

18 Oct 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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A. GS 1 Related

Category: GEOGRAPHY

1. [Kottayam, Idukki worst hit; Kerala rain toll at 27](#)

Context:

Flash floods, mudslides and landslides have been reported in most districts located between central and southern Kerala. Some bridges and a number of roads have been washed away.

What is the cause of such intense rain?

- A low-pressure system that developed in the east-central Arabian Sea moved closer to the Kerala coast and triggered severe weather.
- While rainfall is common in Kerala in October, associated with the Northeast monsoon, such intense and localised spells are not frequent.
- It is mainly a localised phenomenon triggered due to the low-pressure system formed in the Arabian Sea.

The disaster management machinery in the State is functioning round the clock. [National Disaster Response Force \(NDRF\)](#) has been deployed in different parts of the state.

Category: SOCIETY

1. 'Only 3.9% children malnourished'

Context:

The Government of India has said that the value of a key indicator used in the [Global Hunger Index](#) is 'inflated' as only 3.9% of the Anganwadi children were found to be undernourished.

Details:

- The GHI 2021 ranked India at 101 out of 116 countries.
- India's performance is shown to deteriorate only for undernourishment, which is what the Government has challenged.
 - According to FAO's data, which is used in the Index, the prevalence of undernourishment in India rose from 14% in 2017-2019 to 15.3% in 2018-2020.
- However, undernourishment and undernutrition used as synonyms by the Government of India are treated as two different indicators by FAO and in the GHI.

This topic has been covered in [Oct 16th, 2021 CNA](#).

B. GS 2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Tamil Nadu police warn of likely attack on fishermen

Context:

The Tamil Nadu police have issued an alert on the possibility of an attack on fishermen crossing the Internal Maritime Boundary Line for fishing in Sri Lankan waters.

Issue:

There have been growing differences between fishermen from India and Sri Lanka over the catching of fish in the Katchatheevu area.

Katchatheevu Island:

- Katchatheevu is an uninhabited off-shore island in the Palk Strait.
- It is administered by Sri Lanka.
- Though the island was jointly managed by India and Sri Lanka, allowing fishermen from both countries to dry their nets there, it was ceded to Sri Lanka in 1974.
- Since then, Katchatheevu has remained an issue, with some parties from Tamil Nadu demanding that the island be returned to benefit the fishermen from India.

This issue has been covered in [Oct 14th, 2021 CNA](#).

C. GS 3 Related

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. China tested 'nuclear capable hypersonic missile', says report

Context:

China's military has carried out its first-ever test of a nuclear-capable hypersonic missile.

Details:

- Chinese military launched a rocket that carried a hypersonic glide vehicle.
 - The vehicle was launched on a Long March rocket, which is used for the space programme.

- Hypersonic speeds are 5 or more times the speed of sound.
- The missile has demonstrated an advanced space capability.
 - It circled the globe, flew through low-orbit space before cruising down towards its target.
 - However, it missed its target by about two-dozen miles.
- The development has caught U.S. intelligence by surprise.
 - It is believed that the test would pose a big challenge to U.S. missile defence systems because the weapon could, in theory, fly over the South Pole.
 - This would pose a big challenge for the U.S. military because its missiles defence systems are focused on the northern polar route.

Implications for India:

- This test by China certainly needs to be watched closely by the world, especially India considering its issues along the LAC with China in the recent past.
- Such capabilities highlight the threat for India's space assets along with the surface assets.
- The offence system operating at hypersonic speeds would mean the requirement to develop defence systems at these speeds.
 - India too is working on hypersonic technologies.
 - India's [DRDO](#) successfully flight-tested the Hypersonic Technology Demonstrator Vehicle (HSTDV), with a capability to travel at 6 times the speed of sound in September 2020.
 - A solid rocket motor of [Agni missile](#) took it to an altitude of 30 km where the cruise vehicle separated as planned.
 - The hypersonic combustion sustained and the cruise vehicle continued on its desired flight path at a velocity of six times the speed of sound for more than 20 seconds.
 - In December 2020, an advanced Hypersonic Wind Tunnel (HWT) test facility of the DRDO was inaugurated in Hyderabad.
 - It is a pressure vacuum-driven, enclosed free jet facility that simulates Mach 5 to 12.

Scramjet Technology:

- Most hypersonic vehicles primarily use scramjet technology.
- Scramjets are a category of engines designed to handle airflows of speeds in multiples of the speed of sound.
- This extremely complex technology also needs to be able to handle high temperatures.
 - This makes the hypersonic systems extremely costly.
- It is all about how long the systems can be sustained at those extreme conditions.
 - Most military powers in the world are in the process of developing hypersonic systems.

Note:

- Only the U.S., Russia and China are developing hypersonic glide vehicles, that are launched on rockets and then orbit the earth at their own speed.
- They are difficult to track because unlike ballistic missiles, they do not follow the fixed parabolic trajectory.

Category: DEFENCE**1. UAVs boost Army watch in eastern sector****Context:**

The Army Aviation has recently got control of Heron-I unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) in the eastern sector.

Heron-I unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV)

- It is a medium-altitude long-endurance (MALE) unmanned air vehicle (UAV) system primarily designed to perform strategic reconnaissance and surveillance operations.
- It was developed by the Malat division of Israel Aerospace Industries.
- These are not equipped with offensive weapons and are confined to being used in reconnaissance missions.
- With this, India has the capability to attack enemy positions and even moving targets deep inside enemy territory without having to send across a fighter aircraft.

Details:

- This brings all aviation assets under one roof and augments its ability to keep an eye on Chinese activities across the border.
- In the last few years, the Army and Air Force have significantly upgraded their defences in the eastern sector, including induction of new equipment, as part of efforts to match China's build-up and infrastructure development on its side of the Line of Actual Control (LAC). There has also been a major impetus to infrastructure development in the region.
 - During the standoff in eastern Ladakh, the Army Aviation had seen a significant increase in the employment of helicopters along the northern borders.
- The Army Aviation Brigade at Missamari, Assam was raised in March 2021 to enable better command and control of aviation resources.

- The Brigade operates the Cheetah and Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH) Dhruv utility helicopters, Rudra weaponised ALH and Heron-I UAVs.

Significance:

- There are certain advantages of UAVs or remotely piloted aircraft (RPA) being with Army Aviation.
 - Heron-I unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) were earlier with the Artillery.
- All aerial assets under one umbrella allows optimised employment of RPAs during operations in conjunction with other aviation assets.
- In the future battlefield, manned and unmanned aircraft teaming will reap huge dividends.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: GOVERNANCE

1. Alarming hunger or statistical artefact?

Background:

- **2021's Global Hunger Index (GHI) ranks India 101 out of the 116** assessed countries.
- India has been **consistently ranking low in the Global Hunger Index**. Barring 2020's rank of 94 out of 107 countries, India's rank has been between 100 and 103 since 2017.
- The article analyzes the various parameters considered in the Global Hunger Index and evaluates if India's performance on hunger is as dismal as denoted by the index or is partly a statistical artefact.

GHI's components:

- The GHI has **four components**.
 - **Insufficient calorie intake** —applicable for all age groups.
 - **Wasting** (low weight for height), **stunting** (low height for age) and **mortality** — confined to children under five years.

- Deficiency in calorie intake is accorded 33% weight. The data on child wasting and stunting (2016-2020), each account for 16.6% of the weight. Under-five mortality data account for the rest of the weightage.

Sources of the data:

- Deficiency in calorie intake data is sourced from the [Food and Agriculture Organization's](#) Suite of Food Security Indicators (2021).
- The data on child wasting and stunting (2016-2020) are from the World Health Organization, [UNICEF](#) and World Bank, complemented with the latest data from the Demographic and Health Surveys.
- Under-five mortality data is from the UN Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation.

Issues with the evaluation:

- Though the source of the data is from reputed sources, this does not mean that the GHI is free from inadequacies. Some of the major issues with the GHI are as follows:
 - **The GHI is largely children-oriented with a higher emphasis on undernutrition than on hunger and its hidden forms, including micronutrient deficiencies.** Thus it misses critical parameters in its consideration.
 - The calorie insufficiency component in particular is problematic for the following reasons.
 - **Lower calorie intake does not necessarily mean deficiency.** Lower calorie intake may also result from reduced physical activity, better social infrastructure (road, transport and healthcare) and access to energy-saving appliances at home.
 - **The use of a uniform calorie norm fails to recognise differentiated calorie requirements at the State level.** This could lead to a scenario where a large proportion of the population in Kerala and Tamil Nadu may get counted as calorie deficient despite them being better in nutritional outcome indicators thus leading to overestimation in such states. While in States that have a higher average level of calorie intake, such as Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, due to the high prevalence of communicable diseases and low level of mechanisation in the economy there may be an underestimation of calorie deficiency. Thus there are serious questions on the appropriateness of the calorie component of the GHI.
 - Notably, **India has registered relatively better performance in the child mortality parameter.** Despite studies suggesting that child undernutrition and mortality are usually closely related, as child undernutrition plays an important facilitating role in child mortality, **India appears to be an exception in this regard.** India's child mortality rate has been lower compared to Sub-Saharan African countries despite it having higher

levels of stunting. This could be indicative of the availability of and access to better health facilities in India.

India's poor record:

- As per the latest data on calorie intake provided by the National Sample Survey Office **consumption expenditure in India has declined between 2011-12 and 2017-18 by 4%**. In rural India, it stands at about 10% per annum. This could be considered indicative of the increasing pressure on food security and corresponding deficiency in calorie intake.
- **India's record in terms of reducing child undernutrition has been dismal.** India's wasting prevalence (17.3%) is one among the highest in the world. Though child stunting in India declined from 54.2% in 1998–2002 to 34.7% in 2016-2020 it still remains way above the global average.
- **COVID-19 has most likely exacerbated child undernutrition in general and child wasting in particular.**

Way forward:

- The low rank on the Global Hunger Index should push India to look at its policies and interventions and ensure that they can effectively address the concerns raised by the findings.

Focus on countering stunting:

- **A higher order of priority must be accorded to stunting over wasting as it is a stable indicator** and does not oscillate with minor changes in circumstances, while wasting does.
 - **Stunting is a chronic, long-term measure of undernutrition, while wasting is an acute, short-term measure.** Child wasting can manifest as a result of an immediate lack of nutritional intake and sudden exposure to an infectious atmosphere.
- Effectively countering episodes of wasting is key to making sustained and quick progress in child nutrition.

Considering regional factors:

- Variations in wasting prevalence across the region should be estimated and understood. India should try to tackle wasting by effectively **monitoring regions that are more vulnerable to socioeconomic and environmental crises.**

Category: ECONOMY

1. Powering the energy sector

Context:

- The **Electricity (Amendment) Bill of 2020**.

Background:

- The **Indian energy sector in general and the distribution sector, in particular, have been plagued by many issues**.
- The distribution sector has been consistently making huge losses owing to problems such as **expensive long-term power purchase agreements, poor infrastructure, inefficient operations** (high aggregate technical and commercial (AT&C) losses), and leakages and weaknesses in State-level tariff policies.

Details:

- The Electricity (Amendment) Bill of 2020 is a game-changing reform for India's energy sector. Some of the important provisions of the bill include the following.
 - It prescribes the **process of de-licensing power distribution** with the aim of breaking the monopoly of select few companies in the sector. This will provide the consumers with an option of choosing the service provider, switch their power supplier and enable the entry of private companies in distribution, thereby resulting in increased competition. This can help reduce AT&C losses significantly.
 - It proposes **open access for purchasing power from the open market**. This will help provide more options to consumers to choose their discoms.
 - It calls for the **removal of cross-subsidy surcharge, additional surcharge and electricity duty** being applied by States.
 - The Bill prescribes some important provisions for **strengthening the regulatory architecture of the sector**. It proposes the appointing of a member with a legal background in every electricity regulatory commission and strengthening the Appellate Tribunal for Electricity. This will ensure faster resolution of long-pending issues and reduce legal hassles.
 - The Bill through its proposal for a **penalty for non-compliance with the renewable energy purchase obligations** will help mainstream renewable energy. This will ensure that India gradually moves towards non-fossil fuels thereby helping it meet its global climate change commitments.
 - The creation of an **Electricity Contract Enforcement Authority** will help supervise the fulfilment of contractual obligations under the power purchase agreement.

For more detailed information on this topic, refer to the following article:

[CNA dated Aug 22, 2021: Power play](#)

Recommendations:

- The **availability of quality, affordable energy supply** is pivotal for fulfilling the developmental priorities of India and in this direction the following measures may be undertaken.
 - **A financially viable tariff policy** is the need of the hour. Tariffs ought to be reflective of the average cost of supply to begin with and eventually move to customer category-wise cost of supply. This will allow for a reduction in cross-subsidies.
 - **Electrical energy should be covered under GST**, with a lower rate of GST. This will make it possible for power generator/transmission/distribution utilities to get a refund of input credit, which in turn will reduce the cost of power.
 - The authorities must focus on the **use of technology solutions such as the installation of smart meters and smart grids to reduce AT&C losses**.
 - There should be a **focussed push on renewal energy sources** like roof-top solar plants to help mitigate the impact of climate change.

F. Prelims Facts

1. India, U.S. militaries match skills in Alaska

What's in News?

17th edition of the India-U.S. bilateral exercise, Yudh Abhyas 2021.

- Yudh Abhyas is the largest running bilateral military training and defence cooperation endeavour between India and the USA.

Read more on [Yudh Abhyas 2021 - 17th Joint Military Bilateral Exercise between India & USA](#)

2. Unorganised workers' portal sees good traffic

What's in News?

Over four crore unorganised sector workers have been registered on the [e-Shram portal](#) in under two months of its launch.

- The Union Ministry of Labour has launched the National Database of Unorganised workers (E-Shram) portal.
- It is the first-ever national database of unorganised workers.
- The E-Shram portal maintains a database of workers in the country's unorganised sector.
- Unorganised workers, Building and Other Construction Workers, SHG members, domestic workers, ASHA workers, Anganwadi workers, street vendors, rickshaw-pullers, brick-kiln workers, agricultural labourers, [MGNREGA](#) workers, fishermen, shopkeepers and small retailers can register on the website.
- The new E-Shram portal will help in accessing social security schemes available for the unorganised workers.
- The workers who register on the portal will get an e-SHRAM card which will have a 12 digit unique number.
 - This card is aimed at the integration of the Centre's social security schemes.
- The Universal Account Number on the e-Shram card will be acceptable across the country.

3. The founder of a 'mini-India'

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan:

- Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was an Islamic reformer and educationist in nineteenth-century British India.
- Believing that the future of Muslims was threatened by the rigidity of their orthodox outlook, Sir Syed began promoting Western-style scientific education by founding modern schools and journals and organising Islamic entrepreneurs.
- He called for a shift from medieval thinking towards broad-mindedness, reason and progress.
- Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was the founder of the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU).
- Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's ideas on religious unity and the use of education for national integration continue to remain relevant even in contemporary times.

Context:

- Birth anniversary of [Sir Syed Ahmad Khan](#).

G. Tidbits

Nothing here for today!!!

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. Article 17 is an Absolute Right.
2. Primary responsibility for the prevention of atrocities against SC/ST under Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, rests with the Central Government.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Absolute right is a right that has no exceptions in its applicability.
- Article 17 of the Indian Constitution abolishes the practice of untouchability. This is an absolute right and it has no exceptions or relaxations against it.
- Primary responsibility for the prevention of atrocities against SC/ST under Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, rests with the State Government.

Q2. With respect to Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. He is the founder of the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU).
2. He was awarded the Kaisar-i-Hind for his contribution to Indian education.
3. He was critical of the Indian National Congress ever since its formation.

Options:

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Sir Syed Ahmad Khan is the founder of the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU).

- AMU was originally established by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan as the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College in 1875.
- In 1869, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan received the Order of the Star of India from the British government.
- He opposed the Indian National Congress since its formation as he believed that it was established to cater to the needs of the majority community (i.e, Hindus).

Q3. Which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. Unorganised workers are essentially those who do not have the benefit of pension, provident fund, gratuity, maternity leave etc. and work mostly on daily/hourly wages.
2. The unorganized workers do not receive sufficient attention from the trade unions.

Options:

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Unorganised workers are those who do not have the benefit of pension, provident fund, gratuity, maternity leave, etc. and work mostly on daily/hourly wages.
- The unorganized workers do not receive sufficient attention from the trade unions.

Q4. Marib, recently seen in the news, is in which country?

- a. Iran
- b. Afghanistan
- c. Yemen
- d. Lebanon

Answer: c

Explanation:

Marib is a city in Yemen. The Saudi-led military coalition supporting Yemen's government has said that it has killed hundreds of Houthi rebels in strikes south of Marib.

Q5. Consider the following statements: [UPSC 2016]

1. New Development Bank has been set up by APEC.
2. The headquarters of New Development Bank is in Shanghai.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- The New Development Bank (NDB), formerly referred to as the BRICS Development Bank, is a multilateral development bank established by the BRICS states (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa).
- The headquarters of New Development Bank is in Shanghai.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Evaluate the role of caste demographics in influencing electoral outcomes, particularly in state elections. (250 words; 15 marks) (GS 2 Polity)
2. The low rank on the Global Hunger Index should push India to look again at its policies and interventions. Discuss. (250 words; 15 marks) (GS 2 Governance)