

Current Affairs of the Day

Paper - II

- China's rise and fall at the UN
- India fares poorly in the hunger index
- What is behind the anti-government demonstrations in Thailand?
- Knesset backs Israel-UAE deal

Paper - III

- Stubble burning: Justice Lokur, students to save NCR
- Far from a happy toy story

Stubble burning: Justice Lokur Committee

GS III: Environmental Pollution and Degradation

Storage, Transport and Marketing of Agricultural Produce and Issues and Related Constraints

A Supreme Court Bench led by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sharad A. Bobde on Friday appointed Justice Lokur as a one-man committee to monitor and prevent instances of stubble burning by farmers in the neighbouring States of Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh this winter. He will be helped by student volunteer forces deployed from the National Cadet Corps, the National Service Scheme and the Bharat Scouts and Guides.



Green Task

1. Student forces will patrol highways and fields in the three States and ensure that no fires are started in the fields.
2. The Chief Secretaries of the three States will provide facilities to the committee and provide the student volunteers with adequate transportation to aid their vigil.
3. Existing mobile teams and nodal officers of the States will report to the committee. The Supreme Court's own Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority (EPCA) would consult with the committee on issues related to stubble burning.
4. The committee will file status reports with the court at least every fortnight.

Understanding the stubble burning

1. In Punjab and Haryana, the paddy crop is usually harvested between the first and last weeks of October. Farmers then sow the wheat crop from the first week of November until the middle of December.



2. These farmers regularly complain about the menace of rice straw – a product of mechanised agriculture – exacerbated by a shortage of labour and lack of time. When paddy is harvested by a combined harvester and thresher, the machine leaves behind a significant length of straw and stubble on the field.
3. This prevents other machines from sowing wheat seeds. With only 10-15 days between the rice-harvesting season and the wheat-sowing time, farmers often burn the stubble to quickly eliminate the paddy stubble. According to some estimates, farmers burned about 11 million tonnes of stubble in Punjab and Haryana, out of the 27 million tonnes of paddy stubble produced last year. The numbers are likely to be similar this year.
4. This way is very easy for them – but the huge clouds of smoke that rise up blow into Delhi, contributing significantly to the national capital's notorious wintertime air pollution.

Why stubble burning

1. Saves farmer's time, investment
2. Other alternatives will demand more time, investment and labour

Problems

1. Heavy air pollution in Delhi-NCR and around
2. Stubble-burning deteriorates the soil's organic content, essential nutrients and microbial activity – which together will reduce the soil's long-term productivity

Alternatives to burning

1. If farmers wish to remove stubble manually, they will need at least Rs 6,000-7,000 per acre. To reduce these costs, as well as save labour and time, the Government of Punjab distributed 24,000 tractor-mounted 'happy seeders' to cut down the rice stubble and sow wheat seeds simultaneously. To use a 'happy seeder' over one acre, farmers have to spend Rs 1,000 for rent plus about Rs 2,000 on diesel.
 - Punjab state requires 50,000 happy seeders to clear its 75 lakh acres of paddy fields in 15 days, but the government only distributed 24,000.
 - In addition, farmers have also complained about problems while sowing and low germination of wheat seeds, when sown with 'happy seeders'.



- Many machines have been dumped only after two years of use.
2. Officials have also advertised a machine called a straw baler – to compress crop residue into compact bales – to bale rice stubbles and moving them out of the field. These bales can be utilized for biomass-based power. However, this idea failed.
 - Baler are charging Rs 1,000-1,500 per acre.
 - No systemic linkages to biomass-based power plants, paper mills and cardboard factories where these bales can be used.
 3. Another machine is the paddy straw chopper-cum-spreader – to chop paddy straw left behind on mechanically harvested paddy fields.
 4. Yet another alternative is the accelerated straw decomposition process. The Indian Agricultural Research Institute has developed a solution it has named ‘Pusa’, which can decompose crop residue into manure by accelerating the decomposition process. These agents act on the straw to make it soft and ploughable, break down its molecular components and release the nutrients into the field. As a result, Pusa may reduce the use and cost of fertilisers and could help increase the yield of the subsequent crop. It costs less than Rs 1,000 per acre.
 5. Swedish technology Torrefaction: A third option is to convert stubble into biochar, which can be used as a fertiliser, by burning it in a kiln.
 6. In the longer term, another way to reduce stubble burning is to replace long-duration paddy varieties with shorter duration varieties like Pusa Basmati-1509 and PR-126, which can be harvested in the third week of September itself. This will widen the window between the end of the rice season and start of the wheat season, allowing enough time for the paddy stubble to decompose, and eliminate the need for stubble-burning.
 7. Apart from all this, the state government needs to popularise the traditional use of paddy straw and stubble as fodder and as part of feed-mixture preparations. This can happen locally as well as can be stored and transported to deficit areas like Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra, by developing the fodder and feed markets.

Steps taken by states



1. The Punjab government has resolved to make the state a zero stubble-burning zone. To this end, it offers a 50% subsidy on machines for individual farmers and 80% for cooperative societies and farmers' groups.
2. Last year, the Supreme Court asked the Punjab and Haryana governments to provide Rs 100 per quintal to small farmers to manage the stubble.
3. Governments have also been punishing farmers using monetary penalties for stubble-burning.

Way forward

1. Awareness of various options should be generated in farmers, with pros and cons explained
2. The government has to either increase monetary incentives or offer technologies and policies that don't require farmers to spend even more
3. The state governments can rope in block-level agricultural officers and officials of agricultural produce market committees to develop and implement comprehensive 'no burning' strategies at the local level.

China's rise and fall at the UN

GS II: Important International institutions, agencies and fora - their Structure, Mandate

Effect of Policies and Politics of Developed and Developing Countries on India's interests

Main Argument: It's an opportune time for New Delhi to push for institutional changes and reformed multilateralism in the global system.



Context: Recently China lost elections to various posts in the UN system, some of them grabbed by India. Post COVID-19 there is a disenchantment against china the world, which creates an opportunity for India and reformed multilateralism.

Chinese rise



1. It all began a century ago with World War I.
2. China saw an opportunity in World War I to rid itself of German occupation from some of its territory and allied with the United Kingdom and France. The Chinese sent large numbers of labour to support the western war efforts against Germany and won an invite at the Versailles Peace Conference. Things, however, did not turn out well as the West sided with the Japanese and China refused to sign the Versailles Peace Treaty.
3. The United States was sympathetic to the Chinese cause and a few years later helped reach a peace deal between China and Germany.
4. World War II saw strong U.S.-China collaboration against the Japanese, including U.S. operations conducted from India.

The forgotten ally

These old trans-Pacific linkages of the U.S. and China, including the presence of a very large Chinese community on the west coast of the U.S., are not well known, especially in India, but China is really “the forgotten ally” of the U.S. to use an expression coined by Oxford Professor Rana Mitter. This is important to bear in mind as the world, and India pontificates the outcome of a U.S.-China contestation and its implications for multilateralism.

Formation of P-5

Their bilateral ties saw the U.S. include the Chinese in the ‘Four Policemen’, a group of the most important countries for ensuring world peace post- WorldWar II, along with the real victors of World War II — the U.S., the USSR and the U.K. This number morphed into the P-5, with France being added by the UK at the San Francisco conference held in 1945 where the UN charter was finalised. The pure multilateralism of the League of Nations was thus infused with a multipolarity, with the U.S. as the sheet anchor.

The Republic of China (RoC) vs the People’s Republic of China (PRC)

The U.S. thought that China would act as a bulwark against the USSR. But that was the Republic of China (RoC) led by the Kuomintang who were soon routed on the mainland by the communists and found themselves on the island of Formosa (now Taiwan). This is important as the People’s Republic of China (PRC) would have us believe that it was a founder of the UN.



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RoC retained the UN seat of China till 1971 when it was expelled from the UN and the PRC admitted as a member giving it a de jure pole position at the UN. U.S. President Richard Nixon visited Beijing in 1972 and the U.S.'s opening to the PRC certainly paved the way for the unprecedented economic growth of China. However, in its march to global hegemony, the COVID-19 pandemic may have caught China on the wrong foot.

Institutional transformations

Multilateralism is under unprecedented stress fuelled by the COVID-19 pandemic and a certain disenchantment with globalisation. At the root, of course, is the rise of China and its challenge to U.S. global hegemony. But for global action, there are no substitutes for multilateralism backed by strong multipolarity relevant to contemporary realities. This demands institutional reform.

Perhaps most important are institutional reforms in the UN Security Council (UNSC) and at the Bretton Woods Institutions so that their governance leverages the capabilities of the major players among both the developed and developing countries. In this context, it is good that recently India, Germany, Japan and Brazil (G-4) have sought to refocus the UN on UNSC reform. As proponents of reform, they must remain focused and determined even if these changes do not happen easily or come soon. This is also the way forward for India which is not yet in the front row.

A window opens

Earlier in the year, India was elected as a non-permanent member of the UNSC for a two-year term. India will also host the BRICS Summit next year and G-20 Summit in 2022. These are openings for India in coalescing the world in critical areas that require global cooperation especially climate change, pandemics and counter-terrorism. India also needs to invest in the UN with increased financial contributions in line with its share of the world economy and by placing its people in key multilateral positions.

Three defeats and a near defeat for China in elections to UN bodies post-COVID-19 and the negative reaction to its threat of a veto to forestall a discussion on the pandemic in the UNSC clearly point to disenchantment with China in the globe and is a thumbs down for them. It is also an opportune moment for India and a Reformed Multilateralism.



Far from a happy toy story

GS III: Indian Economy and issues relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment, Inclusive Growth and issues arising from it

GS II: Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and issues arising out of their Design and Implementation.

Main Argument: While the Prime Minister says India has the potential to become a hub for the global toy industry, artisans face a range of problems. An influx of cheaper Chinese toys, high GST, lack of innovation and funds, and inadequate training plague the traditional industry. Problems and suggestions emerge from a few toy industries discussed in the article however issues are common to the traditional toy industry across the country.



Opportunity:

1. Wages are increasing in China
2. COVID has created hostility against Chinese products
3. The world is shifting towards eco-friendly toys

Problems

1. 12% of GST eats away the income of artisans
2. The influx of cheap Chinese toys
3. Demonetization shock
4. COVID-19 effect, no fairs being organized, merchants from all over India not showing up to purchase traditional toys
5. The absence of innovation in the design of toys is an area of concern, officials say. Artisans, they say, habitually produce the same set of toys without any innovation. In contrast, the new and attractive designs and colours of the Chinese products score over the Channapatna toys



6. In order to make quick buck artisans employ less seasoned wood and chemical dyes, many countries impose bans on toys with chemical dyes as they are harmful to children.
7. Allegation of hurdles posed by the Forest Department in the transport of ivory wood

Results

1. Young generations not taking up the art
2. The number of artisans engaged in the toy-making industry is dwindling as their earnings fall well below the wages offered in other industries

Channapatna toys (Prelims: Art and Culture)

South Indian towns and Villages famous for the traditional toy industry.

(Prime Minister Narendra Modi's mentioned of the brightly coloured Channapatna toys in his 'Mann Ki Baat' programme)

The hand-crafted wooden products, which wear coats of vegetable paint and lacquer, enjoyed a good market locally and abroad. The variety of necklaces, bangles, beads and napkin rings were carved out from the logs of ivory wood, to meet export orders, about 15-20 years ago. These products were in great demand in foreign countries even till the late 1990s. But not anymore.



These toys are handcrafted in the town of Channapatna in the Ramanagara district of Karnataka state, India. This traditional craft is protected as a geographical indication (GI) under the World Trade Organization, administered by the Government of Karnataka. As a result of the popularity of these toys, Channapatna is known as Gombegala Ooru (toy-town) of Karnataka.



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Traditionally, the work involved lacquering the wood of the *Wrightia tinctoria* tree, colloquially called Aale mara (ivory-wood).

Channapatna toys date back to the reign of the 18th-century ruler of the erstwhile Mysore kingdom, Tipu Sultan, who invited Persian artisans to train local artisans in making wooden toys. As ivory wood trees, easily distinguishable with their blooms of white, star-shaped flowers, were available aplenty in and around Ramanagara district, the craft flourished in Channapatna. Ivory wood trees help make lightweight toys. The uniqueness of the craft also helped the toys earn the Geographical Indication (GI) tag.

Etikoppaka is a village on the banks of the Varaha river. Over 200 traditional artisan families are part of the Etikoppaka toy-making industry in the village. The Etikoppaka signature toys include a standing couple, a wedding scene, automobiles, birds, and shehnai troupes. They are made with the soft variety of wood from the Ankudu tree. Like in Channapatna, here too artisans use only vegetable colours. The soft-edged toys are useful for children. They help their eye-hand coordination, they help them recognise colours and enhance their motor skills. The industry also makes utility, decorative, ornamental and measurement utensils besides toys. Etikoppaka handicrafts also have a GI tag.

The elegant toys of Kondapalli include wooden-painted bullock carts, a Dasavatharam set, a palanquin, wedding sets, farmers in the field, and Sita, Rama and Lakshmana in a boat. The primary issue with the industry is its basic ingredient, the Tella Poniki wood, which is illegal to fell.

Way Forward

1. Withdrawal of 12% GST on toys, a corpus fund to support artisans to fulfil larger orders, innovate and infuse technology, old-age pensions for artisans and Interest-free loans
2. Register craftsman for export-oriented support
3. Innovation and use of new technology, taking toys to e-commerce in a big way
4. Workshops on design innovation should be organised by the authorities
5. Artisans registration on the Government e-Marketplace portal



6. Need a start-ups culture to promote the industry, the Department of Science and Technology and the National Innovation Foundation can help in this regard
7. Many youngsters are ready to learn and pursue the handicraft, the platform should be available to impart skill in traditional toys making
8. The corporate social responsibility funding of IT firms can be used for promotion of the crafts industry
9. One district one product scheme can be utilized for promotion of toy industry across the country, the government can help artisans to create innovative tools to enable faster manufacturing
10. Industry players and artisans point out that an organised approach towards enhancing the skills of artisans along with subsidies, interest-free loans, scientific development of the industry, market interventions, and official supply of wood and lacquer would ensure the industry's growth and competitiveness

Conclusion

Market research reports suggest that there is greater demand for eco-friendly wooden toys across the world. There is a visible change in the way schools and households are looking at toys for children. Toys made of plastic and other hazardous material are being replaced by wooden toys and toys made of other non-hazardous material. This provides wooden toy-makers with a great opportunity to innovate and meet the surging demand. Artisans feel encouraged by Modi's push, but the toy story can end well only if their many problems are addressed and the government manages to bring the industry out of the woods.

India fares poorly in the hunger index

GS II: Issues relating to Poverty and Hunger

Welfare Schemes for Vulnerable Sections of the population by the Centre and States and the Performance of these Schemes; Mechanisms, Laws, Institutions and Bodies constituted for the Protection and Betterment of these Vulnerable Sections.

Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Bottom line: The Country has the highest prevalence of ‘wasted children’; even Bangladesh and Pakistan score better

News: India has the highest prevalence of wasted children under five years in the world, which reflects acute undernutrition, according to the Global Hunger Index 2020. The Index, which was

Where India stands

The Global Hunger Index score is computed using four indicators – undernourishment, child wasting, child stunting and child mortality. A country's GHI score is classified by severity – low (green), moderate (yellow) and serious (red)



RANK	COUNTRY	2020 SCORE
1-17*	China	<5
64	Sri Lanka	16.3
73	Nepal	19.5
75	Bangladesh	20.4
78	Myanmar	20.9
88	Pakistan	24.6
94	India	27.2
99	Afghanistan	30.3

*17 countries have scores of less than 5 and are collectively ranked 1-17

released on Friday, is a peer-reviewed report released annually by Concern Worldwide and Welthungerhilfe.

Major findings of the report

1. The situation has worsened in the 2015-19 period, when the prevalence of child wasting was 17.3%, in comparison to 2010-14, when it was 15.1%.
2. Overall, India ranks 94 out of 107 countries in the Index, lower than neighbours such as Bangladesh (75) and Pakistan (88). 2020 scores reflect data from 2015-19.
3. It uses four parameters to determine its scores. India fares worst in child wasting (low weight for height, reflecting acute undernutrition) and child stunting (low height for age, reflecting chronic undernutrition), which together make up a third of the total score.
4. Although it is still in the poorest category, however, child stunting has actually improved significantly, from 54% in 2000 to less than 35% now. Child wasting, on the other hand, has not improved in the last two decades and is rather worse than it was decades ago.



5. Stunting improvements means chronic malnutrition problem is being managed well, while persistence prevalence of wasting highlights acute malnutrition which reflects the prevalence of diseases which lead to a severe loss of nutrition (like diarrhoea) and lack of sanitation, hygiene and potable drinking water.
6. India has improved in both child mortality rates, which are now at 3.7%, and in terms of undernourishment, with about 14% of the total population which gets an insufficient caloric intake.
7. In the region of the south, east and south-eastern Asia, the only countries which fare worse than India are Timor-Leste, Afghanistan and North Korea.

Pandemic effect

1. Globally, nearly 690 million people are undernourished, according to the report, which warns that the COVID-19 pandemic could have affected the progress made on reducing hunger and poverty.
2. The world is not on track to achieve the second Sustainable Development Goal — known as Zero Hunger for short — by 2030. At the current pace, approximately 37 countries will fail even to reach low hunger, as defined by the Global Hunger Index Severity Scale, by 2030.
3. More so, these projections do not account for the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which may worsen hunger and undernutrition in the near term and affect countries' trajectories into the future.
4. COVID-19 has made it clearer than ever that our food systems, as they stand, are inadequate to the task of achieving Zero Hunger.

Key Terms to Know

1. Wasting (Acute malnutrition)
2. Stunting (Chronic malnutrition)
3. Hidden Hunger
4. Fortification, Biofortification
5. Poshan Abhiyan

Anti-government demonstrations in Thailand

GS II: Effect of Policies and Politics of Developed and Developing Countries on India's interests

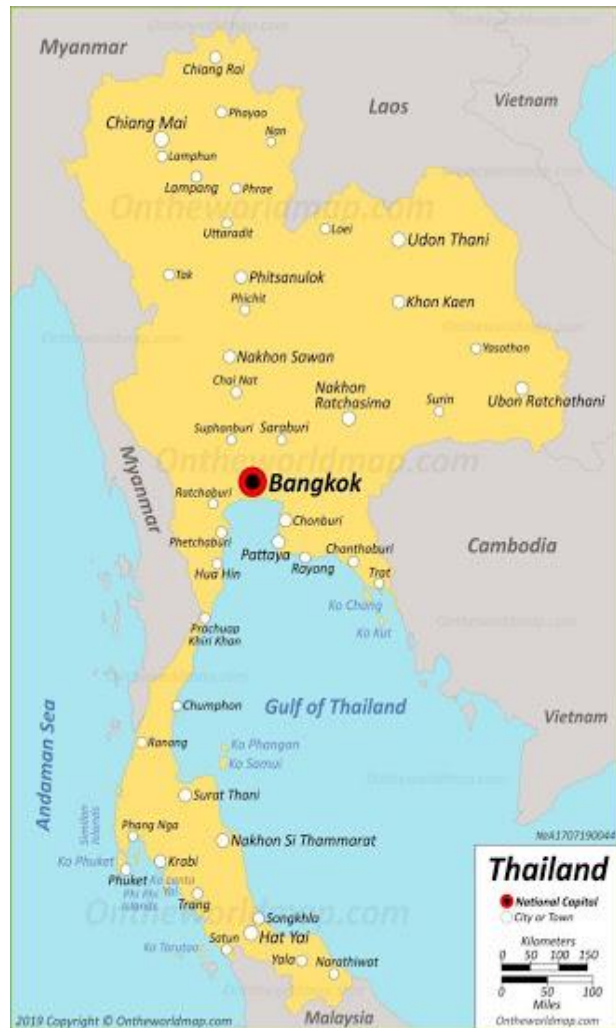
News: Thailand's government, led by the Army chief-turned Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-Ocha, declared a state of emergency on Thursday, banning public gatherings and censoring the media, to tackle the growing students' protests. The protesters have dismissed the emergency decree as yet another attempt by the government to take away their rights and vowed to continue the agitation, deepening the crisis that has shaken the country's political and royal establishments.

The genesis of the crisis

1. The roots of the current discontents go back to the 2014 coup which brought Mr Prayuth to power. Ever since the junta tightened its grip on power and introduced more and more restrictions on the public.
2. The protests, which subsided in the following months due to the pandemic, sprang back into action. From July onwards, students have maintained the street pressure on the government and even started targeting the monarchy.

Role of the monarch and Anger of Youth

1. King Vajiralongkorn's plan appears to be taking the country closer to absolute monarchy. The Generals are on the line. But this has triggered unprecedented resistance from the country's youth.



Students' demands

1. The current movement is largely led by school and college students. They used young adult pop culture icons and symbols from the Harry Potter and The Hunger Games books and films for mobilising.
2. Students called for reforms to the monarchy and its separation from power and government.
3. The students have also called for the Prime Minister's resignation; a new Constitution; fresh, free and fair elections; and an end to attacks on dissidents and opposition parties such as the Future Forward Party.

Knesset backs Israel-UAE deal

GS II: Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Effect of Policies and Politics of Developed and Developing Countries on India's interests, Indian Diaspora.

News: Israel's Parliament voted on Thursday in favour of normalisation of ties with the United Arab Emirates. This historic agreement will bring Israel closer to other

countries in the region to sign other peace agreements. The West Asia agreements were condemned by the Palestinians as a "betrayal".





Significance

1. The UAE in August became the first Arab state to establish relations with Israel since Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994. It was quickly followed by Bahrain.
2. This deal will increase trade, connectivity and integration in the conflict-ridden region.
3. It may also help west Asia in diversifying its economy based on the technological superiority of Israel.
4. Solidarity against terrorism will increase in the region bringing normalcy.

India

1. Peace, increasing trade and connectivity in West Asia is good for the Indian trade, export and Diaspora
2. Prospects of deepening of ties in the region as peace commence