

05 Oct 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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B. GS 2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. SC lashes out at farmers' groups

Context:

In the backdrop of an agitation that snowballed into violence in Uttar Pradesh's Lakhimpur Kheri, resulting in the death of eight people, the Supreme Court lashed out at farmers' organisations for continuing the protests against the Centre's new [farm laws](#).

Details:

- Despite the government's assurance that it would not give effect to the farm laws, farmers continue protests.
 - They want the farm laws to be withdrawn.
- The Supreme Court Bench has said that it would first decide whether the right to protest was an "absolute right".

"Right to Protest" has been comprehensively covered in [January 22nd, 2020 CNA](#)

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. 'Hold Sri Lanka provincial polls'

Context:

India has urged Sri Lanka to hold elections to its provincial councils without further delay, along with the full implementation of the 13th Amendment.

Issue:

- The five-year terms of the provincial councils born out of the Indo-Lanka Accord of 1987 as a step to devolve political power to all the provinces last expired in 2018 and 2019, during the time of the former Maithripala Sirisena–Ranil Wickremesinghe government.
- Despite the then oppositional Rajapaksa camp demanding that the polls be held to the nine provinces, the Sirisena administration, which amended the Provincial Councils Elections Act in 2017, postponed holding the elections, as it grew increasingly unpopular amid internal rifts.

13th Amendment:

- The 13th amendment of the Sri Lankan Constitution is an outcome of the [Indo-Lanka Accord of 1987](#), which was signed by the then Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Sri Lankan President J.R. Jayawardene.

This topic has been covered in [September 6th, 2020 CNA](#)

2. Shringla pushes projects, connectivity in Sri Lanka

Context:

India's Foreign Secretary who is on a visit to Sri Lanka has stressed the need for the conclusion of connectivity projects in Sri Lanka.

Details:

- India has underscored the need for early conclusion of bilateral projects in Sri Lanka.
- It has sought the enhancement of connectivity by air and sea between the neighbouring countries, which are seeking to reset ties amid a strain in ties.
- The foreign secretary, referring to halted, or delayed projects awaiting a push for revival or completion has asserted:
 - With the easing of the situation in Sri Lanka, it may be time to work on connectivity initiatives like the Jaffna to Chennai flight, ferry services between Karaikal and Kankesanthurai, and Dhanushkodi and Talaimanar and the Buddhist corridor with the new international airport at Kushinagar.

Note:

During his virtual bilateral summit with Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa in 2020, the Prime Minister of India had announced a \$15 million grant for the promotion of Buddhist ties, aimed at deepening people-to-people linkages between the two countries.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. Unlocking mysteries of senses

Context:

US scientists David Julius and Ardem Patapoutian have won the Nobel Medicine Prize for discoveries on receptors for temperature and touch. They will share the Nobel Prize cheque for 10 million Swedish kronor (\$1.1 million).

Details:

- Their work is focused on the field of somatosensation which explores the ability of organs such as the eyes, ears and skin to see, hear and feel.
 - The ability to sense heat, cold and touch is essential for survival.
 - It underpins our interaction with the world around us.
- Julius was recognised for his research using capsaicin (a compound from chilli peppers that induces a burning sensation) to identify which nerve sensors in the skin respond to heat.
 - The human body generates heat in response to inflammation, so the affected area can now be protected and be allowed to heal.
- Ardem Patapoutian's pioneering discovery was identifying the class of nerve sensors that respond to touch.

- These ground-breaking discoveries have facilitated the understanding of how heat, cold and mechanical force can initiate the nerve impulses that allow perception and adaption to the world.
- The duo's research is being used to develop treatments for a wide range of diseases and conditions, including chronic pain.

Note:

- They conducted the research independently of each other in the late 1990s and 2000s.

2. Drone-based vaccine delivery model launched

Context:

Health Minister has launched the ICMR's drone response and outreach in the north-east (i-Drone).

- The delivery model is aimed at ensuring that life-saving vaccines reach everyone.
- This is for the first time that a 'Make in India' drone has been used in South Asia to transport COVID vaccine over an aerial distance of 15 km in 12-15 minutes from the Bishnupur district hospital to Loktak lake, Karang island in Manipur for administration at the primary health centre.
- The delivery model would serve remote areas and hard to reach terrains.
- Currently, the drone-based delivery project has been granted permission for implementation in Manipur and Nagaland, as well as the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Significance:

- India is home to geographical diversities and drones can be used to deliver essentials to the last mile.
- Drones can be used in delivering important life-saving medicines, collecting blood samples.
- This technology can also be used in critical situations.
- It may prove a game-changer in addressing the challenges in health care delivery, particularly health supplies, in difficult areas.

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Govt. moots changes to Forest Conservation Act

Context:

The Union Government has proposed changes to Forest Conservation Act.

Details:

- It has proposed absolving agencies involved in national security projects and border infrastructure projects from obtaining prior forest clearance from the Centre.
 - The FCA, which first came in 1980 and was amended in 1988, requires such permission.
 - The onerous requirements imposed by the FCA have in the past delayed critical border infrastructure projects.

- Earlier, MoEFCC had accorded general approval for diversion of forest land for construction and widening of border roads in the areas falling within 100 km from the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China.
- Given the deteriorating security situation along the LAC, India will have to significantly increase the pace of the construction of border roads.
- India is also planning to link Ladakh to the rest of the country through a rail line, and is also working on significantly improving railway connectivity in Arunachal.
- The proposed amendment could remove one of the biggest hurdles in the timely completion of border infrastructure projects.
- There is also a plan in the document to exempt land acquired before 1980 by public sector bodies such as the Railways.
 - Currently, there is strong resentment among several Ministries on how the Act was being interpreted over the right of way of railways, highways.
 - At present, a landholding agency (Rail, [NHAI](#), PWD, etc.) is required to take approval under the Act and pay stipulated compensatory levies such as Net Present Value (NPV), Compensatory Afforestation (CA), etc. for use of such land which was originally been acquired for non-forest purposes.
- The Environment Ministry has proposed adding a clause to make offences under the modified Act punishable with simple imprisonment for a period which may extend to one year and make it cognisable and non-bailable.
- Provisions have been proposed for penal compensation to make good for the damage already done.
- It proposes removing zoos, safaris, Forest Training infrastructures from the definition of “non-forestry” activities.
 - The current definition restricts the way money collected as part of compensatory cess can be spent towards forest conservation purposes.

Note:

- The proposed amendment is part of a larger rationalising of existing forest laws.
- The document is open to public discussion.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. An alphabet soup New Delhi needs to sift through

The article talks about the various alliances that India is a part of and the need to rationalise them.

Context:

The AUKUS – the trilateral security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States has revealed the hazards of group diplomacy.

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

Issue:

- At present, the world has a whole spectrum of groups from the European Union at one end to the [African Union](#) at the other with varying shades of cooperation.
- Groups such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), G-2 etc, exist.
- Many of them do not have regional, ideological or thematic homogeneity to lend them a reason for forming a group.
- The time, the money and the energy spent on convening not only summits but also ministerial, official and expert level meetings do not seem justified.
- Bureaucracies, with United Nations salaries and perks, grow around these bodies, developing vested interests to perpetuate them.
- Such groups which do not have sunset clauses continue even after they diminish in importance.
- Finding the agenda for these organisations and groups is another difficult exercise.
 - The growing agenda of the [United Nations](#) includes everything.

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) years:

- Apart from its reservations about the reference to security in the draft charter for SAARC, India was in a dilemma — that not joining the forum would look as though India was against regional cooperation. And if it joined, it faced the possibility of its neighbours ganging up and using the [SAARC](#) institutions to pressure India on various regional issues.
- Another concern was that the proposer of such a group would be suspected of aspiring to the leadership of a region.
- Therefore, India joined the Association with a number of conditionalities such as the exclusion of bilateral issues, decision-making by voting, and holding of meetings without all members being present.
- But despite the imperative for cooperation in vital fields, SAARC became an arena for India bashing, particularly by Pakistan.
- SAARC became a liability as it was clear that the region was not mature enough to have a regional instrumentality.

Commonwealth:

- When India decided to remain in the Commonwealth even as an independent country, the nature of the affinity to the British Crown changed.
- Its agenda expanded beyond the concerns of the former British colonies.

- The only way it could survive, after Zimbabwe became independent and apartheid disappeared in South Africa, was by duplicating the agenda of the United Nations and repeating pronouncements of member-states made in other organisations.
- The role of the [Commonwealth](#) was reviewed, but the members reached the conclusion that it had continuing relevance.

BRICS:

- The rationale of some of the other new groups was unclear even when they were formed.
- A Goldman Sachs economist found similarities among fast-growing economies such as China, Russia, India and Brazil and recommended massive western investments in these countries. The countries concerned formed an intergovernmental group called BRIC and later [BRICS](#), with South Africa added as a representative of the African continent.
- At that time, it was feared that, with the presence of China and Russia in it, it would be construed as an anti-American group.
- China quickly assumed the leadership of BRICS and tried to seek changes in the international economic system by establishing a bank, with the possibility of credit for its members.
- The result of this development was undermining the relevance of another, less ambitious, group of India, Brazil and South Africa (IBSA), which had several common interests.
- As candidates for permanent membership of the Security Council, they had specific ideas on UN reform and on South-South cooperation.
- The recent BRICS summit had Afghanistan on its agenda.

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO):

- The [SCO](#) started off as a friendly group of China and some of the former Republics of the Soviet Union, but with the addition of India, Pakistan and Iran, it became a diverse group and it could not reach an agreement.

BIMSTEC:

- India had also had the experience of taking initiatives to encourage groups without the participation of Pakistan, knowing well that Pakistan's presence is a sure recipe for trouble.
- One of them is the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation ([BIMSTEC](#)), an international organisation of seven South Asian and Southeast Asian nations which are dependent on the Bay of Bengal: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand.
- The group remained dormant for many years till it was revived a few years ago as an alternative to SAARC.
- Though it has an ambitious agenda for sectoral cooperation, it has not gained much momentum.

IORA:

- Another group which India has championed is the [Indian Ocean Rim Association \(IORA\)](#).

- The organisation was first established as the Indian Ocean Rim Initiative in Mauritius in 1995 and formally launched in 1997.
- It also drags on without any significant progress.

India and Other groupings:

- On the other hand, the two active groups, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and [Nuclear Suppliers Group \(NSG\)](#), have eluded India even though it has major stakes in them.
- India campaigned actively for membership of these two bodies, but gave up when it made no headway.
- In the process of working with the U.S. on a bouquet of groups such as Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), NSG, the [Wassenaar Arrangement](#) and the Australia Group, India ended up with membership of Wassenaar and the Australia Group, in which it was not interested.

QUAD and AUKUS:

- The Quad had not gained much prominence or years till the Chinese threat became real in 2020.
- As India is reluctant to accept that the grouping has been formed to contain China's influence in the Indo-Pacific, it has driven the U.S. to new alliances such as a second Quad and then AUKUS.
 - The U.S. wanted to fortify itself with allies against China.
- However, the reaction of France to AUKUS has raised the issue of loyalty among allies even though AUKUS has made it clear that it was meant only to enable the U.S. to transfer nuclear-propelled submarine technology to Australia.

Conclusion:

- The proliferation of alliances and groups will be a matter of close scrutiny by many countries in light of the new trend initiated by the U.S.
- Collective bargaining is the strength of group diplomacy but it cannot be effective without commitment to a common cause.
- India should also reconsider the plethora of groups it is in and rationalise them.

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Taproots to help restore India's fading green cover

The article talks about the importance of participation of local communities, adequate financing and incentives in the restoration of India's declining forest cover.

Significance of Forest Cover:

- Forests cover nearly 30% land surface of the earth.
- They provide a wide variety of ecosystem services and support countless and diverse species.
- They stabilise the climate, sequester carbon and regulate the water regime.

Issue:

- Despite various international conventions and national policies in place to improve green cover, there is a decline in global forest cover.
- The State of the World's Forests Report 2020, says that since 1990, around 420 million hectares of forest have been lost through deforestation, conversion and land degradation.
- India lost 4.69 MHA of its forests for various land uses between 1951 to 1995.
- Dependence on forests by nearly 18% of the global human population has put immense pressure on ecosystems; in India, this has resulted in the degradation of 41% of its forests.

Steps taken to improve the Forest Cover:

- Restoration is bringing back the degraded or deforested landscape to its original state by various interventions to enable them to deliver all the benefits.
- 2021-2030 has been declared as the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration for improving environmental conditions and enhancing human communities.
- India joined the [Bonn Challenge](#) with a pledge to restore 21 MHA of degraded and deforested land which was later revised to 26 MHA to be restored by 2030.
- The first-ever country progress report under the Bonn Challenge submitted by India by bringing 9.8 million hectares since 2011 under restoration is an achievement.
- There have been remarkable initiatives to involve local people in the protection and development of forests by forming joint forest management committees (JFMC).
- However, continued degradation and deforestation need to be tackled effectively to achieve the remaining target of restoration by addressing various challenges.

Key challenges:

- Forest restoration and tree planting are leading strategies to fight global warming by way of carbon sequestration. However, planting without considering the local ecology can result in more damage.
- Planting a forest in the wrong places such as savannah grasslands could be disastrous for local biodiversity.
- Also, naturally regenerated forests tend to have more secure carbon storage.
 - Being less tech-sensitive, cost-effective and conserving more biodiversity, natural forest restoration is becoming more widely accepted.
- Nearly 5.03% of Indian forests are under protection area (PA) management needing specific restoration strategies. The remaining areas witness a range of disturbances including grazing, encroachment, fire, and climate change impacts that need area-specific considerations.
- Though India's increasing economic growth is helping to eliminate poverty, there is continued degradation and a growing scarcity of natural resources. The intricate link between poverty and environmental degradation was first highlighted by India at the first UN global conference on the human environment in Stockholm.
- Encroachment of nearly 1.48 MHA of forest and grazing in nearly 75% of forest area is also linked to the livelihood of local communities.
 - This dependency, along with various social-political and economic factors, complicates the issue manifold.

- Adequate financing is one of the major concerns for the success of any intervention including restoration.
- The involvement of multiple stakeholders in forest restoration is bound to cause a conflict of interests among different stakeholders; along with low priority and insufficient funding, it becomes even more challenging.

Way Forward:

- It is fundamental to consider the local ecology before implementing any restoration efforts to retain their biodiversity and ecosystem functions.
- Restoration, being a scientific activity, needs research support for its success. Critical examination is necessary before putting restoration interventions into practice.
- The relevance of local research duly considering ecological aspects, local disturbances and forest-dependent communities is important to formulate guidelines for locally suitable interventions and to meet India's global commitment.
- Alternate ways of financing such as involving corporates and dovetailing restoration activities with ongoing land-based programmes of various departments can help to make it easy for operation.

2. Science over smog towers

Context:

Two new smog towers have been inaugurated in Delhi.

This topic has been covered in [Aug 20th, 2021 CNA](#).

Details:

- The smog towers have also been installed in cities like Bengaluru and Chandigarh.
- Mumbai's clean air plan indicates a financial requirement of ₹25 crore for installing air filtration units at major traffic intersections in the city.

Issue:

- While the efforts by governments indicate that they are taking cognisance of air pollution, the deployments are mostly driven by symbolism rather than science.
- For instance, the Delhi government claims that the newly installed smog tower in Connaught Place could reduce air pollution levels by 80%.
 - However, there is no scientific evidence of smog towers or any other outdoor air filtration units improving air quality in cities.
 - The smog tower installed in two cities in China did not prove to be effective and were not scaled up.

Reconsidering the installation of Smog Towers:

- Smog towers create an illusion of progress towards clean air while diverting crores of public money away from proven solutions. They misdirect policymakers and citizens by deflecting attention from areas that call for urgent action.

- Therefore, governments looking at investing in outdoor filtration systems should defer their deployment plans.
- The data on the effectiveness of the newly installed smog towers should be made available publicly for independent evaluation.
- Until there is scientific consensus on their effectiveness, every new tower installed is just a violation of taxpayers' money and citizens' trust.

Way Forward:

- Governments must ramp up investments in proven solutions to reduce air pollution.
- Policymakers should expand air pollution monitoring in areas with limited or no air quality monitoring and strengthen forecasting capacity across cities.
- Cities should strengthen their air quality forecasting systems by collaborating with scientific institutions that are transparent about their approach and findings.
 - The forecasts should be used in rolling out preventive measures such as travel restrictions, pausing commercial activities or encouraging working from home, on anticipated high pollution days.
- City-level emission inventories must be updated periodically. These data are critical to identify key sources of air pollution and design effective clean air plans as per the local context.
- Targeted efforts must be made to improve air quality for urban slum dwellers who have no access to clean cooking energy.
 - Policymakers must focus on providing LPG connections to these households along with ensuring sustained usage of LPG as the primary fuel.

Conclusion:

Cities should strengthen their enforcement capacity by investing in people and systems that can keep a round-the-clock watch on polluters. India is witnessing a rising democratic demand for clean air. But this cannot be met by unproven technological fixes. Instead, the government must vigorously pursue solutions that are rooted in science. Restoring ecosystem health can sustain human systems as well.

F. Prelims Facts

1. VAHAN Portal:

- VAHAN is the name of the national vehicle registry, which intends to collate all the information available with road transport authorities for easy access by both citizens and regulators.
- VAHAN is a highly flexible and comprehensive system that takes care of all the burdensome activities of Vehicle Registration, thus letting the Transport Department deal with more important business issues.
- The software enables the processes at RTO/DTO/MLO/SDM involving Vehicle Registration, Fitness, Taxes, Permits & Enforcement to get computerized.
- With Vahan, multiple visits to the RTO, extensive paperwork, queues, middlemen and bribes will be eliminated.
- Vahan helps carry out most of the RTO related transactions including payments, online.

- Vahan allows access to all details related to vehicles such as registration number, chassis/engine number, body/fuel type, colour, manufacturer and model and provides various online services to citizens.
- Driving Licence and related data are automated through a separate application called 'Sarathi'.

G. Tidbits

1. Govt. promises probe into Pandora Papers

What's in News?

The Union Government has promised an investigation into the revelations in the Pandora Papers and assured appropriate action in such cases as per law.

- It has said that investigations in cases of the Pandora Papers leaks appearing in the media would be monitored through a multi-agency group.
- The multi-agency group headed by the Central Board of Direct Taxes Chairman, with representatives from the Enforcement Directorate, the Financial Intelligence Unit and the Reserve Bank of India, would keep a tab of the phased disclosures from the Pandora Papers indicated by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) website.
- India is part of an Inter-Governmental Group that ensured collaboration and experience sharing to effectively address tax risks associated with such leaks.
- Also, following earlier similar such leaks in the form of ICIJ, HSBC, Panama Papers and Paradise Papers, the government has already enacted the Black Money (Undisclosed Foreign Income and Assets) and Imposition of Tax Act, 2015, with an aim to curb black money, or undisclosed foreign assets and income by imposing suitable tax and penalty on such income.

Read more on this topic covered in [Oct 4th, 2021 CNA](#).

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. With respect to Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. Every offence punishable under this Act shall be cognizable.
2. It is mandatory for the judge to award the Death penalty for certain offences after a previous conviction.

Options:

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, every offence punishable under this Act shall be cognizable.
- Cognizable offences are those where a police officer can arrest without a warrant.
- Non-cognizable offence, as the name suggests, is the offence in which the police has no authority to apprehend a person for crime on its own, as explicit permission of the court is required.
- The judge has an option to award the Death penalty for certain offences after a previous conviction. It is not mandatory.

Q2. Consider the following statements:

1. Killing any animal in a manner required by the religion of any community is not an offence under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act.
2. Prohibiting the slaughter, of cows and calves and other milch and draught cattle, falls under the Gandhian Principles of DPSP as part of Article 48.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Killing any animal in a manner required by the religion of any community is not an offence under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act.
- Prohibiting the slaughter, of cows and calves and other milch and draught cattle, falls under the Gandhian Principles of DPSP as part of Article 48.

Q3. Which amongst the following statements is the best description of Ex Milan?

- a. India, Thailand and Singapore annual trilateral exercise
- b. Naval exercise between United Arab Emirates (UAE) and India
- c. Multilateral naval exercise hosted by the Indian Navy
- d. Naval exercise in the Indo-Pacific region by India, USA and Japan

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Exercise Milan is a multilateral naval exercise hosted by the Indian Navy under the aegis of the Andaman and Nicobar Command.
- It is a biennial event held in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and features professional exercises and seminars, social events and sporting fixtures between participating nations.
- Milan was first held in 1995.

Q4. The Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine 2021 was awarded jointly to David Julius and Ardem Patapoutian for their discoveries of

- a. how cells sense and adapt to oxygen availability
- b. receptors for temperature and touch
- c. cancer therapy by inhibition of negative immune regulation
- d. concerning a novel therapy against infections caused by roundworm parasites

Answer: b

Explanation:

The Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine 2021 was awarded jointly to David Julius and Ardem Patapoutian for their discoveries on receptors for temperature and touch.

Q5. Which one of the following books of ancient India has the love story of the son of the founder of Sunga dynasty?

- a. Swapnavasavadatta
- b. Malavikagnimitra
- c. Meghadoota
- d. Ratnavali

Answer: b

Explanation:

Malavikagnimitra is a Sanskrit play by Kalidasa on the love story of the son of the founder of the Sunga dynasty. It is based on some events of the reign of Pushyamitra Shunga.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. India needs to reconsider the plethora of regional and global alliances it is in and rationalise them after a reality check. Critically evaluate. (250 words; 15 marks)[GS-2, International Relations].
2. In forest restoration, the participation of local communities and adequate financing and incentives are essential. Elucidate. (250 words; 15 marks)[GS-3, Environment and Ecology].

Read the previous CNA [here](#).