

01 Dec 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. The Iran-US deadlock over nuclear capability

Topic: Effect of Policies and Politics of Developed and Developing Countries on India's interests

Prelims: JCPOA; Uranium enrichment levels; Centrifuges

Mains: Implications for India with respect to the Nuclear deal between Iran and U.S.

Context:

- Iran, Russia, China and the European countries have resumed **negotiations in Vienna to revive the 2015 [Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action \(JCPOA\)](#) nuclear agreement.**

Background:

Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA):

- The 2015 JCPOA agreement sought to **cut Iran off a possible path to a nuclear bomb in return for lifting of economic sanctions.**
- According to the 2015 deal, Iran had to cut its stockpile of enriched uranium and keep them at a low purity level. Iran was also expected to restrict the number of centrifuges and open all its facilities to the inspection of the [International Atomic Energy Agency \(IAEA\)](#).
 - **Low-enriched uranium, with less than 5% concentration of the fissile isotopes U-235, is used in nuclear power plants.** While uranium with 20% and more purity is used in research reactors, **uranium with 90% purity is used in bombs.**
 - Centrifuges are used to enrich uranium.
- The above restrictions were meant to ensure that it would take **at least one year (the breakout period)** to manufacture enough highly enriched uranium and centrifuges to do so if Iran chose to renege on its commitments.

U.S. pull out of the deal and its implications:

- In 2018, U.S. administration under President Donald Trump unilaterally pulled the U.S. out of the nuclear deal amid doubts from its allies in the region of the ability of the nuclear deal to address Iran's growing influence in the region. It also reimposed economic sanctions on Iran.
- The Trump administration also added that it wanted to negotiate Iran's ballistic missile programme as part of a new agreement.
- Iran has since refused to engage with the U.S. administration for a new agreement. It has also resumed its nuclear programme. In fact **Iran has substantially stepped up its nuclear activities since 2019.** It has installed a substantial number of advanced centrifuges, which can enrich uranium more quickly. Iran has also started enriching uranium to 20% purity or more. The advances made by Iran in its nuclear programme has **reduced the current breakout time to as little as a month.**

Details:

- The current U.S. administration has expressed its desire to revive the JCPOA, including removing sanctions, but it wants Iran to return to the agreement first.
- Iran wants the U.S. to remove all the sanctions first and give assurances that a future American leader would not renege on the agreement. As a result, the talks have reached a stalemate.

C. GS 3 Related**Category: ECONOMY****1. GDP grew 8.4% in Q2, but recovery appears patchy****Topic: Indian Economy and issues relating to Growth, Development and Employment**

Prelims: Base effect

Mains: Challenges to India's economic recovery in the post pandemic phase

Context:

- **Economic data for the second quarter** of the current fiscal year released by the [National Statistical Office](#).

Details:

- India's gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 8.4% in the July to September quarter, compared to a 7.4% contraction a year ago. Considering the impressive growth rate in the first quarter as well, **India is likely to record double digit growth for 2021-22 as a whole.**
 - The first quarter of the current fiscal year had recorded a GDP growth of 20.1%.
- Based on the above observations, the Finance Ministry's Chief Economic Adviser (CEA) pointed out that this was indicative of the **economic recovery underway in India.**

Concerns:

- Despite impressive growth rates being recorded, some economists have expressed **doubts over the extent and durability of the economic recovery.**

Weak demand and investment levels:

- Demand and investments are yet to see a meaningful and durable recovery. The Indian economy continues to grapple with **low demand and subdued investment climate**.
- There continues to be **weak private consumption spending** which continues to be below pre-COVID levels.
 - Private consumption expenditure accounts for a large part of India's GDP.
- Private investment is not showing any signs of a recovery. It is the government expenditure and investment which has continued to remain the key growth driver in the Indian economy. The government expenditure cannot be maintained at the same levels going ahead given the need to maintain fiscal prudence. **Government investment in the recovery phase should incentivise higher private investments**. This is not being observed in the Indian economy.

Continued stress in some sectors:

- The activity in **employment-intensive sectors like construction and contact-intensive sectors like retail and hotels** continues to remain below pre pandemic levels. This would have an impact on the income levels of the workers in these sectors which could have a cascading impact on demand levels and consumption expenditure in the Indian economy.

Base effect:

- Some experts have pointed out that the **base effect of negative growth last year** would have helped push the GDP numbers up.
 - The base effect occurs whenever two data points are compared as a ratio where the current data point or point of interest is divided or expressed as a percentage of another data point, the base or point of comparison. Because the base number makes up the denominator in the comparison, comparisons using different base values can yield widely varying results. If the base has an abnormally high or low value it can greatly distort the ratio, resulting in a potentially deceptive comparison.
- A comparison of the absolute GDP in the second quarter with that in the pre-pandemic levels, shows that the percentage increase continues to remain small.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: SECURITY CHALLENGES

1. Afghanistan, the rise of a Narco-terrorist State

Topic: Security challenges and their management in border areas – linkages of organized crime with terrorism

Prelims: UNODC, Golden Crescent, Golden Triangle

Mains: Rise of Narco Terrorism in Taliban-led Afghanistan and its threats for India.

Context

This article discusses the rise of Narco Terrorism in Taliban-led Afghanistan and how it can pose potential threats for India.

What is Narco-Terrorism?

- The link between narcotics and terrorism is known as narco-terrorism.
- The concept of narco-terrorism stems from the realisation that drugs trafficking and terrorism are strongly interconnected.
- Any narco-terrorist organisation employs both terrorism and the drug trade.
- The ultimate goal of narco-terrorism is to destabilise the country through terrorism or to undermine it through the illegal drug trade, either alone or in combination.

What Narco-Terrorism Means?

Use of illegal drug trade or narcotic-trafficking and terrorism to influence state policy

Use of illegal drug-trade or narcotics-trafficking trade to sponsor terrorism

Use of terror (violent) activities to control narcotics-trade

Narco-Terrorism in Afghanistan:

- **Potential Threat:**
 - According to a [UNODC](#) estimate, opium production in Afghanistan has surpassed 6,000 tonnes for the fifth year in a row.
 - As a result of the stated increase in worldwide opium prices, the exponential output of opiates has increased by 8%.
 - The Taliban controls 85 percent of the world's opium-growing land, making them the world's most powerful narcotics gang.
 - According to a report by the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), illegal drugs account for up to 60% of the Taliban's annual earnings.
 - India's fears of ungoverned regions and a lawless Afghanistan being a major source of domestic security danger are increasingly becoming a reality.
- **Issues with Taliban-led Afghanistan:**

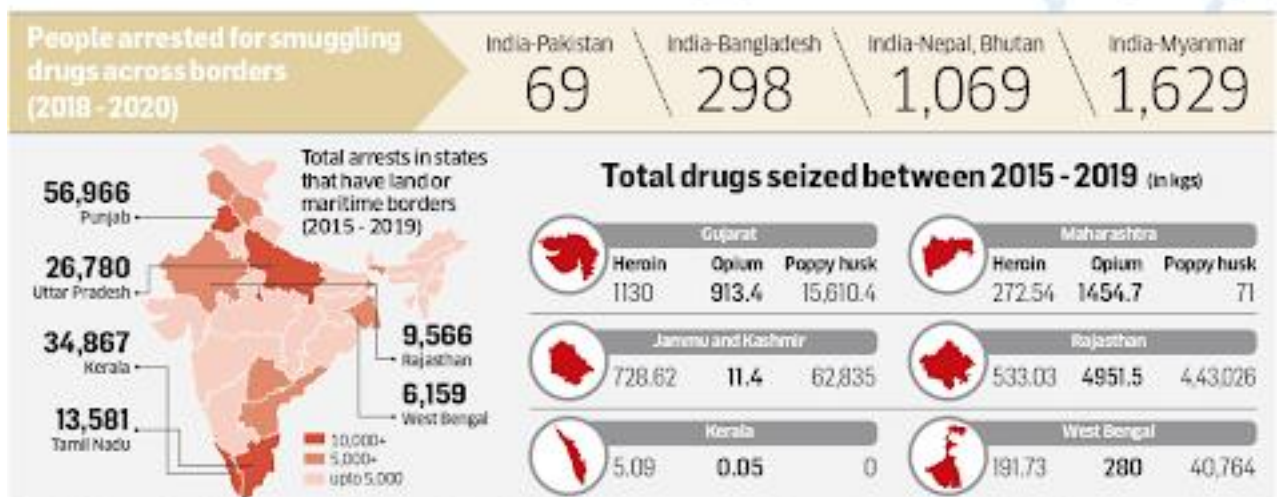
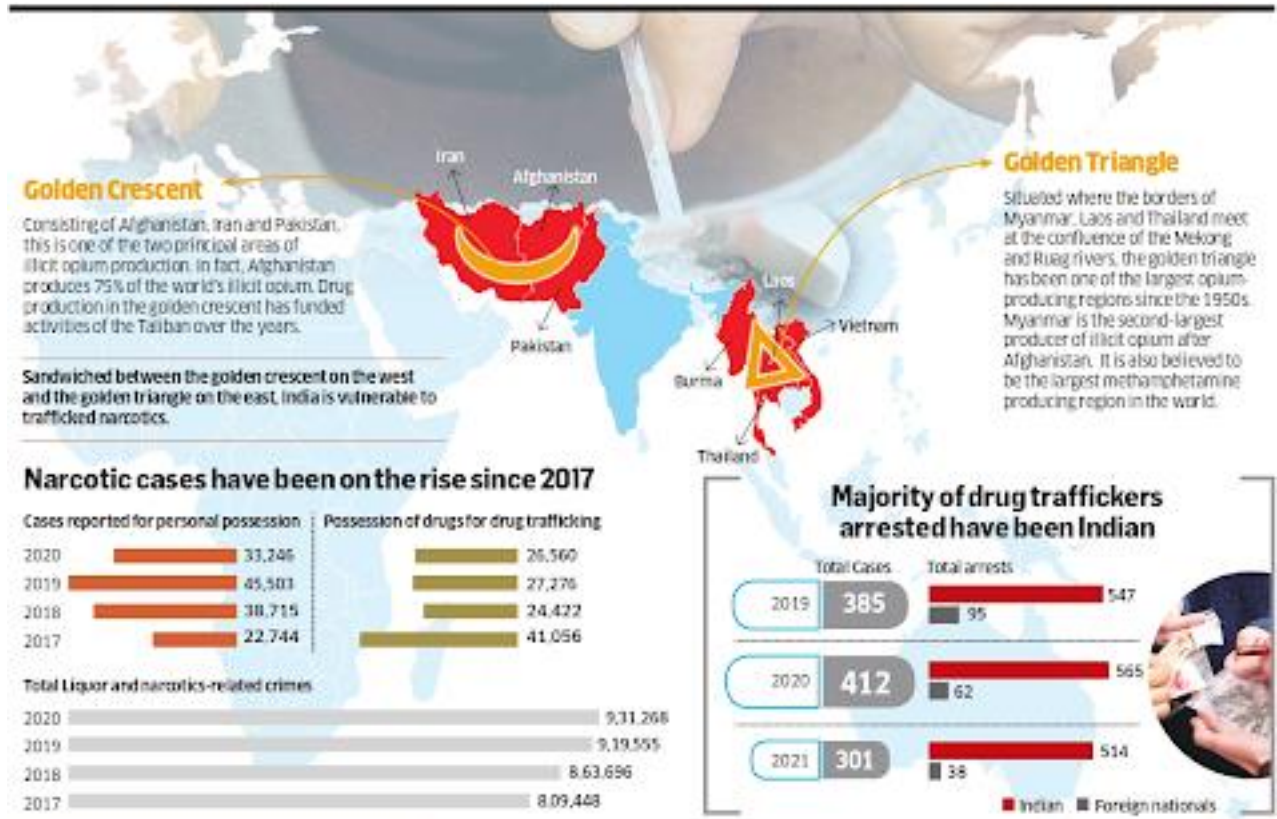
- As the Taliban is aiming to gain income from the illegal cash crop, cases of smuggling and arrests of huge consignments of narcotics in India have increased.
- Afghanistan has dramatically increased its methamphetamine manufacturing.
- To transfer opiates, the [Taliban](#) employs a variety of smuggling methods.
- It transports its products to Western Europe via the Caucasus and the Balkans, and then to North America.
- Pakistani security personnel facilitate the southeastern route by collaborating with the Taliban and smuggling syndicates known as "tanzeems" in the region.
- **Global Concerns of Rising Narcotism in Afghanistan**
 - The Taliban appear to be taking advantage of the international community's vacuum and disinterest.
 - Between 2001 and 2020, the worldwide inability to establish an acceptable counter-narcotic policy to rein in the narco-trade beginning in Afghanistan might be partly to blame.
 - The emergence of a narco-terrorist state will have grave implications for the United States, Europe, and the region.
 - In this sense, the UNODC was only able to accomplish a slight reduction in the area under poppy cultivation and opium production.
 - For a number of reasons, efforts to promote alternative livelihood programmes and encourage farmers to plant other income crops have mostly failed. The central government in Kabul has minimal authority, and the international community has urged a punishing strategy.
 - Production increased as the US and the international community worked to get out of the Afghan quagmire, and it is expected to continue to rise in the coming years.
 - There is widespread agreement that drugs can ruin society, and that money generated from the narco-trade may be used to fund organised crime and terrorism.

India and Narco-Terrorism

- **Potential Threat:**
 1. **Porous Borders:** India has a 15,106-kilometre porous border and a 7,516-kilometre coastline. China, Pakistan, Bhutan, Myanmar, Afghanistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh are all on the same side of those lengthy boundaries.
 2. **State-sponsored Terrorism:** Narco-terrorism is a key component of Pakistan's state-sponsored cross-border terrorism, which is used to fund and conduct asymmetric warfare against its neighbours.
 3. **Inefficient Policymaking:** Terrorist and militant actions are a problem in India, which are supported by the neighbouring countries. It's no surprise that few Indians see the importation of

ganja, opium, hashish, and other drugs as a concern because secessionism, terrorism, and insurgency have occupied the thoughts of policymakers and the general people.

- India's Position between Triangle and Crescent:** India is inconveniently placed between the [Golden Crescent](#) and the Golden Triangle, two of the world's most active hotbeds of illegal drug trafficking. The Golden Triangle is defined as the area where Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar intersect. Until the early twenty-first century, when Afghanistan overtook the Golden Triangle as the world's leading producer, the [Golden Triangle](#) produced the majority of the world's heroin.



Source: Lok Sabha unstarred questions 1968, 1546, 2536; Rajya Sabha question 1501; Crime in India-reports 2020, 2019, 2018, 2017 and UNWorld Drug Report 2021. Compiled by Varsha Gowda. DDI Graphics, Sage M5

Source: Deccan Herald

5. **Terror Funding:** The lion's share of the source of terror funding in Kashmir emanates from across the border in Pakistan through its notorious agency ISI. The ISI generates its finances through narco-financing which comes from the control of narcotics trade in the AfPak region.
 6. **Pakistan as a Major Culprit:** Pakistan has the highest per capita heroin addiction rate in the world. The ISI pumps drugs in Jammu and Kashmir with twofold intentions. Drug-peddling funds terrorist activities; on the other, there is a strong correlation between receptive attitudes towards Jihadism and drug use.
 7. **Northeast Region:** Drugs, sourced from Myanmar and Bangladesh, has a direct bearing on the funding of terror and extremist activities in the northeast. A series of intermittent seizures in India of 'yaba' tablets that were meant for Bangladesh, indicates the existence of multiple exit points along the border in Tripura, Assam, and Meghalaya. The proceeds of this drug-trade find its way to insurgent-outfits.
- **Concerns for India From Taliban:**
 1. India, which lies between the world's two main opium-producing regions, the "Golden Crescent" and the "Golden Triangle," has seen an increase in seizures of Afghan-origin heroin.
 2. Afghan opiates have been entering India through convoluted sea and air routes for decades, involving Pakistan, Sri Lanka, African nations such as Mozambique and South Africa, and Qatar.
 3. The Taliban's control of Kabul may have sparked a flood of free-for-all narcotics smuggling that, if not halted, might destabilise India's security.
 4. If anti-India organisations like the Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Jaish-e-Mohammed, who are currently active in Afghanistan again, are able to get hold of the money from such narco-trafficking, India's efforts to control terror financing at home would yield only limited benefits.

Possible Solutions

- A legal, accountable, powerful, and inclusive administration in Kabul is the cure to this phenomena.
- India has to restructure its criminal justice system, with forensic science playing a key role in combating narco-terrorism.
- The Afghan state's economic collapse and the escalating humanitarian disaster must be avoided.
- Reaching out to Afghans and raising their voices in support of a government that is genuine and acceptable to them would be a good start.
- India should seek out new partnerships in Central, West, and South Asia in order to form a willing coalition.

- India should take the initiative and reach out to Afghans from all walks of life, including women, civil society organisations, political leaders, and business organisations, who are seeking aid in establishing a credible, representative, and inclusive government in their nation.
- A collapsed state in the neighbourhood, paired with narco-terrorism, cannot be overlooked, and will have grave implications for India's security in the future.

Conclusion:

There is a tangible and perceptible threat to India's domestic security with the emergence of the Taliban in Afghanistan and their grip over the narco-trade. With greater terror-funding, these trends will encourage the emergence of terrorism and separatist actions. India must be extremely watchful in order to prevent these two dangers, since they provide a clear and present risk.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Small grant but a big opportunity for local bodies

Topic: Devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein

Prelims: Finance Commission

Mains: Recommendations of Fifteenth Finance Commission for local bodies on Health

Context

The Ministry of Finance released health grants to rural and urban local bodies (ULBs) as recommended by the [Fifteenth Finance Commission](#).

Fifteenth Finance Commission Recommendations on Health:

- States' health spending should be boosted to more than 8% of their budgets by 2022, according to the XVFC.
- Given the imbalance in medical practitioner availability between states, an All-India Medical and Health Service, as intended under Section 2A of the All-India Services Act, 1951, is required.
- The entire grants-in-aid support to the health sector for the award period is 10.3% of the total grants-in-aid proposed by XVFC. The funding for the health sector will be provided on a no-strings-attached basis.
- The XVFC has recommended health grants for urban health and wellness centres (HWCs), building-less sub centres, block level public health units, support for diagnostic infrastructure for

primary healthcare activities, and the conversion of rural sub-centres and PHCs to HWCs. These funds will be distributed to local governments.

What is the Significance of the Grant?

- The money will be used to fix gaps in basic healthcare infrastructure in both rural and urban areas.
- This award covers 18.5% of the budget for FY 2021-22 and around 55% of COVID-19's second emergency response package.
- In the years ahead, it has the potential to have a significantly bigger influence on India's health services.

Focus on Local Bodies

- The duty for delivering primary care and public health services was shifted to local bodies (LBs) in the rural (Panchayati raj institutions) and urban (corporations and councils) regions as part of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in 1992. The expectation was that this would lead to more attention to and funding for healthcare in the geographic authority of local governments.
- In addition, rural areas received support for primary healthcare institutions as part of continuing national programmes.
- However, the judgement was a setback, particularly for urban healthcare.

Government Measures:

1. **National Rural Health Mission (NRHM):** The [National Rural Health Mission \(NRHM\)](#) was established in 2005 with the goal of providing rural populations, particularly vulnerable groups, with accessible, cheap, and high-quality healthcare. NRHM aims to offer rural residents, particularly disadvantaged populations, with equitable, inexpensive, and high-quality healthcare.
2. **National Urban Health Mission (NUHM):** NUHM strives to enhance the health of the urban population in general, especially the poor and other marginalised groups, by ensuring equal access to high-quality healthcare.

Challenges before Urban Healthcare in comparison to Rural Healthcare

- The government's funding for urban primary healthcare was not routed via the State Health Department, and the ULBs' health budgets were not increased in proportion.
- A lack of resources, a lack of clarity on responsibilities connected to healthcare, or altogether different spending priorities were among the explanations given.
- Inadvertently, the well-intentioned legislative measure weakened healthcare in urban regions more than in rural areas.

- Both urban and rural India require additional health services; however, the problem in rural regions is the ineffectiveness of present primary healthcare facilities, whereas the problem in urban areas is a lack of primary healthcare infrastructure and services.
- According to the author of this editorial, primary healthcare services in cities are inferior to those in rural India as the maximum attention is given to improving rural services. Regular dengue and chikungunya outbreaks, as well as the difficulties individuals had in two waves of the emerging coronavirus pandemic to obtain COVID-19 consulting and testing services, are just a few instances.
- Health is given a low priority and receives limited financing, which is exacerbated by a lack of coordination among a variety of entities responsible for various sorts of health services (by areas of their jurisdiction).

Essential Steps

1. **First**, The grant should be used to educate key stakeholders in local governments about their roles and responsibilities in primary care and public health service delivery.
2. **Second**, Citizens' understanding of local government's duties in healthcare services should be increased. Such a strategy might serve as an empowering instrument for system accountability.
3. **Third**, Civil society organisations could play a larger role in promoting awareness of the role of Local Bodies in health, as well as maybe building local dashboards to assess success on health programmes.
4. **Fourth**, The health grants from the Fifteenth Finance Commission should not be used as a "replacement" for local government health expenditure; instead, local governments should boost their own health spending on a regular basis to have a real impact.
5. **Fifth**, Institutionalise systems for greater cooperation among different agencies working in rural and urban regions. It is necessary to build time-bound and coordinated action plans with quantitative indicators and road maps.
6. **Sixth**, Local governments are still considered "healthy greenfield" places. Young administrators in charge of such Rural Local Bodies and Urban Local Bodies, as well as enthusiastic councillors and members of Panchayati raj institutions, must use this chance to establish novel health models.
7. **Seventh**, A number of state governments and cities had planned to build various sorts of community clinics in rural and urban regions before the new coronavirus pandemic began. All of these initiatives should be revived with the funds.

Way Forward

- India's healthcare system needs additional government support.
- When it comes to local governments, however, incremental financial allocations must be supplemented by elected officials demonstrating health leadership, multiple agencies

coordinating with one another, increased citizen engagement in health, the establishment of accountability mechanisms, and the process must be guided by a multidisciplinary group of technical and health experts.

- The health grant from the Fifteenth Finance Commission has the potential to develop a health ecosystem that can serve as a long-awaited springboard for mainstreaming health in rural and urban local government activity.
- This is an opportunity that the Indian healthcare system cannot afford to forego.

2. Protect, don't pander

Topic: Constitution of India - significant provisions and basic structure

Prelims: Heckler's Veto, Freedom of Speech and Expression

Mains: Role of State in ensuring the freedom of expression and the provision dealing with "reasonable restraints."

Context

This editorial describes how 'heckler's veto' seems to be winning repeatedly in the cases against comedians such as Munawar Faruqui.

What is 'heckler's veto'?

- A notion known as a heckler's veto exists in free speech law. It refers to a private actor's capacity, but not right, to be loud and annoying enough to obstruct others' free speech.
- A heckler, by definition, is someone who is unable to explain his position using genuine facts, logic, and reason.
- The term "heckler's veto" refers to the belief that those who disagree with a concept can prevent it from being spoken by endangering public safety.
- When the government approves speech limits due to the expected or actual reactions of opponents of the speech, this is known as a heckler's veto.

Recent Case Studies:

1. Munawar Faruqui, a stand-up comedian, was unjustly imprisoned after a BJP functionary's son claimed that he was preparing to mock Hindu gods in a planned event. For the same reason, he was prevented from performing in a number of events.

2. After being suppressed by conservative and religious organisations, Tamil writer Perumal Murugan announced his own "death" in a literary sense.

Against Freedom of Speech and Expression:

- When such matters are brought before a court of law, the ensuing decisions are speech-protective, but the authorities' inclination to pander to chauvinist organisations poses a severe threat to society's free expression.
- Instead of appeasing individuals who threaten to take the law into their own hands, it is necessary to emphasise the state's responsibility to safeguard free expression and maintain peace and order.
- It's a shame that police officers urge authors, lecturers, and artists to be quiet rather than taking proactive actions to preserve their [fundamental rights](#).

Supreme Court Observation

1. Suppression of free speech in response to a threat of demonstration or protest "would be tantamount to negation of the rule of law and a surrender to blackmail and intimidation," as the Supreme Court stated in *S. Rangarajan etc. vs P. Jagjivan Ram* (1989), appears to have few takers among those in positions of power.

Get detailed information on [Freedom of Speech and Expression](#) here.

Category: **ECONOMY**

1. India's informal economy has not shrunk

Topic: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment

Prelims: Informal Sector

Mains: Significance and Challenges of Informal Sector in Indian Economy.

Context

According to a recent State Bank of India (SBI) research report, the informal economy in India has been shrinking since 2018.

What does the State Bank of India (SBI) Research report say?

- The gross value-added (GVA) method was used to formalise the process.
- Increased digital payments and the job path are two ways to increase consumption.
- According to the research, the informal sector would account for just 15-20% of GDP in 2021, down from 52.4 percent in 2018.

What is Informal Economy?

- Household enterprises that are not formed as distinct legal organisations and for which no comprehensive records are available are classified as informal enterprises by the [International Labour Organization's](#) 15th International Conference of Labour Statisticians (1993).
- Informal employees were classified as individuals who did not have access to social security during the 17th Conference (2003).
- Internationally comparable estimates of both forms of informality (given above) are available based on these criteria.
- India has a rate of 80% and 91%, respectively. The latter is greater since formal businesses use both formal and informal personnel.

Why is this a Misleading Claim?

1. **Lack of Standard Definition:** The SBI study uses a number of different definitions of formality (digitisation, GST registration, cashless payments), none of which are widely utilised. These may be useful tools for fostering formality, but they cannot be equated with formality on their own or even in combination.
2. **Impact of Pandemic:** The SBI report conflates the decline in the informal sector's proportion of GDP as a result of COVID-19's economic impact with formalisation. The lockdowns, as well as the resulting economic slump, had a negative influence on the informal economy. The lockdowns had the greatest impact on industries with a higher level of informality.
3. **Fall in Gross Value Added (GVA):** The drop in informal activities might be to blame for the informal sector's declining percentage of GVA. At best, calling this formalisation is deceptive. We don't know if the decrease in GVA is temporary or permanent. It has certainly resulted in job losses, particularly in the non-farm sector.
4. **Role of Agriculture:** The proportion of agricultural workers in total employment increased dramatically between 2018-19 and 2019-20 (National Statistical Office's Periodic Labour Force Survey). Agriculture is virtually totally unorganised, both in terms of businesses and employees.

5. **Misconceptions regarding e-Shram portal:** The number of employees registered in the new [e-Shram site](#), according to the SBI, is another factor for the reduction in informality. Over 9.9 crore unorganised labourers have enrolled since the portal's introduction. Registration, on the other hand, refers to the documenting of employees rather than their formalisation. The portal's goal is not to provide social security benefits.
6. **No Credible Database:** There is no reliable database on India's unorganised employees at the moment. In 2020, the government cried helplessness when asked for figures on how many migrant labourers were injured or killed during the lockdowns. These migratory labourers used to be, and still are, a component of the unorganised sector.
7. **Homogeneous Entity:** In the research, the formal sector was regarded as a single unit. In actuality, the formal sector is divided into several tiers.
8. **Informalisation of the formal sector:** Contractualization and outsourcing of labour have resulted in a large-scale informalisation of the official sector during the last three decades. The pandemic boosted the share of non-permanent, casual, and contract employees in the organised sector. As a result, a large amount of the formal sector's production is really generated by informal labour within the official sector.

Way Forward

- The continuous demolition of employer-employee relationships in the labour market has blurred the line between formal and informal employment relationships.
- The formal sector's whole structure is built on the backs of informal employees.
- There are layers of mediators between employers and employees, resulting in a separation. This is a purposeful rather than natural separation.
- As a result, contrary to what the research claims, the formal sector's contribution has been exaggerated while the informal sector's participation has been undervalued.

F. Prelims Facts

1. Fiscal deficit was 36.3% of estimate at end-October

- According to data released by the [Controller General of Accounts \(CGA\)](#), the Union government's fiscal deficit stood at ₹5.47 lakh crore or 36.3% of budget estimates (BE) at end-October.
 - **The difference between total revenue and total expenditure of the government is termed as fiscal deficit.** It is an indication of the total borrowings needed by the government.
- **For FY22, the Centre expects the deficit at 6.8% of GDP** or ₹15.06 lakh crore.
- India recorded a **fiscal deficit of 9.3% of GDP in 2020-21.**

2. 6 lakh Indians renounced citizenship

- **Article 5 to 11 in Part II of the Constitution deals with [citizenship](#).** The provisions of citizenship in the Constitution are applicable only up to the commencement of the Constitution, after that parliament can make laws regarding citizenship. In this regard, the government of the day had passed the **Citizenship Act in 1955**. This Act deals with matters of Citizenship after the commencement of the Constitution and are revised as per changing needs.
- Citizenship is listed in the **Union List under the Constitution** and thus is under the exclusive jurisdiction of Parliament.
- The Constitution of India provides **single citizenship**. It means an Indian person can only be a citizen of one country at a time. It does not recognize dual citizenship.
- There are **five ways in which Indian citizenship can be acquired: birth, descent, registration, naturalization and acquisition**.
- There are **three ways to renounce Citizenship in India - Voluntary Renunciation, Termination and Deprivation by Government**.

Context:

- As per data provided by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), more than six lakh Indians renounced citizenship in the past five years, while 10,645 foreigners applied for Indian citizenship from 2016 to 2020.

Additional information:

- According to a **Global Wealth Migration Review report**, in 2019, India stands second in terms of number of high net worth individuals (HNIs) leaving the country.

G. Tidbits

1. Pentagon reviews U.S. posture towards China

- The “**global posture review**,” commissioned by **U.S. President**, has highlighted **Indo-Pacific region as the priority region** for the U.S. military and the focus is on **China as the U.S.’s leading defence rival**.
- The U.S. military will reinforce deployments and bases directed at China and Russia, while maintaining adequate forces in West Asia to deter Iran and jihadist groups. As part of these measures the U.S. will be upgrading and expanding military facilities in Guam and Australia.

- The review suggests **additional cooperation with allies and partners across the Indo-Pacific region** to advance initiatives to deter potential military aggression from China. This is a notable aspect of the review for India given that it has had to face increasing pressure from an assertive China along its northern borders and India has been seeking closer defense cooperation with the U.S. in a bid to balance out China's threat to India.
 - Recently the U.S. had formed a **new defence alliance with Britain and Australia — [AUKUS](#)** — to counter a rising China.

2. Farm fires added 14.6% to city's PM2.5 in Nov.

- Delhi usually experiences **two spells of high air pollution during winter**, one in October-November and the other in December-January.
 - During the **October-November spell**, one of the main reasons for the high pollution in Delhi and NCR is **[stubble burning](#)**.
 - During the second spell in **December-January**, the main reason for air pollution is the transport of pollutants from the rest of the Indo-Gangetic Plain to Delhi combined with **extreme cold and foggy conditions**.
- The contribution of stubble burning in neighbouring States to the daily levels of PM2.5 in Delhi was as high as 48% in the first week of November and averaged around 14.6% in the month of November, according to data from the government-run monitoring agency **[SAFAR \(System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research\)](#)**. This observation indicates the need to equally focus on other sources of air pollution in Delhi along with stubble burning.
- The annual contribution is usually far lesser since the **burning of stubble is only a seasonal activity** and not all year round.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Located in the Idukki district of Kerala, the Mullaperiyar dam is under the control of which of the following states or UTs?

- a. Karnataka
- b. Tamil Nadu
- c. Kerala
- d. Puducherry

Answer: b

Explanation:

- The dam is at the centre of a decades-long conflict between Tamil Nadu and Kerala, two southern Indian states.
- The dam, which is located in Kerala, poses a threat to thousands of people who live downstream.
- The water provided by the dam, which is **controlled by Tamil Nadu**, is a lifeline for residents in five districts.
- Hence Option B is Correct.

Q2. Which amongst the following is not one of the criteria to be eligible for reservation under the EWS category?

- a. Your family should not own agricultural land of size 5 acres or more.
- b. Your family should not own a residential flat of area 1000 square feet or more.
- c. Your family should not own a residential plot (in notified municipalities) of an area 100 square yards or more.
- d. Your family should not own a residential plot (other than in notified municipalities) of area 250 square yards or more.

Answer: d

Explanation:

Eligibility Criteria for EWS Reservation:

1. The quota would be available to persons who earn less than Rs 8 lakh per year.
2. People who own a home on a plot of land larger than 1,000 square feet.
3. Those who possess a residential parcel of land in a notified municipality that is larger than 100 square yards.
4. People who possess a residential plot of more than 200 (**NOT 250**) yards in a non-notified region will be ineligible as well.
5. Under the social backwardness criteria, those who currently benefit from education and job restrictions.

Hence Option D is Correct.

Q3. Which of the following is incorrect with regards to the voluntary renunciation of Indian citizenship?

- a. If an Indian citizen wishes, who is of full age and capacity, he can relinquish citizenship of India by his will.

- b. When a person relinquishes his citizenship, every minor child of that person also loses Indian citizenship.
- c. However, when such a child attains the age of 18, he may resume Indian citizenship.
- d. None of the above

Answer: d

Explanation:

- If an Indian citizen is of full age and capacity, he can voluntarily resign his Indian citizenship.
- When a person relinquishes his citizenship, his or her minor children lose their Indian citizenship as well.
- When the youngster reaches the age of 18, he may reclaim his Indian citizenship.
- **Hence Option D is Correct.**

Q4. Amongst the eight core sectors in the Index of Industrial Production, which sector has the lowest weightage?

- a. Cement
- b. Coal
- c. Fertilizers
- d. Steel

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, fertiliser, steel, cement, and power are among the eight key sector industries.
- The eight core industries account for 40.27 percent of the weight of the items in the Industrial Production Index (IIP).
- In decreasing order of weightage, below are the eight Core Industries:
 - Refinery Products
 - Electricity
 - Steel
 - Coal
 - Crude Oil
 - Natural Gas
 - Cement
 - Fertilizers

Hence Option C is Correct.

Q.5. Why is there a great concern about the 'microbeads' that are released into the environment?

- a. They are considered harmful to marine ecosystems.
- b. They are considered to cause skin cancer in children.
- c. They are small enough to be absorbed by crop plants in irrigated fields.
- d. They are often found to be used as food adulterants.

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Microbeads are solid plastic particles with a greatest diameter of less than one millimetre.
- Polyethylene is the most common material, however other petrochemical plastics such as polypropylene and polystyrene can also be used.
- Exfoliating personal care items, toothpastes, and biomedical and health-science studies all employ them.
- Microbeads in freshwater and ocean water can produce plastic particle contamination and constitute an environmental concern to aquatic species.
- **Hence Option A is Correct.**

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Illustrate how the health allocation recommended by the 15th Finance Commission can fulfil a mandate on primary care at the level of local governments. (250 words; 15 marks) [GS II (Polity & Governance)]
2. Suppression of free speech by yielding to threats has become an unfortunate norm. Discuss. (250 words; 15 marks) [GS II (Polity)]