

## 20<sup>th</sup> June 2022 Comprehensive News Analysis

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#### Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. [Indian interests at the WTO Ministerial Conference](#)

**Syllabus: Important International institutions, agencies and fora-their structure, mandate.**

**Prelims: World Trade Organization (WTO) and its Ministerial Conference**

**Mains: Key outcomes of the 12th Ministerial Conference of WTO**

**Context:**

12th Ministerial Conference (MC12) of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

### **World Trade Organization (WTO)**

- WTO was established in 1995 after the Uruguay Round negotiations (1986-94)
- WTO replaced the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) that had been established in 1948.
  - **Headquarters:** Geneva, Switzerland
  - **Members:** WTO has over 160 member countries which represent about 98% of global trade.
- WTO is the only global international organisation dealing with the rules of trade between nations.
- The key objective of the organisation is to ensure that global trade takes place as smoothly, predictably and freely as possible.
- All decisions at the WTO are made through consensus among member countries at various councils and committees.
- The WTO derives its income from contributions by its members and these contributions are based on a formula that considers member's share of international trade.

### **Ministerial Conference of WTO**

- The Ministerial Conference (MC) is the topmost decision-making body of the WTO.
  - Ministerial conferences usually take place biennially (once every two years).
- It brings together all members of the WTO, all of which are countries or customs unions.
- The Ministerial Conference can take decisions on all matters under any of the multilateral trade agreements.

To read more about – [WTO and its Ministerial Conference](#)

### **12th Ministerial Conference (MC12)**

- The WTO's 12th Ministerial Conference took place in June 2022 in Geneva.
- This Conference was co-hosted by Kazakhstan as it was originally scheduled to be held in June 2020 in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan and was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- "Geneva Package" was unveiled in the latest edition of the conference which includes agreements on
  - Relaxing patent norms to achieve global vaccine equity

- Ensuring food security
- Extending subsidies to the fisheries sector
- Continuation of moratoriums in e-commerce industry

### Important outcomes of the 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12)

#### Discussion over Agriculture

- The agreements on agriculture are said to be very significant for India.
- The main focus of the agreements on the subject was to ensure the availability, accessibility and affordability of food for those in need during humanitarian emergencies.
- India, which has been a key contributor to the World Food Programme (WFP) had held that it had never imposed export restrictions for procurement under the programme and said that a blanket exemption could impact its work in ensuring domestic food security.
  - This blanket exemption would have mandated India to comply with its WFP commitments irrespective of its domestic requirements.
- It has been agreed that member countries would not impose export bans or restrictions on food items purchased for humanitarian purposes of the WFP and this agreement would not stop member countries from implementing steps to ensure domestic food security.
- Decisions were taken that encouraged member countries with available surplus to release them to the international markets in compliance with WTO regulations.
- The agreements also gave rise to a work programme that will come up with steps to help LDCs (least-developed countries) and NFDCs (Net Food Importing Developing Countries) improve their domestic food security and increase their agricultural output.
- However, the agreements failed to address issues like the permissible public stockholding threshold for domestic food security, domestic support for agriculture, cotton, and market access.

#### Agreements on fisheries sector

- India succeeded in negotiating an agreement that eliminated subsidies to those involved in illegal and unregulated fishing.
  - The only exception for the continuation of subsidies for overfishing is when they are deemed necessary to establish a biologically sustainable level.
  - Overfishing means exploiting fish at a pace faster than they could replenish themselves.
- Declining fish stocks pose a threat of aggravating poverty and thereby affecting the lives and the livelihoods of fishing communities
- The agreements also meant that there will not be any restrictions on subsidies granted by developing or least-developed countries for fishing within their exclusive economic zones (EEZ).

#### Agreements on the moratoriums on electronic transmissions

- Electronic transmission (ET) constitutes online deliveries such as music, e-books, films, software and video games.
  - Despite being ordered online, ET is different from other cross-border e-commerce as they are not delivered physically.
- Agreements were reached to extend the current moratorium on not imposing customs duties on electronic transmission (ET) until MC13

- This move was supported by over 105 countries which included advanced economies such as the U.S., the U.K., Australia, China and Japan.
  - These countries felt that in the backdrop of the COVID pandemic, an extension of the moratorium would help ensure certainty and predictability for businesses and consumers.
- India and South Africa had opposed the move by highlighting the fact that the data from the UN Conference on Trade and Development showed that the extension of duty-free market access due to the moratorium led to a loss of \$10 billion per annum globally and about 95% of it was borne by developing countries.
  - The custom duties have also been helpful in avoiding an unwanted increase in imports and also provide the required capital infusion for capacity building.
  - Further, they had also asked for more clarity on what constitutes electronic transmission.

### Discussions on patent relaxations

To know about the discussions on this matter, refer the [CNA dated on 18th June 2022](#)

### Nut Graf

*The outcomes of the 12th Ministerial Conference of the WTO have been largely beneficial to India in terms of fisheries and agriculture sectors while India was forced to compromise on its stance on IP waiver on COVID-19 essentials and custom duties on ET.*

## C. GS 3 Related

*Nothing here for today!!!*

## D. GS 4 Related

*Nothing here for today!!!*

## E. Editorials

### Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

#### 1. Petty patents can boost R&D

*Syllabus: Issues relating to Intellectual Property Rights.*

*Prelims: Global*

*Innovation*

*Index*

*Mains: Concerns in India's R&D segment and recommendations*

**Context:**

**Context:**

- India has been ranked **46<sup>th</sup>** in WIPO's Global Innovation Index (GII) of 2021.

- There has been a constant improvement in India's ranking over the years. India had been ranked 81 in 2015.

#### **Significance of R&D sector:**

- A vibrant R&D sector would help ensure much needed **self-reliance in technology** for India.
- A robust R&D sector can provide much needed **impetus to economic growth and development** in India. Innovative activity is the key driver of competitiveness and economic growth. It can provide employment opportunities and also provide a competitive edge to Indian companies in the global market.

#### **Concerns in India's R&D segment:**

- **Gross R&D expenditure (GERD) as a percentage of GDP** is 0.7% which is very low as compared to other comparable countries.
- The R&D expenditure is mainly from the government with only about **30% of the GERD being spent by business enterprises**. Also, the bulk of innovative activity is conducted by a handful of companies in the pharma and auto sectors. This is indicative of the lack of R&D culture among Indian enterprises. Also, this leads to the lack of innovative rivalry which has been able to spur innovations as well as economic growth in countries like the U.S.
- Though the number of patent filings has been increasing, the patents granted continue to remain low. It has been observed that many patent applications fail to satisfy the three-pronged test of novelty, inventive step and utility.

#### **Recommendations:**

##### **Raise expenditure in R&D segment:**

- India needs to raise Gross R&D expenditure (GERD) as a percentage of GDP to upwards of 2% of GDP, as observed in the leading innovative nations.

##### **Supportive policy:**

- The governments both at the Union and state level must support and incentivize R&D activities through policies such as **weighted tax deductions, partial funding for specific R&D projects** undertaken by business enterprises.
- Notably, subsidies up to 50% of project costs have been made non-actionable under the World Trade Organization rules.
- Also, products based on indigenously developed technology could be given **production tax concessions** and **income tax concessions** be given to innovators to encourage innovation.

##### **Flexible patent system:**

- A major challenge with the current patent system is that it fails to encourage minor innovations since the criteria for granting IP rights considers the novelty of the invention while overlooking minor adaptive innovations.
- An important intervention to protect minor innovations and to promote local innovation could be to consider the so-called **utility models or petty patents**.
- Petty patents regime **provides protection to minor incremental innovation**. They provide a limited period of protection (5-10 years in contrast to 20 years in case of patents). But more importantly they have **less stringent requirements and procedures**.

- The petty patents would encourage domestic enterprises to undertake minor adaptive innovations paving the way for more significant innovations by them in the future. This augurs well for the growth of R&D segment in India.

## Nut Graf

*Boosting the R&D culture among business enterprises to strengthen their competitiveness is an urgent imperative for India to not only ensure speedy economic growth but also ensure economic development and ensure self-reliance.*

### Category: ECONOMY

#### 2. Recognising the 'compulsory' woman worker

**Syllabus:** Inclusive Growth and issues arising from it.

**Mains:** Challenges faced by rural women workforce and recommendations

#### Context:

- Recently, the **Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE)** has reported that the labour participation rate of rural women stood at 9.92% in March 2022 compared to 67.24% for men.
- According to CMIE, the **"dropping out" of women from the labour market** is one of the main reasons for this large difference in labour participation rate between Rural women and men.

#### Challenges for rural women workforce:

##### Lack of fixed employment opportunities:

- Rural women have had to often look for different employment opportunities. While **farm labour activities provide seasonal job opportunities**, during the off-season period, rural women workers are pushed into looking for job opportunities in construction sites or work as migrant worker, or other odd jobs. Also, the **mechanisation of agricultural operations** has drastically decreased the number of workdays available to rural women workforce and pushed them into odd jobs.

##### Challenges in work:

- Work at Construction sites is mostly part time and needs **migration from their villages**. Also, since they have not been registered as construction workers they continue to remain ineligible for any legal benefits accruing to them from the Construction Workers' Welfare Board. Also women working in construction sites are paid less than men

##### Challenges in MGNREGA:

- The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) offers work opportunities for rural workforce, but this too is plagued by some challenges.
- As against the guaranteed 100 days of work, there have been reports of work availability days being less than this mandated number of workdays.
- Women are having to undertake **physically challenging work**. There are reports of women workforce being **under paid** for not being able to complete the challenging physical work.
- **Lack of basic facilities** like creche facility, provision of drinking water at worksite remains a major challenge for rural women workforce.

#### Recommendations:

**Providing minimum wage:**

- Notably, the lack of fixed piece rates for women labour has resulted in the underpayment of women labourers in India. In this regard it is very important to ensure **minimum living wages for women with piece rates fixed for different types of women's labour.**

**Financial support:**

- Landless manual labourers in rural India especially women should be provided **cash support** like the one being provided for small farmers.

**Improving work conditions:**

- The schedule of rates for women at MGNREGA projects based on impossibly high productivity rates must be lowered and the work sites made more **worker-friendly.**

**Data driven policies:**

- There is the need for widespread surveys of poor rural women and how they spend their time, to unravel the plight of rural women workforce in India. This can provide valuable insights for making **suitable laws and policies** that address their issues.

**Nut Graf**

Rural women workforce faces several challenges, and the addressing of these challenges is important to ensure inclusive and sustainable growth and development.

**Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY****1. A poverty trend in search of an explanation**

**Syllabus: Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation.**

This article analyses India's performance in the recently released Environmental Performance Index across the various parameters of the index. For detailed information on this topic refer to the following article.

<https://byjus.com/free-ias-prep/environment-performance-index-epi/>

**F. Prelims Facts****1. Appointment of CHIEF JUSTICE of the High Court**

**Syllabus: GS2, Polity; Appointment to various Constitutional posts.**

**Prelims: Process of appointment of Chief Justices of High Court**

**Context:**

The Union government has approved the appointments of new Chief Justices for five High Courts.

**Process of appointment of Chief Justices of High Court**

- According to **Article 217** of the Constitution, the Chief Justices of the High Courts are to be appointed by the President.

- the seniority of Judges in their own High Courts will be the basis for the purpose of elevation as Chief Justices
  - Also, they will be considered for appointment as Chief Justices in other High Courts when their turn has come for being considered for such appointments in their own High Courts.
- The **Chief Justice of India (CJI)** will initiate the proposal for the appointment of Chief Justice of a High Court.
- The CJI after consulting **two senior-most Judges of the Supreme Court** would send his recommendations for the appointment of a Judge of the High Court as Chief Justice of a High Court to the **Union Law Minister**
- The Union Law Minister would then obtain the views of the **concerned State Government** and place the recommendations before the **Prime Minister**, who would then advise the **President** about the selection.

## G. Tidbits

### 1. India, Bangladesh should work on river management

- During the seventh round of India-Bangladesh Joint Consultative Commission, the India External Affairs minister said that India and Bangladesh should work together for comprehensive management of rivers
- The two countries share about 54 rivers and parts of Bangladesh and North East Indian states are experiencing unprecedented flooding in the recent few days. This requires both the countries to work together and share “environmental responsibility” in these areas.
- The Minister further said that the two countries are now sharing flood management data for an extended period and offered assistance to Bangladesh in terms of management of flood and relief efforts.
- India and Bangladesh have resolved border problems through the Land Boundary Agreement of 2015, but are still negotiating over the sharing of multiple rivers that define the borders and impact lives and livelihoods on both sides.

### 2. Agniveer to have distinct rank and insignia

- Agniveers recruited under the Agnipath scheme would form a distinct rank different from existing ranks and also sport distinctive insignia on their uniform
- The Indian Air Force (IAF), in a detailed brief about the “[Agnipath scheme](#)” said that Agnipath is a “new Human Resource (HR) management scheme” for the armed forces.
- Further, Agniveers will be barred from disclosing classified information gained during service to any unauthorised person under the [Official Secrets Act, 1923](#)

## H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. The King Hamad Bin Isa Al-Khalifa Prize is associated with which of the following?  
(Difficulty Level: Medium)

- a. Education
- b. Science and Technology
- c. Health
- d. Journalism



Answer:

**Option a**

Explanation:

- The UNESCO's King Hamad Bin Isa Al-Khalifa Prize is associated with the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in the field of **Education**.
- The theme of the 2021 edition is the "use of technology to enable inclusive crisis-resilient learning systems".

**Q2. Consider the following transboundary rivers. (Difficulty Level: Medium)**

1. Feni
2. Teesta
3. Umngot
4. Kushiyara

**Which of the above statements is/are correct?**

- a. Only one
- b. Only two
- c. Only three
- d. All the above four

Answer:

**Option d**

Explanation:

- All the above rivers are transboundary rivers between India and Bangladesh.
- The two countries share about 54 rivers

**Q3. Which of the following statement/s is/are incorrect? (Difficulty Level: Medium)**

1. India suffers a net deficit in terms of international agricultural commodity trade.
2. Among the agricultural commodity imports by India, edible vegetable oils account for the highest imports in terms of value in the last few years.

**Which of the above statements is/are correct?**

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

Answer:

**Option a**

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 is not correct**, India's agri-exports in FY22 reached \$50.3 Billion against agri-imports of \$32.4 Billion. This means that India has a net surplus in terms of trade in international agricultural commodities.
- **Statement 2 is correct**, Vegetable oils account for the **highest import** in terms of value in recent years and India relies heavily on imports for 70% of its edible oil consumption.

**Q4. Consider the following statements with respect to Legislative Councils in India.**  
(Difficulty Level: Medium)

1. The creation of Legislative Council requires both the legislative assembly of the concerned state and the Parliament to pass the resolution by a special majority.
2. The Legislative Council of a state shall not have more than half of the total strength of the State Assembly, and not less than 40 members.
3. Currently, seven states have a Legislative Council in India.

**Which of the above statements is/are correct?**

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

Answer:

**Option d**

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 is not correct, Article 169** of the Constitution provides provisions for abolition or creation of Legislative Councils in States.
  - The article states – The Parliament can abolish a Legislative Council or create it by a **simple majority**, if the Legislative Assembly of the State passes a resolution to that effect by a **special majority** i.e majority of the total membership of the Assembly and by a majority of not less than two-thirds of the members of the Assembly present and voting.
- **Statement 2 is not correct**, According to **Article 171** of the Constitution, the Legislative Council of a state shall not have more than **one-third of the total strength** of the State Assembly, and not less than 40 members.
- **Statement 3 is not correct**, Currently, **6 states** in India have the Legislative Council. They are: Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar.

Q5. What is Cas9 protein that is often mentioned in news? (Difficulty Level: Medium) (PYQ-2019)

- a. A molecular scissors used in targeted gene editing
- b. A biosensor used in the accurate detection of pathogens in patients
- c. A gene that makes plants pest-resistant
- d. A herbicidal substance synthesized in genetically modified crops

Answer:

**Option a**

Explanation:

- CRISPR/CAS9 is a **gene editing tool** that allows scientists to essentially cut-and-paste DNA.
- CRISPR is a dynamic, versatile tool that helps target genomic location and potentially repair broken genes. It can remove, add or alter specific DNA sequences in the genome of higher organisms.

## I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. **Write a note on key takeaways from the 12th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization.** (15 Marks, 250 Words) (GS III – Economy)
2. **Should the government pursue the policy of reservations in the private sector? Critically Analyze.** (10 Marks, 150 Words) (GS II – Polity)