing diplomacy, development and democracy.
- He further added that although the U.S. would want to use peaceful means for resolution of any outstanding issues, it would stand up for its allies and oppose attempts by stronger countries to dominate weaker ones via **changes to territory by force, economic coercion, technological exploitation or using information**. This is being seen as a reference to the **increasingly assertive attitude of China in the region**.
- He added that the U.S. was ready to work with any nation that pursues **peaceful resolution to shared challenges like COVID-19, climate change and terrorism**, despite disagreement in other areas.
- Addressing other important aspects, the U.S. President said the U.S. was willing to return to full compliance with the [Iran nuclear deal](#) if Iran did the same. He also expressed support for the **two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict** and sought the complete **denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula**.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. ‘Railways falling foul of CVC norms’

Context:

- The report on the ‘Rationalisation of Government Bodies and Proposal for the Ministry of Railways’, prepared by Principal Economic Adviser, Ministry of Finance, Government of India.

Background:

Vigilance Directorate of the Railways:

- The Vigilance Directorate of the Railways deals with **allegations of corruption, misappropriation of funds, abuse of official power and other irregularities** and recommends punishments.

- It is the **largest Vigilance Directorate in the Central government** with over 1,170 personnel, including 192 officers.

Details:

- The report notes with concern that the Vigilance Directorate of the Railways is **functioning in violation of the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) guidelines**.
 - The CVC guidelines prescribe that the **Chief Vigilance Officer (CVO) should be appointed from other Ministries (external) for a certain tenure**.
- It points out that the administrative structure of the Vigilance Directorate of the Railways is not compliant with the CVC guidelines.
 - As against the guidelines of the CVC, **the Chief Vigilance Officer (CVO) is being appointed with internal officers in the Railways**.
 - In many cases, the **Vigilance Officers have tenures longer than what is permitted by the CVC**.

Concerns:

- The observations made in the report raises **questions on the legality** of the decisions made in the past and pending cases of the Vigilance Directorate relating to allegations of corruption and other irregularities.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: INTERNAL SECURITY

1. Ceasefire along LoC expected to hold

Context:

- **Security scenario along the Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir.**

Details:

- There has been **no increase in ceasefire violations (CFVs) in 2021**. The CFVs have gone down drastically after the **ceasefire agreement between India and Pakistan came into effect in February**. It would mean one of the quietest years along the LoC in many years.
 - Data from the Army show there were 4,645 CFVs in 2020, 3,168 in 2019 and 1,629 in 2018.
- There were only two infiltration attempts and these too were not supported by Pakistan by providing firing cover.
- The ground assessment is that the **security situation would remain silent along the otherwise volatile and tense border between India and Pakistan**.

Contributive factors:

- While the **renewal of the ceasefire agreement** between India and Pakistan is the main factor behind the de-escalation between the two countries, the situation is influenced by **regional and global developments** – the sudden U.S. pull-out from Afghanistan and the **Taliban takeover**, which

has taken all the attention of Pakistan as also **Pakistan's listing in the Financial Action Task Force**.

Challenges:

- The **local recruitment of militants** remains a cause for the security scenario in the Kashmir valley.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: GOVERNANCE

1. What counts is seldom counted

Context

India is busy debating the caste census when the regular Census itself has not been conducted owing to the pandemic. This is the first time that India has not conducted its decadal Census since the exercise began.

Issue:

- It is quite ironic that various elections have been held while the Census has still not been conducted.
- The exercise is not merely about counting the population. Census has a lot of potential in policymaking.
 - Unfortunately, the limited information collected, and the under-utilisation or non-utilisation of Census data, have limited the role of the Census in policymaking.
 - This more-than-century-old decadal exercise is a matter of pride and distinction for this country. Unfortunately, its potential is hardly tapped by policymakers.
- Its importance is further diminished when numerous large-scale surveys are funded by the various ministries of the Government of India.
 - These surveys are conducted periodically.
 - They allow for a detailed analysis of the socio-economic issues of significance since the raw data are made available in the public domain.
 - The Census, at best, serves as a framework for designing these surveys.
- While alternative sources of information have enriched our understanding of population dynamics and facilitated focused interventions, the Census has lost its potential relevance.
- The fundamental reason why the Census has lost significance is that the data collected are not disseminated on time, despite the use of technology.
 - The government regulates the release of the numbers based on its calculations of whether or not the Census data have the potential to harm the political agenda.
- The engagement with the Census has been limited to two concerns: sex ratio and work participation (female work participation in particular).

Characteristic information:

- The primary axes of disaggregation of Census-based information are residence, age, gender, administrative units, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and religion.
 - A lot can be inferred from these attributes of disaggregation.
- Apart from such disaggregation, the Census offers two units of analysis: at the individual level and at the household level.
- Attributes of disaggregation are meant for identification and they are more neutral for intervention purposes.

Way Forward:

- Census-based information was important at a time when there was no alternative way of gauging the dynamics of population change alongside its varied features like employment, education, etc.
- The design of the Census can be improved.
- A digital Census would ensure better quality, coverage and quick results in this digital age.
- Despite the decadal nature of the data, the inter-Censal and post-Censal information could very well be generated with interpolation and extrapolation and offer a lot of scope for understanding future trends as well.
- Census data, if explored intelligently and systematically without the limitation of survey-based data sets like biases, errors and representational issues, have much more potential.
- With respect to the need for a caste census, the author argues that associating caste/religion for identification and intervention generates an environment of patronage.
- Counting ascribed identities like caste and religion is less progressive than counting capability attributes like education and profession and other tangible endowments like the ownership of land, house and other consumer durables.

On the whole, count and characteristics are equally important, but the characteristics that are modifiable hold the key towards change.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. The big deal behind the ruckus over AUKUS

Context:

- The U.S. President announced the new Australia-U.S.-Britain (AUKUS) 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.](#)

Category: SECURITY

1. Swooping down on algorithms

The article throws light upon the authoritarianism hidden in China's draft rules on regulating recommendation algorithms.

Context:

In the recent past, China has pursued aggressive measures in its tech sector. It ranges from strong-arming IPOs to limiting gaming hours for children.

Details:

- A host of legislative instruments are in the process of being adopted, including the Personal Information Protection Law, the Cybersecurity Law, and the draft Internet Information Service Algorithm Recommendation Management Provisions.

The Management Provisions, released by the Cyberspace Administration of China:

- These are ground-breaking interventions among the new set of legislative instruments.
- The provisions lay down the processes and mandates for the regulation of recommendation algorithms which are everywhere in e-commerce platforms, social media feeds and gig work platforms.
 - Algorithmically curated feeds dominate most of the interactions on the Internet.
 - These algorithms learn from user demographics, behavioural patterns, location of the user, the interests of other users accessing similar content, etc., to deliver content.
 - This limits user autonomy, as the user has little opportunity to choose what content to be presented with.
 - Algorithms tend to have certain inherent biases which are learned from their modelling or the data they encounter.
 - This often leads to discriminatory practices against users.
- The interventions attempt to address the concerns of individuals and society such as user autonomy, economic harms, discrimination, and the prevalence of false information.
- China is aiming to mandate recommendation algorithm providers to share the mantle with the users.
- The draft says users should be allowed to audit and change the user tags employed by the algorithms to filter content to be presented to them.
- Also, the draft specifically strikes at labour reform at the algorithmic level, by necessitating compliance with working hours, minimum wage, and labour laws.

This indicates how China is attempting to crack down on mis-/dis-/mal-information.

Lessons for the present:

- Regulating algorithms is unavoidable and necessary. But the world is lagging in such initiatives.
- The draft released by China addresses pressing issues and establishes some normative ideals that should be pursued globally.
- The regulatory mechanism institutionalises algorithmic audits and supervision.
- This could prove to be a blueprint for other economies.

Conclusion:

A distinct Chinese flavour of authoritarianism is evident in the draft rules. China has less than desirable records in liberty and is not the ideal choice to set standards through laws. The overtone of the draft is such that it requires recommendation algorithm providers to “uphold mainstream value orientations”, “vigorously disseminate positive energy”, and “advance the use of algorithms in the direction of good”. This is China’s attempt at dissuading any disaffection to the Party and remain in tight control of the social narrative. It would be best for liberal democracies to avoid such overtures and stick to technically sound regulation which is free from the stress of censorship and social control.

Category: ECONOMY

1. Changing the agri exports basket

The article talks about the steps that India must take to unleash its potential of becoming a global leader in the food processing sector.

Details:

- India’s agricultural export basket is changing from traditional commodities to non-traditional processed foods.
 - Traditionally, Basmati rice is one of the top export commodities. However, now there is an unusual spike in the export of non-basmati rice.
- Indian buffalo meat is seeing strong demand in international markets due to its lean character and near organic nature. The export potential of buffalo meat is tremendous, especially in countries like Vietnam, Hong Kong and Indonesia.
- The export of processed food products has not been growing fast enough.
 - India lacks a comparative advantage in many items.
 - This may imply that the domestic prices of processed food products are much higher compared to the world reference prices.
- The main objective of the Agriculture Export Policy is to diversify and expand the export basket. Instead of primary products, the goal is to increase the export of higher value items, including perishables and processed food.

Issues:

The exporters of processed food confront difficulties and non-tariff measures imposed by other countries on Indian exports. Some of these include:

- Mandatory pre-shipment examination by the Export Inspection Agency being lengthy and costly.
- Compulsory Spice Board certification being needed even for ready-to-eat products which contain spices in small quantities.
- Lack of strategic planning of exports by most state governments.
- Lack of a predictable and consistent agricultural policy discouraging investments by the private sector.
- Prohibition of import of meat- and dairy based-products in most of the developed countries.

- Withdrawal of the Generalised System of Preference by the U.S. for import of processed food from India.
- Export shipments to the U.S. requiring an additional health certificate.
- Absence of an equivalency agreement with developed countries for organic produce.

Steps taken by the Government:

- The Indian government has been encouraging agricultural exports to meet an ambitious target of \$60bn by 2022.
- As per the Ministry of Food Processing Industries data, the contribution of agricultural and processed food products in India's total exports is 11%.
 - The major share is of primary processed agricultural commodities.

Potential of food processing industry:

- From 2015-16 to 2019-20, the value of agricultural and processed food increased significantly from \$17.8bn to \$20.65bn.
- The Indian agricultural economy is changing and the focus is more on developing various processed foods.
- The Indian food processing industry promises high economic growth and makes good profits.
- India's export earnings will increase by focusing more on value-added processed food products rather than primary processed agricultural commodities.

Way Forward:

- The Centre's policy should be in the direction of nurturing food processing companies.
- Developed countries have fixed higher standards for the import of food items. Low cost of production and global food quality standards must be ensured.
- A supportive environment is needed to promote the export of processed food.
- Reputed Indian brands should be encouraged to export processed foods globally as they can comply with the global standard of codex.
- Indian companies should focus on cost competitiveness, global food quality standards, technology, and tap the global processed food export market.
- India has competitive advantages in various agricultural commodities which can be passed onto processed foods. It has the potential to become a global leader in the food processing sector.

F. Prelims Facts

1. Kasturirangan to lead syllabus panel

- The Centre has appointed former ISRO chief **K. Kasturirangan as the head of a 12-member steering committee** responsible for developing a **new National Curriculum Framework (NCF)**.
 - Notably, Dr. Kasturirangan also chaired the **drafting committee for the National Education Policy, 2020** which recommended the development of a new NCF.

- The NCF is meant to be a **guiding document for the development of textbooks, syllabi and teaching practices** in schools across the country. The subsequent revision of textbooks by the National Council of Educational Research and Training will draw from the new NCF.
- The steering committee will develop **four frameworks**, one each to guide the curriculum of school education, teacher education, early childhood education and adult education.

2. 'India added 521 MW of rooftop solar in Q2 2021'

- The **target set for installed solar energy capacity is 100 GW by March 2023 — 40 GW rooftop solar and 60 GW ground-mounted utility scale.**
- However, according to data by the Central Electricity Authority (CEA) under the Union Ministry of Power, India has managed to install only 43.94 GW by July 2021. The rooftop solar installation has been particularly dismal.

Context:

- According to Mercom India Research's newly released **Mercom India Rooftop Solar Market Report Q2 2021**, India has added 521 MW of rooftop solar capacity in the second quarter of the calendar year 2021, which is the highest capacity installed in a quarter.

G. Tidbits

1. SAARC Ministers' meet unlikely

- A meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the member countries of the **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)**, scheduled to be held on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York, is unlikely to take place.
- The **disagreement over the representation of Afghanistan** subsequent to the Taliban takeover of Kabul has led to the cancellation of the meeting.
- Previously, **differences between India and Pakistan regarding cross-border terrorism** had led to the cancellation of the meetings of the SAARC.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. E V Ramaswami was never part of the Indian National Congress as he felt it served the interests of a few elite sections of society.
2. E V Ramaswami came from Tamil Nadu to support the Vaikom Satyagraha.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both
- d. None

Answer: b

Explanation:

- Periyar E. V. Ramasamy was a Dravidian social reformer and politician from India, who founded the Self-Respect Movement and Dravidar Kazhagam.
- In 1919 Periyar Ramaswamy joined the Indian National Congress. In 1922, Periyar was elected the President of the Madras Presidency Congress Committee during the Tirupur session where he advocated strongly for reservation in government jobs and education.
- He quit the Congress in 1925 owing to some differences with the working of the Congress.
- In Vaikom, a small town in Kerala state, then Travancore, there were strict laws of untouchability in and around the temple area. Dalits, also known as Harijans, were not allowed into the streets around and leading to the temple. In 1924 Vaikom was chosen as a place for an organised Satyagraha. Periyar and his wife Nagamma arrived in Vaikom for the satyagraha.

Q2. Which of the following items are included under the Concurrent List?

1. Public health and sanitation
2. Marriage and divorce
3. Criminal procedure
4. Charities and charitable institutions

Options:

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- The Concurrent List is a list of subjects given in the Seventh Schedule to the Constitution of India. It includes the power to be considered by both the union and state government.
- The subjects of marriage and divorce, criminal procedure and charities and charitable institutions come under the concurrent list while Public health and sanitation is a state subject.

For detailed information on the contents of the various lists of the seventh schedule of the Indian Constitution refer to the following article:

[Seventh Schedule of Indian Constitution – Article 246](#)

Q3. With reference to Asian Development Bank (ADB), which of the following statements is/are incorrect?

1. India is a founding member of the Asian Development Bank.
2. Japan holds the largest share in ADB, followed by China and India.
3. Only countries from Asia can be part of ADB.

Options:

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is a regional development bank established in 1966 and headquartered in Manila, Philippines. India is a founding member of the Asian Development Bank.
- Japan holds the largest share in ADB with 15.677%, followed by U.S.A (15.567%), China (6.473%), and India (5.812%).
- From 31 members at its establishment in 1966, ADB has grown to encompass 68 members—of which 49 are from within Asia and the Pacific and 19 outside.

For more information refer to the following article:

[Asian Development Bank \(ADB\)](#)

Q4. Which of the following is/are the Nerve agents?

1. Sarin (GB)
2. Soman (GD)
3. Tabun (GA)
4. VX

Options:

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Nerve agents, sometimes also called nerve gases, are a class of organic chemicals that disrupt the mechanisms by which nerves transfer messages to organs. The disruption is caused by the blocking

of acetylcholinesterase (AChE), an enzyme that catalyzes the breakdown of acetylcholine, a neurotransmitter. Nerve agents are acetylcholinesterase inhibitors used as poison.

- The main nerve agents are the chemicals sarin (GB), soman (GD), tabun (GA) and VX.

Q5. In the context of modern scientific research, consider the following statements about 'IceCube', a particle detector located at South Pole, which was recently in the news:

1. It is the world's largest neutrino detector, encompassing a cubic kilometre of ice.
2. It is a powerful telescope to search for dark matter.
3. It is buried deep in the ice.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- IceCube, the South Pole neutrino observatory, is a cubic-kilometer particle detector made of Antarctic ice and located near the Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station. It is buried beneath the surface, extending to a depth of about 2,500 meters. A surface array, IceTop, and a denser inner subdetector, DeepCore, significantly enhance the capabilities of the observatory, making it a multipurpose facility.
- It is the world's largest neutrino detector. It is a powerful telescope to search for dark matter.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Examine the problems hindering India's Agricultural Exports and discuss how India has the potential to become a global leader in the food processing sector. (10 Marks, 150 Words) [GS-3, Economy]
2. Census data in India are losing their relevance in the development agenda. Substantiate. (10 Marks, 150 Words) [GS-2, Governance]