

## 22 Feb 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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### B. GS 2 Related

#### Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. **India waited till China pulled back its troops**

**Context:**

The first phase of disengagement in eastern Ladakh.

**Read about the agreement between India China on disengagement of troops along Line of Actual Control (LAC) covered in [16<sup>th</sup> February 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).**

**Background:**

India and China have been engaged in a face-off in various pockets in Eastern Ladakh since April 2020 after China stopped Indian patrols in Finger area of Pangong Tso.

**Read about the [India-China Border Clash at Galwan Valley](#) in detail.**

**Details:**

- Though disengagement had taken place, de-escalation is yet to be implemented.
- At the 10th Corps Commander talks, both the countries have agreed to push for a mutually acceptable solution for the remaining issues.

**2. India and Maldives sign defence pact**

**Context:**

India and the Maldives signed a defence Line of Credit agreement worth \$50 million during the ongoing visit by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar.

**Details:**

- The Defence Line of Credit will facilitate capability building in the maritime domain.
- Both sides agreed to maintain peace and security in the Indian Ocean Region.
- They agreed to strengthen coordination in enhancing regional maritime security.
- An agreement to develop, support and maintain a Maldives National Defence Force Coast Guard Harbour at Sifvaru was also signed.
  - This indicates deepening security cooperation.

**Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE**

**1. Child abuse is unpardonable, says HC**

**Context:**

The Delhi High Court remarked “An offence involving abuse of child victim is unpardonable”, while refusing to lower the sentence awarded to a teacher, who was convicted for sodomising a 7-year-old boy.

**Details:**

- It was opined that reducing the sentence would send a wrong signal to the society and will be against the purpose for which the POCSO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences) Act was enacted.

Read more on the [POCSO \(Protection of Children from Sexual Offences\) Act](#)

## 2. Telangana achieves 100% tap water connections to schools

**Context:**

Telangana has joined a group of States that has ensured tap water connections to all schools and Anganwadi centres (AWCs).

**Details:**

- Telangana was among States like Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Goa, Haryana and Tamil Nadu, which reported the provision of tap water in all schools and AWCs.
- Work on providing connection to schools, AWCs and ashramshalas was taken up under the 100-day special campaign of the Ministry of Jal Shakti under the [Jal Jeevan Mission](#).
- The programme was launched by the Union government, which acknowledged the need for potable piped water to children as they were more susceptible to water-borne diseases.

**Note:**

- The State was the first to provide tap water connections to all households and the achievement was recently acknowledged by the Central Government.

## C. GS 3 Related

### Category: ECONOMY

#### 1. Cairn Energy seeks swift resolution

**Context:**

Cairn Energy has filed a case in a U.S. district court to enforce a \$1.2 billion arbitration award it won in a tax dispute against India, adding pressure on the government to pay its dues.

### **Background:**

- In December 2020, a three-member tribunal in the Permanent Court of Arbitrage at The Hague had ruled unanimously against the retrospective tax levied by India on Cairn in 2015, ruling that the tax violated the bilateral investment pact.
- The tribunal also awarded Cairn \$1.2 billion in damages.

This topic has been covered in the [17<sup>th</sup> February 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis](#)

### **Details:**

- A number of proposals are being discussed by Cairn Energy with the government to find a mutually acceptable swift resolution.
- The company would look at investing more in India if such a resolution occurs.

## D. GS 4 Related

*Nothing here for today!!!*

## E. Editorials

### Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

#### 1. Voice vote as constitutional subterfuge

#### **Context:**

- The Karnataka Prevention of Slaughter and Preservation of Cattle Bill was passed by the State's Legislative Council through a **voice vote without any division of votes** as demanded by the opposition members. This allowed the state government to get the bill passed by the Council despite the lack of a majority in the upper house.
- A similar process of a voice vote was used to pass the [farm laws](#) in the Rajya Sabha despite the government lacking a majority in the Upper House.

#### **Concerns:**

- The article discusses some of the recent concerns associated with the legislative process in India.

### **Bypassing constitutionally mandated legislative process:**

- In both cases, the pandemonium in the House caused by heated interventions by the Opposition was used as a pretext to resort to a voice vote. However, these two sets of laws passed with a voice vote amount to a gross bypassing of the constitutionally envisaged legislative process.
- The legislative process followed for these laws did away with actual voting in the Upper House. These legislations were **passed without an actual legislative majority voting for them.**

### **Reluctance to refer bills to parliamentary committees:**

- Despite the repeated calls for **referring bills to parliamentary committees for detailed scrutiny or review**, the governments have often insisted on the bills not being referred to the legislative committees.

### **Misuse of money bill provisions:**

- There has been the **misuse of money bill provisions to bypass the Upper House of Parliament.** The money bill route has been utilised increasingly in instances even where the laws concerned would not fit within the definition of a money bill.
- Example: Aadhaar Bill, electoral bonds, retrospective validation of foreign political contributions and the overhaul of the legal regime relating to tribunals have been carried out through the [Money Bill](#) route.
- The dissenting judge in the Aadhar case has called the misuse of the Money Bill nothing less than **“a fraud on the Constitution”**. A later constitutional Bench of the Court has since referred the issue of interpreting the Money Bill provision to a larger Bench.

### **Devaluing legislature:**

- There has been a sort of contempt for the legislature that has been shown by the executive since the mid-1970s, which has become more apparent during the pandemic. The legislature's role in India is seen as only to pass legislation **without allowing it to scrutinize the executive.**
- Parliament in India was not convened until it became necessary and there was also the uproar surrounding the **suspending of the Question Hour.**

### **Devaluing bicameralism:**

- The increasing use of the Money Bill route was defended by the then Leader of the Rajya Sabha when he deplored the repeated questioning by the indirectly elected Rajya Sabha of the wisdom of the directly elected Lok Sabha.

- Democracy is being portrayed only in terms of parliamentary majority in the Lower House, the countervailing function of the Upper House is being neglected. This amounts to devaluing bicameralism itself.

### **Significance of bicameralism:**

#### **More representative:**

- The two Houses are chosen by different processes of representation and elected on a different schedule.
- Rajya Sabha membership which is determined by elections to State Assemblies leads to a different principle of representation, often allowing different factors to prevail than those in the Lok Sabha elections. **Rajya Sabha allows for the representation of the state's interests.**
- The legislative council in the states allows for the inclusion of experts and academicians who would otherwise not be able to meet the demands of electoral politics.

#### **Extra layer of legislative scrutiny:**

- John Stuart Mill had warned in his classic treatise on representative democracy that a majority in a single assembly could easily become despotic, if released from the necessity of considering whether its acts will be concurred in by another constituted authority.
- The **second chamber offers the opportunity for a second legislative scrutiny** and thus helps keep the lower house activities in check.

#### **Ensures robust separation of powers:**

- An important merit of bicameralism in a **Westminster system like India**, where the **Lower House is dominated by the executive** is that the Rajya Sabha holds the potential of a somewhat different legislative relation to the executive, thus making a robust [separation of powers](#) possible.

### **Lacunae in bicameralism:**

- The undesirable practice of allowing members representing States they have no affiliation to has been allowed to flourish in Rajya Sabha.
- The upper house has been increasingly used as a conduit to get the defeated candidates in the general elections into the executive. There has been very less scope for the entry of academicians and experts.
- There has been controversy surrounding the use of money power to get elected to the upper houses with candidates spending huge amounts to get the electors to vote for them.
- The constitutional design has resulted in an unequal positioning of the upper houses making them powerless.

### Conclusion:

- Even laws that are unquestionably desirable and necessary cannot be enacted using dubious legislative mechanisms.
- It is important to recognize and acknowledge the key constitutional role played by the legislature and the crucial role that the upper house plays in this.

## Category: EDUCATION

### 1. The blank pages in India's online learning experience

#### Context:

- The article analyzes the **impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education sector.**

#### Background:

- The COVID-19 pandemic has had an adverse impact on the social, economic and political spheres. COVID-19 has affected all sectors including the education sector.
- The schools have remained closed for almost a year. The lockdown happened during the last quarter of the academic year which led to the postponement of examinations and the curtailment of the prescribed syllabi.

#### Digital learning:

- **Digital distance learning method is being promoted as an alternative to traditional classroom training.** The focus has been on the use of text/video/audio content through SMS, WhatsApp, radio and TV programmes to reach out to students and engage them.
- The Union Ministry of Human Resource Development in March 2020 started sharing free e-learning platforms. They include the **Diksha portal, e-Pathshala, [SWAYAM](#) portal and SWAYAM Prabha.**
  - Diksha portal has e-learning content aligned to the curriculum.
  - e-Pathshala is an app by the National Council of Educational Research and Training for Classes 1 to 12 in multiple languages.
  - SWAYAM portal hosts 1,900 courses including teaching videos, computer weekly assignments, examinations and credit transfers, aimed both at school (Classes 1 to 12) and higher education.
  - SWAYAM Prabha is a group of 32 direct to home channels devoted to the telecasting of educational programmes.

#### Details:

- The COVID-19 pandemic would have the following negative impacts.

### Rise in school dropouts:

- Currently, around 300 million children across all age groups are reported to be out of school in India.
- This number is **expected to increase going forward, given the adverse economic impact of the pandemic on the poorer sections of society.**
  - A survey promoted by the Centre for Budget and Policy Studies found that in families which faced cash and food shortages, only 50% of the boys and girls were confident of returning to school. The abilities of the families and communities concerned to support the educational journeys of the children have been found to be affected.

### Doubts over learning outcome:

- There are **questions on the level of understanding of students who have undergone 'digital learning' at home.** Studies conducted on government-run schools in various States indicate poor performance of students who have undergone digital learning.
- With the educational routine having been disrupted, children, in many cases, have also forgotten what they learnt earlier. The decision to postpone the board examinations and to allow automatic promotion to the higher classes is bound to affect the quality.

### Impact on girl students:

- The girl students have to bear the extra burden due to the pandemic as apart from **poor access to digital data, they were also burdened with household/farm work.**
- There is a growing apprehension that the disruption in education would lead to **child marriages in girl students.**

### Social impact:

- The long closure of schools has also meant the **disruption of a range of social initiatives** such as the **mid-day meal scheme, the school health programme** and pre-metric scholarships to girl children. These initiatives have helped in enrolment as well as regular attendance.

### Neglect of existing divides:

- School closures have had a significant impact on both students and their families, more in the case of the vulnerable and underprivileged sections. Studies indicate that the rapid transition to digital learning has been very challenging for this section.



- The digital initiative failed to take into account **existing divides** — **spatial, digital, gender and class**.
- Due to this divide, many students were **unable to access online education due to a lack of devices and poor or no Internet connectivity**. The attempts at digital learning have only exposed the wide digital divide between the rich and the poor and the urban and rural areas.
  - A recent UNICEF report points out that the massive school closures exposed the uneven distribution of technology that is needed to facilitate remote learning.

#### **Lack of capacity:**

- The digital initiative seems to have been taken in a haphazard manner.
- **Many States lacked adequate digital infrastructure and even teachers were poorly equipped to teach**. Also, they were not consulted before the initiative.
- There is credible evidence that students, parents and teachers were unprepared for the pedagogic shift.

#### **Way forward:**

- In order to achieve **education-enabled social and economic mobility**, the following aspects need to be considered.

#### **NGO model as a template:**

- Interestingly, schools run by the non-governmental organisation sector did fairly well during the interregnum. Catering mostly to the poor and backward segments, these schools did not go online. Instead, teachers visited individual students at home. They also taught children in small groups.
- This could serve as a model for further replication.

#### **Post pandemic approach:**

- Once schools reopen finally, the authorities should **establish the re-enrolment of children as mandated by the National Education Policy 2020**.
- Mass outreach programmes should be developed with civil society to encourage re-enrolment. **Remedial tuitions and counselling** are advisable, along with scholarships, targeted cash transfers and other entitlements to retain the poorest at school.

#### **Addressing systemic issues:**

- The **systemic issues of education that relate to quality, equity and gender** need to be addressed. **Education planning has to be context-specific, gender-responsive and inclusive**.

## Category: ECONOMY

### 1. Clean energy post COVID-19

#### Context:

- The report, titled **Shaping a Sustainable Energy Future in Asia and the Pacific: A greener, more resilient and inclusive energy system**, released by the **United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific**.

#### Details:

- The report observes the healthy pace of renewable energy development in countries such as China and India, throughout 2020.
- The report notes that the Asia-Pacific region has been moving towards **clean, efficient and low-carbon technologies**.

#### Significance:

##### **Added resilience:**

- Renewable energy systems can help transform energy systems to help ensure resilience to future crises such as COVID-19.
- Evidence shows that **renewable energy and energy efficiency projects create more jobs for the same investment in fossil fuel projects**. Renewable energy presents opportunities for an **inclusive recovery** after the pandemic.
- Increasing expenditure on clean cooking and electricity access can help enhance economic activity in rural areas and support modern infrastructure that can make the communities more resilient and inclusive.

##### **Climate goals:**

- Investing in low-carbon technologies can help achieve the ambitious climate pledges the world needs to fulfil to reach the **Paris Agreement target of a 2-degree global warming limit**.

##### **Green growth strategy:**

- A focus on renewable energy can help **launch a 'green recovery' post-COVID-19 that simultaneously rebuilds our economies and puts us on track to meet global climate and sustainability goals**.

- The energy sector offers multiple opportunities to align stimuli with clean industries of the future.

#### Way forward:

- The global community should not waste the opportunities this crisis presents. The world should work towards **making modern energy available to all** and decarbonising the energy system through a transition to **sustainable energy**.
- There is the need to phase out the use of coal from power generation portfolios and substitute it with renewables. This could be realized by **ending fossil fuel subsidies and implementing carbon pricing**.

## F. Prelims Facts

### 1. Amid surge in cases, Centre orders more RT-PCR tests

#### What's in News?

The Centre has written to six states which are witnessing a surge in the number of daily COVID-19 cases, calling for an increase in the proportion of RT-PCR tests while ensuring that those testing negative with the Rapid Antigen Tests be retested by RT-PCR.

#### RT-PCR tests:

- RT-PCR (reverse transcription-polymerase chain reaction) is a nuclear-derived method for detecting the presence of specific genetic material from any pathogen, including a virus.
- It is a laboratory technique combining reverse transcription of RNA into DNA and amplification of specific DNA targets using polymerase chain reaction.
- Rapid-Reverse Transcriptase Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR) tests are considered the gold standard for detecting the virus.
- RT-PCR involves extracting RNA from a swab collected from the throat or nose, converting it into DNA, magnifying the quantity of DNA and using chemical probes to bind target genes that distinguish SARS-CoV2 from other viruses.

### 2. Iran says talks with IAEA chief 'fruitful'

#### What's in News?

Iran said that it had held fruitful discussions with the UN nuclear watchdog chief in Tehran.

- The discussion comes ahead of a deadline when Iran is set to restrict the agency's inspections unless the United States lifts painful sanctions.
- Efforts are being stepped-up between U.S. President Joe Biden's administration, European powers and Iran to salvage the 2015 nuclear deal (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) that has been on the brink of collapse since former President Donald Trump withdrew from it.

**Concerns:**

- Iran has signalled that it wants to avoid an impasse, but also warned it could step further away from its commitments if sanctions are not lifted.
- Iran's conservative-dominated parliament had demanded that if the U.S. did not lift sanctions, Iran would suspend some IAEA inspections.
- However, Iran has stressed it will not cease working with the IAEA or expel its inspectors.

Read more about [International Atomic Energy Agency \(IAEA\)](#)

## G. Tidbits

*Nothing here for today!!!*

## H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

**Q1. Consider the following statements with respect to Reverse Transcription Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR):**

1. It is a nuclear-derived method for detecting the presence of specific genetic material from any pathogen, including a virus.
2. It helps to measure the amount of a specific RNA in a sample.
3. It combines reverse transcription of RNA into DNA and amplification of specific DNA targets using polymerase chain reaction.

**Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?**

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

**Answer: b**

**Explanation:**

- RT-PCR (reverse transcription-polymerase chain reaction) is a nuclear-derived method for detecting the presence of specific genetic material from any pathogen, including a virus.
- RT-PCR is a laboratory technique combining reverse transcription of RNA into DNA and amplification of specific DNA targets using polymerase chain reaction.
- It is primarily used to measure the amount of a specific RNA.

**Q2. Consider the following with respect to Sant Ravidasji:**

1. He was a poet-saint of the Bhakti movement in northern India.
2. Some of the devotional verses composed by him are included in the Guru Granth Sahib.
3. He was the founder of the Ravidassia sect.

**Which of the given statement/s is/are INCORRECT?**

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. 3 only
- d. None of the above

**Answer: d**

**Explanation:**

- Guru Ravidas/Sant Ravidasji was a North Indian mystic poet of the bhakti movement.
- The saint chose to focus on spiritual pursuits and also penned several devotional songs which made a huge impact on the Bhakti movement during the 14th to 16th century CE.
- Some of the devotional verses composed by him are included in the Guru Granth Sahib.
- He was the founder of the Ravidassia sect.
- Guru Ravidas spoke against the caste divisions and spoke of removing them to promote unity. His teachings resonated with the people, leading to a religion being born called the Ravidassia religion.

**Q3. Consider the following statements with respect to International Atomic Energy Agency:**

1. It is a specialised agency of the United Nations.
2. The organisation's first name when it was formally established was 'Atoms for peace'.
3. India is a founding member of the IAEA.

**Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?**

- a. 1 and 2 only

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

**Answer: b**

**Explanation:**

- ‘Atoms for Peace’ was the organisation’s first name when it was formally established in 1957.
- It is an autonomous organisation within the United Nations system and not a specialised agency of the UN.
- India became a member in 1957 itself. It is a founding member.

**Q4. Consider the following statements with respect to International Mother Language Day:**

1. It is part of the initiative to promote the preservation and protection of all languages used by peoples of the world.
2. The idea to celebrate International Mother Language Day was the initiative of India.
3. First announced by UNESCO in 1999, it was formally recognized by the United Nations General Assembly in 2002.

**Which of the given statement/s is are correct?**

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

**Answer: c**

**Explanation:**

- International Mother Language Day is observed on 21 February every year.
- It is part of the initiative to promote the preservation and protection of all languages used by peoples of the world.
- The idea to celebrate International Mother Language Day was the initiative of Bangladesh.
- It was announced by UNESCO in 1999 and was formally recognized by the United Nations General Assembly in 2002.
- The theme for IMLD 2021 is “Fostering multilingualism for inclusion in education and society”.

## I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Even laws that are unquestionably desirable and necessary cannot be enacted using dubious legislative mechanisms. Comment in light of the recent concerns associated with the legislative process in India. (15 marks, 250 words) (GS Paper 2/Polity and Governance)
2. Analyze the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education sector. Also evaluate if the initiatives taken by the government for the promotion of digital distance learning have been effective in addressing the challenges put forth by the pandemic. (15 marks, 250 words) (GS Paper 2/Education)

