

24 Sep 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Category: INTERNAL SECURITY

1. IS sleeper cells working in Kerala?

Context:

- The arrest of several persons in Kerala by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) in connection with terror-related cases.

Details:

- NIA has filed chargesheet against the suspects for **running Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (IS) propaganda channels on social media platforms**, propagating violent jihad and **radicalising and recruiting gullible youth**. The recruited are then made to communicate with online handlers based abroad. The handlers use the person for uploading online content, collection of arms and ammunition, preparation of IEDs, terror funding and even attacks.
- One of the accused was engaged in raising and distributing funds for propagating the activities of the IS in India.

Concerns:

- The NIA says its investigations have revealed that the IS is trying to spread its presence in India. The recent developments have also raised concerns about suspected **sleeper cells of the Islamic State (IS) operating in the state of Kerala**.
 - A sleeper cell refers to a cell, or isolated grouping of agents, that lies dormant until it receives orders or decides to act. Given the secrecy with which such a group works, it is more effective in resisting detection or penetration by law enforcement agencies.

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Centre, States outline plans to stem pollution

Context:

- The Union Environment Ministry had convened a meeting with representatives from Delhi and neighbouring states on measures to be taken to tackle the air pollution levels that soar during winter.
- The meeting was convened under the ambit of **the Commission for Air Quality Improvement in NCR and Adjoining Areas**.
 - The Commission for Air Quality Improvement is an executive body gaining its authority through an Act of Parliament.

Background:

Air pollution in NCR:

- **Emissions from vehicles, thermal plants and the rice stubble burning** in Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh ahead of the winter sowing of wheat are key contributors to air pollution in the National Capital Region during winters.
- The **meteorological conditions** only further exacerbate the air pollution scenario.

Details:

- The following measures have been proposed.
 - The Haryana government will be spending Rs. 200 crore to dissuade farmers from burning the rice stubble. It will be used to **incentivize farmers and dissuade them from stubble burning**.
 - Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab states will be deploying an **organic chemical decomposer** to decompose the stubble and turn it into manure.
 - The **use of bio-mass with 50% paddy straw as a supplement fuel in coal plants** has been mandated in the National Capital Region (NCR).
 - A committee would be set up to look into ways to **repurpose the rice stubble as fodder for cattle** in Rajasthan and Gujarat.
 - Promoting the use of cleaner fuels like natural gas in industries.

Also read: [Air Pollution in Delhi](#)

Category: ECONOMY

1. DFC rejets PPP model for 374-km freight corridor

Context:

- To attract bidders for a 374-km stretch between Sonnagar (Bihar) and Andal (West Bengal), the **Dedicated Freight Corridor Corporation of India (DFCCIL)** has reworked the proposal for the public-private participation (PPP) project.

Background:

PPP model:

- Public-Private Partnership Model is an **arrangement between the government and private sector for the provision of public assets and/or public services**. It involves collaboration between a government agency and a private-sector company that can be used to finance, build, and operate projects.
- The involvement of the private sector brings in the much needed **private investments, technology and innovation and efficiency associated with the private sector**.
- There is a well-defined **allocation of risk between the private sector and the public entity** in such a model of infrastructure development.

Details:

- The project is now proposed to be developed via a **design, finance, build, operate and maintain and transfer (DFBOT) model** wherein the payment will not be based on traffic volumes but on the services of the rail system developed by the private entity. **The payment will be based on the uptime offered by the private concessionaire.**
 - **BOT is the conventional PPP model** in which the private partner is responsible to design, build, operate (during the contracted period) and transfer back the facility to the public sector. The private sector partner has to bring in the required finance. **The government will allow the private sector partner to collect revenue from the users. Eg. – toll charges on the highways.** The tenure of the contracted period will be based on the projected traffic volume on the highway.
- This new proposal would help **de-risk the private concessionaire** given that in the earlier proposed PPP model, stakeholders had expressed apprehension over risks related to finance and revenues.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: HEALTH

1. A disease surveillance system, for the future

The article talks about the importance of a well-functioning disease surveillance system that can help reduce the impact of disease and outbreaks.

Epidemiology:

Epidemiology is the branch of medicine which deals with the incidence, distribution, and possible control of diseases and other factors relating to health.

Details:

- Epidemiology has become a key discipline to prevent and control infectious diseases (for non-communicable diseases as well).
- The application of principles of epidemiology is possible through systematic collection and timely analysis, and dissemination of data on the diseases.
 - This is to initiate action to either prevent or stop the further spread, a process termed disease surveillance.
- In the late 19th century, with the emergence of understanding that germs cause diseases, and then in the early 20th century, with the discovery of antibiotics and advances in modern medicine, attention from epidemiology shifted.
- The high-income countries invested in disease surveillance systems but low- and middle-income countries used limited resources for medical care.
- In the second half of the twentieth century, as part of the global efforts for smallpox eradication many countries recognised the importance and started to invest in and strengthen the diseases surveillance system.

- These efforts received a further boost with the emergence of Avian flu in 1997 and the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak in 2002-04.

Surveillance in India:

- India launched the National Surveillance Programme for Communicable Diseases in 1997.
- However, this initiative remained undeveloped till, in the wake of the SARS outbreak, in 2004, India launched the Integrated Disease Surveillance Project (IDSP).
- The focus under the IDSP was to:
 - increase government funding for disease surveillance
 - strengthen laboratory capacity
 - train the health workforce
 - have at least one trained epidemiologist in every district of India
- It was on this foundation of the IDSP (which now has become a full-fledged programme) that when the COVID-19 pandemic struck, India could rapidly deploy teams of epidemiologists and public health experts to respond to and guide the response, coordinate the contact tracing and rapidly scale up testing capacity.

Issues:

- The disease surveillance system and health data recording and reporting systems are key tools in epidemiology; however, these have performed variably in the Indian states.
- This is evident from available analyses, be it seroprevalence survey findings or the analysis of excess COVID-19 deaths.
- The estimated excess deaths are also higher in those states which have weak disease surveillance systems and the civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems.
- In a well-functioning disease surveillance system, an increase in cases of any illness would be identified very quickly.

Way Forward:

- A review of the IDSP by joint monitoring mission in 2015, made a few concrete recommendations to strengthen disease surveillance systems.
 - These included increasing financial resource allocation, ensuring an adequate number of trained human resources, strengthening laboratories, and zoonosis, influenza and vaccine-preventable diseases surveillance.
- These recommendations must be re-looked and acted upon. At a more specific level, the following should be considered by health policymakers.
- The government resources allocated to preventive and promotive health services and disease surveillance need to be increased by the Union and State governments.
- The workforce in the primary healthcare system in both rural and urban areas needs to be retrained in disease surveillance and public health actions.
- The vacancies of surveillance staff at all levels need to be urgently filled in.

- The laboratory capacity for COVID-19, developed in the last 18 months, needs to be planned and repurposed to increase the ability to conduct testing for other public health challenges and infections.
- The 'One Health' approach has to be promoted beyond policy discourses and made functional on the ground.
 - The emerging outbreaks of zoonotic diseases, such as the [Nipah virus](#), avian flu, scrub typhus in Uttar Pradesh are a reminder of the interconnectedness of human and animal health.
- There has to be a dedicated focus on strengthening the civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems and medical certification of cause of deaths (MCCD). These are complementary to disease surveillance systems.
- It is also time to ensure coordinated actions between the State government and municipal corporations to develop joint action plans and assume responsibility for public health and disease surveillance.
 - The allocation made by the 15th Finance Commission to corporations for health should be used to activate this process.

Conclusion:

The emergence and re-emergence of new and old diseases and an increase in cases of endemic diseases are partly unavoidable. With a well-functioning disease surveillance system and with the application of principles of epidemiology, their impact can be reduced. There is a need for coordinated actions between a disease surveillance system, a civil registration system and experts in medical statistics, and, finally, informed by the application of principles of epidemiology.

Category: GOVERNANCE

1. Make departments smart, first

The article talks about the significance of E-governance in improving local governance.

Details:

- As Urbanization in India is accelerating, the importance of effective governance and service delivery by city governments becomes central to the well-being of Indians.
- The country plans to design smart cities, where digital systems enable the use of data generated by people living and working in the city itself, in order to continuously improve the functioning of the city.
 - A smart city requires good data for informed decision-making.
 - The only reliable way to get good data is to design 'smart systems' that generate such data by default.

A smart city is a network of smart functions and departments. Given the complexity of Indian cities, and the various entities that are involved in their governance, this should be done one step at a time. More precisely, one function at a time, then one department at a time, finally building up to the city as a whole.

Digitisation:

- There is a five-level framework for assessing where a given function, department, or city stands in its journey of e-governance.
- The framework sees how the department has been able to apply digital technologies across three domains in order to work more smartly. The three domains are:
 - Processes
 - Human resources
 - Citizen-centricity
- Even the most advanced e-governance systems stand on the foundation of a simple behavioural change, i.e, going digital.
 - Records kept on papers instead of being stored digitally creates scope for errors and manipulation.

Way Forward:

- To ensure digitisation, a combination of expectation-setting and incentives must be introduced.
- The time saved and ease of work when digital tools automate record creation and retrieval can be demonstrated in order to gain confidence.
 - In Andhra Pradesh, for instance, ULB employees reported saving an average of 11 hours every week after a digital system was adopted.
- Phased targets can be set for adoption of the new tools.
- Adequate technical support and education for employees is necessary during the transition.
- In implementing such changes administrators must ensure that e-governance is not reduced to an exercise in performance management alone.
- The framework incorporates a 'citizen centricity' lever to emphasise that urban local bodies are service delivery organisations, and that internal reforms have to reflect in better experience and empowerment for citizens.

Conclusion:

- Digitisation leads to richer datasets that will bring various departments in a city to collaborate with each other to create a virtuous cycle of co-creation, learning, and efficiency.
- Thereby, smart cities emerge from organic collaboration between departments, employees, and citizens, who are simply looking to do their own jobs more effectively.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Another Grouping

The article talks about the challenges and opportunities that AUKUS presents to India as a group member.

Read more on this topic covered in [Sep 17th, 2021 CNA](#), and [Sep 22nd, 2021 CNA](#).

Category: EDUCATION

1. Does NEET privilege the privileged?

Context:

Tamil Nadu government has passed a bill to do away with the requirement for candidates to qualify in the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) for admission to undergraduate medical courses in the State.

Read more on this topic covered in [Sep 16th, 2021 CNA](#).

F. Prelims Facts

1. Rs. 7,523-cr. order for Arjun Mk-1A tanks

MBT Mk-1A:

- The **Main Battle Tank Mk-1A** is a new variant of Arjun tank designed to enhance firepower, mobility and survivability.
- It involves **new features and more indigenous content** from the Mk-1 variant.
- The MBT Arjun Mk-1A was designed and developed by the Combat Vehicles Research and Development Establishment (CVRDE), along with the other laboratories of the Defence Research and Development Organisation ([DRDO](#)).

Context:

- The Defence Ministry has placed an order with the Heavy Vehicles Factory (HVF), Avadi, Tamil Nadu for the supply of 118 indigenous Arjun Mk-1A main battle tanks for the Army.

G. Tidbits

1. Will meet 2022 deadline for CEPA, says UAE minister

- The formal negotiations for the **India-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)** have begun and are expected to be finalized by March 2022.
- Also a **high-level joint task force on investments** has been set up to address the barriers to free flow of investments between the two countries.
- The CEPA, combined with easier investment flows, will enable the two countries' businesses to tap global opportunities together, given their synergies and complementarities in different sectors.

2. Govt. notifies SEIS rates for 2019-20, sets ceiling

SEIS scheme:

- Under the framework of the SEIS Scheme, service exporters for eligible service categories, are granted benefits in the nature of **transferable Duty Credit Scrips** as a percentage of Net Foreign Exchange earned on the export of the eligible services in a financial year.
 - Duty Credit Scrips (DCS) is an export promotion benefit offered by the Government of India under the **Foreign Trade Policy (FTP) 2015-20**.
- The Duty Credit Scrips can be used for payment of **Basic Customs Duty and certain other duties**.

Context:

- The government has notified the benefits to be given under the Service Exports from India Scheme (SEIS) for exports undertaken in 2019-20.
- The SEIS incentives will **ease the credit burden of service export firms**, especially for players in the **travel, tourism and hospitality sectors that have been hit hardest by the pandemic**.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. PM2.5 and PM10 are capable of penetrating deep into the lungs but PM2.5 can even enter the bloodstream, primarily resulting in cardiovascular and respiratory impacts.
2. As of now National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) do not meet the WHO's existing standards.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Particulates matter are microscopic particles of solid or liquid matter suspended in the air.
 - PM10 is more likely to deposit on the surfaces of the larger airways of the upper region of the lung. Particles deposited on the lung surface can induce tissue damage, and lung inflammation.
 - PM2.5 (particles less than 2.5 micrometers in diameter) can penetrate deeply into the lung, irritate and corrode the alveolar wall, and consequently impair lung function. PM2.5 can even enter the bloodstream.
- The National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) set limits for SO₂, NO₂, particulate matter (PM2.5 and PM10), Ozone, Lead, Carbon Monoxide, Ammonia, Benzene, Benzo Pyrene, Arsenic, Nickel. Notably, the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) do not meet the WHO's existing standards.

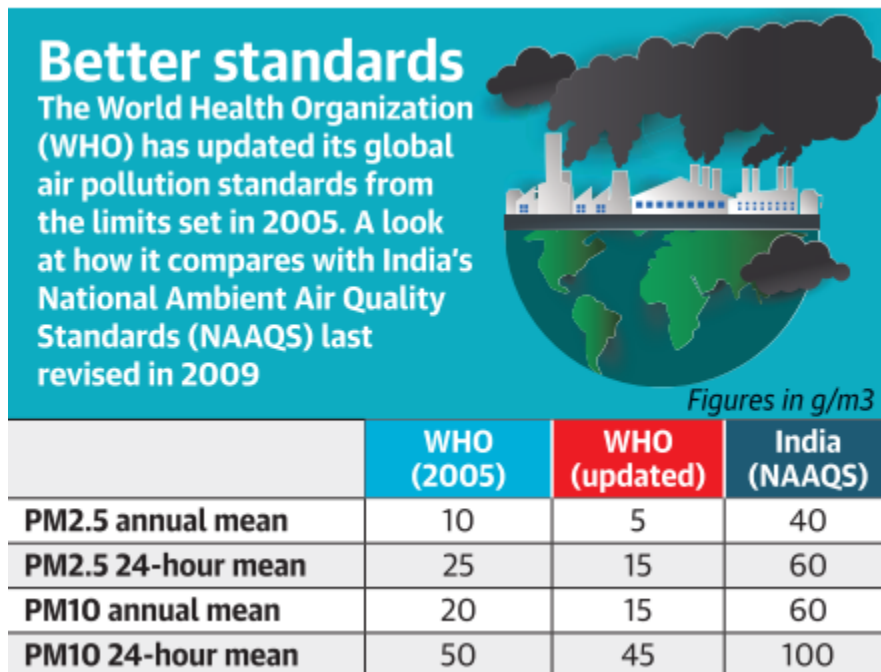


Image Courtesy: The Hindu

Q2. Fast and Secured Transmission of Electronic Records (FASTER) recently seen in news is

- An electronic toll collection system operated by the National Highways Authority of India
- A system conceived by Supreme Court to ensure bail orders reach jail authorities swiftly
- An Investor Facilitation Portal for Ease of Doing Business
- A secure cloud based platform for storage, sharing and verification of documents

Answer: b

Explanation:

- Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana launched a new initiative called 'FASTER' or 'Fast and Secure Transmission of Electronic Records'.
- Under the initiative, the Supreme Court will instantly transmit bail and other orders to the jail authorities, district courts and the High Courts. This will be done in a secure way electronically.

Q3. Arab Spring, a series of anti-government protests, originally started from

- Egypt
- Lebanon
- Syria
- Tunisia

Answer: d

Explanation:

- The Arab Spring was a series of anti-government protests, uprisings, and armed rebellions that spread across much of the Arab world in the early 2010s.
- It began with the Tunisian Revolution.

Q4. With respect to Arjun Mk-1A battle tanks, which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. It is a second-generation main battle tank manufactured in India in collaboration with Russia.
2. India has recently agreed to export the battle tanks to Vietnam to boost India's material exports.

Options:

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- The Main Battle Tank Arjun Mk-1A is a new variant of the Arjun tank designed to enhance firepower, mobility and survivability.
- It involves new features and more indigenous content from the Mk-1 variant.
- The MBT Arjun Mk-1A was designed and developed by the Combat Vehicles Research and Development Establishment (CVRDE), along with the other laboratories of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).
- As of now, there are no plans to export the Arjun Mk-1A battle tanks to Vietnam.

Q5. With reference to an organization known as 'Birdlife International', which of the following statements is/are correct? (UPSC-2015)

1. It is a Global Partnership of Conservation Organizations.
2. The concept of 'biodiversity hotspots' originated from this organization.
3. It identifies the sites known/referred to as 'Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas'.

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- BirdLife International is a global partnership of non-governmental organizations that strives to conserve birds and their habitats. It is a Global Partnership of Conservation Organizations.
- BirdLife International has identified 13,000 Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas and is the official International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List authority for birds.
- The term 'biodiversity hotspot' was given by Norman Myers in 1988. He first identified 10 hotspots based on the high degree of endemism and habitat loss, i.e. the regions of richest biodiversity and most endangered.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Smart cities emerge, not from the top down approach, but from organic collaboration between departments, employees, and citizens. Analyse. (10 Marks, 150 Words)[GS-2, Governance]
2. Diseases and outbreaks are realities and a well functioning system can help reduce their impact. Discuss the measures to be taken by the Government in this regard. (10 Marks, 150 Words)[GS-2, Health]

Read the previous CNA [here](#).