

28 Sep 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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A. GS 1 Related

Category: SOCIAL ISSUES

1. Centre wants to keep birth, death database

Context

- The Centre has proposed amendments to the Registration of Births and Deaths Act (RBD), 1969.

Proposed Changes

- Currently, the registration of births and deaths is done by the local registrar appointed by States.
 - The State Government may appoint a Registrar for each local area comprising the area within the jurisdiction of a municipality, panchayat or other local authority or any other area or a combination of any two or more of them.
- Changes proposed:
 - It is proposed that the Chief Registrar (appointed by the States) would maintain a unified database at the State level and integrate it with the data at the “national level,” maintained by the Registrar General of India (RGI).
 - The amendments will imply that the Centre will be a parallel repository of data.
 - Appointment of Special Sub-Registrars
 - In the event of disaster, he/she would be given powers for on the spot registration of deaths.

How will it help?

- The database may be used to update the Population Register and the electoral register, and Aadhaar, ration card, passport and driving license databases.

B. GS 2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. SC sets up committee to examine Pegasus allegations

Context

- The Supreme Court (SC) has appointed a three-member technical committee supervised by former SC judge, Justice R.V. Raveendran to investigate if the Government used spyware [Pegasus](#), to snoop on Indian citizens, including journalists and political leaders.

Pegasus

- It is a military-grade spyware made by Israeli cyber-surveillance company NSO Group.
- The NSO Group sells its spyware only to certain undisclosed governments and the end-user of its products are “exclusively government intelligence and law enforcement agencies”.

Why did the SC create an independent expert committee?

Government’s failure to reply on Pegasus

- The government did not answer whether it had bought the spyware to snoop upon Indians or not and stonewalled questions in Parliament about its usage.
- It further refused to respond to the allegations made by the petitioners even when prodded by the Supreme Court.
 - In fact, the Court cited the 2011 landmark ruling on black money Ram Jethmalani v. Union of India to say that the Government “should not take an adversarial position when the fundamental rights of citizens are at threat”.

Surveillance was not backed by law

- The Constitution mandates that any restriction on the right to privacy must be through a valid law, be necessary to meet a legitimate purpose and be proportionate, i.e., there is a proper balance to be achieved between that purpose and the harm caused by limiting the right.
- It is likely that the snooping, if any, through Pegasus may not be sanctioned by any law.

National security as the ground for not giving relevant information

- The government refused to disclose information on who was spied on claiming it’s a national security secret.

SC observation

- The government cannot get a “free pass”, citing the “bugbear” of violation of national security, when constitutional rights of the citizens were at stake. The government cannot merely evoke ‘national security’ to stonewall judicial review. There cannot be an omnibus denial of information.
 - A balance has to be struck between cherished liberties and “necessary” surveillance by the State to protect the citizens’ liberties.
- The SC feels if the allegation is right, the snooping exercise would widely impact the right to privacy and freedom of speech of ordinary citizens.

Concerns

- There are allegations that Pegasus was used to implant false documents and evidence on the devices of persons under surveillance.
- The Supreme Court expressed concern about the protection of journalistic freedom.
 - It said the State should not create an atmosphere that has a “chilling effect” on the freedom of the press.

Terms of reference

The court has set seven terms of reference for the committee, which are essentially facts that need to be ascertained to decide the issue.

- Whether the Pegasus suite of spyware was used on phones or other devices of the citizens of India to access stored data, eavesdrop on conversations, intercept information and/or for any other purposes not explicitly stated herein?
- The details of the victims and/or persons affected by such a spyware attack.
- What steps/actions have been taken by the Union of India after reports were published in the year 2019 about hacking of WhatsApp accounts of Indian citizens, using the Pegasus suite of spyware.
- Whether any Pegasus suite of spyware was acquired by the Union of India, or any State Government, or any central or state agency for use against the citizens of India?
- If any governmental agency has used the Pegasus suite of spyware on the citizens of this country, under what law, rule, guideline, protocol or lawful procedure was such deployment made?
- If any domestic entity/person has used the spyware on the citizens of this country, then is such a use authorised?
- Any other matter or aspect which may be connected, ancillary or incidental to the above terms of reference, which the Committee may deem fit and proper to investigate.

Significance

- Court's insistence on transparency and disclosure by the Union government.
- The Government had sought to appoint the technical committee composed of members from the executive.
 - However, the court has not allowed it, saying "such a course of action would violate the settled judicial principle against bias, i.e., that 'justice must not only be done, but also be seen to be done'."

How have other countries responded?

- Morocco, France and Israel have launched investigations and taken other measures to prevent the use of spyware.
- In several countries, there have been calls for investigations and efforts to hold governments accountable.

Conclusion

- The Supreme Court's move for an independent probe is an important step towards fixing accountability and protecting citizens from unlawful surveillance.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Don't use new law to justify LAC moves, India tells China

Context

- China has passed the Land Border Law which will come into effect from January 1.

Details

- The law deals with the country's patrolling activities on its land border.
- The new law gives more powers to the Chinese People's Liberation Army to counter any invasion, encroachment, infiltration or provocation on any of the country's borders with 14 nations and is not meant specifically for the border with India.
- According to the new law, "the state shall take effective measures to strengthen border defence construction, support the economic and social development of the border and open up to the outside world, promote the action of strengthening the border and enriching the people of the border, improve the level of border public services and infrastructure construction, improve the production and living conditions of the border, and encourage and support border residents in border production and life, and promote the coordinated development of border defence construction and border economy and society".

Concerns

- The India-China relationship has deteriorated since 2020. The announcement that China's borders are "sacred and inviolable" signals that China wants to hold to current positions along the LAC without resolving the dispute and is indicative of a "tougher stance".
- The law ensures that the Chinese negotiating stance will become more rigid and may make negotiations a little more difficult.

India's Response

- Expressing concern India has said China must not use its new "Land Boundary Law" to justify any actions that alter the situation at the Line of Actual Control (LAC).
- It was called a unilateral move by the Government, having an impact on existing border disputes as they are yet to be resolved.
- It also reaffirmed India's rejection of the China-Pakistan 1963 agreement.
 - The Shaksgam Valley was ceded to China by Pakistan in 1963 when both countries signed a boundary agreement to settle their border differences.
 - India claims all of Jammu and Kashmir, which includes Aksai Chin, and has maintained that the agreement is "illegal and invalid".

2. 'India respects UNCLOS rights'

Context

- Defence Minister while addressing the Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue which was jointly organized by the Navy and National maritime Foundation, has reiterated that India will protect its legitimate maritime rights and interests, and also respect the rights of all nations as laid down in the UN Convention on the Law of Seas (UNCLOS)

UNCLOS:

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue (IPRD)

- It is the apex international annual conference of the Indian Navy.
- It was first conducted in 2018.
- Through this annual dialogue, the Indian Navy and the National Maritime Foundation, continue to provide a platform for incisive discussions pertaining to the geopolitical developments affecting the maritime domain of the Indo-Pacific.
- The National Maritime Foundation (NMF) is the Indian Navy's Knowledge Partner and the chief organizer of the event.

Know more about IPRD in [PIB dated Oct 26, 2021](#).

National Maritime Foundation (NMF)

- It was established in 2005 as the nation's first maritime think-tank for conducting independent and policy-relevant research on 'matters maritime'.
- It is an autonomous think-tank but its intellectual and organizational development is supported by the Ministry of Defence and the Indian Navy.

C. GS 3 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Energy cooperation as the backbone of India-Russia ties

Context:

- The article analyses the energy cooperation between India and Russia and the potential of such a partnership not only for the two countries involved but for the global energy framework.

Bilateral cooperation in the energy domain:

- India and Russia have **an extensive record of bilateral cooperation in the energy domain**.
- The companies of both the countries have been pushing for greater **cooperation in the oil and gas sector**. All of Russia's major energy companies have expressed interest in projects in India. Russia's Gazprom and India's ONGC Videsh Ltd. (OVL) and the Indian Oil Corporation signed separate memorandums of understanding to augment energy cooperation.
- **Russia is among the largest investors in India's energy sector**. Around U.S.\$32 billion have been invested in joint projects between the companies of the two countries.
 - A few years ago, Rosneft invested U.S.\$12.9 billion in India's Essar Oil, renamed Nayara Energy, marking it one of the most significant foreign investments in years.

- Russian companies have been **involved in the construction of six nuclear reactors in the Kudankulam nuclear power project** in Tamil Nadu. Of these, unit 1 and unit 2 have been operating at total capacity. Unit 3 is still under construction.

Potential of the energy partnership:

Complementarity of India and Russia:

- India has a comparatively low per capita energy usage as compared to the global average. India's per capita energy usage is poised to increase in the near future and its **need for clean and affordable energy** is bound to increase. **With its abundant energy sources, Russia could be an ultimate long-term partner in the energy sector.**
 - Russia has one of the world's largest shares of fossil energy resources with Russia's far-east in particular housing abundant fossil fuel resources.
- Thus there exists a **complementarity wherein India is looking for energy resources to meet its energy demands while Russia is seeking long term markets for its energy resources.**
- Also given **India's large petrochemical refining capacity**, it is emerging as a critical refining hub in Asia. Russia could sign long term contracts with these refineries and emerge as a major supplier of unprocessed fossil fuels to these refineries. This will **allow Russia to monetize its fossil fuel resources while also allowing Indian refineries a constant source of fossil fuels.**
 - Currently, India has an installed capacity of more than 249.36 mtpa, with local companies planning to significantly expand the capacity by investing more than U.S.\$27 billion by 2021.

Transformation of global energy framework:

- India has been at the forefront of the transformation of global energy. India has been increasingly **expanding towards petrochemicals to capture the additional value and diversify the sector while also trying to overcome supply chain risk in the segment.**
- Russian companies have the potential to be long-term partners with India in aiding its energy transformation. **Russia with its technological prowess** can play an important role in helping India in this process.
- One of the examples of cooperation between the two countries in energy transformation is the **joint venture between India's Reliance Industries Ltd. and Russia's Sibur in Jamnagar, Gujarat.** The venture now leads the first butyl and halogenated butyl rubber production facility in South Asia. This venture has emerged as a significant supplier of butyl rubber in the Indian market previously wholly dependent on imports. This comes as a boost to domestic tyre manufacturers in India. Also, it helps overcome supply chain risk by securing an uninterrupted supply of the butyl rubber market. This is of particular importance in the current pandemic, multiplying the risks of global supply chains disturbance.
- Notably, the venture has also been exporting its products to other countries as well and thus offers economic potential for Indian products.
- The project is a clear manifestation of the **"Make in India" and "Atmanirbhar Bharat" initiatives**, representing a practical example of **technology transfer from Russia to India.** The technology involved is not commercially available in the market and is the most advanced in terms of lower ecological footprint.

Push towards greener sources of energy:

- India has been leaning toward green energy sources with **increasing emphasis on renewable energy resources**. **Russia, one of the key global players across the energy market**, could emerge as an indispensable partner for such a transition.
 - **Decarbonization of the energy sector** is not only an environmental imperative but could also positively impact the country's growth trajectory. A recent Deloitte report has forecasted that India could gain U.S.\$11 trillion in economic value over the next 50 years by limiting rising global temperatures and realising its potential to 'export decarbonization'.
- India aims to install 175 GW of renewable energy by December 2022. This would require additional investments of about \$80 billion in renewables up to the year 2022. Also to meet its growing energy demand and succeed in green transformation, India needs approximately U.S.\$500 billion of investments in wind and solar infrastructure, grid expansion, and storage to reach the 450 GW capacity target by 2030.
- **Russia can be a potential source of such investments.**

Renewable, nuclear energy:

- **Nuclear energy currently accounts for a very small proportion of the renewable energy sector in India.** India will have to ramp up its nuclear energy sources in the near future to meet its renewable energy targets.
 - Notably, India's nuclear power generation capacity of 6,780 MW may increase to 22,480 MW by 2031, contributing to the country's efforts to turn to green energy.
- **Russia with its technological know-how and experience with respect to nuclear energy** can pitch in this context. Russia has repeatedly expressed its willingness to build more nuclear reactors in India.
- India and Russia secure the potential of **designing a nuclear reactor specifically for developing countries**, which is a promising area of cooperation.

Conclusion:

- Given the huge potential for energy partnership between India and Russia, more efforts are needed to expand this energy cooperation between the two countries.
- This energy cooperation will not only help strengthen the bilateral relationship with mutual benefits to the two countries but also has the **potential to provide an impetus to the global energy framework** and benefit other countries as well.
 - As noted by the Indian Prime Minister at the 6th Eastern Economic Forum (EEF) in Russia's Vladivostok, "**India-Russia energy partnership can help bring stability to the global energy market.**"

Category: GOVERNANCE

1. The need to move away from clientelism

Background:

- There has been a **growing culture of freebies** among the political parties in different states of India over the years particularly during the election season.
- This is directed towards **focussing on electoral gains** with such initiatives being primarily targeted at the party's core supporters and swing voters who could be influenced easily.
- **The line between welfarism and populism has blurred.**

Difference between welfare initiatives and freebies:

- While welfare initiatives include measures such as targeted Public Distribution System, providing social security for labourers, quality education, fair employment, affordable healthcare, decent housing, and protection from exploitation and violence, freebies could include offers such as free rations, TV sets, laptops to students, free rides for women in buses, free gas cylinders and stoves and so on.
- **Freebies are provided to attract voters to cast their vote in a particular election** and unlike the welfare initiatives, they **create only limited private benefit for the receiver and do not contribute towards strengthening public goods/facilities.**

Impact of freebie culture and populism in India:

Neglect of welfare measures and its impacts:

- **Given the electoral effectiveness of the freebies culture, states seem to accord lesser importance to welfare initiatives** and hence welfare measures have taken a back seat in terms of governance. There seems to be a withdrawal of the state in providing welfare measures such as social security, access to quality education and health, etc.
- The governments have not been taking concrete and constructive efforts to fulfil the aspirations of the people.
- **The impact has been all the more severe on the poor and marginalised communities** due to denial of access to their rightful share of state resources. **Freebies drastically widen the gap between the rich and the poor.**

Violative of the constitutional mandate:

- **Freebies violate the constitutional mandate of extending benefits for public purposes and instead create private benefits.**
 - Example: The distribution of free laptops does not serve the purpose of increasing the quality of education.

Depoliticising the poor:

- **Populism encourages mediocre political critics and affects critical and rational thinking**, which are important to hold the people in power accountable.
- **Freebies thus depoliticise the poor** and marginalised communities.

Impact on democratic polity:

- Unsolicited freebies **cultivate a patron-client syndrome** and encourage personality cults in a democratic polity. This does not augur well for a democratic polity.

- The culture of freebies results in the treating of people like subjects whereas **the democratic polity visualizes the citizens as being entitled to civil rights as constitutional guarantees.**

Recommendations:

- There is an **urgent need to tackle the freebie culture in India**, given its negative impacts. Also, there needs to be a **reorientation of public policy in a healthy direction.**
- The political party manifestos should offer programmatic policy interventions towards better public services than narrow private benefits in the form of freebies. They should focus on enhancing budgetary allocation for the maintenance of public infrastructures like schools, colleges, hostels and hospitals.
- The **Election Commission** and the **Higher Judiciary intervention** can help in this regard. An **informed and aware citizenry** is a must to bring about this change.

Category: HEALTH

1. Strengthening healthcare

Context:

- The government has recently launched the **Pradhan Mantri Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission (ABHIM).**

Background:

- India's healthcare sector is plagued by many issues. It remains **grossly underfunded and faces shortages of staff, equipment, drugs and infrastructure** in many parts of the country. There seems to be a **growing importance of the private sector in India's healthcare system which is not capable of catering to the health needs of the poor and marginalized communities.**
- The COVID-19 pandemic exposed these weaknesses in India's health system.

Details:

- Following the budget proposal for great investment in the health system and the **Fifteenth Finance Commission recommendations** for the strengthening of urban and rural primary care, stronger surveillance systems and laboratory capacity, the government has launched the Pradhan Mantri Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission (ABHIM).

For detailed information on the provisions of this scheme refer to the following article:

[PM Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission](#)

Significance:

- ABHIM can fix the weaknesses in India's health system by **addressing critical gaps in the health infrastructure with a focus on most backward regions.** The various measures of this scheme will **extend primary healthcare services** across India thus addressing the most basic aspect of the healthcare system in India. The inclusion of areas like hypertension, diabetes and mental health brings much-needed relief given the increasing prevalence of these diseases.

- The measures will also **help build a trained public health workforce** that can perform routine public health functions while responding to a public health emergency.
- The measures like National Platform for One Health will help **enhance the capabilities for microbial surveillance**. Also, the hub-and-spoke model of the block, district, regional and national public health laboratories will enable effective microbial surveillance.
- The establishment of critical care hospital blocks planned to be established in 602 districts will enable care for those with serious infectious diseases without disrupting other services. In non-pandemic situations, this capacity could be utilised for providing critical care for other disease conditions. The 15 health emergency operation centres and two container-based mobile hospitals will **enhance the level of disaster response readiness**.
- ABHIM, if financed and implemented efficiently, can strengthen India's health system by augmenting capacity and creating a framework for coordinated functioning at district, state and national levels. It can **help deliver universal healthcare**.

F. Prelims Facts

1. National Tribal Dance Festival

Context

- National Tribal Dance Festival will take place in Raipur, Chhattisgarh.

Details

- It is being organized under the tourism development plan of the Chhattisgarh government.
- The event will witness the participation of tribal dance groups from various states and union territories along with international participation from several countries portraying and celebrating their respective tribal folk culture.
- The dance performances will be held in two categories – 'wedding ceremonies' and 'other prominent rituals'.
- 2019 was the first edition of the National Tribal Dance Festival.

Significance

- It will be an occasion for the people to get to know about the costumes, jewellery, crafts, designs, and food of the tribals.
- It will provide an opportunity to the tribal communities to share their experiences in various fields, including arts, music, film, health, tourism and food.
- Through this platform, they will also be able to share their thoughts about the developments in their community and plans.
- The works of tribes will be showcased and people will be able to get detailed information about their arts and crafts.

G. Tidbits

Nothing here for today!!!

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. With reference to Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. AIIB is a multilateral development bank headquartered in Shanghai.
2. It began its operations in 2009 after the Global Financial Crisis.
3. India is the second-largest shareholder after China.

Options:

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is a multilateral development bank that aims to improve economic and social outcomes in Asia. It is headquartered in Beijing, China.
- The bank started operations in December 2015, after ratifications were received from 10 member states holding a total number of 50% of the initial subscriptions of the Authorized Capital Stock.
- India is the second-largest shareholder after China.

Q2. Consider the following statements:

1. The Solicitor General of India is allowed to represent private clients.
2. The remuneration of the Solicitor General of India is not fixed by the Constitution.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- The Solicitor General of India is subordinate to the Attorney General of India. He/she is the second law officer of the country, assists the Attorney General, and is assisted by Additional Solicitors General for India.

- The Solicitor General is not a government servant and is not debarred from private legal practice i.e, he/she is allowed to represent private clients.
- The remuneration of the Solicitor General of India is not fixed by the Constitution. He/she receives such remuneration as the President may so determine.

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

1. China is the world's largest aluminium producer.
2. Bauxite is the main source of alumina production.
3. Bauxite has been found in all continents except Antarctica.

Options:

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- China is the world's largest aluminium producer by far, accounting for around 50% of the world's aluminium production.
- Bauxite ore is the world's primary source of aluminium. The ore must first be chemically processed to produce alumina (aluminium oxide). Alumina is then smelted using an electrolysis process to produce pure aluminium metal. Bauxite is typically found in topsoil located in various tropical and subtropical regions.
- Aluminium is the third most abundant element on Earth's surface. Bauxite has been found in all the world's continents except Antarctica.

Q4. With respect to National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NaBFID), which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. No investigation can be initiated against employees of NaBFID without the prior sanction of the central government in the case of the chairperson or other directors.
2. Appointments Committee of the Cabinet will recommend candidates for the post of the Managing Director and Deputy Managing Directors.

Options:

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

- The Indian Parliament had in March 2021 cleared the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NaBFID) Bill 2021 to support the development of long-term non-recourse infrastructure financing in India, including the development of the bonds and derivatives markets necessary for infrastructure financing.
- As per the 2021 NaBFID bill, a body constituted by the central government will recommend candidates for the post of Managing Director and Deputy Managing Directors.
- No investigation can be initiated against employees of NaBFID without the prior sanction of the central government in case of the chairperson or other directors

Context:

- The government has announced the appointment of veteran banker K. V. Kamath as chairperson of the newly set up ₹20,000-crore National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NaBFID).

Q5. With reference to 'Agenda 21', sometimes seen in the news, consider the following statements:

1. It is a global action plan for sustainable development.
2. It originated in the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg in 2002.

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: a

Explanation:

- Agenda 21 is a non-binding action plan of the United Nations with regard to sustainable development. It is a product of the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. The Supreme Court recently ruled that the power of the state to snoop into people's 'sacred private space' is not absolute. Critically examine the statement in the light of the Pegasus scandal. (15 marks, 250 words)[GS-2, Polity]
2. Russian companies have the potential to be long-term partners with India in aiding its energy transformation. Illustrate. (15 marks, 250 words)[GS-2, International Relations]

