

09 Oct 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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B. GS 2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. SC flags consequences of growing digital divide

Context:

The Supreme Court has warned that the digital divide caused by online classes will defeat the fundamental right of every child to education.

Issue:

- During the course of the pandemic, as schools increasingly turned to online education to avoid exposing young children to the pandemic, the digital divide produced stark consequences.
- Children belonging to the Economically Weaker Sections [EWS]/Disadvantaged Groups [DG] had to suffer the consequence of not having to fully pursue their education or worse still drop out because of the lack of access to the Internet and computers.

Details:

- The court regretted the fact that the right to education now hinged on who could afford “gadgets” for online classes and who could not.
- It highlighted that many children dropped out of school during the pandemic and even run the danger of being drawn into child labour or worse, child trafficking.
- It said that even though schools are now reopening gradually, the need to provide adequate computer-based equipment together with access to online facilities for children is of utmost importance.

Note:

Earlier, the Delhi High Court had directed both private and government schools in the Capital to provide gadgets and Internet packages free of cost to poor students for attending online classes.

Read more on this topic covered in [September 19th, 2020 CNA](#)

2. Palk Bay scheme will be given a fillip: Murugan

Context:

The Union Government is considering increasing the unit cost of deep-sea fishing vessels under the Palk Bay scheme to make it more attractive to fisherfolk.

Palk Bay Scheme:

- The scheme was launched in 2017.
- The aim of the scheme was to finance 2,000 vessels in three years for the fishermen in Tamil Nadu.

- The Palk Bay scheme is being financed by the Union and the State Governments with beneficiary participation.
- It aimed at shifting the fishermen away from bottom trawling.
 - Trawlers greatly damage the marine ecosystem.
 - The Sri Lankan government has passed a bill, banning the use of trawlers in their waters.
- The Indian government is now creating a new deep sea fishing harbour at Mookaiyur, south of the Palk Bay in the Gulf of Mannar, where many of these vessels are likely to be berthed.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. After 68 years, Tatas win back Air India with ₹18,000 cr. Bid

Context:

Tata Sons subsidiary Talace Pvt. Ltd. has emerged as the winning bidder for the debt-laden national carrier – Air India.

Timeline:

1932: JRD Tata pilots Tata Airlines' inaugural flight from Karachi to Bombay	2007: Air India merges with Indian Airlines, that operates only domestic routes	Jan, 2020: Govt. launches a second attempt, this time offers 100% stake in Air India
1946: Tata Airlines becomes a public company; renamed Air India Limited	2012: Govt. approves ₹30,000 crore bailout for Air India, which has over ₹67,000 crore in debt	Oct, 2020: Govt. confirms Tata Sons' subsidiary Talace Pvt. Ltd. as the winning bidder
1948: Govt. of India acquires a 49% stake in the carrier	May, 2018: Govt. attempts to sell 76% stake in Air India; attracts no bidders	
1953: Government nationalises Air India		

Image source: The Hindu

Read more on Beginning, Journey and Crisis relating to [Air India – Complete Journey of National Carrier](#)

Background:

- The first attempt to reduce the government's stake through disinvestment was made in 2001 under the then NDA government. But that attempt to sell a 40% stake failed.
- As the viability of running AI worsened with every passing year, it was clear that sooner or later the government would have to privatise the airline.

Details:

- The Tatas will own a 100% stake in Air India, as also 100% in its international low-cost arm Air India Express and 50% in the ground handling joint venture, Air India SATS.
- Apart from 141 aircraft and access to a network of 173 destinations, including 55 international ones, Tatas will also have the ownership of iconic brands such as Air India, Indian Airlines and the Maharajah.

Addressing the Employees' Concern:

- The winning bidder will retain all employees for a period of one year.
- In the second year, if anyone has to be removed, they will be offered the Voluntary Retirement Scheme. They will be provided gratuity and provident fund as per the applicable law of the land.
- The post-retirement medical benefits of those who have retired and those who will be retiring will also be taken care of by the government.

What is the significance of this sale?

- It underscores the present government's commitment to reducing the government's role in the economy.
- Considering the historical difficulties in disinvestment of this airline, this is a significant achievement.
- However, purely in terms of money, the deal does not result in as big a step towards achieving the government's disinvestment target of the current year.
- It can be argued that if the government had run AI well, it could have made profits and paid off the debts instead of selling the airline (that can make profits) and still be left with a lot of debt.

Conclusion:

The sale of Air India can be viewed as one of the biggest reforms in the aviation sector. However, there is a long road ahead for rebuilding Air India which will require very long term and patient capital. For Tatas, the AI's acquisition is a long-term bet. The Tatas are expected to invest far more than what they have paid the government if this bet is to work for them.

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Special push for ethanol as a fuel, says Gadkari

Context:

The minister said that a special push would be given for ethanol as a fuel.

- With 100% use of 20% blend of bioethanol, India would be able to save ₹30,000 crore on import of fossil fuel.
- Further, the use of ethanol-blended petrol decreases emissions of carbon monoxide, hydrocarbons and nitrogen oxides by 40%.

Also read: [Ethanol Blended Petrol Programme](#)

Ethanol:

- Ethanol is a biofuel and a common by-product of biomass left by agricultural feedstock such as corn, sugarcane, hemp, potato, etc.
- It is produced mainly from molasses, a byproduct of sugar manufacture.
- Ethanol is basically alcohol of 99%-plus purity, which can be used for blending with petrol.
- Ethanol being a less polluting fuel will cut down carbon emissions.

Read more on “Ethanol Blending” covered in [UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis. January 29th, 2021.](#)

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: POLITY

1. Reflections on the ‘quasi-federal’ democracy

Introduction

- India is a land of diversity, multi-cultural with myriad castes, tribes and religions.
- Many in the West believed India would be balkanized under the weight of its diversity, its sovereignty would be challenged.
 - Thanks to our revered freedom fighters and their contributions in drafting a constitution that is able to accommodate wide-ranging diversity within one sovereign state, with a formal democratic framework.
 - With universal adult suffrage and free institutions of justice and governance, it is nearly impossible to polarise its wide-ranging diversity within any single divisive identity.
- Yet, in India’s journey towards the 75th year since its independence, it is time to reflect on India’s federal structure where there are competing identities. So, the article discusses the existing concerns in Indian federalism and the need for change.

Some fault lines

1. Rajya Sabha Chairman briefly broke down when some opposition members climbed on the reporters’ table.
 - The Chairman was unable to conduct proceedings despite the use of marshals.
 - However, the House passed a record number of bills amidst a record number of adjournments, pointing to rushed passing of bills without due deliberation.
2. Cross-border police firing by one constituent State against another
 - Example: Assam-Mizoram clash

- Such events have led to increased violence and casualties on both sides, which has resulted in retaliatory action in the form of an embargo on goods trade and travel links.
3. According to K.C. Wheare, India is a “centralized state with some federal features” as “quasi-federal”.
- Quasi-federal refers to a system of government where the distribution of power between the centre and the state is not equal.
 - The constitutional division of power and resources remains heavily skewed in favour of the Centre; along with “Residual”, “Concurrent” and “Implied” powers.
 - Indian federalism, to be democratically federal, needs institutional amendment despite being a “basic structure”.
4. Principles of Democratic Federalism
- Institutions should ensure equality between federal units.
 - The Centre should coordinate and respect the views of the States.
 - The Centre is subordinate to the Constitution.
 - Disputes between federal units should be adjudicated by an independent judiciary with impeccable professional and moral credibility.
 - Concern
 - India's federal structure is constitutionally hamstrung by deficits on all these counts, and operationally impaired by the institutional dents in the overall democratic process.
 - Institutional preferences are based either on ethnic or kinship network, or anti-incumbency.
 - Banking on individual role-models rather than actively participating in change: T.N. Seshan for the Election Commission of India, J.F. Ribeiro for the police or Justices Chandrachud or Nariman for the judiciary.
5. State Territorial Boundaries
- The Government of India Act, 1935, introduced the element of federalism in view of the fact that India was a country of sub-continental size.
 - It initiated ‘provincial autonomy’, attempted democratising it by: renaming “Provinces” to autonomous “States”; transferring all **“Reserved Powers” to popular governance**; constitutionally dividing powers between the two tiers; inserting federalism in the Preamble, and Parts 3 and 4 containing citizens’ “Fundamental Rights” and “Directive Principles”; **but nothing about States’ rights, not even their territorial boundaries**.
 - This has enabled the Centre to unilaterally alter State boundaries and create new States.
6. Judicial Appointments

- The judiciary is empowered to adjudicate on conflicts between the Centre and the States, but higher judicial appointments (an estimated 41% lying vacant), promotion and transfers becoming a central prerogative, their operations are becoming increasingly controversial.

7. Role of Rajya Sabha

- The Rajya Sabha indirectly represents the States whose legislators elect it.
- Representatives elected should focus on issues of the States but emphasis is along political lines.
- Members failing to win on the popular vote in Lok Sabha elections have also sought the route of Rajya Sabha indirectly.
- It is not empowered to neutralize the demographic weight of the populous States with larger representation in the popular chamber; it cannot veto its legislations, unlike the U.S. Senate.
- Joint sessions to resolve differences goes in favour of the Lok Sabha.

8. Other issues

- Control over All India Services
- Appointment of Governors

Inference

- Thus, the critical instruments of national governance have been either assigned or appropriated by the Centre, with the States left with politically controversial subjects such as law and order and land reforms.
- Thus, most of India's federal conflicts are structural, reinforced by operational abuses.

Conclusion

- India's national security deserves a functional democratic federal alternative to its dysfunctional "quasi-federal" structure, which is neither federal nor democratic but a constitutional "basic structure".

Important Terms

Soft State

- The term 'soft state' was introduced by Gunnar Myrdal.
- The word "soft" refers to a general societal indiscipline prevalent in South Asia as well as much of the developing world in comparison to European countries. This gets reflected in our inability to adhere to standards, enforce the law and maintain discipline.
- Myrdal used the term to describe:
 - various types of social indiscipline which manifest themselves by deficiencies in legislation and, in particular, law observance and enforcement, a widespread disobedience by public officials and, often, their collusion with powerful persons and groups ... whose conduct they should regulate.
- Inference

- At all levels, most of us exercise the soft option of doing what is popular rather than what is right.
- These failures weaken institutions and lead to unacceptably high levels of corruption, which, in turn, adversely impact development.

Functioning anarchy

John Kenneth Galbraith, the US ambassador to India and a renowned economist, had called India a “functioning anarchy”, where the implication was that the country did well despite the government not doing much.

Category: SECURITY

1. Grim turn

Context

- Civilians killed in Kashmir.

Responsibility for the killings

- A militant group called The Resistance Front (TRF) has claimed the responsibility.
- It is an amalgam of old groups that have long been present in the Valley, such as Lashkar-e-Toiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed and Hizb-ul-Mujahideen.

Why is it difficult to locate them?

- Most of them would fall in the category of “overground” militants, or “hybrid” as the security establishment now refers to them because they may be only partially active.
- This is one reason why the security establishment is finding it harder to locate them.

Surge in target killings in Kashmir

- It might be in the backdrop of increasing tourist influx and planned industrial investment in Kashmir where the Centre is promoting a raft of development schemes.
- The administration is encouraging the Pandits to return.
 - Some allege it is also because of fear and phobia of demographic change.
- A nine-week-long outreach of the Centre in J&K where Union Ministers are visiting remote districts, including those closer to the LoC, is underway.
- Strict directives were issued to unfurl the national flag in all government buildings, including schools, on August 15.
- There is an aggressive drive too to punish government staff suspected to be separatist sympathisers.
- People suspected of being “collaborators” of the post-2019 set-up in J&K are being killed.

Therefore, civilians are soft targets for the terrorists in this milieu to spread fear among these communities.

Conclusion

- No society can tolerate such violence. The J&K administration should thus engage with political parties and civil society organizations.

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. Simple, but brilliant

Context

- The Nobel Prize for chemistry has been awarded to Benjamin List and David WC MacMillan.
- They were awarded for their work in developing a new way for building molecules known as “asymmetric organocatalysis.”

Catalysis

- When two or more compounds react to form new compounds, the process is often aided by other chemicals that do not change themselves, but help speed up the reaction.
 - A catalyst is thus a substance that increases the rate of a chemical reaction without taking part in the reaction, or without undergoing any changes during the chemical reaction.
- Catalysis is the process of increasing the rate of a chemical reaction by adding a catalyst.
- The major types of catalysts are metals and enzymes.
 - Metals, mainly heavier metals;
 - Enzymes, naturally-occurring heavy molecules that facilitate all life-supporting biochemical processes.

Concerns associated with these catalysts.

- **Heavier metals** are expensive, difficult to mine, and toxic to humans and the environment.
 - Despite the best processes, traces remained in the end product; this posed problems in situations where compounds of very high purity were required, like in the manufacture of medicines.
 - Also, metals required an environment free of water and oxygen, which was difficult to ensure on an industrial scale.
- **Enzymes**, on the other hand, work best when water is used as a medium for the chemical reaction. But that is not an environment suitable for all kinds of chemical reactions.

Asymmetric organocatalysis

- In 2000, Dr. List and Dr. MacMillan, independent of each other, developed a third type of catalysis named asymmetric organocatalysis.

Organic compounds

- They are mostly naturally occurring substances, built around a framework of carbon atoms and usually containing hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen, sulphur, or phosphorus.
- Life-supporting chemicals like proteins, which are long chains of amino acids (carbon compounds containing nitrogen and oxygen) are organic.

- Enzymes are also proteins, and therefore, organic compounds.

How did they progress?

- List and MacMillan were aware of earlier research from the 1970s, in which an amino acid called proline was used as a catalyst in some specific reactions. But its role was not fully explored.
- They started working with individual amino acids in enzymes.
- List and MacMillan discovered that by using a natural compound like an amino acid as a catalyst, they were obtaining only one specific mirror image of the end-product. This was later named asymmetric catalysis.

Applications

- Organocatalysis finds several applications in pharmaceutical research and other industries.
- It has helped streamline the production of existing pharmaceuticals, including paroxetine, used to treat anxiety and depression, and oseltamivir, a respiratory infection medication.

Category: HEALTH

1. Infusing public health into Indian medical education

Community Medicine

- It is a branch of medicine concerned with the health of populations.
- It is concerned with the prevention of disease, the determinants and natural history of disease in populations, and the influence of the environment and of society on health and disease.
- It deals with analysing and measuring the health needs of populations, their health status and then develops appropriate and technically and practically feasible strategies to prevent and control diseases and improve the health of populations through Health Promotion, Health Education and Health Protection.

Origin in India

- The origin of community medicine in India can be traced back to 1946.
- Health Survey and Development Committee (Bhore) Report recommended a 3-month compulsory training for physicians in preventive and social medicine.

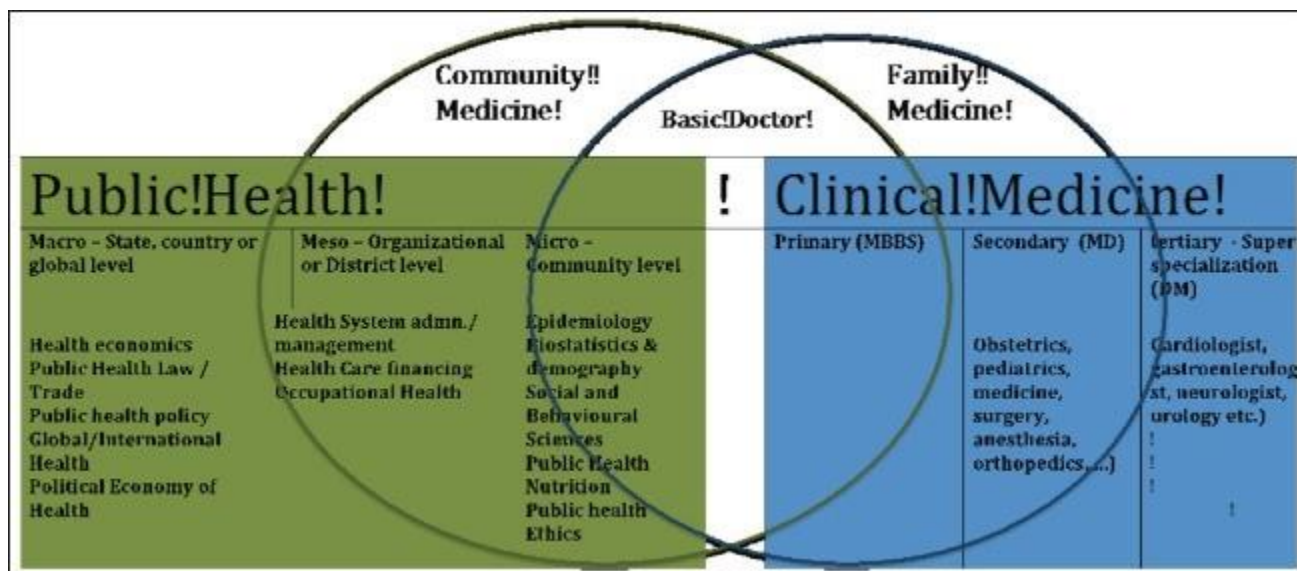


Image source: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/>

Issues

- The medical curriculum on community medicine has remained more or less stagnant since post-independence.
- Hardly any attempt has been made to reform the community medicine curriculum, from one that primarily provides technical inputs to technocratic health programmes — to one which can also take on the larger questions related to health policy and health systems, and inculcate critical thinking along lines that are divergent from clinical medicine.

Recommendations

- Some experts have advocated the establishment of public health departments in medical schools, inspired by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Upgrading community medicine to 'community medicine and public health' both at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels of medical training.
- It should involve revamping the community medicine curriculum through the incorporation of or emphasising those areas of public health which are presently left out or under-emphasised, such as social health, health policy and health systems.
- At the same time, the representation of experts other than doctors and from fields allied to public health will be essential in the refurbished 'community medicine and public health' departments.

F. Prelims Facts

1. Reserve Bank raises IMPS limit to ₹5 lakh

What's in News?

The Reserve Bank has proposed to increase the per transaction limit through Immediate Payment Service (IMPS) from ₹2 lakh to ₹5 lakh.

- The proposal has been made in a bid to promote digital transactions.
- The increase in limit will lead to a further rise in digital payments and provide an additional facility to customers for making digital payments beyond ₹2 lakh.

IMPS:

- IMPS is an important payment system providing 24×7 instant domestic funds transfer facility.
- It is an interbank electronic funds service that is especially working in India.
- It is accessible through various channels such as the Internet and mobile banking.
- There is no minimum payment limit.

G. Tidbits

1. Goyal pushes for a reset of India-ASEAN FTA

What's in News?

Commerce and Industry Minister has called for a renegotiation of the India-ASEAN free trade agreement (FTA).

- A few factors had hurt Indian exports disproportionately since the pact was operationalised in 2010.
- India had to deal with several restrictive barriers to its exports in the [ASEAN](#) region, particularly in the agriculture and auto sectors.
- The renegotiations have been called for in order to:
 - Prevent its misuse by 'third parties'
 - Remove trade restrictions
 - Remove non-tariff barriers to boost confidence

India ASEAN FTA:

- The ASEAN–India Free Trade Area (AIFTA) is a free trade area among the ten member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and India.
- The initial framework agreement was signed in 2003 in Bali, Indonesia and the final agreement in 2009. The free trade area came into effect on 1 January 2010.

2. Modi, Kishida commit to strengthening relations

What's in News?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to new Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, in their first conversation since the latter took charge.

- Both the leaders committed to strengthening bilateral relations and opposing the use of military and economic force in the Indo-Pacific region through the [Quad](#) with the U.S. and Australia.
- The leaders discussed the increasing alignment of perspectives, and robust cooperation, between India and Japan in the Indo-Pacific region. They reviewed the progress of cooperation under the Quad framework in this regard.

- Promoting cooperation on “green technology, digital, healthcare, enhancing connectivity” was also discussed.
- Kishida was earlier known for a moderate foreign policy line and has now taken a tough posture on countering China.

The statements are significant as tensions have been rising in the South China Sea over a record number of Chinese jets being flown into Taiwan’s Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ), after recent military exercises involving the U.S., Japan, the U.K. and other allies in the region.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q.1 With reference to the Tata Sons winning the bid to acquire Air India, consider the following statements and choose the correct one(s).

1. Talace Pvt. Ltd. has been officially declared as the winning bidder in the process.
2. As per the agreement, the Tatas will now own 100% stake in Air India and 76% stake in its international low cost arm Air India Express.
3. With this acquisition, the Tatas will also own the pending debt of Air India.

Options:-

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Talace Pvt. Ltd. has been officially declared as the winning bidder in the process.
- The Tatas will own a 100% stake in Air India, as also 100% in its international low-cost arm Air India Express and 50% in the ground handling joint venture, Air India SATS.
- Of the total AI debt of Rs 61,562 crore, the Tatas will take care of Rs 15,300 crore and will pay an additional Rs 2,700 crore in cash to the government. That leaves Rs 43,562 crore of debt with the government. The Tatas will not own the pending debt of Air India. The assets left with the government, such as buildings, etc., will likely generate Rs 14,718 crore. That will leave the government with a debt of Rs 28,844 crore to pay back.

Q.2 Consider the following statements with regards to the ‘Lateral entry’ program run by the Government of India:

1. Reservations or caste-based quotas do not apply to these recruitments.
2. The recruitment under this program does not involve any written test.
3. The basic qualification for a Joint Secretary lateral entrant is 15 years of work experience.

Which of these statements is/are correct?

- a. 1 & 2 only
- b. 2 & 3 only
- c. 1 & 3 only
- d. All of the above

Answer: d

Explanation:

- The term lateral entry means the appointment of specialists and experts, mainly those from the private sector, in government organizations and ministries.
- Reservations or caste-based quotas do not apply to these recruitments.
- The recruitment under this program does not involve any written test.
- The basic qualification for a Joint Secretary lateral entrant is 15 years of work experience.

Q.3 Nations across the world have been contemplating imposing a minimum permissible level of corporate tax in order to counter tax havens. Which of the following rates of minimum corporate tax has been decided by these nations?

- a. 23%
- b. 15%
- c. 20%
- d. 18%

Answer: b

Explanation:

- According to Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), a global deal to ensure big companies pay a minimum tax rate of 15% and make it harder for them to avoid taxation has been agreed upon by 136 countries.
- The global minimum tax is being discussed as the governments want to discourage multinationals from shifting profits – and tax revenues – to low-tax countries regardless of where their sales are made.
- The global minimum tax rate would apply to overseas profits of multinational firms with 750 million euros in sales globally.
- Governments could still set whatever local corporate tax rate they want, but if companies pay lower rates in a particular country, their home governments could top up their taxes to the 15% minimum, eliminating the advantage of shifting profits.

Q.4 Which of the following statements regarding RBI's G-SAP operations is not correct?

- a. It involved the RBI buying government securities from the market.

- b. It was launched to restrict the availability of liquidity in the market and thus control inflation.
- c. This was launched during the Covid-19 outbreak.
- d. None of the above.

Answer: b

Explanation:

- The RBI periodically purchase Government bonds from the market through Open Market Operations (OMOs).
- The G-SAP is in a way an OMO but there is an upfront commitment by the central bank to the markets that it will purchase bonds worth a specific amount.
- This was launched during the Covid-19 outbreak. It was launched to ensure adequate liquidity and for stabilising financial markets.

Q.5 With reference to Mian Tansen, which one of the following statements is not correct? (UPSC 2019)

- a. Tansen was the title given to him by Emperor Akbar.
- b. Tansen composed Dhrupads on Hindu gods and goddesses.
- c. Tansen composed songs on his patrons.
- d. Tansen invented many Ragas.

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Tansen was a composer, musician and vocalist, to whom many compositions have been attributed in northern regions of the Indian subcontinent.
- He was also an instrumentalist who popularized and improved musical instruments.
- He is among the most influential personalities in the North Indian tradition of Indian classical music, called *Hindustani*.
- Tansen was the title given to him by Raja Vikramjit of Gwalior. Tansen was a court musician in the darbar of Raja Ramachandra of Bandavagarh (Rewa).
- Tansen composed Dhrupads on Hindu gods and goddesses. He also composed songs on his patrons.
- Tansen invented many Ragas.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Despite a basic structure, Indian federalism needs institutional amendment to be democratically federal. Critically evaluate. (250 words; 15 marks)[GS-2, Polity]
2. Examine the need to infuse public health into Indian medical education. (250 words; 15 marks)[GS-2, Governance]

