

UPSC Daily Current Affairs 9 Jun 2021

1. Small Island Developing States

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, the election of Maldives Foreign Minister as the President of the 76th session of the United Nations General Assembly is a major boost for the island-nation's international profile.
- Maldives also sees it as a win for the 52-member Small Island Developing States (SIDS), which are battling climate change vulnerability and other developmental challenges.

Related Information

About the Small Island Developing States



63.2
Million

SIDS have a combined population of **63.2 million** people and a combined annual GDP of ~ **USD 600 billion**.¹

Tourism comprises up to **70%** of total GDP in SIDS.¹

27 SIDS are classified as Middle Income Countries (Lower and Upper); and **5** are Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC).²

>60%

Caribbean and Pacific SIDS import **more than 60%** of their food, with half importing **over 80%**.¹

SIDS import **>USD 5 billion** of food annually.¹

The top 5 food imports are processed foods, wheat, corn, meat and dairy, valuing **>USD 1 billion** annually.¹

1/3

Caribbean SIDS average **33%** obesity rates, with at least **twice** as many obese women as men.¹

70% of adults in Pacific SIDS are overweight or obese and **77%** of deaths are attributable to NCDs.¹

Childhood stunting rates are **>20%** in the five poorest SIDS¹

17%

SIDS experience the largest annual losses due to damage from natural disasters relative to GDP at **17%**.¹

Women comprise **52%** of the agricultural workforce in SIDS.¹

In Pacific SIDS, the fishing industry contributes **up to 10%** of total GDP.⁴

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- Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are islands of the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans.
- The SIDS was recognized as a distinct group of developing countries in June 1992, at the UN Conference on Environment and Development.
- SIDS' unique and particular vulnerabilities are highlighted in “The Future We Want”, adopted at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (**also known as Rio+20**) that took place in **Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in June 2012**

2. Overview of the Genomic sequencing in India

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

Why in the news?

- Recently in a study it has found that India has been slow in adoption and has used sub-optimally, it is genomic sequencing which is one of the effective tools for COVID-19 pandemic.

More on the news

- Though the procedural steps such as setting up the Indian SARS-CoV2 Genomic Consortia, or INSACOG have been taken, the sequencing has remained at a very low level of a few thousand cases only.
- India has decoded the Delta variant (B.1.617.2, the original lineage B.1.617 was first reported from Maharashtra, India in October 2020) far less than the Alpha variant (B.1.1.7, first reported from Kent, England in September 2020) reported just a month before Delta.
- The challenge of insufficient genomic sequencing is further compounded by the pace at which data is being shared, especially when the emergence of strains is so vital in tracking and responding to a pandemic.
- India seems to be faltering on both expanding vaccination coverage and genomic sequencing with respect to advance technological country like USA and United Kingdom.

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- Unfortunately, there is not enough attention to scale up genomic sequencing, which as per the original plan was supposed to cover 5% of confirmed COVID-19 cases.

Yet to be Peer reviewed of Delta Variant

- The release of findings of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research-Institute of Genomics; Integrative Biology and National Centre for Disease Control and Academy of Scientific and Innovative Research study; tracking variants of SARS CoV-2 in Delhi; on a pre-print server (yet to be peer reviewed) is a welcome change and provides new insights.

Most Circulating strains

- Based upon the analysis of nearly 3,600 genomic sequence samples from November 2020 to April 2021, the Delta variant became the most circulating variant in Delhi and was found in nearly 60% of the samples analyzed; is 50% more transmissible than the Alpha variant (which already had 70% higher transmissibility over the ancestral virus).
- Public Health England (PHE) reported that the Delta variant has become the most common circulating strain in the U.K., replacing Alpha.

Implication of Genomics sequencing

- The data from genomic sequencing has both policy and operational implications.
- The State and district officials should engage the epidemiologists in coming up with practical and operational implications and strategies.

Need to more invest

- **According to the Economy Survey, 2020-21**, India's gross expenditure on R&D is 0.65 per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP), significantly lower than the 1.5-3 per cent of GDP spent by the top 10 economies.
- It remains low despite the Centre's higher contribution to GERD (gross domestic expenditure on R&D).

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- India’s business sector needs to rise to the occasion and significantly ramp up its gross expenditure on R&D to a level commensurate to India’s status as the fifth largest economy.
- This requires boosting business sector contribution to total GERD from 37 per cent currently, to close to 68 per cent — the average business contribution in GERD of other top 10 economies.
- Indian business sector’s contribution to total R&D personnel and researchers also needs to be scaled up from 30 per cent and 34 per cent per cent, respectively, to the average level in other top 10 economies (58 per cent and 53 per cent, respectively),” the Survey noted.
- The Survey compared India’s journey to that of China, **which formulated a 15-year “Medium to Long-Term Plan (MLP) for the Development of Science and Technology” in 2006** to become an innovation-led economy.
- Indian government needs to invest and support more scientific and operational research on vaccine effectiveness.
- The data should be analysed on a regular basis and should include various stratifiers such as age, gender and comorbid conditions.

Way forward

- India needs to scale up genomic sequencing, across all States.
- There should be sufficient and representative samples collected for genomic sequencing to track district-level trends in circulating variants.
- More genomic sequencing is needed from large urban agglomerations.
- A national-level analysis of collated genomic sequencing data should be done on a regular basis and findings shared publicly.
- As India prepares for the third wave, there is a need for rapidly expanding genomic sequencing, sharing related data in a timely and transparent manner, and understanding of the impact of new variants on transmissibility, severity and vaccine effectiveness.
- The only assured way to fight the pandemic is to use scientific evidence to decide policies, modify strategies and take corrective actions.

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- To increase genomic sequencing and use of scientific evidence for decision making are not a choice but an absolute essential

3. BRICS opposes exceptionalism: China

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

Why in the news?

- China has recently sought to frame a joint statement from the Foreign Ministers of the BRICS [Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa] countries, who met virtually last week, as standing in opposition to what Beijing has increasingly hit out at “bloc politics” from the United States and the West

More on the news

- The BRICS Foreign Ministers, at a virtual meet last week, put out a joint statement on multilateralism, in addition to the usual Ministers’ press statement.
- The idea behind the statement was to forge a common understanding among the BRICS countries when there were “so many different interpretations and definitions of multilateralism in the world”.
- Ironically, among the targets of China’s recent attacks on what it calls “selective multilateralism” is the India-Australia-Japan-U.S. Quad grouping, which Chinese officials have repeatedly criticised

Multilateral system

- On the “different interpretations” of multilateralism, the “BRICS countries, as representatives of emerging markets and developing countries, have tackled the problem head-on and given their answer”.
- The BRICS Joint Statement on Strengthening and Reforming the Multilateral System laid out the following principles –
 1. It should make global governance more inclusive, representative and participatory to facilitate greater and more meaningful participation of developing and least developed countries.

2. It should be based on inclusive consultation and collaboration for the benefit of all.
 3. It should make multilateral organisations more responsive, action-oriented and solution-oriented based on the norms and principles of international law and the spirit of mutual respect, justice, equality, mutually beneficial cooperation.
 4. It should use innovative and inclusive solutions, including digital and technological tools.
 5. It should strengthen capacities of individual States and international organizations.
 6. It should promote people-centered international cooperation at the core.
- The BRICS countries were “indeed different from a few developed countries in their attitude towards multilateralism and multilateral cooperation.”
 - The BRICS countries stress the need to observe the purposes and principles of the UN Charter and oppose exceptionalism and double standard.

About BRICS

- It is an association of 5 major emerging national economies: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.
- All the member of BRICS is also the G-20 members.
- It represents over 40% of the world’s population and accounts for 22% of global GDP.

About BRICS Plus

- China had introduced the “BRICS Plus” format at the Xiamen summit .
- It involved inviting a few countries from different regions.
- South Africa emulated it, with representation of 5 nations of its choice - Argentina, Jamaica, Turkey, Indonesia and Egypt.

4. India elected to UN Economic and Social Council for 2022-24 terms

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

Why in the news?

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- Recently, India has been elected to the Economic and Social Council, one of the six main organs of the United Nations, for the 2022-24 terms.

Key highlights

- India was elected in the Asia-Pacific States category along with Afghanistan, Kazakhstan and Oman in the elections.
- From the African states, Côte d'Ivoire, Eswatini, Mauritius, Tunisia and the United Republic of Tanzania were elected while from the eastern European states, Croatia and the Czech Republic and from the Latin American and Caribbean states, Belize, Chile and Peru were elected.
- In the Economic and Social Council by-election, Greece, New Zealand and Denmark were elected for a term of office from January to December 2022 and Israel was elected for a term of office beginning January 1, 2022 and until December 31, 2023.

About UN Economic & Social Council

- The UN Charter established ECOSOC in 1945 as one of the six main organs of the United Nations.
- It is the principle body for the implementation of internationally agreed development goals.
- **It has 54 members, which are elected by the General Assembly for a three-year term.**

Seats Allocation

Seats on the Council are allotted based on geographical representation with

- 14 allocated to African states
- 11 to Asian states
- 6 to eastern European states
- 10 to Latin American and Caribbean states
- 13 to western European and other states

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Tenure

- For the nations to be elected as members of ECOSOC for a three-year term, it needs 2/3rd majority of UN General Assembly votes.
- Each member of the council has one vote and generally voting in the council is by simple majority.
- **The president is elected for a one-year term.**

India and UN Economic & Social Council

- India is currently serving the 2021-22 terms as a non-permanent member of the powerful UN Security Council and will assume the Presidency of the 15-nation UN organ in August.
- In 2018, India got elected to various crucial subsidiary bodies working under ECOSOC such as
 - i. Committee on Non-Governmental Organisations for a term of 2019-2023 and India got the highest number of votes followed by Pakistan,
 - ii. Commission on Population and Development for a term of 2018 – 2021,
 - iii. Commission for social development for a term of 2018-2022,
 - iv. Commission on crime prevention and criminal justice for a term of 2019 – 2021,
 - v. Council to the Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) for a term of 2019-2021.
 - vi. Executive Board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) for a term of 2019-2021.
- Election to committee on NGO is considered as crucial, because it scrutinises the NGOs applying for consultative status with ECOSOC and can recommend or block them.

5. Rengma Nagas demand autonomous council

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

Why in the news?

- The Rengma Nagas in Assam have written to Union Home Minister demanding an autonomous district council amid a decision by the Central and the State governments to upgrade the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) into a territorial council.

Background

- The Rengmas were the first tribal people in Assam to have encountered the British in 1839, but the existing Rengma Hills was eliminated from the political map of the State and replaced with that of Mikir Hills (now Karbi Anglong) in 1951.
- During the Burmese invasions of Assam in 1816 and 1819, it was the Rengmas who gave shelter to the Ahom refugees.
- The Rengma Hills was partitioned in 1963 between Assam and Nagaland at the time of creation of Nagaland State and the Karbis, who were known as Mikirs till 1976, were the indigenous tribal people of Mikir Hills.
- Thus, the Rengma Hills and Mikir Hills were two separate entities till 1951.

About Sixth Schedule and Autonomous District Councils

- The Sixth Schedule was incorporated to protect the rights of the minority tribals living within a larger state dominated by the majority.

Constitutional Provisions of Sixth Schedule Areas

- It is mentioned under Article 244 of the Constitution of India.
- The Sixth Schedule applies to the Tribal Areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.
- The Constituent Assembly passed it in 1949; it seeks to safeguard the rights of the tribal - population through the formation of Autonomous District Councils (ADC).

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- Though these areas fall within the executive authority of the state, provision has been made for the creation of the District Councils and regional councils for the exercise of the certain legislative and judicial powers.
- Each district is an autonomous district and Governor can modify / divide the boundaries of the said Tribal areas by notification.

The Governor may, by public notification:

- Include any area.
- Exclude any area.
- Create a new autonomous district.
- Increase the area of any autonomous district.
- Diminish the area of any autonomous district.
- Alter the name of any autonomous district.
- Define the boundaries of any autonomous district.

6. Election Commissioner

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, President Ram Nath Kovind has appointed Anup Chandra Pandey, a retired Uttar Pradesh-cadre IAS officer, to the post of Election Commissioner.

About Election Commission

- The Election Commission is a permanent and an independent body established by the Constitution of India directly to ensure free and fair elections in the country.
- **Article 324** of the Constitution provides that the power of superintendence, direction and control of elections to parliament, state legislatures, the office of president of India and the office of vice-president of India shall be vested in the election commission.

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Composition

- Article 324 of the Constitution has made the following provisions with regard to the composition of election commission:
 - The Election Commission shall consist of the chief election commissioner and such number of other election commissioners, if any, as the president may from time to time fix.
 - The appointment of the chief election commissioner and other election commissioners shall be made by the president.
 - When any other election commissioner is so appointed, the chief election commissioner shall act as the chairman of the election commission.
- The president may also appoint after consultation with the election commission such regional commissioners as he may consider necessary to assist the election commission.

Appointment & Tenure of Commissioners

- The President appoints Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners.
- They have tenure of six years, or up to the age of 65 years, whichever is earlier.
- They enjoy the same status and receive salary and perks as available to Judges of the Supreme Court of India.
- All Election Commissioners have equal say in the decision making of the Commission

7. New norms for digital content

(Topic- GS Paper II –Governance (Issue for Vulnerable Section), Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- The Education Ministry has recently laid down new guidelines for producing digital education resources for children with disabilities, after a year in which the COVID-driven shift to online education has spotlighted the lacunae in such resources.

More on -the news

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- However, **the PDF document containing the guidelines does not even follow its own rules**, making it partially inaccessible to the visually challenged and activist raised concerns about effective implementation.

Guidelines

The guidelines are based on **four guiding principles**, stipulating that all resources must be -

- **Perceivable**
- **Operable**
- **Understandable and**
- **Robust for disabled student**

They recommend that all textbooks be made digitally accessible in a phased manner, so that they are available in multiple formats such as text, audio, video and sign language with turn-on and turn-off features.

Detailed technical standards have been provided.

- The closure of regular schools and learning centres due to COVID-19 has led to special difficulties for many disabled children.
- For instance, **a recent study by the Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy showed that more than half of the NCERT textbooks available on the government's virtual education platform DIKSHA were not accessible for visually impaired students.**

Supplementary content

- The guidelines provide strategies to produce supplementary content for varying disabilities, including students who face -
 - **Visual and hearing challenges,**
 - **Those on the autism spectrum,**
 - **Those with intellectual or special learning disabilities, and**
 - **Those with multiple disabilities**

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8. QS World University rankings 2022

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, there are 22 Indian institutions in the top 1,000 list compared to 21 last year has been in the **QS World University rankings 2022**.

Key Findings

Top varsities | JNU, featuring for the first time in the QS World Universities Ranking list, is among the top-600 in the world
= indicates shared ranking

2022 global rank	Name
177=	Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay
185	Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi
186=	Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru
255=	Indian Institute of Technology, Madras
277=	Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur
280	Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur
395=	Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati
400=	Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee
501-510 (ranking band)	University of Delhi
561-570 (ranking band)	Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi

- Jawaharlal Nehru University has entered the top 1,000 of the QS World University rankings for the first time as its **new undergraduate engineering programme now makes it eligible for the rating**.
- IIT Bombay maintained its position as the top Indian institution for the fourth consecutive year, although it fell five places in the global rankings to the joint 177th position.
- Of the 35 Indian institutions in the rankings, 20 have improved on academic reputation this year.

Under Top 100

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- IIT Delhi (185th rank) overtook the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore (186th rank), giving India three institutions in the world's top 100.

World's top research university

- IISc was also declared the world's top research university by the indicator of most citations per faculty member, when adjusted for faculty size.

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