



Current Affairs of the Day

GS Paper II

- *UNSC resolution addresses 'key concerns' on Afghanistan: India*
- *China opens first road-rail transport link to the Indian Ocean*

GS Paper III

- *Economy grows 20.1% in Q1, lags pre-pandemic level*
- *The core sector logs 9.4% growth*
- *Compensatory afforestation unlikely to make up for the loss of carbon stocks*



UNSC resolution addresses 'key concerns' on Afghanistan: India

1. Despite the abstention of two "PS" countries — Russia and China — from the India-led United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2593, the Government of India said it was a "matter of satisfaction" that the resolution addressed India's "key concerns" on Afghanistan.
2. PS refers to the five permanent members of the UNSC — China, France, Russia, the U.K. and the U.S.



The resolution:

1. According to official sources, the resolution called on the Taliban to keep their commitments to preventing terror groups in Afghanistan and urged them to assist the safe evacuations of all Afghan nationals wishing to leave the country.
2. The resolution demands that Afghan territory should not be used to threaten or attack any country or to shelter and train terrorists and plan or finance



terrorist attacks. It mentions individuals designated by Resolution 1267, (which includes the Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Jaish-e-Mohammad).

China opens first road-rail transport link to the Indian Ocean

1. The first shipments on a newly-launched railway line from the Myanmar border to the key commercial hub of Chengdu in western China, that provides China with a new road-rail transportation channel to the Indian Ocean.
2. This passage connects the logistics lines of Singapore, Myanmar and China, and is currently the most convenient land and sea channel linking the Indian Ocean with southwest China.
3. Chinese planners have also looked at the Gwadar port in Pakistan as another key outlet to the Indian Ocean that will bypass the Malacca Straits. Gwadar is being developed as part of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to the far western Xinjiang region but has been slow to take off amid concerns over security.

Economy grows 20.1% in Q1, lags pre-pandemic level

1. India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew by 20.1% in the first quarter of 2021-22, compared with the 24.4% contraction recorded in the corresponding quarter a year ago, but economic activity remained well below the pre-pandemic levels, thanks to the second wave of COVID-19.



2. Gross Value Added (GVA) in the economy during the April to June period rose 18.8%, as per the National Statistical Office (NSO), from a 22.2% dip in the first quarter of 2020-21.
3. GVA from agriculture, forestry and fishing, the only sector to grow amid last year's national lockdown, picked up the pace to grow 4.5% in Q1 this year from 3.5% in Q1 2020-21.
4. The government said the NSO numbers reaffirmed its prediction of an "imminent V-shaped recovery".

Concerns:

1. The share of consumption in GDP was lower this time which indicates that the second wave and lockdowns impacted households more than the first wave.
2. The growth rates in 2021-22 in some cases are unduly high due to the low base.
3. The main disappointment comes from the contribution of the government sector, both from the demand and output sides as the government final consumption expenditure (GFCE) contracted by 4.8% in Q1 this year — the only demand segment to show a fall.
4. This is a clear indication that the government has been far too cautious in increasing its expenditures to contain the fiscal deficit.
5. Economists were worried about a decline in public capital and revenue spending in July indicated by data released separately by the Controller General of Accounts.



The core sector logs 9.4% growth

1. Output from India's eight core sectors grew by 9.4% in July from a year earlier, a marginal uptick from June's 9.3% pace. Crude oil was the sole sector to register a decline, with output shrinking 3.2%, official data showed.
2. Cement production expanded the fastest in July, surging 21.8%, while fertilizer output clocked the slowest pace of growth at 0.5%. Production of natural gas grew by 18.9%, that of coal rose 18.7%, while steel and electricity saw output expand by 9.3% and 9%, respectively.
3. The 9.4% growth in the core sector, which accounts for a little over 40% of the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) is due to a combination of two factors — the base effect from last July, when output contracted 7.6%, and some affirmative action by the government on infrastructure spending.

The overall Index of Eight Core industries is released by the Office of Economic Adviser in the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade.

Compensatory afforestation unlikely to make up for the loss of carbon stocks

- In its Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) submission to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, India has pledged "to create an additional (cumulative) carbon sink of 2.5-3 GtCO₂e through additional forest and tree cover by 2030."
- India carries out compensatory afforestation under the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA), an



institutional mechanism to receive and manage funds for compensatory afforestation.

- *Experts have questioned CAMPA's ability to compensate for the lost, old-growth carbon-rich forests. They say that the complex biodiversity of a forest can never be compensated for by a monoculture plantation.*

Afforestation

1. *Afforestation, by definition, is the establishment of a forest in an area that previously had no tree cover. Around the world, it is a sought-after method to fight climate-change concerns. Trees absorb carbon, and if a forest can absorb more carbon than it releases, it becomes a carbon sink.*
2. *Afforestation is broad of two types — naturally regenerated forests, which research shows are far more effective at absorbing carbon, and plantation forests, which are generally of the same age and the same species.*
3. *According to the Global Forest Resource Assessment 2020 data, approximately three per cent of the global forests of the world come under plantation forests.*

Compensatory afforestation

1. *In India, one of the major ways in which afforestation takes place is via compensatory afforestation, which, under the Forest Conservation Act (1980) is defined as "afforestation is done in lieu of the diversion of forest land for non-forest use."*
2. *Under compensatory afforestation, when forest land is diverted for non-forest use, the project proponents are required to provide funds to the state forest department to do afforestation in a non-forest land of equal size or improve a degraded forest land of double the size of the diverted land.*



3. To streamline the management of the funds, CAMPA has been set up at the state level to monitor, assist and evaluate compensatory afforestation activities in the respective states. The state-level CAMPAs are monitored by a National CAMPA Advisory Council.
4. Over time, CAMPA has accumulated a corpus of over 50,000 crores (Rs. 500 billion). In 2016, a Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management Bill was passed, wherein the central government would provide the corpus funds to the state governments so that they can carry out afforestation activity in their respective states. The bill and its rules have been met with several criticisms.

Does compensatory afforestation increase India's carbon sink?

1. According to the 2019 Forest Survey of India report, India's total forest cover is 24.56 per cent of the country's total geographical area.
2. It plans to increase this area to 33 per cent by 2030, under the National Mission for Green India, one of eight Missions under the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) that aims to increase tree cover on five million hectares of designated forest and non-forest designated lands and improve tree cover on an additional five million hectares.

But how does this work if forests continue to be diverted for non-forest use?

1. We cut down an old-growth forest, and say that this thickly forested area can be adequately compensated by planting young saplings elsewhere.
2. Looking at it purely from a carbon accounting perspective, the new plantation cannot compensate for the loss of carbon stocks and other ecosystem services provided by old-growth forests in any realistic timeframe.



3. Every state in India usually has the recommendation to plant certain types of species. For example, the Uttarakhand forest department's 2019-2020 annual report states that they had plantations of deodar, oak, bamboo and mulberry plantations.
4. Each state has its set criteria for plantations. Experts say that usually bamboo, teak, and eucalyptus are popular choices.
5. This comes with a few problems. For example, the choice of tree species for a new plantation often is chosen without due consideration of its wider ecological value.
6. Compensating forest cover by raising non-native and artificial plantations elsewhere may not translate to the compensation of the forest benefits lost and are likely to be hazardous to the existing ecosystem.

Where is the land to build a forest?

1. In Goa, forest land diverted for non-forest use is compensated by doing afforestation in other states, such as Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh.
2. Activists have protested against this, stating their obvious confusion about how one can expect to offset razing down a forest by compensating it in a completely different state.
3. Land grab, in the name of compensatory afforestation, has also been well documented. Tribal communities and forest dwellers are the rightful guardians of Community Forest Resources, under the Forest Rights Act, 2006 say experts.
4. The gram sabha (village council) is also an empowered body under the Act, enabling the tribal population to have a decisive say in the determination of local policies and schemes impacting them.



5. *The Compensatory Afforestation Bill does not acknowledge the FRA or the gram sabhas in any way.*
6. *The government has essentially run out of land and is grabbing the land of the forest-dwelling communities. This is one of the biggest challenges of afforestation today, says an expert.*
7. *The implementation challenges cannot be resolved unless the forest rights issues are resolved. The Community Forest Resources gram sabhas should have the management authority for those lands, they should be the ones receiving the money for any afforestation programme.*

Evaluation and monitoring

1. *Media reports have said that one of the top forest officials stated that 70 per cent of the data received in the central ministry on afforestation is incorrect and incomplete.*
2. *A retired forest official told that monitoring as an activity is not something that is still implemented very well. Evaluation needs to be done after ten years, but it doesn't happen.*