

UPSC Daily Current Affairs 07 Jul 2021

1. Ministry of Cooperation

(Topic- GS Paper II-Governance, Source- PIB)

Why in the news?

- The government has recently created a new Ministry of Cooperation.

About the Ministry of Cooperation

- It has been announced in Budget 2021- 22 to set up a separate administrative structure to “streamline ease of doing business for cooperatives”.
- The Ministry of Co-operation to implement the vision of ‘Sahkar se Samriddhi’ or prosperity through cooperation.
- It will provide a separate administrative, legal and policy framework for strengthening -the cooperative movement in the country.
- It will help deepen Co-operatives as a true people based movement reaching upto the grassroots.
- The Ministry will also work to streamline processes for ‘**Ease of doing businesses for co-operatives** and enable development of Multi-State Co-operatives (MSCS).

2. Repercussions of U.S leaving Afghanistan

(Topic- GS Paper II- IR, Source- The Hindu)

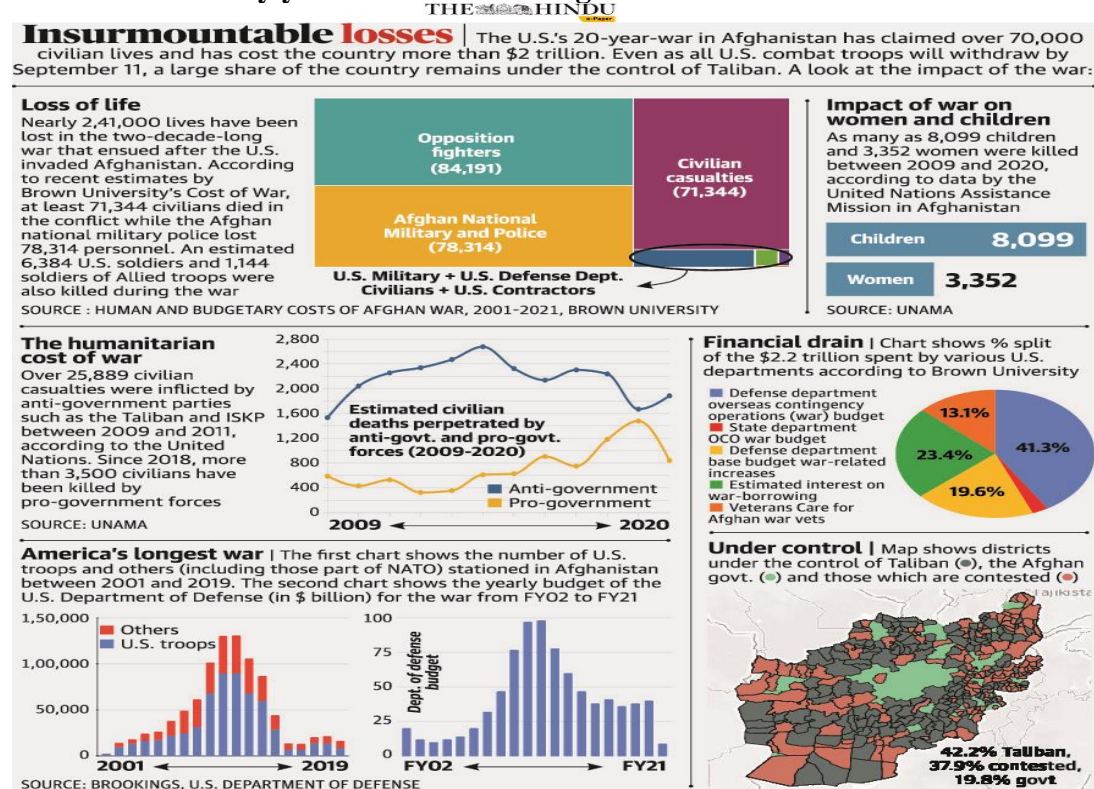
Why in the news?

- Recently, the U.S. left Afghanistan’s Bagram Airfield after nearly 20 years by shutting off the electricity and slipping away in the night without notifying the base’s new Afghan commander.

More on the news

- Under a deal with the militant group, the US and its NATO allies agreed to withdraw all troops in return for a commitment by the Taliban not to allow al-Qaeda or any other extremist group to operate in the areas they control.
- President Joe Biden set a deadline of 11 September - the 20-year anniversary of the 9/11 attacks on the US - for American troops to fully withdraw, but reports suggest the pullout may be complete within days.

Overview of twenty years of conflict in Afghanistan



Why did the U.S. invade Afghanistan?

- Weeks after the 9/11, 2001 terrorist attacks, U.S. President George W. Bush declared war on Afghanistan.
- Mr. Bush said the Taliban regime had turned down his demand handly over al-Qaeda leaders, including Osama bin Laden, who plotted the attacks.
- Inside Afghanistan, the NATO coalition troops led by the U.S. quickly dislodged the Taliban regime and established a transitional government. Al-Qaeda's leaders and key operatives fled to safe havens in Pakistan.
- In May 2003, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld announced that major military operations within the country were over.
- The U.S. focus shifted to the Iraq invasion, while in Afghanistan, western powers helped build a centralized democratic system and institutions.
- But that neither ended the war nor stabilized the country.

What does Pakistan want?

- Pakistan was one of the three countries that had recognized the Taliban regime within the 1990s.
- The Taliban captured much of the country with help from Pakistan's ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence.)

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- After the 9/11 attacks, Pakistan’s military dictator Pervez Musharraf, struggling from the Bush administration, cut formal ties with the Taliban and joined America’s war on terror.
- But Pakistan played a double game.
- It provided shelter to the Taliban’s Rahbari Shura, a gaggle composed of their top leaders. In Pakistan, the Taliban regrouped, raised money and recruits, planned military strategy, and staged a comeback in Afghanistan.
- The fractious Kabul government, faced with corruption allegations, incompetence, and therefore the excesses of the invading forces, made matters easier for the Taliban.
- Now, when the U.S. is leaving and therefore the Taliban are advancing, Pakistan is again within the spotlight.

India’s position on Taliban

- India made contact with the Taliban in Doha.
- For New Delhi, which has protested being left out of regional formulations in the past both in the original Moscow process, and in the **United Nation’s April 2020 “6+2+1” that included Afghanistan’s “immediate neighbours” only, the U.S.’s suggestion is a relief.**
- Previously, India refused to recognise the **Taliban regime of 1996-2001 and rather supported the ‘Northern Alliance’ in fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan.**
- India has long held the position of dealing only with the elected government in Kabul, and has always considered the Taliban a terrorist organisation backed by Pakistan.
- India supports an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled peace process.

India has three critical areas in handling the Taliban.

- a. protecting its investments, which run into billions of rupees, in Afghanistan;
- b. preventing a future Taliban regime from being a pawn of Rawalpindi;
- c. ensuring that the Pakistan-backed anti-India terrorist groups don't get support from the Taliban within the past, India chose to not engage the Taliban and therefore the costs were dear when the Taliban was in power.

India has called for an “immediate comprehensive ceasefire” in Afghanistan

- At a recent UNSC meeting, convened under the Arria Formula (informally convened at the request of a UNSC member), India reiterated that “For durable peace in Afghanistan, we have to put an end to terrorist safe havens and sanctuaries operating across the Durand Line.

3. Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD)

(Topic- GS Paper II +I- IR and Geography, Source- Indian Express)

Why in the news ?

- Ethiopia has started the second phase of filling a mega-dam's reservoir also known as Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the upper Blue Nile.

More on the news

- Egypt and Sudan has raising tensions ahead of an upcoming UN Security Council meeting on the divisive project.
- Both Cairo and Khartoum said they had been notified by Addis Ababa that the second phase of filling had begun at the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.

Concern

- The huge dam, set to be Africa's largest hydroelectric project when completed, has sparked an almost decade-long diplomatic stand-off between Addis Ababa and downstream nations Egypt and Sudan. \
- **Ethiopia says the project is essential to its development, but Cairo and Khartoum fear it could restrict their citizens' water access.**

About Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam



- It was formerly known as the **Millennium Dam** is located in **Ethiopia**, on the **Blue Nile River** about **40km east of Sudan**.

- It is a gravity dam on the Blue Nile River in Ethiopia that has been under construction since 2011.
- The dam will be the **largest hydroelectric power plant in Africa** when completed as well as **the seventh largest in the world.**

Location

- It is in the **Benishangul-Gumuz Region of Ethiopia, about 15 km east of the Border with Sudan.**
- The dam will be the largest hydroelectric power plant in Africa when completed, as well as the seventh largest in the world.

Contentious issue

- The contentious issue around the GERD, Africa's biggest hydropower project, concerns control of the flow of water in the world's longest river among the riparian states.
- Ethiopia, Africa's second-most populated country and a manufacturing hub, views the mega dam as a symbol of its sovereignty.
- Egypt fears the project will allow Ethiopia to control the flow of Africa's longest river.
- Hydroelectric power stations do not consume water, but the speed with which Ethiopia fills up the dam's reservoir will affect the flow downstream.

What is the dispute?

- The **Nile River** has been at the **center of the dispute involving several countries** that are **dependent on the river's waters.**
- At the forefront of this dispute are **Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan.**
- The main waterways of the Nile run through **Uganda, South Sudan, Sudan and Egypt** and its **drainage basin runs through several countries** in East Africa including **Ethiopia, the portion** where this dam is being constructed.
- Egypt has objected to the **dam's construction saying the dam's location on the Blue Nile tributary would allow Ethiopia to gain control of the flow of the river's waters** and could result in **lower water levels within its own borders.**
- **Sudan** too is concerned that if **Ethiopia were to gain control over the river**, it would **affect the water levels Sudan receives.**

Note:

- The **construction of the dam** was initiated in **2011 on the Blue Nile tributary** of the river that **runs across one part of Ethiopia.**

4. Maitree Power Project

(Topic- GS Paper II-IR, Source- PIB)

Why in the news?

- Recently, Secretary (Power) Govt of India met Secretary (Power) Govt of Bangladesh for the issues related to 1320MW Maitree Power project.

About Maitree Power Project



- It is thermal power project of 1,320MW.

Location

- It is located at Moithara, Rampal, in the Bagerhat district of Bangladesh.
- The coal-fired facility is being developed on a 1,834-acre-site on the **bank of Passur River in south-west Bangladesh.**

Developed by

- The power plant is being developed by Bangladesh India Friendship Power Company (BIFPCL), a 50:50 joint venture between India's state-run National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) and Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB).
- The project is an environmentally friendly supercritical technology based thermal power plant.

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5. Tele-Law

(Topic- GS Paper II-Governance, Source- Indian Express)

Why in the news?

- Recently, Justice Department commemorates the milestone of crossing 9 lakh beneficiaries under its Tele-Law programme.

About Tele- Law

- This initiative was launched on April 20, 2017 with an aim to provide legal advices in the villages through Common Service Centers (CSC) by the Ministry of Law and Justice in collaboration with the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).

Objective of Tele-law



- Under this legal aid services will be provided through Common Service Centres (CSC) at the Panchayat level, spread across the country.

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- It is a program by the government where people can seek legal advice from lawyers through video conferencing available at the Common Service Centers, on the 'Tele Law' portal.



Role of a Para Legal Volunteer (PLV)

- Every CSC will also engage a PLV, who will be the first point of contact for the rural citizens.
- These PLVs will help the applicant connect with a lawyer through the video conferencing facility at the CSC, will help them in understanding the legal issues and explain the advice given by lawyers.
- A panel of lawyers will be provided by the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) in every state capital to advise the applicants through video conferencing.
- This scheme has been expanded to 115 Aspirational Districts in 100 days programme of the Government of India.
- A dedicated website on Tele-Law is maintained by the Department of Justice which has been designed with support from CSC e-Governance and has translated in to 22 languages.

About Nyaya Bandhu Mobile Application

- It is a new mobile applications meant to aid litigants in need of legal services.
- The Nyaya Bandhu mobile app facilitates the provision of free legal services.
- The app aims to connect litigants in need with lawyers willing to offer such pro bono services. Lawyers willing to offer free legal services may register themselves with the app.
- This app is also intended to help users pre-register their case.

Constitutional provision for Legal Aid

- **Article 39A** of the Constitution of India provides for free legal aid to the poor and weaker sections of the society and ensures justice for all.
- **Articles 14 and 22(1)** of the Constitution also make it obligatory for the State to ensure equality before law and a legal system which promotes justice on the basis of equal opportunity to all.

Note :

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- The National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) has been constituted under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987 to monitor and evaluate implementation of legal aid programmes and to lay down policies and principles for making legal services available under the Act.

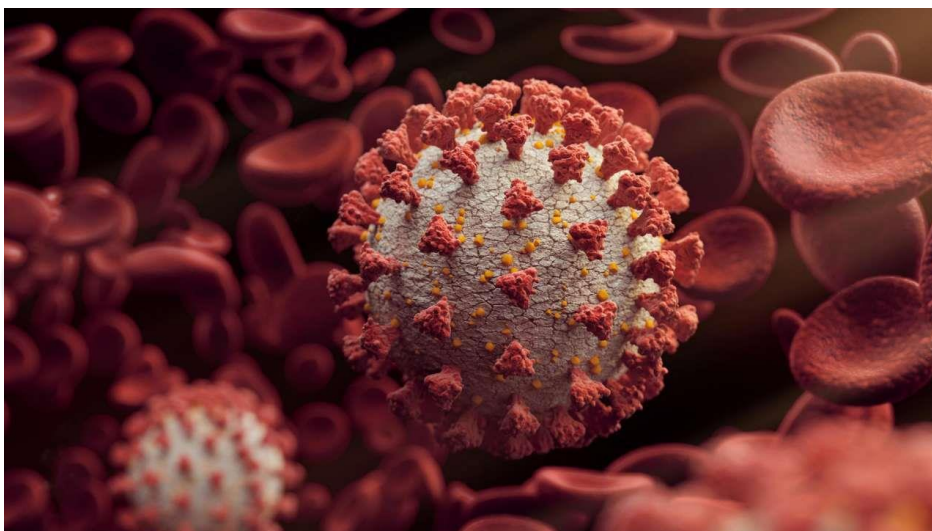
6. Lambda variant

(Topic- GS Paper III-Science and Technology, Source- Indian Express)

Why in the news?

- Recently, the World Health Organization designated the Lambda variant, previously known by its formal scientific name C.37, as the seventh and newest “variant of interest”.

About Lambda variant



- The Lambda variant has now been detected in more than 25 countries.
- It has been the dominant variant in Peru and other countries of South America.
- The Lambda variant has not yet been found in the Indian population, but has recently been detected in the UK and other European countries.
- According to the WHO, the Lambda variant has at least seven significant mutations in the spike protein (the Delta variant has three) which could have a range of implications, including
 - a. the possibility of increased transmissibility or
 - b. enhanced resistance to antibodies, created either through natural infection or vaccination.

About “variant of interest”

- It means that the genetic changes involved are predicted or known to affect transmissibility, disease severity, or immune escape.

- It is also an acknowledgement of the fact that the variant has caused significant community transmission in multiple countries and population groups.

Coronavirus variants

- The World Health Organization has identified 11 coronavirus variants so far (there are 24 letters in the Greek alphabet).
- There are four variants of concern:
 - a. Alpha
 - b. Beta
 - c. Gamma
 - d. Delta
- There are currently seven variants, including the Lambda, that the WHO classifies as “variants of interest”.
 - a. Epsilon
 - b. Zeta
 - c. Eta
 - d. Theta
 - e. Iota
 - f. Kappa
 - g. Lambda
- These were all recently named after letters of the Greek alphabet to avoid linkage with the country of their origin that had been happening until then.

Concern

- The potential of emerging variants to bypass the immunity gained through vaccination means that there could be fresh waves of infections even in populations that were being considered close to reaching community-level protection.

7. Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) project

(Topic- GS Paper III-Economics, Source- Indian Express)

Why in the news?

- The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) has recently issued orders appointing an advisory committee for its **Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) project**.

About Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) project

- It aimed at curbing “digital monopolies”.
- This is a step in the direction of making e-commerce processes open source, thus creating a platform that can be utilised by all online retailers.
- The task of this project has been assigned to the Quality Council of India (QCI).

What processes are expecting to be open-sourced with this project?

- Several operational aspects including onboarding of sellers, vendor discovery, price discovery and product cataloguing could be made open source on the lines of Unified Payments Interface (UPI).

Significance of making something open-source

- Making software or a process open-source means that the code or the steps of that process is made available freely for others to use, redistribute and modify it.
- For example, while the operating system of Apple's iPhones — iOS — is closed source, meaning it cannot be legally modified or reverse engineered, Google's Android operating system is open-source, and therefore it is possible by smartphone OEMs such as Samsung, Xiaomi, OnePlus, etc to modify it for their hardware.
- If the ONDC gets implemented and mandated, it would mean that all e-commerce companies will have to operate using the same processes.
- This could give a huge booster shot to smaller online retailers and new entrants.

What does the DPIIT intend from the project?

- The DPIIT noted that the ONDC “aims at promoting open networks developed on open-sourced methodology, using open specifications and open network protocols, independent on any specific platform.
- ONDC is expected to digitise the entire value chain, standardise operations, promote inclusion of suppliers, derive efficiency in logistics and enhance value for consumers”.

8. Discrete auroras on Mars

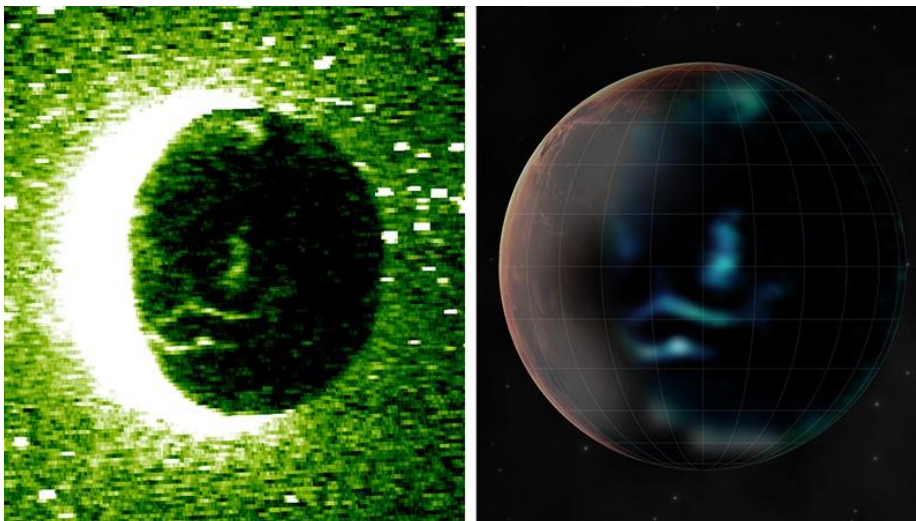
(Topic- GS Paper III-Science and Technology, Source- Indian Express)

Why in the news?

- Recently, the UAE's Hope spacecraft, which is orbiting Mars since February 2021, has captured images of glowing atmospheric lights in the Red Planet's night sky, known as discrete auroras.

About the Discrete auroras

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- The beacons of light that stand out against the dark night side disk are highly structured discrete aurora, which traces out where energetic particles excite the atmosphere after being funneled down by a patchy network of crustal magnetic fields that originate from minerals on the surface of Mars.”
- Unlike auroras on Earth, which are seen only near the north and south poles, discrete auroras on Mars are seen all around the planet at night time.

What causes an aurora on Earth?

- Auroras are caused when charged particles ejected from the Sun’s surface — called the solar wind — enter the Earth’s atmosphere.
- These particles are harmful, and our planet is protected by the geomagnetic field, which preserves life by shielding us from the solar wind.
- However, at the north and south poles, some of these solar wind particles are able to continuously stream down, and interact with different gases in the atmosphere to cause a display of light in the night sky.
- **This display, known as an aurora, is seen from the Earth’s high latitude regions (called the auroral oval), and is active all year round.**

Aurora borealis

- In the northern part of our globe, the polar lights are called aurora borealis or Northern Lights, and are seen from the US (Alaska), Canada, Iceland, Greenland, Norway, Sweden and Finland.

Aurora australis

- In the south, they are called aurora australis or southern lights, and are visible from high latitudes in Antarctica, Chile, Argentina, New Zealand and Australia.

About Hope orbiter mission

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- The Hope Probe, the Arab world's first mission to Mars, took off from Earth in July 2020 and has been orbiting the Red Planet since February.
- The primary objective of the mission is to study Martian weather dynamics.
- By correlating the lower atmosphere and upper atmosphere conditions, the probe will look into how weather changes the escape of hydrogen and oxygen into space.
- By measuring how much hydrogen and oxygen is spilling into space, scientists will be able to look into why Mars lost so much of its early atmosphere and liquid water.
- It is expected to create the first complete portrait of the planet's atmosphere.

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