

19 Oct 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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A. GS 1 Related

Category: URBANISATION

1. 'Mumbai lost 40% green cover between 1991 and 2018'

Context:

According to a recent study, Mumbai lost 40% green cover between 1991 and 2018.

Details:

- Between 1991 and 2018, Mumbai lost:
 - 81% of its open land (barren spaces without any vegetation)
 - 40% green cover (forests & scrublands)
 - approximately 30% of its water bodies (lakes, ponds, floodplains).
- During the same period, the built-up area (areas developed upon) rose by 66%.
- The study concludes that the city witnessed a 2-degree Celsius average temperature rise across 27 years.
- Declining green cover as a result of the large-scale transformation of the green cover into built-up land for the infrastructural development has given rise to Urban Heat Island effect in the city.

Urban Heat Island effect:

- The extreme heat that one experiences while strolling through any urban landscape is caused by the Urban Heat Island effect.
- It is a micro-climatic phenomenon.
- Urban Heat Island is a concept where the urban area experiences warmer conditions than its surrounding regions.
- This is due to a number of causes, the most prominent being the usage of materials such as concrete.
- Other factors contributing to the Urban Heat Island effect are population density, and the density of the land-use area.
- This will not only deteriorate the urban thermal environment but also increase the serious risks to health for city dwellers.

Read more on [The Urban heat Island Effect – Causes and Impact](#)

B. GS 2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Kushinagar connect to Sri Lanka

Context:

Inauguration of Kushinagar International Airport in Uttar Pradesh. The inaugural flight will land at the airport from Colombo, Sri Lanka, carrying a delegation of dignitaries and Buddhist monks.

Details:

- The airport is expected to provide seamless connectivity to tourists from Sri Lanka, Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, China, Thailand, Vietnam, Singapore and so on.

Buddhist circuit:

- Kushinagar is the centre of the Buddhist circuit, which consists of pilgrimage sites at Lumbini, Sarnath and Gaya.
- Buddhist pilgrims consider Kushinagar a sacred site where, they believe, Gautama Buddha delivered his last sermon and attained 'Mahaparinirvana' or salvation.

Cultural diplomacy:

- In the decade after the civil war and also with China's growing influence, India is keen on recasting its image with Sri Lanka as a friend, using religious and cultural diplomacy.
- Sri Lanka, too, considers promoting shared Buddhist ties a matter of paramount importance, as was outlined in the Integrated Country Strategy prepared by Sri Lanka's High Commissioner to India.

Also read: [India – Sri Lanka relations](#)

2. Long-pending trade talks between India, Israel to resume

Context:

India and Israel have agreed to resume long-pending negotiations on a free trade agreement.

Details:

- The push for an FTA between the two countries is the latest in a series of attempts to negotiate a trade agreement over the past 14 years.
- Both in 2007, the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, and in 2017, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that an FTA would be completed, but talks have lapsed over a number of issues.
- During the last round of talks, both sides explored the possibility of a limited trade deal or a Preferential Trade Agreement for about 200 goods, which had also not been concluded.
- The latest effort for an FTA with Israel comes on the back of the government's recent drive to resume a number of trade negotiations, and the government has thus far committed to resumed talks with the U.K., Australia and the [European Union](#), expressing the hope they would also be concluded in 2022.

India-Israel Relationship:

- India and Israel elevated bilateral relations to a strategic partnership during the historic visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Israel in July 2017.
- Since then, the relationship between the two countries has focused on expanding knowledge-based partnership, which includes collaboration in innovation and research, including boosting the 'Make in India' initiative.
- 2022 will mark 30 years of bilateral relations between the two countries.

- Israel has also expressed its interest to join the [International Solar Alliance \(ISA\)](#), a global initiative that India has spearheaded.

C. GS 3 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Slippery slopes

Context:

- The retreating monsoon has resulted in **heavy rainfall** along parts of northern Karnataka, Telangana, Odisha, Gangetic Bengal and the northeastern States, leaving a trail of destruction in several districts.
- Heavy rains have also been reported in the states of Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and Uttarakhand as well, leading to **significant loss of life and property**. The situation remains critical in the state of Kerala wherein the torrential rains have resulted in the filling up of almost all large reservoirs of the state even as the Northeast monsoon lies ahead.

Vulnerability of Indian states to monsoon fluctuations:

- The **variations in the pattern and intensity of the Indian Monsoons pose a rising challenge to India** given the precarity of living conditions of millions of people in the country.
- Several states **face climate change impacts and extreme weather events**.
 - Kerala, which hosts a vast stretch of the Western Ghats, is having to contend with this challenge more than any other state, with almost continuous severe monsoons and associated destruction over the past few years.

Recommendations:

- The government should take the requisite measures to **reduce the risk to life and property**.

Environmentally sustainable development model:

- There is ample evidence to indicate the impact of human activities in increasing the vulnerability to extreme weather events.
 - The increased quarrying activity in central Kerala districts is believed to be contributing to increased instances of mudslides in the region.
- Despite land being an extremely scarce resource, **expanding economic activity to montane forests is unsustainable** in the long run and such interventions should be avoided to the maximum extent possible.

- There is the need to **adopt a development policy that treats nature as an asset, and not an impediment.**
- **Accurately mapped hazard zones** should inform all decisions in the vulnerable regions.

Strengthen natural defences:

- To face heavy monsoons, States must **preserve the integrity of rivers and mountains.**
- Nurturing the health of rivers and **keeping them free of encroachments**, protecting the integrity of mountain slopes by **ending mining, deforestation and incompatible construction** should be the top priority in the governmental measures.
- Similar suggestions have been made by the **Madhav Gadgil committee report on the Western Ghats** as well.

For more related information refer to the following article:

[UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis of 10th Aug 2020: Balancing priorities](#)

Category: ECONOMY

1. Greenfield hopes

Background:

Uptick in investment in the Indian economy:

- The reducing burden of COVID-19 infections, accompanied by the gradual lifting of restrictions, has not only spurred an improvement in important economic indicators but has also led to a **much-needed investment revival.**
- Recent data have shown that the investment commitments and indicators of actual capital expenditure on the ground have recorded a **more than robust growth in the second quarter (July-September quarter) after an insipid Quarter 1.**
- In fact, the fresh investments in the first half of 2021-22 have been higher than even the pre-COVID year of 2019-20.

Significance:

- **Increased investment is inevitable for the economic growth of any country**, especially for a developing economy like India. The uptick in investments could be indicative of the prospects of the Indian economy in the medium and long term.
- While the increased public expenditure forms the major part of the investment, the **private capital outlays also amount to an impressive Rs. 4.87-lakh crore.** This is significant as it could be considered **indicative of the increasing confidence of the private sector** in the Indian economy in the post-pandemic phase.

Governmental measures being taken:

PLI scheme:

- The implementation of the **“PLI” scheme to promote manufacturing investments in India** is expected to further spur more investments in textiles, pharma, electronics over the second half of this year and 2022-23. The PLI scheme could help nudge a few investments away from Vietnam, Cambodia and Bangladesh towards India.

Reforms in telecom sector:

- The government recently approved several measures for the ailing telecom sector. The new reforms include **nine structural reforms and five procedural reforms for the sector**. The new reforms will go a long way in addressing the telecom industry’s long-standing issues like spectrum auctioning and the AGR issue and help in its revival.

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

[UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis of 16th Sep 2021](#)

Other measures:

- The **disinvestment process of the public sector firm, Air India** and the **nullification of the provisions for retrospective tax** augur well for the investment climate in India as it will add to the confidence of prospective investors in India.

For detailed information on the nullification of provisions for retrospective tax, refer to the following article:

[UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis of 8th Aug 2021](#)

Recommendations:

- The rebound in investments must be nurtured with the right policy measures to ensure sustained economic growth in India. In this direction, the article makes the following recommendations.

Speedy implementation of schemes and policies:

- Speedy implementation is essential to ensure the realization of the expected gains from the committed investments.
- Out of the 13 sectors for which PLIs have been announced, only nine have been notified so far, and the others must be spelt out quickly to ensure that global investors do not pick another destination.

International economic partnership:

- India should seek to seal **economic partnership pacts and scale up its ties with key markets like the EU, the U.S. and the U.K.**

Improving perception of India on the international stage:

- In a world where **capital is increasingly influenced by environmental, social and governance standards**, these factors should be given the requisite policy attention as well.

- India should focus on improving its image on key socio-economic parameters and **adherence to the ‘rule of law’** while refraining from heavy-handed regulations like the draft norms for e-commerce.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. A shadow foreign policy for the first time

Context:

- The Centre for Policy Research (CPR) has come out with the document titled **‘India’s Path to Power: Strategy in a world adrift’**, outlining an alternative to the present foreign and defence policies of the government of the day.

Evaluation of India’s recent foreign policy:

Success in foreign relations:

- India has adopted an **innovative, bold and assertive foreign policy** in recent times.
- India has been able to overcome the hesitations of history and has adopted a more pragmatic approach to its foreign policy. It has broken out from traditional moulds of non-alignment and adopted a **strategic multi-alignment strategy** keeping in mind the national interest.
- After the failure of peace initiatives with Pakistan, India has adopted a firm stand against state-sponsored terrorism originating from Pakistan and has been able to convince international organizations and several countries to exert pressure on Pakistan. The sanctioning by the **FATF** of Pakistan has forced Pakistan to take some measures to dismantle terror networks in the country.
- **India’s relations with Israel and the Arab countries have become productive.**
- India has been able to ensure the **deepening of its ties with the U.S.** despite a political change in the U.S.

Failures in foreign policy:

- The **efforts to strengthen relations with the neighbours have not materialised for India.** Its relationship with countries like Nepal, Sri Lanka continues to be at an all-time low. China’s influence in these countries seems to be growing at the cost of India’s.
- **China’s incursion into Ladakh** marks a failure of India’s attempts to contain the increasingly assertive nature of China.

Details:

- The document is critical of the foreign and defence policies of the current government and argues that such policy is not conducive to finding a path to power for India in the post-pandemic world.
- The document notes with concern that **domestic issues have impacted foreign policy** and suggests that India should set its house in order to stem the tide of international reaction. It warns against the perverse impact of domestic political and ideological factors driving India’s foreign policy. It warns that political polarisation and majoritarianism could **diminish India’s strength on the international stage.**

- The foundational source of India's influence in the world is the power it enjoys and this rests on **four pillars, domestic economic growth, social inclusion, political democracy and a broadly liberal constitutional order.**
- The report criticizes the **omni-directional Indian foreign policy.**

Recommendations:

- The document calls for a change in India's foreign policy and makes the following recommendations.

Increasing multilateral engagement:

- The document warns that it would be **incorrect and counterproductive for India to turn its back on globalisation** and in this direction it calls on India to intensify its multilateral engagement.
- The document suggests that **SAARC** should be revived and that India should rejoin the **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership** and continue its long-standing quest for membership in the **Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation.**

Maintaining strategic autonomy:

- The report stresses the importance of strategic autonomy in the ever-changing world. It **suggests maintaining good relations individually with both the U.S. and China.**

China Policy:

- The report acknowledging the influence of China on India's external environment suggests a **combination of engagement and competition with China.**

Pakistan policy:

- The report suggests the **resumption of dialogue and a gradual revival of trade, transport and other links with Pakistan.**

Conclusion:

- Though the suggestions made by the report are open to deliberation, the significance of the report is that it reveals the end of the era of consensus foreign policy and presents a **shadow foreign policy for the first time in India.**
 - The **shadow cabinet is a feature of the Westminster system of government.** It consists of a group of opposition spokespeople who, under the leadership of the Leader of the Opposition, form an alternative cabinet to that of the government.
 - Members of a shadow cabinet have no executive power. It is the shadow cabinet's responsibility to **scrutinise the policies and actions of the government, as well as to offer alternative policies.**
 - **India does not have a tradition of shadow cabinets.**

F. Prelims Facts

1. Delhi reports this year's first dengue death

Dengue:

- Dengue is a mosquito-borne viral disease caused by the Dengue virus.
- The dengue virus is transmitted by female mosquitoes – *Aedes aegypti*.
- These mosquitos are found to be at the peak of their activeness at dawn and dusk.
- The disease is endemic in many countries, including India.
- This tropical disease inflicts significant health, economic and social burden on the populations of endemic areas.
- Although it usually results in mild illness, severe dengue infections can sometimes prove fatal.

Read more on [Dengue: Causes, Symptoms & Prevention.](#)

2. Glossy ibis

- The glossy ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) is a water bird.
- IUCN Red List category: Least Concerned.
- According to State of India's Birds 2020 released at the 13th Conference of Parties of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, this species has shown an increase in numbers over the past 25 years.
- This migratory bird travels to Maguri Motapung Beel in Assam.

3. Spot-billed pelicans

- Pelicans are a genus of large water birds that make up the family Pelecanidae. They are characterized by a long beak and a large throat pouch.
- The spot-billed pelican (*Pelecanus philippensis*) or grey pelican, is a member of the pelican family.
- It breeds in southern Asia from southern Iran across India east to Indonesia.
- IUCN Red List category: Near Threatened
- Atapaka bird sanctuary in Andhra Pradesh is identified as the world's largest home for spot-billed pelicans.
- Nelapattu bird sanctuary is considered one of the biggest habitats for some hundreds of pelicans.

G. Tidbits

1. Army trains officers posted along LAC in Tibetology

What's in News?

The Army has begun a course in Tibetology to orient the officers posted along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Tibetan culture.

- This would prepare them to better understand information warfare.

- The course has been designed in a tie-up with the Central Institute of Himalayan Cultural Studies in Arunachal Pradesh.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements with respect to the polar bear:

1. It is a hypercarnivore animal.
2. Its IUCN status is 'Vulnerable'.
3. Polar bears do not feed on penguins because they have a symbiotic relationship.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- A hypercarnivore is an animal whose nutritional requirements are found only in animal meat. Moreover, these organisms might be able to ingest plant matter but they do not have the physiological mechanisms that are required to effectively digest it.
- The polar bear is a hypercarnivore animal.
- Polar Bear (*Urus maritimus*) is classified as "Vulnerable" in the IUCN Red List.
- Polar bears do not eat penguins as penguins do not make up the ecosystem of the Arctic.
- Yet another reason as to why polar bears would not have preferred to prey on penguins is that birds such as this cannot provide sufficient protein for the bears to survive the frigid Arctic weather.

Q2. With respect to the Governor of a State, which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. The appointment of State Governors by the Centre is a feature borrowed from the Government of India Act of 1935.
2. The appointment of the same person as Governor for two or more States was introduced under the 7th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1956.

Options:

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only

- c. Both
- d. None

Answer: b

Explanation:

- The appointment of State Governors by the Centre is a feature borrowed from the Canadian Constitution.
- The 7th Constitutional Amendment Act of 1956 promoted the appointment of the same person as a governor for two or more states.

Read more on [Sources of Indian Constitution – Borrowed Features of Indian Constitution](#).

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

1. Cabinet Committees find a mention in the Constitution under Article 77.
2. Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) is composed of the Prime Minister of India and the Minister of Home Affairs.

Options:

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- Cabinet Committees are extra-constitutional in emergence, which means, they are not mentioned in the Indian Constitution. But, the Rules of Business provide for their formation.
- Cabinet Committees are not mentioned in the Constitution but are still constituted by governments.
- They are established by the PM as per the exigencies of the time and needs of the situation. Hence, their number, nomenclature, and composition vary from time to time.
- Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) is composed of the Prime Minister of India and the Minister of Home Affairs.

Q4. Consider the following statements:

1. The retreating southwest monsoon season is marked by clear skies and a rise in temperature.
2. The weather in the retreating monsoon is dry in north India but it is associated with rain in the eastern part of the Peninsula.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Retreating monsoon season commences with the beginning of the withdrawal of the southwest monsoon.
- The retreating southwest monsoon season is marked by clear skies and a rise in temperature.
- The weather in the retreating monsoon is dry in north India but it is associated with rain in the eastern part of the Peninsula.

Q5. What was the main reason for the split in the Indian National Congress at Surat in 1907?

- a. Introduction of communalism into Indian politics by Lord Minto
- b. Extremists' lack of faith in the capacity of the moderates to negotiate with the British Government
- c. Foundation of Muslim League
- d. Aurobindo Ghosh's inability to be elected as the President of the Indian National Congress

Answer: b

Explanation:

Extremists questioned the ability of moderates to negotiate with the British Government through their ways and means. They lacked faith in the capacity of the moderates to negotiate with the British Government. Hence there was a disagreement between the moderates and extremists leading to the Surat split of 1907.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. As heavy monsoons bring in more extreme weather events, States must act to preserve the integrity of our rivers and mountains to mitigate the impact. Examine. (250 words; 15 marks)[GS-3, Environment and Ecology].
2. Critically evaluate the need for a socio-economic caste census. (250 words; 15 marks)[GS-2, Polity].