

# 31 Dec 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### A. GS 1 Related

### B. GS 2 Related

#### *INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS*

1. [Govt. nod for missions in Estonia, Paraguay and Dominican Republic](#)

### C. GS 3 Related

#### *SECURITY*

1. [Facial recognition technology: law yet to catch up](#)

#### *SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY*

1. [Cabinet gives approval for Akash missile export](#)

#### *ENVIRONMENT*

1. [Boost given for ethanol production](#)

#### *ECONOMY*

1. [CCEA nod for 3 infra projects](#)

### D. GS 4 Related

### E. Editorials

#### *INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS*

1. [Himalayan manoeuvres](#)

#### *ECONOMY*

1. [Separating the wheat from the agri-policy chaff](#)

#### *POLITY*

1. [Give adequate time for a probe](#)

### F. Prelims Facts

1. [Dibru-Saikhowa National Park](#)

### G. Tidbits

## H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

## I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

### A. GS 1 Related

*Nothing here for today!!!*

### B. GS 2 Related

#### Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

##### 1. Govt. nod for missions in Estonia, Paraguay and Dominican Republic

###### Context:

Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister has cleared the proposal from the Ministry of External Affairs to open three missions in Estonia, Paraguay and the Dominican Republic in 2021.

###### Details:

- While the government had announced the opening of 18 missions in 2018, not all of them have been established yet.
- Opening of the newly announced missions may be further delayed by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

###### Significance:

- The opening of the missions will help expand India's diplomatic footprint and deepen political relations. It would bolster political outreach in multilateral fora.
- It will enable the growth of bilateral trade, investment and economic engagements.
- Enhancement of India's diplomatic presence will provide market access for companies and bolster exports of goods and services.
- It would be instrumental in facilitating stronger people-to-people contacts.
- The move would also help the diaspora members residing in these countries.
- It would help garner support for the foreign policy objectives.
- It would also strengthen ties in trade and cybersecurity.

###### Note:

- Both Paraguay and the Dominican Republic had set up missions in Delhi in 2006.
- India and Estonia will serve together in the [Security Council](#) in 2021.

### C. GS 3 Related

#### Category: SECURITY

## 1. Facial recognition technology: law yet to catch up

### Context:

Deployment of facial recognition system by the government without any law in place.

### What is facial recognition tracking (FRT)?

- Facial recognition is a biometric technology that uses distinctive features on the face to identify and distinguish an individual.
- With machine learning, the technology has become capable of sorting out types of faces.

### Automated facial recognition system (AFRS):

- AFRS works by maintaining a large database with photos and videos of peoples' faces.
- Then, a new image of an unidentified person — often taken from CCTV footage — is compared to the existing database to find a match and identify the person.

### Deployment of facial recognition tracking in India:

- There are currently 16 different facial recognition tracking (FRT) systems in active utilisation by various Central and State governments across India for surveillance, security or authentication of identity.
- Its application has been rapidly increasing: from unlocking the phone to validating the identity, from auto-tagging digital photos to finding missing persons, and from targeted advertising to law enforcement.

### Concerns:

- The Delhi police was one of the first law enforcement agencies in India to start using the technology (in 2018).
  - It, however, declined to answer to a [Right to Information \(RTI\)](#) query on whether it had conducted “privacy impact assessment” prior to deployment of the facial recognition system (FRS).
- While the FRT system has seen rapid deployment by multiple government departments in recent times, there are no specific laws or guidelines to regulate the use of this potentially invasive technology.
- Legal experts say that this poses a huge threat to the fundamental rights to privacy and freedom of speech and expression as it does not satisfy the threshold the Supreme Court set in its landmark privacy judgment in the [‘Justice K.S. Puttaswamy Vs Union of India’ case](#).
  - The Supreme Court in the Puttaswamy judgment ruled that privacy is a fundamental right even in public spaces.
  - If these rights need to be infringed, then the government has to show that such action is sanctioned by law, proportionate to the need for such interference, necessary and in pursuit of a legitimate aim.
- Use of FRT without regulation might lead to an over-policing problem or problems where certain minorities are targeted without any legal backing or any oversight as to what is happening.

- Another problem that may arise is of mass surveillance, wherein the police are using the FRT system during protests.
- Concerns are being raised about AFRS, an ambitious pan-India project under the Home Ministry which will be used by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) and various States' law enforcement departments.
- Identification of people protesting against the government would have a chilling effect on the individual's freedom of speech and expression and right to protest as well as the right to movement.
- The FRS runs the risk of automating discriminatory policing and could exacerbate existing injustices in our criminal justice system.

#### **Questionable accuracy:**

- 100% accuracy in finding matches has not been achieved under this technology.
  - This poses two problems: There can be a 'false positive' wherein somebody is recognised as somebody they are not or 'false negative' wherein the system refuses to recognise the person as themselves.
- If a 'false negative' occurs when the government is using the FRT system to provide its schemes, then this could lead to many people facing exclusion from such government schemes.

#### **Conclusion:**

Without proper legal and regulatory mechanisms in place, such systems of mass surveillance will erode democratic liberties and threaten the rights of lakhs of Indians.

## **Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

### **1. Cabinet gives approval for Akash missile export**

#### **Context:**

The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister, has approved the export of the indigenously developed and manufactured Akash short-range Surface to Air Missile (SAM) system.

- It also approved the high-level committee formed to expedite clearance of such exports.

#### **Details:**

- So far, Indian defence exports included parts and components but the export of big platforms was minimal.
- This decision by the Cabinet would help the country to improve its defence products and make them globally competitive.
- After its induction in the Services, interest was shown in the Akash missile by many friendly countries during international exhibitions/Def Expo/Aero India.

#### **Akash missile:**

- Akash is a mid-range [surface-to-air missile \(SAM\)](#).

- It is a medium-range nuclear-capable supersonic missile. It has been indigenously developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) under the Integrated Guided-Missile Development Programme (IGMDP).
  - The Integrated Guided Missile Development Program started in 1984.
- It is a multi-target, multi-directional, all-weather air-defence missile system consisting of surveillance and tracking radars for defending vulnerable areas against medium-range air targets penetrating from low, medium and high altitudes.
- It has supersonic speeds ranging from Mach 2.8 to 3.5.
- It has the capability to carry 55- kg fragmentation warhead that is triggered by proximity fuse.
- It can engage aerial targets up to a range of approximately 25 kms. It can reach a high altitude of 18 kms and as low as 30 meters.

## Category: ENVIRONMENT

### 1. Boost given for ethanol production

#### Context:

Modification of a scheme for interest subvention for [ethanol](#) production.

#### Details:

- The Union Cabinet has approved a modified scheme for interest subvention for ethanol production, expanding the scheme to include grain-based distilleries and not just molasses-based ones.
- The government would bear interest subvention for five years including a one-year moratorium against the loan availed by project proponents from banks @ 6% per annum or 50% of the rate of interest charged by banks whichever is lower.

#### Significance:

- The decision would encourage ethanol production from grains like barley, maize, corn and rice.
- The scheme would boost production and distillation capacity to 1,000 crore litres and help in meeting the goal of 20% ethanol blending with petrol by 2030.

Read more on Ethanol and E 20 fuel covered in [19<sup>th</sup> December 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

Also read: [Ethanol Blended Petrol Programme \(EBP Programme\)](#)

## Category: ECONOMY

### 1. CCEA nod for 3 infra projects

#### Context:

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) approved three infrastructure proposals estimated at ₹7,725 crore.

#### Details:

- The proposals are for setting up greenfield industrial cities with connectivity to major transportation corridors such as the eastern and western dedicated freight corridors, expressways and national highways.
- The three projects, proposed by the Department of Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, include:
  - Construction of various trunk infrastructure components for the Krishnapatnam Industrial Area in Andhra Pradesh.
  - The Tumakuru Industrial Area in Karnataka.
  - A multi-modal logistics hub (MMLH) and multi-modal transport hub (MMTH) at Greater Noida in Uttar Pradesh. It will be developed as a world-class facility that will provide efficient storage/transitioning of goods to/from dedicated freight corridors, and offer a one-stop destination to freight companies and customers.

**Significance:**

- The objective of the Industrial Corridor Programme is the creation of greenfield industrial cities with sustainable, 'plug n play', ICT enabled utilities to facilitate manufacturing investments into the country.
- Industrial Corridor programme was launched with the aim of development of futuristic industrial cities and the creation of employment opportunities.
- These projects would generate ample employment opportunities through industrialisation.

## **D. GS 4 Related**

*Nothing here for today!!!*

## **E. Editorials**

### **Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

#### **1. Himalayan manoeuvres**

**Context:**

Political crisis in Nepal.

**Background:**

- The Nepal Prime Minister K.P. Oli recommended to dissolve the Parliament when the house had two more years to serve.
- This has paved the way for a constitutional crisis in the country.

**This topic has been covered in the Editorials segment of 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis.**

**Details:**

- A senior delegation of the Communist Party of China was sent to Kathmandu within days of Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli's controversial decision to dissolve Parliament and call for elections.
- Through this, Beijing has sent a worrying message that it is prepared to intervene in Nepal's politics.
- In contrast, India has chosen to be more pragmatic and restrained.
- India is not playing its traditional leading role in Nepal.
- Both Mr. Oli, who has reached out to India after months of the map controversy, and his rival Mr. Dahal, who has been a closer Indian ally during this period, are engaging the government.
- The positive situation gives India a little more space in which to consider its moves, and how to avoid instability in its neighbour's polity.

### **Conclusion:**

Avoiding political crisis/instability is crucial to India-Nepal relations and in the long term, to their closely inter-linked prosperity.

## **Category: ECONOMY**

### **1. Separating the wheat from the agri-policy chaff**

The article talks about the exchequer-farm subsidies issue and the spending on farm subsidies.

### **Issue:**

- In the on-going debates around the three agricultural laws and the farmers' demand for the continuation of minimum support prices (MSP), questions have often been raised whether the government should be using the taxpayers' money to provide subsidies to the farming community in this country.
- The other two questions that need to be answered are:
  1. Why have successive governments used the exchequer to provide farm subsidies?
  2. How large is India's spending on farm subsidies as compared to those of other countries having substantial interests in agriculture?

### **Adverse terms of trade:**

- India's agriculture has been living beyond its means.
  - In 1950-51, agriculture's share in the country's GDP was 45%, the share of the workforce dependent on the sector was close to 70%.
  - Seven decades later, agriculture's share in GDP is below 16%, but almost 50% of the country's workforce depends on this sector.
- Agriculture has been facing adverse terms of trade over extended periods since the 1980s.
- Even during the phases when the terms of trade have moved in its favour, there was no distinct upward trend.
- Farming communities have almost consistently faced adverse terms of trade vis-à-vis non-farmers.
- Growing inefficiencies due to lack of meaningful investment in agriculture triggered erosion of farm incomes.

- The share of this sector in the total investment undertaken in the country consistently fell from about 18% in the 1950s to just above 11% in the 1980s. In the subsequent decades, the situation has got far worse with agriculture's share not even reaching double digits.

#### **Agricultural yields:**

- A comparison of the yields of the major crops in India with those of other countries confirms the gloomy state of agriculture in the country.
- If one ranks countries in terms of their yields in wheat and rice — India's two major crops — the country's ranks were 45 and 59 respectively, in 2019.
  - This ranking would go down sharply if the areas recording high yields, such as Punjab and Haryana, are excluded.
- For farmers in most regions of the country, it is an uphill battle for survival amid low yields.

#### **Marketing system:**

- The market has always been the farmers' biggest rival, making it impossible for them to realise remunerative prices for their produce.
- The existing marketing system dominated by the Agricultural Produce Market Committees has long been proved to be against the interests of the small farmers.
- The government has now, decided to introduce even larger middlemen, which would further aggravate misery for the farming communities.

#### **Agricultural Policies:**

- The lack of a coherent policy for agriculture is seen as the most remarkable failures of the governments in post-Independence India.
- The magnitude of this failure can be better understood if one considers the fact that the United States, with less than 2% of its workforce engaged in agriculture, has been enacting farm legislations every four years since 1933.
- Similarly, members of the European Common Market adopted their Common Agricultural Policy in 1962, only a few years after establishing the institution.
- These policies comprehensively address the needs of the farm sector through proactive support from the respective governments.

#### **Issue of farm subsidies:**

- Distribution of subsidies without a proper policy framework has distorted the structure of production and, consequently, undesirable outcomes in terms of excessive food stockpiling.
- Instead of engaging with the farming communities for putting in place a comprehensive set of policies, successive governments have chosen to dole out subsidies in order to ensure domestic food security and protect rural livelihoods.
- The government dole out is a price that India is paying for the failure of the policymakers to comprehensively address the problems of the farm sector.



- The two major providers of farm subsidies, namely, the U.S. and the members of the European Union (EU) gave much larger magnitudes of support than India did.
  - However, absolute numbers do not provide a good yardstick to compare the farm subsidies.
  - The ratios of subsidies to agricultural value addition must be considered.
  - For 2017, India's farm subsidies were 12.4% of agricultural value addition, while for the U.S. and the EU, the figures were 90.8% and 45.3%, respectively.

### **Economically weak farmers:**

- India has notified the World Trade Organization (WTO) that 99.43% of its farmers are low income or resource-poor.
- According to the agricultural census conducted in 2015-16, these are the farmers whose holdings are 10 hectares or less.
- Thus, according to the Government of India, almost the entire farm sector comprises economically weak farmers.

### **Way forward:**

- There is a need to step up investment in agriculture, which will not only ensure more efficient use of farm resources but also is a crucial step towards improving farm incomes.
- A comprehensive agricultural policy must also provide for the setting up of farmer-friendly institutions in order to improve the economic viability of the sector.
- India must strive to increase the ratios of subsidies granted to the agricultural value addition.
- Complex problems facing Indian agriculture need an agricultural policy that addresses the challenges facing this sector in a comprehensive manner.

## **Category: POLITY**

### **1. Give adequate time for a probe**

#### **Context:**

Taking a cue from the Andhra Pradesh's Disha Bill of 2019, the Maharashtra government has announced that it would enact a law to deal sternly with the cases of sexual assault on women.

#### **Details:**

- The proposed Maharashtra Shakti Act of 2020 will have stern punishment for offences of sexual assault and a provision to complete the investigation within 15 days.

#### **Concern:**

- Concerns have been raised that narrow timelines for investigation of sensitive cases create scope for procedural loopholes.

#### **Time for investigation:**

- In the 'Nirbhaya' case, the police filed a charge sheet on the 18th day of its reporting. No effort was spared to nab the criminals and the case was rigorously supervised.
- In the recent Hathras case, the police took more than 90 days to file a charge sheet.
- The [Criminal Procedure Code \(CrPC\)](#) provides that:
  - Investigation relating to offences punishable with imprisonment up to 10 years must be completed within 60 days.
  - For offences with higher punishment (including rape), the investigation must be completed within 90 days of detaining the accused, else he or she shall be released on bail.
- To speed up the process, the CrPC was amended in 2018 and the period of investigation was reduced from 90 to 60 days for all cases of rape.
- Though every investigation has to be completed without unnecessary delay, there is no upper limit to complete investigation when the offenders are at large. Each investigation is guided by its own set of facts and circumstances.

#### **Factors to be considered:**

- Generally, the time of investigation depends on the severity of the crime, the number of accused persons and agencies involved.
- It includes:
  - Examination of the scene of crime by the investigating officer (IO) and forensic expert;
  - Recording the statement of the victim (by the IO and the judicial magistrate) and witnesses;
  - Medical examination of the victim (at a place where a female doctor is available) and accused persons;
  - Collecting documents relating to age from parents, local bodies and school (in case of child victim and delinquents);
  - DNA findings of the forensic science lab (FSL); test identification parade of accused persons (if initially not named);
  - Seizing weapons of offence;
  - The arrest of accused persons; etc.
- In many cases of rape, the victim remains under trauma for some time and is not able to narrate the incident in detail.
- The speed and quality of investigation also depend on whether a police station has separate units of investigation and law and order (a long-pending police reform awaiting compliance of the apex court's directives).
- It also depends on the number of available IOs and women police officers, and the size and growth of the FSL and its DNA unit.

#### **Conclusion:**

- Investigation of sensitive offences should be done expeditiously.
- However, setting narrow timelines for investigation creates scope for procedural loopholes which may be exploited during trial.

- Therefore, instead of fixing unrealistic timelines, the police should be given additional resources so that they can deliver efficiently.

## F. Prelims Facts

### 1. Dibru-Saikhowa National Park

- Dibru-Saikhowa is a National Park as well as a Biosphere Reserve situated on the south bank of the river Brahmaputra in Assam.
- The national park is located in Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts of Assam.
- It is an identified Important Bird Area (IBA) notified by the Bombay Natural History Society.
- The park is bounded by the Brahmaputra and Lohit rivers in the north and Dibru river in the south.

## G. Tidbits

*Nothing here for today!!!*

## H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements with respect to Akash Missile:

1. Akash is a medium-range mobile surface-to-surface missile.
2. It has been indigenously developed by DRDO under Integrated Guided-Missile Development Programme.

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

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

**CHECK ANSWERS:-**

**Answer: b**

**Explanation:**

- Akash is a mid-range surface-to-air missile (SAM).
- It is a medium-range nuclear-capable supersonic missile. It has been indigenously developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) under the Integrated Guided-Missile Development Programme (IGMDP).
  - The Integrated Guided Missile Development Program started in 1984.

- It is a multi-target, multi-directional, all-weather air-defence missile system consisting of surveillance and tracking radars for defending vulnerable areas against medium-range air targets penetrating from low, medium and high altitudes.

**Q2. Consider the following statements with respect to SAHAYAK-NG:**

1. It is India's first indigenously designed and developed Air Droppable Container.
2. It has the capacity to carry a payload of up to 500 kg and can be dropped from a heavy aircraft.
3. It is a GPS aided air dropped container.

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

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

**CHECK ANSWERS:-**

**Answer: c**

**Explanation:**

- SAHAYAK-NG is India's first indigenously designed and developed Air Droppable Container.
- It is an advanced version of SAHAYAK Mk I. It is a GPS aided air dropped container with the capacity to carry a payload of up to 50 kg and can be dropped from a heavy aircraft.
- The successful maiden test was conducted by the DRDO along with the Indian Navy.
- The container was dropped from IL 38SD aircraft (of the Indian Navy) off the coast of Goa during the test flight.
- The trial was conducted by the Navy to enhance its operational logistics capabilities and provide critical engineering stores to ships which are deployed more than 2000 km from the coast.
- It reduces the requirement of ships to come close to the coast to collect spares and stores.

**Q3. Consider the following statements Dibru-Saikhowa:**

1. Dibru-Saikhowa is a National Park as well as a Biosphere Reserve situated on the south bank of the river Brahmaputra.
2. It is an identified Important Bird Area (IBA) notified by the Bombay Natural History Society.
3. The park is bound by the Lohit River in the south and Dibru river in the north.

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

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 1 and 3 only

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

**CHECK ANSWERS:-**

**Answer: a**

**Explanation:**

- Dibru-Saikhowa is a National Park as well as a Biosphere Reserve situated on the south bank of the river Brahmaputra in Assam.
- The national park is located in Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts of Assam.
- It is an identified Important Bird Area (IBA) notified by the Bombay Natural History Society.
- The park is bounded by the Brahmaputra and Lohit Rivers in the north and Dibru river in the south.

**Q4. Consider the following statements with respect to Kala-azar:**

1. Kala-azar is endemic to the Indian subcontinent.
2. It is also known as Visceral leishmaniasis (VL).
3. It is a parasitic disease.

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

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

**CHECK ANSWERS:-**

**Answer: d**

**Explanation:**

- Kala-azar is endemic to the Indian subcontinent in four countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal).
- It is also known as Visceral leishmaniasis (VL) and black fever.
- It is a parasitic disease caused by protozoan parasites of the Leishmania genus.

## I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. What are the implications of the rapid deployment of facial recognition system by the government without any law in place, on the fundamental rights? Examine. (GS 3 Security) (15 Marks, 250 Words).
2. Is India's spending on farm subsidies from the exchequer justified? Substantiate your answer by drawing a comparison with those of other countries having substantial interests in agriculture. (GS 3 Agriculture) (15 Marks, 250 Words).

