

UPSC Daily Current Affairs 21 May 2021

1. A-76: World's largest iceberg breaks off from Antarctica

(Topic- GS Paper I – Geography, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, A-76- a huge ice block has broken off from western Antarctica into the Weddell Sea, becoming the largest iceberg in the world.
- It is the latest in a series of large ice blocks to dislodge in a region acutely vulnerable to climate change; although scientists said in this case it appeared to be part of a natural polar cycle.

About A-76



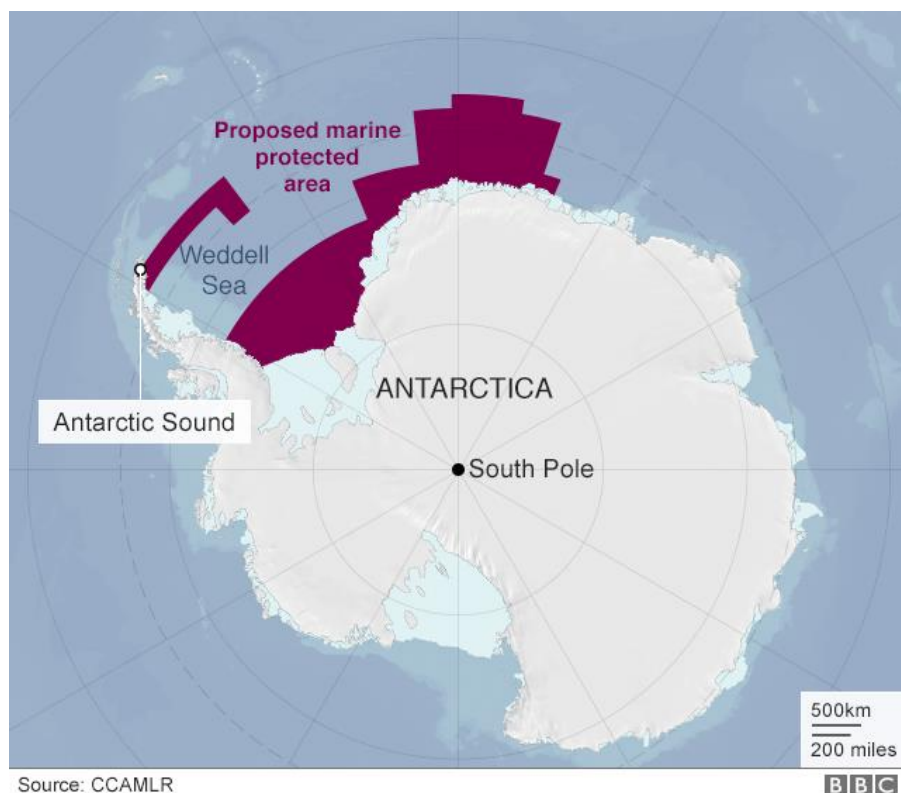
- A-76 was originally spotted by the British Antarctic Survey and the calving - the term used when an iceberg breaks off - was confirmed using images from the Copernicus satellite.
- It is slightly larger than the Spanish island of Majorca.
- The iceberg, measuring around 170 km long and 25 km wide, with an area of 4,320 sq km is now floating in the Weddell Sea.
- It joins previous world's largest title holder A-23A - approximately 3,880 sq. km. in size - which has remained in the same area since 1986.

About Weddell Sea

- The Weddell Sea is part of the Southern Ocean and contains the Weddell Gyre.

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- Its land boundaries are defined by the bay formed from the coasts of Coats Land and the Antarctic Peninsula.
- The easternmost point is Cape Norvegia at Princess Martha Coast, Queen Maud Land.



Note:

- Icebergs form when hunks of ice break off from ice shelves or glaciers and begin to float in open water.

2. Center circumventing states

(Topic- GS Paper II –Governance, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, Centre has direct interactions through the bypassing the elected leadership while dealing with States under the Articles 256 and 257.

More on the news

- Two recent developments have raised concern that the Centre wants to give instructions to officials functioning under elected State regimes.
 - a. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has held two virtual meetings with district magistrates and State officials to review the COVID-19 situation.

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- b. Union Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal held a virtual meeting to discuss the National Education Policy, and related matters such as the conduct of Class XII examinations with State Secretaries in charge of education.
- The Tamil Nadu Minister for School Education, Anbil Mahesh Poyyamozi, took the right stand by not deputing any official to represent the State in Mr. Pokhriyal's virtual interaction.
- The idea was not to boycott the meeting, but to say the Minister ought to have been included in a discussion on the NEP.

Not a new Precedent

- The Prime Minister addressing district magistrates, or collectors, does have a precedent.
- Rajiv Gandhi addressed the heads of the district administration in Uttar Pradesh, when it was under Congress rule, on the issue of Panchayati Raj.

Administrative Relations

- The administrative jurisdiction of the union and the state Governments extends to the subjects in the union list and state list respectively, which clearly establishes the superiority of the Union Government in the administrative sphere as well.
- In addition the Constitution contains a number of provisions which accord a position of superiority to the Union Government.
- **Article 256** lays down that the executive power of every state shall be so exercised as to ensure compliance with the laws made by Parliament and any existing laws which apply in that State, and the executive power of the Union shall extend to the giving of such directions to a state as may appear to the Government of India to be necessary for that purpose.
- **Similarly, Article 257** of the Constitution provides that the executive power of every state shall be so exercised as not to impede or prejudice the exercise of the executive power of the Union, and the executive power of the Union shall extend to giving of such directions to a state as may appear to the Government of India to be necessary for that purpose.
- In short, the Union Government can issue directions to the state Government even with regard to the subjects enumerated in the state list.
- The Union Government can also give directions to the state with regard to construction and maintenance of the means of communication declared to be of national or military importance.
- It can also ask the state Governments to construct and maintain means of communication as part of its functions with respect to naval, military and air force works.

Other Constitutional Provision of Centre-State Administrative Relations

- Article 257A. Assistance to States by deployment of armed forces or other forces of the Union (Repealed)
- Article 258. Power of the Union to confer powers, etc., on states in certain cases
- Article 258A. Power of the states to entrust functions to the union

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- Article 259. Armed Forces in States in Part B of the First Schedule (Repealed)
- Article 260. Jurisdiction of the Union in relation to territories outside India
- Article 261. Public acts, records and judicial proceedings.

3. Global Entry Programme

(Topic- GS Paper II –International Relation, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news ?

- Recently on the request of the U.S. authorities, Indian security agencies in the past two years checked the antecedents of more than 9,000 Indians who wanted to enroll for the paid Global Entry Program.
- The **Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS)**, a secure application that links over 97% police stations in the country is being used for antecedent verification for Global Entry.

About Global Entry Programme

- The Global Entry is a facility run by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), an agency that works under the Department of Homeland Security that fast tracks movement of pre-approved, low-risk travellers upon arrival after a rigorous background check through designated kiosks.
- The Program allows members to use expedited lanes at the U.S. airports and few other international airports.
- Applicants are charged \$100 and a personal interview before they are enrolled.
- Their biometrics is also collected.

Who are not eligible for Global Entry Programme?

- The CBP does not process the application if a person has been “convicted of any criminal offence or have pending criminal charges, including outstanding warrants; have been found in violation of any customs, immigration or agriculture regulations or laws in any country.”

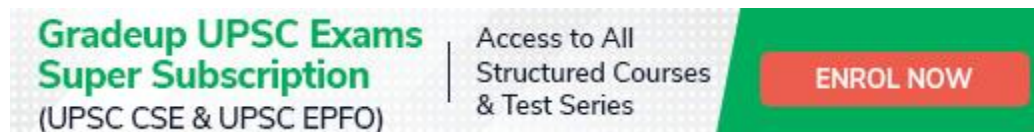
Members

- The other countries along with India that are part of this programme are Argentina, Australia, Canada, Colombia, Germany, Mexico, New Zealand, Panama, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Switzerland, Taiwan and the United Kingdom.

Indian and Global Entry Programme

- India became a member of Global Entry in 2017.

Recent Development



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- Recently in response to a Right to Information Act (RTI) request filed by The Hindu on the number of applicants successfully verified by the NCRB for the programme, the agency denied information under Section 8 (exemption from disclosure of information) of the Act.
- It said, “background verification of Indian citizens who have applied for U.S CBP’s Global Entry has been undertaken by Government of India on behalf of U.S government’s CBP Global Entry Program.
- This is not a public service open to all the Indian citizens.
- Hence, there is no obligation on the part of Government of India to furnish any information pertaining to the processing of this service to the GEP applicants or the general public.

Benefits of Global Entry Programme

- The biggest advantage of getting enrolled in this programme is that you will no longer have to stand in the long queues for immigration.
- The approved applicants can make their way ahead through automatic kiosks instead of standing in the immigration lines.

Related Information

About Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems

- It is a centrally funded scheme.
- It has been developed by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) through a Mission Mode Project under the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) of the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- It was approved in 2009.

4. Sri Lanka Parliament passes Bill on China-backed Port City

(Topic- GS Paper II –International Relation, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, the Sri Lankan Parliament passed a controversial Bill on laws governing the China-backed Colombo Port City.

Recent Issue

- The ruling Rajapaksa administration tabled a Bill, titled **Colombo Port City Economic Commission**, in Parliament last week, outlining proposed laws for the \$1.4 billion-Port City being built on reclaimed land at Colombo’s seafront.

Constitutional validity

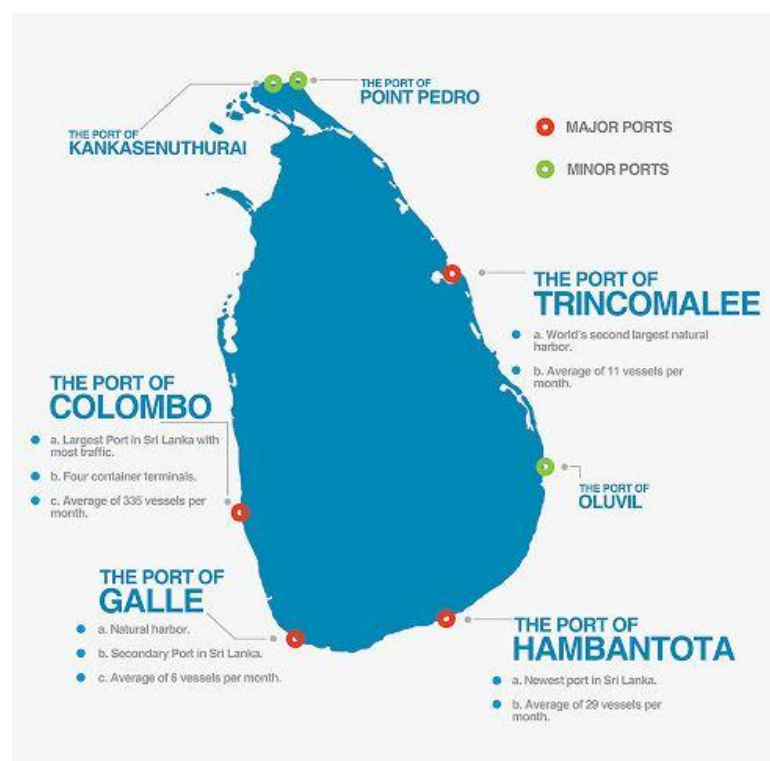
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- Sri Lanka's Opposition parties Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB or United People's Front), Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), the United National Party (UNP), Colombo-based NGO Centre for Policy Alternatives, and labour organisations have challenged the constitutional validity of the proposed legislation for the Port City, touted by the government as an investment hub for foreign capital.

Highlights of the bill

- The clauses prohibit investment in the Port City in Sri Lankan rupees, which will keep out Sri Lankan.
- It will be like a forbidden city within Colombo.
- The government claims it stands for 'one country, one law', but the Bill allows for running the Port City like a foreign country with special laws."

About Port City



- The Port City was launched by President Xi Jinping during his state visit to the island nation in September 2014, during former President Mahinda Rajapaksa's second term in office, months before his poll defeat.
- The successor government, led by President Maithripala Sirisena and PM Ranil Wickremesinghe, vowed to develop the site into an "Indian Ocean financial hub".

4. CBID Program on rehabilitation of Divyangjan

(Topic- GS Paper II –Social Justice, Source- DD News)

Why in the news?

- Union Minister of Social Justice & Empowerment has recently launched a 6- month Community Based Inclusive Development (CBID) Program on rehabilitation of Divyangjan.

About Community Based Inclusive Development (CBID) Program

- This program will be first of its kind which will create trained manpower in identifying risk cases, apprising the parents/guardians about the nearest early intervention centres, and guiding them for availing Government benefits for Divyangjan.
- The program aims to create a pool of grass-root rehabilitation workers at community level who can work alongside ASHA and Anganwadi workers to handle cross disability issues and facilitate inclusion of persons with disabilities in the society.
- The program has been designed to provide competency based knowledge and skills among these workers to enhance their ability for successfully discharging their duties.
- These workers will be called ‘Divyang Mitra’ i.e., friends of persons with disabilities.

Course Designed by

- This CBID course has been co-designed by Rehabilitation Council of India and University of Melbourne as a joint initiative under the MoU signed between the Government of Australia and the Government of India on 22nd November, 2018 for cooperation in disability sector.
- Content and curriculum of the course has been developed by an Expert Committee comprising experts drawn from India and Australia.
- The National Board of Examination in Rehabilitation under the Rehabilitation Council of India will conduct examinations and award certificates to pass-out candidates.

5. Covid 19 risk for children

(Topic- GS Paper III –Science and Technology, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently in a study it has been found that this year, more and more children have started getting affected by the coronavirus infection, as part of the second wave.

Affected with the B.1.1.7 variant

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- The B.1.1.7 variant first detected in the United Kingdom could be causing more infections in children.
- Lab studies suggest the B.1.1.7 variant has a mutation that makes it easier for the virus to latch onto our cells and cause an infection — which could be why more kids seem to be getting the disease.
- Children have been largely spared during the pandemic, mainly because the coronavirus has a harder time binding to receptors in their cells compared to those of adults.
- Concern is growing that kids can contract the B.1.1.7 variant more easily, but there's no evidence to suggest the variant causes more severe symptoms in kids.
- Quickly vaccinating adults who are around and live with kids is crucial.

6. Haiyang-2D (HY-2D) satellite

(Topic- GS Paper III –Science and Technology, Source- Business Standard)

Why in the news?

- China has recently successfully launched a **new ocean observation satellite Haiyang-2D**.
- The new ocean-monitoring satellite is a part of its effort to build an all-weather and round-the-clock dynamic ocean environment monitoring system which would provide early warning on marine disasters.

About Haiyang-2D (HY-2D) satellite



- The HY-2D was developed by the China Academy of Space Technology, and the carrier rocket by the Shanghai Academy of Spaceflight Technology.

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- The satellite was launched by a Long March-4B rocket from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre in northwest China, the state media reported.
- The HY-2D will form a constellation with the HY-2B and HY-2C satellites to build an all-weather and round-the-clock dynamic ocean environment monitoring system of high frequency and medium and large scale.

Benefits

- The constellation will support the country's early warning and prediction of marine disasters, sustainable development and utilisation of ocean resources, effective response to global climate change as well as ocean research.

Note:

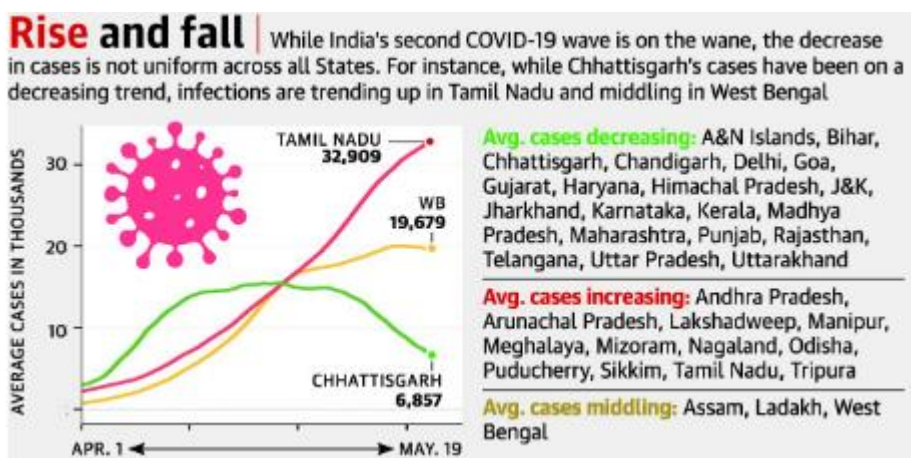
- China's space programme made significant advancements recently when it landed a spacecraft on Mars, becoming the second country after the United States to have a rover on the red planet.

7. Aerosols

(Topic- GS Paper III –Health, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news ?

- According to the government advisory on stopping the spread of COVID-19, the Aerosols can be carried in the air for up to 10 m and improving the ventilation of indoor spaces will reduce the spread of COVID-19 transmission.



Key highlights of the Government Advisory

- Ventilation can decrease the risk of transmission from one infected person to the other.

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- Just as smells can be diluted from the air through opening windows and doors and using exhaust systems, ventilating spaces with improved directional air flow decreases the accumulated viral load in the air, reducing the risk of transmission.
- Ventilation is a community defence that protects all of us at home or at work.
- It recommended adding outdoor air in offices, homes and public spaces. Droplets and aerosols were the key transmission modes of the virus.
- While droplets **fell up to 2 m from an infected person, aerosols could travel up to 10 m.**
- Ventilation in hutments could be improved by adding “jaali or other simple air outlets”, apart from installing exhaust fans.
- **For workplaces, it** recommended keeping doors and windows open while air-conditioners were on.
- **For rural or semi-urban areas,** every person entering the area should undergo a Rapid Antigen Test before entry for which ASHA and Anganwadi workers should be trained and protected.
- These workers should be given N95 masks even if they are vaccinated.
- Hospitals should ensure that vaccinations were carried out in well-ventilated areas and public transport like buses should keep windows open and use exhaust fans.

About Aerosol

- An aerosol is a suspension of fine solid particles or liquid droplets in air or another gas. Aerosols can be natural or anthropogenic.
- Examples of natural aerosols are fog or mist, dust, forest exudates and geyser steam.

8. FinMin grants ‘infrastructure’ status for convention centres

(Topic- GS Paper III –Economics, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- The Finance Ministry has recently granted ‘Infrastructure’ status for exhibition and convention centres, a move that is expected to ease bank financing for such projects.

More on the news

- ‘Exhibition-cum-Convention Centre is included in the Harmonised Master List of Infrastructure sub-sectors by insertion of a new item in the **category of Social and Commercial Infrastructure,**.
- However, the benefits available as ‘infrastructure’ projects would only be available for projects with a minimum built-up floor area of 1, 00,000 square metres of exclusive exhibition space or convention space or both combined.
- This includes primary facilities such as exhibition centres, convention halls, auditoriums, plenary halls, business centres, meeting halls etc.

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- As of now, the major projects under way in the sector are backed by the government – the International Exhibition-cum-Convention Centres at Dwarka as well as Pragati Maidan in the capital.

Benefits

- The infrastructure tag no longer involves significant tax breaks but would help such projects get easier financing from banks.
- Becoming a MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) destination can generate significant revenue with several global companies active in India but it will take time to become a preferred destination.
- It will enable more such projects to come up across India's tourist destinations, though it may make sense to review the prescribed floor area so we can have convention centres of different sizes for varying needs.

Related Information

About the Harmonized Master List

- The Harmonized Master list approved by the cabinet committee on infrastructure has five main sectors and 29 infra subsectors.
- The five sectors include transport, energy, water sanitation, communication and social and commercial infrastructure.
- The infra tag allows certain benefits including access to easier borrowings overseas, the ability to raise funds through tax-free bonds, tax concessions, and access to dedicated lenders such as IIFCL, and the debt funds.