

28 Mar 2024: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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B. GS 2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. China to develop Sri Lanka's deep sea port and airport

Syllabus: Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Mains: Recent developments in neighborhood

Introduction: In recent diplomatic engagements between Sri Lanka and China, significant pledges have been made toward enhancing Sri Lanka's infrastructure and economy.

Strategic Support for Infrastructure Projects

- Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena announced that China, being Sri Lanka's largest bilateral creditor, has promised to support the development of crucial infrastructure projects.
- This commitment includes assistance in restructuring Sri Lanka's external debt, a vital step to secure a \$2.9 billion IMF bailout.
- While China's stance on debt restructuring remains undisclosed, Sri Lankan officials suggest that China may opt for extending loan tenures and adjusting interest rates instead of outright debt forgiveness.
- This strategic move aims to alleviate Sri Lanka's financial burden while maintaining China's interests in the region.

Economic Revitalization Efforts

Sri Lanka faced a sovereign debt default in 2022 due to a shortage of foreign exchange for essential imports. This crisis led to months of protests and political turmoil, resulting in the ousting of then-President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. In response, China has expressed its commitment to assist Sri Lanka in its debt restructuring process and contribute to its economic development.

Infrastructure Development Plans

China has offered support for the development of key infrastructure projects, including the Colombo International Airport and the Hambantota port. However, specific details regarding the extent of China's involvement are yet to be disclosed. These projects hold significant strategic and economic importance for Sri Lanka's growth and connectivity.

Concerns and Geopolitical Implications

The Hambantota port, previously leased to a Chinese state-owned company for 99 years, has raised concerns among neighboring countries like India and the U.S. about China's expanding naval influence in the Indian Ocean. The involvement of foreign powers in Sri Lanka's infrastructure projects underscores the geopolitical dynamics at play in the region.

Conclusion:

China's commitment to supporting Sri Lanka's infrastructure development and debt restructuring reflects the deepening ties between the two nations. However, the implications of China's involvement in Sri Lanka's strategic projects warrant careful observation amid regional geopolitical tensions.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: BIODIVERSITY AND ENVIRONMENT

1. Is Australia's carbon credit scheme a 'catastrophe'?

Syllabus: Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment.

Mains: Carbon credit scheme

Introduction: Australia's carbon credit scheme faced criticism following damning new research that exposed shortcomings in a world-leading reforestation project. The project aimed to regenerate native forests across vast stretches of the country's desert Outback to offset carbon emissions, but findings revealed significant issues.

Underperforming Reforestation:

Researchers discovered that nearly 80% of the designated plantation areas showed stagnant forest growth or even shrinking woodlands, challenging the effectiveness of the initiative. Despite this, Australia had accumulated millions of tonnes in carbon credits from these projects, which are intended to offset emissions from polluting industries.

Gross Failure:

Experts have described the situation as a "gross failure," highlighting the discrepancy between claimed carbon sequestration and actual forest growth. Australia allocated approximately 42 million hectares for the scheme, presenting it as one of the world's largest natural carbon offset projects.

Questionable Carbon Credits:

- The study, based on satellite imagery, raised doubts about the validity of carbon credits associated with the project. Each tonne of carbon sequestered translates into a carbon credit sold to industries to offset their emissions, but Macintosh suggested that Australia was essentially selling credits based on non-existent carbon sequestration.
- Australia's climate policy has faced significant challenges amid political conflicts dubbed the "climate wars." Despite committing to emission reduction targets, Australia remains a major exporter of gas and thermal coal, exacerbating its carbon footprint.
- Despite the setbacks, Australia aims to reduce carbon emissions by 43% by 2030 from 2005 levels, with a long-term goal of achieving net-zero emissions by 2050. However, the recent revelations underscore the need for robust climate policies and effective implementation to address Australia's high carbon emissions.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Preventing a China-Taiwan conflict

Syllabus: Effect of Policies and Politics of Developed and Developing Countries on India's Interests

Mains: Possible India's stance on China-Taiwan conflict

Context: With the passage of time, China's annexation of Taiwan seems inevitable. If the process is coercive, it can have Economic and security ramifications over India and the Globe.

Need to maintain the Status Quo:

- **Economic Interests:** India has a vested interest in preserving the current status quo between China and Taiwan, particularly due to burgeoning trade relations and strategic partnerships.
- **Avoiding Catastrophic Costs:** Any conflict between China and Taiwan would have severe repercussions for India's economy, given the interconnectedness of global trade and the potential disruption it could cause.
- **Avoiding Regional Escalation:** A conflict could escalate beyond Taiwan, potentially affecting India-China relations and global industrial capacities, with dire consequences for stability and security.

India's Strategic Imperatives:

- **Long-term International Position:** India recognizes the potential ramifications of a conflict over Taiwan on its own international standing. Depending on the outcome, India's strategic interests could be significantly impacted, necessitating a proactive approach to prevent such a scenario.
- **Dependency on the U.S.:** While India is not a formal ally of the U.S., it relies on American support for military modernization and a conducive strategic environment. A conflict over Taiwan could disrupt this dependency and alter the regional power dynamics.

Policy Options for India:

- **Utilizing International Law:** India can leverage international legal frameworks to advocate for a peaceful resolution of the China-Taiwan dispute, emphasizing adherence to existing agreements and norms.
- **Narrative Building and Diplomacy:** Through coordinated diplomatic efforts and narrative building, India can actively oppose any aggressive actions by China towards Taiwan, reinforcing the importance of stability in the region.
- **Economic De-risking:** India can take steps to minimize economic risks associated with a potential conflict, safeguarding its own interests and contributing to regional stability.
- **Military Support to Allies:** While not directly involved in the conflict, India can provide support to U.S. forces in the Indian Ocean, signalling its commitment to regional security and deterrence against Chinese aggression.

Conclusion: India's approach towards preventing a China-Taiwan conflict is guided by its strategic imperatives and economic interests. By maintaining the status quo, pursuing diplomatic initiatives, and leveraging its international influence, India seeks to mitigate the risks associated with a potential conflict while advancing its own strategic objectives.

***Nut Graf:** India aims to prevent a China-Taiwan conflict, prioritizing economic interests, avoiding regional escalation, and safeguarding its strategic position. Through diplomatic efforts and policy options, India seeks to maintain stability and advance its own strategic imperatives.*

Category: ECONOMY

1. WTO's investment facilitation negotiations are not illegal

Syllabus: Effects of Liberalization on the Economy

Mains: Investment facilitation negotiations in WTO

Introduction: WTO's Investment Facilitation Negotiations

- The failure to adopt the Investment Facilitation for Development (IFD) agreement was a significant outcome of the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Abu Dhabi.
- Negotiations for the IFD agreement began in 2017 through the Joint Statement Initiative, involving 70 countries.
- Despite opposition, the IFD agreement was finalized in November 2023, with support from around 120 of the 166 WTO member countries.

India's Concerns and Arguments:

- India, along with South Africa, played a pivotal role in preventing the inclusion of the IFD agreement in the WTO rulebook.
- India's primary concerns revolve around the nature of investment within the WTO framework and the process followed for integrating the IFD agreement.
- India argues that investment is distinct from trade and questions whether it should be within the purview of the WTO.
- Additionally, India asserts that the process for negotiating the IFD agreement lacked the necessary mandates, as established in previous WTO decisions.

Investment vs. Trade and Process Concerns:

- India contends that investment should not fall under the WTO's domain, emphasizing the differences between investment and trade.
- Despite economic interlinkages between trade and investment, India questions the appropriateness of including investment within the WTO framework.
- Furthermore, India challenges the legitimacy of the process followed in negotiating the IFD agreement, citing previous WTO decisions that establish mandates for new negotiations.

Legal and Procedural Considerations:

- The legal basis for including investment agreements within the WTO framework is debated, particularly regarding the distinction between multilateral and plurilateral negotiations.

- While there is a negative mandate against launching multilateral negotiations on new issues, it is unclear whether this mandate extends to plurilateral negotiations.
- Plurilateral agreements like the IFD hold the potential for revitalising the WTO's legislative function, given the challenges in reaching a consensus on multilateral agreements.
- India is urged to reconsider its stance on plurilateral agreements, given their potential benefits for updating and enhancing the WTO's regulatory framework.

***Nut Graf:** The failure to adopt the Investment Facilitation for Development (IFD) agreement at the WTO's 13th Ministerial Conference in Abu Dhabi highlights India's concerns over integrating investment into the WTO framework and the legitimacy of the negotiation process.*

F. Prelims Facts

1. ICMR set to bring in evidence-based norms for lung cancer management

Context: In India, where lung cancer accounts for 10% of cancer-related deaths, the absence of evidence-based guidelines poses a significant challenge.

About: To bridge this gap, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) is launching a systematic review and meta-analysis initiative. Researchers are invited to submit expressions of interest (EoI) to conduct comprehensive reviews focusing on prevention, screening, diagnosis, and management. The initiative aims to synthesize existing evidence using the GRADE tool to assess quality systematically. By utilizing the Evidence to Decision (EtD) framework, recommendations will be formulated to guide clinical practice and improve patient outcomes.

Significance: This initiative is a crucial step towards enhancing lung cancer management in India, addressing a pressing public health concern

2. India achieves 16% decline in new TB cases since 2015

Context: India's battle against tuberculosis (TB) shows promising signs of progress, with a notable decline in both incidence and mortality rates since 2015.

About: According to the India TB Report 2024 by the Union Health Ministry, there has been a 16% reduction in TB incidence and an 18% decrease in mortality rates. Notably, the private healthcare sector's contribution to TB notifications increased by 17% in 2023, reflecting improved collaboration. Despite challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, India's National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme (NTEP) remained resilient, conducting approximately 1.89 crore sputum smear tests.

Significance: With a target set for 2025 to eliminate the disease, India's continued efforts and engagement from both public and private sectors underscore its commitment to TB control and eradication.

G. Tidbits

Nothing here for today!!!

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements about Lieutenant Governors in India:

1. Governors are appointed by the President and Lieutenant Governors are appointed by the Prime Minister.
2. LGs have powers like reserving bills for the President's consideration or recommending the dissolution of the Legislative Assembly.
3. Lieutenant Governors are deployed only in Union Territories with a Legislative Assembly.

Options:

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: c

Q2. Which of the following statements regarding the Global warming is/are correct?

1. Statement 1: Global warming is caused by the release of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide and methane into the atmosphere.
2. Statement 2: Global warming occurs only due to anthropogenic reasons.
3. Statement 3: The Montreal Protocol is an international treaty primarily aimed at combating global warming.

How many statements is/are correct?

- a. Only Statement 1 is correct.
- b. Statements 1 and 2 are correct.
- c. Statements 2 and 3 are correct.
- d. All three statements are correct.

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: a

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

1. Statement I: Rohingya people primarily reside in Myanmar's Rakhine State.
2. Statement II: The Rohingyas predominantly follow Buddhism.
3. Statement III: Rohingya People are one of the minority groups who benefit from the Citizenship Amendment Act 2019.

How many statements is/are correct?

- a. Only one
- b. Only two
- c. Only three
- d. All

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: a

Q4. Which of the following statements is/are correct regarding municipality elections in India?

1. Statement 1: Masala bonds are bonds issued by Indian entities in international markets.
2. Statement 2: The issuer of Masala Bonds pays interest and principal in Indian rupees to investors.

Which statement is/are correct?

- a. Only 1
- b. Only 2
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. None of the above

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: c

Q5. Consider the following statements:

1. In India, the Himalayas are spread over five States only.
2. Western Ghats are spread over five States only.
3. Pulicat Lake is spread over two States only.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a. Only 1 and 2
- b. Only 3
- c. Only 2 and 3
- d. Only 3

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: b

- Mains Questions**
1. Regarding investment facilitation talks in WTO, India's argument is that investment is separate from trade and it should be outside the scope of WTO. Comment on the statement. (15 marks, 250 words) [GS-3, Economy]
 2. Explain the impact of the China-Taiwan conflict on India. (15 marks, 250 words) [GS-2, International Relations]

