

UPSC Daily Current Affairs 4 Jun 2021

1. NITI Aayog's 2020 SDG Index

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

Why in the news?

- NITI Aayog has recently released third edition of Sustainable Development Index for 2020-2021, evaluating progress of states and Union Territories with respect to social, economic and environmental parameters.

About the NITI Aayog Sustainable Development Index

- It has been first launched in December 2018.
- The index has become the primary tool for monitoring progress on the SDGs in the country and has simultaneously fostered competition among the states and union territories by ranking them on the global goals.
- The SDG India Index has been developed in collaboration with the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), the United Nations, and the Global Green Growth Institute.
- The index documents the progress made by India's States and Union Territories towards achieving the 2030 SDG targets.
- This year the index shows improvement on the inequality SDGs.

Methodology Followed

- A composite score for SDG Index (2020) was computed in the range of 0–100 for each State/UT based on its aggregate performance across 16 SDGs.
- The higher the score of a State/UT, the closer it is towards achieving the 2030 national targets.
- States /UTs are classified based on the SDG India Index Score as follows:

Aspirant: 0–49

Performer: 50–64

Front Runner: 65–99

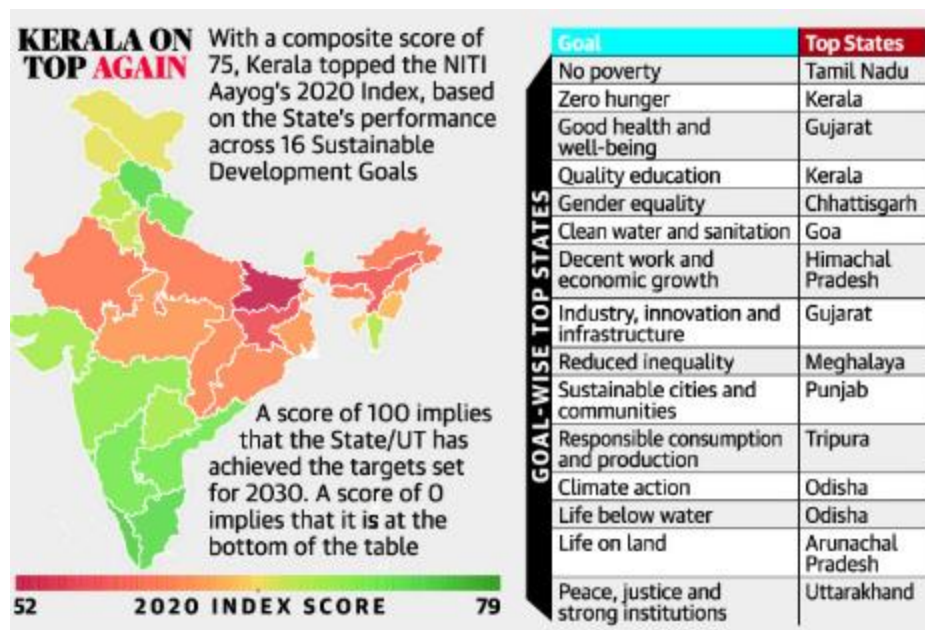
Achiever: 100

Key highlights

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- The country's overall SDG score improved by 6 points — from 60 in 2019 to 66 in 2020-21.
- This positive stride towards achieving the targets is largely driven by exemplary country-wide performance in clean water and sanitation, and affordable and clean energy.

Top Performing States

- Kerala retained its position at the top of the rankings in the third edition of the index, with a score of 75, followed by Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh, both scoring 72.

Worst Performing States

- Bihar, Jharkhand and Assam were the worst performing States.
- However, all the States showed some improvement from last year's scores, with Mizoram and Haryana seeing the biggest gains.

Union territories performance

- Chandigarh maintained its top spot among the Union territories (UTs) with a score of 79, followed by Delhi (68).

Thrust on social equality

- In 2019, the indicators for inequality included the growth rates for household expenditure per capita among the bottom 40% of rural and urban populations, as well as the **Gini coefficient — a measure of the distribution of income — in rural and urban India.**
- The 2018 indicators included the Palma ratio, another metric for income inequality.
- But in 2020 edition of the index, such economic measures have been omitted from the indicators used for this SDG.
- Instead, it gives greater weightage to social equality indicators, such as the percentage of women and Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe representatives in State Legislatures and the panchayati raj institutions and the levels of crime against the SC/ST communities.

- The only economic indicator this year is the percentage of population in the lowest two wealth quintiles.

Front-runners category

- In 2019, 10 states/UTs belonged to the category of front-runners (score in the range 65-99, both inclusive), 12 more states/UTs find themselves in this category in 2020-21.
- Uttarakhand, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Mizoram, Punjab, Haryana, Tripura, Delhi, Lakshadweep, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh graduated to the category of front-runners.

Aspirant

- No state/UT was in the category of aspirants (with index score less than 50).

Health Sector Goal

- Under the health sector goals, Gujarat and Delhi were the top performers among the states and the UTs, respectively.

Education Goal

- Under the goal of quality education, Kerala and Chandigarh were the top performers among the states and UTs, respectively.

Goal on no Poverty

- Under the goal of no poverty, Tamil Nadu and Delhi were the best performers among the states and UTs, respectively.

Goal of reduced inequalities

- Under the goal of reduced inequalities, Meghalaya and Chandigarh (Achiever, with Index score of 100) emerged as the best performers among the states and UTs.

2. Govt sets up expert panel to fix minimum pay, national floor wage

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

Why in the news?

- The Labour and Employment Ministry has recently constituted an expert group under the **Ajit Mishra** to provide technical inputs and recommendations on fixation of minimum wages and national floor for minimum wages.

Second Expert Committee

- This is the second expert committee on minimum wages formed by the government within the last two years.

- The earlier panel, headed by Anoop Satpathy, Fellow, VV Giri National Labour Institute, was set up by the ministry on January 17, 2018, to undertake an evidence-based analysis to determine methodology for fixing national minimum wage.
- The recommendations, which weren't accepted by the Centre, included setting the national floor wages at Rs 375 per day (Rs 9,750 per month) as per July 2018 prices.

About Expert Group on fixation of minimum wages

- **It is chaired by Ajit Mishra who is Director of Institute of Economic Growth.**
- The expert group has been set for a period of three years.

Task of expert group

- To arrive at the wage rates, the group will look into international best practices on the wages and evolve a scientific criteria and methodology for fixation of wages.

What does Code on Wages specify?

- Under the Code on Wages, which is yet to be enforced, a National Floor Level Minimum Wage will be set by the Centre to be revised every five years, while states will fix minimum wages for their regions, which cannot be lower than the floor wage.
- The current floor wage, which was fixed in 2017, is at Rs 176 a day, but some states have minimum wages lower than it.

3. Israel : Benjamin Netanyahu to be removed

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, **Israeli opposition leader Yair Lapid** has informed the country's president that he can form a coalition government, a move that would bring an end to **Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's 12 years in power.**

More on the news

- Lapid, leader of the Yesh Atid party, was tasked with forming a government by President Reuven Rivlin after Netanyahu again failed to put together his own coalition following Israel's fourth election in less than two years.
- This government will work for all the citizens of Israel, those that voted for it and those that didn't. It will do everything to unite Israeli society," he said shortly before a midnight deadline (21:00 GMT).
- Under the coalition agreement, Bennett and Lapid would rotate the role of prime minister, with Bennett taking up the post for the first two years and Lapid the final two.
- The agreement still needs to be voted on in the Knesset, Israel's parliament, where it requires majority support before the government can be sworn in.
- The vote is expected to be held within seven to 12 days.

Concern

- After losing the job of prime minister, he will not be able to push through changes to basic laws that could give him immunity and will lose control over certain justice ministry nominations.
- Netanyahu's Likud won the most seats in the March 23 election but he was unable to form a majority with his natural allies.
- Crucially, Bennett's far-right party – allied with Netanyahu – refused to join forces with the United Arab List, a party that emerged as a kingmaker of sorts.

4. WhatsApp is indulging in anti-user practices: govt.

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

Why in the news?

- The Centre has informed the Delhi High Court that WhatsApp, the instant messaging app, was indulging in “anti-users practices” by obtaining “trick consent” from the users for its updated privacy policy.

More on the news



- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, in an affidavit filed before the court, stated that WhatsApp was “bombarding” million of its existing users who have not accepted the updated 2021 privacy policy, with notifications on a daily basis.
- The Ministry has urged the court to give a direction to WhatsApp to “desist from any action of ‘pushing notifications’ to existing users related to updated 2021 privacy policy”.
- WhatsApp had earlier said its new privacy policy came into effect from May 15, but also clarified that it would not start deleting accounts of those users who had not accepted it and would try to encourage them to get on board.
- Earlier, the Ministry had also stated that that new privacy policy was not in tune with the IT (Intermediary Guidelines) Rules, 2011.

Issues Related to New Whatsapp Policy

Whatsapp as the Owner of Data

- The information that WhatsApp automatically collects and will be sharing with Facebook includes the mobile phone number, user activity, and other basic information of the WhatsApp account.
- WhatsApp's recent privacy policy to share commercial user data with Facebook establishes that it is the owner of the data rather than an intermediary.
- The policy essentially takes away the choice users had until now to not share their data with other Facebook-owned and third-party apps.

Against the Recommendations of the Srikrishna Committee Report

- The new Whatsapp policy contradicts the recommendations of the Srikrishna Committee report, which forms the basis of the **Data Protection Bill 2019**.

5. KSRTC vs KSRTC: Kerala Wins Trademark Battle for Public Transport

(Topic- GS Paper II –Governance, Source- Economics Times)

Why in the news?

- Recently, after the long drawn-out battle over intellectual property rights, the Kerala Road Transport Corporation has got the legal right to its trademarks -- acronym KSRTC, the logo of two elephants and the name Anavandi -- associated with the state-run transport corporation.

More on the news

- The Controller General of Patents Design and Trade Marks under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry approved Kerala's claim.
- The registration will make Kerala RTC the sole custodian of the trademarks.
- All buses of the corporation will display KSRTC with the mark to indicate the registration (R).

What were the issues?

- The tussle over 'KSRTC' began when Karnataka RTC made a move for trademark registration in 2014.
- A legal notice from Karnataka RTC woke Kerala up and made it to speed up proceedings to get custody of the trademark properties.
- The Kerala RTC and Karnataka State Transport Corporation were fighting over the custody of the acronym 'KSRTC'.
- Even now, buses and websites of both RTCs use KSRTC.
- The decision is likely to end the confusion among passengers to know which one is the real KSRTC.

Background

- Kerala State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) is one of the oldest operated and managed public transport utilities in the country.

- Travancore State Transport Department (TSTD) was reestablished as Kerala State Road Transport Corporation on April 1, 1965.
- Karnataka RTC also has a similar legacy, but it started as Mysore Government Road Transport Department and then became Karnataka Transport Corporation in 1973.

6. IFFCO launches world's first nano liquid urea

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

Why in the news?

- The Indian Farmers Fertilizer Cooperative Limited (IFFCO) has launched the Nano Urea Liquid.

About Nano Urea Liquid



- It is a nutrient to provide nitrogen to plants as an alternative to the conventional urea.
- It has been developed to replace conventional urea and it can curtail the requirement of the same by at least 50%.
- It contains 40,000 ppm of nitrogen in a 500 ml bottle which is equivalent to the impact of nitrogen nutrient provided by one bag of conventional urea.

Effectiveness

- The conventional urea is effective 30-40 per cent in delivering nitrogen to plants, while the effectiveness of the Nano Urea Liquid is over 80 per cent.

Significance

- India is dependent on imports to meet its urea requirements.
- During 2019-20, the production of urea was only 244.55 LMT as against the consumption volume of 336 lakh metric tonnes leaving a gap of over 91 LMT.

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- The country imported 91.99 LMT urea fertiliser in 2019-20 to fill this gap.

7. PanBio COVID-19 Antigen Test Device

(Topic- GS Paper III –Science and technology, Source- AIR)

Why in the news ?

- The Indian Council of Medical Research has recently approved the second home-based Rapid Antigen Test kit.
- ICMR had earlier given its approval to the CoviSelf test kit developed by Pune-based Mylab Discovery Solutions.

About PanBio COVID-19 Antigen Test Device



- It has been developed by Chicago-based Abbott Rapid Diagnostics.
- It is a self-use kit.
- It has been given provisional approval till 5th of July and the price of the kit will be declared by the company after that.

8. Strong policies on black carbon can sharply cut glacier melt: World Bank study

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

Why in the news?

- According to a study by World Bank (WB) specialists, Black carbon (BC) deposits produced by human activity which accelerate the pace of glacier and snow melt in the Himalayan region can be sharply reduced through new, currently feasible policies by an additional 50% from current levels.

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Key Highlights

- The research covers the Himalaya, Karakoram and Hindu Kush (HKHK) mountain ranges, where, the report says, glaciers are melting faster than the global average ice mass.
- The rate of retreat of HKHK glaciers is estimated to be 0.3 metres per year in the west to 1.0 metre per year in the east.
- Industry [primarily brick kilns] and residential burning of solid fuel together account for 45–66% of regional anthropogenic [man-made] BC deposition, followed by on-road diesel fuels (7–18%) and open burning (less than 3% in all seasons)” in the region.

Ongoing Policy measure to cut Black Carbon

- Some of the ongoing policy measures to cut BC emissions are
 - a. enhancing fuel efficiency standards for vehicles
 - b. phasing out diesel vehicles and promoting electric vehicles
 - c. accelerating the use of liquefied petroleum gas for cooking and through clean cookstove programmes,
 - d. upgrading brick kiln technologies
- However, with all existing measures, water from glacier melt is still projected to increase in absolute volume by 2040, with impacts on downstream activities and communities.
- Full implementation of current policies to mitigate BC can achieve a 23% reduction but enacting new policies and incorporating them through regional cooperation among countries can achieve enhanced benefits.

About Black Carbon

- Black carbon consists of pure carbon in several linked forms.
- It is formed through the incomplete combustion of fossil fuels, biofuel, and biomass, and is emitted in both anthropogenic and naturally occurring soot.
- It is a short-lived pollutant that is the second-largest contributor to warming the planet behind carbon dioxide (CO₂).
- Unlike other greenhouse gas emissions, BC is quickly washed out and can be eliminated from the atmosphere if emissions stop.
- It is a localised source with greater local impact.

Harmful effects of BC:

- Black carbon (BC) is a pollutant known to aggravate breathing disorders.
- Because BC particles strongly absorb solar and terrestrial radiation and heats up the atmosphere it can upset the monsoon system.
- If deposited on snow, it could accelerate the heating of snow and quicken the melting of glaciers.

9. The U.S. imposes — and suspends — tariffs on six countries over digital taxes.

(Topic- GS Paper III –Economics, Source- The New York Times)

Why in the news?

- The United States government has recently announced further suspension of punitive tariffs for six months on India, Austria, Italy, Spain, Turkey, and the United Kingdom while it continues to resolve the digital services taxes investigation amid the ongoing multilateral negotiations at the OECD and the G20.
- The imposing tariffs on certain goods from six countries in retaliation for taxes those nations have imposed on digital services offered by companies like Facebook, Amazon and Google.

More on the news

- The United States finalized a list of products that would be subject to tariffs but immediately suspended the levies for 180 days while international tax negotiations proceeded.
- Under the administration's announcement, 25 percent tariffs would apply to about \$2.1 billion worth of goods from Austria, Britain, India, Italy, Spain and Turkey.
- The Trump administration began investigating those countries' digital services taxes in June 2020, and the Biden administration faced a one-year deadline to take action.
- The announcement comes as countries around the world are trying to reach agreement on a range of international tax issues.
- Those negotiations are being conducted through the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

What is the US investigation regarding digital services taxation?

- The US has conducted a year-long investigation into digital services taxes imposed by countries, stating that they are against tech companies like Apple, Amazon, Google and Facebook.
- The investigation began in June 2020 and in January 2021, following investigations the USTR determined that the digital services taxes adopted by Austria, India, Italy, Spain, Turkey, and the United Kingdom discriminated against US digital companies and were inconsistent with principles of international taxation and burdened US companies.

What's the case against India?

- In the case of India, the USTR's proposed course of action includes additional tariffs of up to 25 per cent ad valorem on an aggregate level of trade that would collect duties on goods of India in the range of the amount of DST that India is expected to collect from US companies.
- Around 26 categories of goods are in the preliminary list of products that would be subject to the additional tariffs.
- This includes shrimps, basmati rice, cigarette paper, cultured pearls, semi precious stones, silver powder and silver articles of jewelry, gold mixed link necklaces and neck chains and certain furniture of bentwood.

What are the digital services taxes in India?

- Recently the government in the Finance Bill 2020-21 imposing a 2 per cent digital service tax on trade and services by non-resident e-commerce operators with a turnover of over Rs 2 crore, effectively expanding the scope of equalisation levy that, till last year, only applied to digital advertising services.
- The new levy that became applicable from April last year has expanded the ambit of the equalisation levy for non-resident e-commerce operators involved in supply of services, including online sale of goods and provision of services.
- E-commerce operators are obligated to pay the tax at the end of each quarter. Estimates by the USTR indicate that the value of the DST payable by US-based company groups to India will be up to approximately \$55 million per year.

10. 'Taskheer-e-Jabal': Military Exercise

(Topic- GS Paper III –Defence, Source- Indian Express)

Why in the news ?

- Recently Pakistan Army chief witnesses 'Taskheer-e-Jabal' military exercise in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir

About 'Taskheer-e-Jabal'

- The exercise 'Taskheer-e-Jabal' is aimed at enhancing operational preparedness of formations, encompassing defensive and offensive tasks during various contingencies within an operational cycle.
- The troops and units participating in the exercise will rehearse various defensive and offensive manoeuvres in the mountainous terrain.

11. China successfully launches new generation meteorological satellite

(Topic- GS Paper III –Science and technology, Source- AIR)

Why in the news?

- China has successfully launched the first of a new generation meteorological satellite called Fengyun-4B (FY-4B) into planned orbit.

About Fengyun-4B (FY-4B) satellite



- The satellite, Fengyun-4B (FY-4B), was launched by a Long March-3B rocket.
- It will be used in the fields of weather analysis and forecasting, and environmental and disaster monitoring.
- The new satellite will further strengthen China's observation and response capability of small and medium scale disaster events and provide information security services for a range of sectors including meteorological, agricultural, aviation, marine and environmental protection.

Observation Range

- Its observation range covers Asia, the central Pacific Ocean and Indian Ocean regions, so that the network will also greatly improve China's forecast accuracy of disaster weather including typhoons and storms.
- It is equipped with a rapid imager, improving measurement resolution to 250 meters from the geostationary orbit and accelerating scan imaging of the Earth.