

06 March 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A. GS1 Related

B. GS2 Related

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Tariff hike to hit exports to U.S.

C. GS3 Related

ENVIRONMENT

1. Fifteen of the 20 most polluted cities in the world are in India

D. GS4 Related

E. Editorials

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Fifty years apart, the story of two OIC fiascos

INDIAN ECONOMY

1. Life without GSP (International Trade)

SECURITY

1. 'India really needs to enhance its counterterrorism capabilities'

F. Tidbits

1. Six convicts on death row found innocent
2. Supreme Court seeks Centre's response on immigrants
3. SC asks petitioners to clarify stand on 'green crackers'
4. China targets 6 to 6.5% growth in 2019

G. Prelims Facts

1. Dhubri - Phulbari Bridge
2. 65% of hate crimes against Dalits: Amnesty

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

I. UPSC Mains practice Questions

A. GS1 Related

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B. GS2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Tariff hike to hit exports to U.S.

Context

- S. President Donald Trump has announced that he intends to end preferential trade terms for India under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) programme. His intent was conveyed in a letter sent to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President of the Senate.
- The GSP programme, which sets zero tariffs for certain goods from a set of 121 developing countries to foster their trade and economic development, accounts for some \$5.6 billion of India's exports to the U.S., making India the largest GSP beneficiary.
- Chemicals, gems and jewellery, engineering and textiles are among the Indian industrial sectors that benefit from the GSP.
- This could impact India's competitiveness in items groups such as raw materials in the organic chemicals sector and intermediary goods in the US market, alongside items such as iron or steel, furniture, aluminum and electrical machinery.

What is GSP?

- GSP is a U.S. trade program designed to promote economic growth in the developing world by providing preferential duty-free entry for up to 4,800 products from 129 designated beneficiary countries and territories.
- It was instituted on January 1, 1976, and authorised under the US Trade Act of 1974. India has been the biggest beneficiary of the GSP regime and accounted for over a quarter of the goods that got duty-free access into the US in 2017.

What is the objective of GSP?

- The objective of GSP was to give development support to poor countries by promoting exports from them into the developed countries.
- GSP promotes sustainable development in beneficiary countries by helping these countries to increase and diversify their trade with the United States.
- GSP provide opportunities for many of the world's poorest countries to use trade to grow their economies and climb out of poverty.

What are the Benefits of GSP

- Indian exporters benefit indirectly – through the benefit that accrues to the importer by way of reduced tariff or duty free entry of eligible Indian products.
- Reduction or removal of import duty on an Indian product makes it more competitive to the importer – other things (e.g. quality) being equal.
- This tariff preference helps new exporters to penetrate a market and established exporters to increase their market share and to improve upon the profit margins, in the donor country.

Why these changes now?

- "India has implemented a wide array of trade barriers that create serious negative effects on United States commerce. Despite intensive engagement, India has failed to take the necessary steps to meet the GSP criterion," the United States Trade Representative (USTR) said on its website.
- One of the discretionary criteria the President must (as per the GSP statute) take into account while determining GSP eligibility is whether the beneficiary "will provide equitable and reasonable access to its markets and basic commodity resources and the extent to which it has assured the United States it will refrain from engaging in unreasonable export practices."
- India's new e-commerce rules — which have impacted American companies like Amazon and Walmart (majority owner of Flipkart), price controls on medical devices (cardiac stents), tariffs on ICT products like smart watches and high-end mobile phones and lack of greater market access for the U.S. dairy industry are among the issues that have caused trade friction between the two countries.

What is the possible impact?

- India's Department of Commerce feels the impact is "minimal", given that Indian exporters were only

receiving duty-free benefits of \$190 million on the country's overall GSP-related trade of \$5.6 billion.

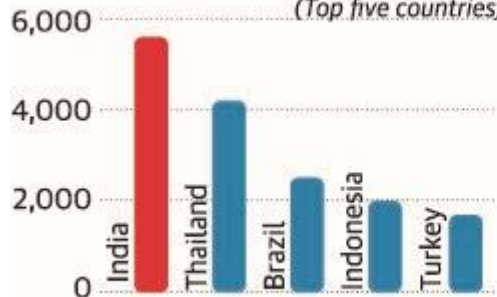
- Some experts feel the move will not have a major impact on India also because it has been diversifying its market in the Latin American and the African region and its trade with countries of the Global South has also been expanding at a “very competitive pace”.
- “The amount of price advantage India has versus competitor countries and what happens to their GSP privileges will determine the extent to which India’s exports will be impacted,” said Dr Jaimini Bhagwati, former ambassador to the UK who also worked in the World Bank.

Duty bound

In 2017, India was the biggest beneficiary of the U.S. Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) programme, which allows duty-free export of some products

India exported products worth \$5.6 bn under the programme in 2017, the highest among all beneficiaries

DUTY-FREE EXPORTS IN \$ MN IN 2017
(Top five countries)



Withdrawal of GSP to India will have a minimal impact... benefits amount to \$190 million on overall exports [under GSP] of \$5.6 billion
- ANUP WADHWAN
Commerce Secretary

What next?

- These changes announced may not take effect until at least 60 days after the notifications are sent to the US Congress and the governments of India, and will be enacted by a Presidential Proclamation.
- India, in June 2018, had intended to impose higher tariffs on 29 goods imported from the US in retaliation to the country’s decision to impose hefty tariffs on imported steel and aluminum products. The move, which could potentially impact products like walnuts, almonds and chickpeas, has been deferred several times.
- Commerce Secretary Anup Wadhwan indicated that the government would continue to engage in “internal” discussions on these issues and that the “door for discussions” with the US was “always open”.

C. GS3 Related

Category: ENVIRONMENT

1. Fifteen of the 20 most polluted cities in the world are in India

Context

- Fifteen of the top 20 most polluted cities in the world are located in India, according to an analysis of air quality in several cities around the world.

Details of the Analysis

- When ranked by country, Bangladesh emerged as the most polluted followed by Pakistan and India respectively.
- Of the cities analysed, 64% exceeded the WHO’s annual exposure guideline (10 micrograms/cubic metre) for fine particulate matter, also known as PM2.5. India’s annual guidelines range from 40-60

micrograms/cubic metre, depending on whether they are residential or industrial areas.

- Every single one of measured cities with data in the Middle East and Africa exceeded the WHO guideline, while 99% of cities in South Asia, 95% of cities in Southeast Asia and 89% of cities in East Asia breached this level.
- The ranking relies on ground-based sensors located in 3,000 cities from 73 countries and was compiled by IQAir Group, a manufacturer of air-monitoring sensors as well as purifiers and environmentalist group Greenpeace.
- Jakarta and Hanoi emerged as Southeast Asia's two most polluted cities and average concentrations in the cities in China fell by 12% from 2017 to 2018. Beijing ranks now as the 122nd most polluted city in the world in 2018 and China, the 12th most polluted country in the world. Of the countries analysed, Iceland emerged as the one with the cleanest air.

Dubious distinction

Fifteen cities from India figure among the 20 most polluted places across the globe

Rank	City	2018*
1	Gurugram	135.8
2	Ghaziabad	135.2
3	Faisalabad, Pakistan	130.4
4	Faridabad	129.1
5	Bhiwadi	125.4
6	Noida	123.6
7	Patna	119.7
8	Hotan, China	116
9	Lucknow	115.7
10	Lahore, Pakistan	114.9
11	Delhi	113.5
12	Jodhpur	113.4
13	Muzaffarpur	110.3
14	Varanasi	105.3
15	Moradabad	104.9
16	Agra	104.8
17	Dhaka, Bangladesh	97.1
18	Gaya	96.6
19	Kashgar, China	95.7
20	Jind	91.6

*Average PM_{2.5} in $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$



What is the solution to improve the Air Quality?

- The more data is needed on the exact sources of air pollution and the quantum of contribution by each to the problem, the available data is clear that there are multiple sources, all of which contribute significantly, such that tackling any one to the exclusion of others will have no impact on the problem.
- It is not just road dust, vehicular pollution, dust storms, industrial pollution from power plants, and

biomass burning, but a combination of all that has led to the problem.

- It is also very clear that this is not just a “Delhi problem” or even an urban problem, but an international one that affects wide swathes of northern, western, and eastern India.
- It cannot be tackled through one-off measures by courts, it cannot be handled with piecemeal measures aimed at one source, and it cannot be focused only on the cities.
- The scale of the task is indeed vast, but—if history is any guide—not insurmountable. London and Los Angeles are among those cities that had a seemingly insurmountable problem of polluted air thanks to a combination of geographic and industrial factors in the last century, but have now made significant progress in improving air quality.
- No part of this progress, however, was cost-free or an overnight process, but change did come about gradually thanks to governmental interventions.

D. GS4 Related

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E. Editorials

Category:INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Fifty years apart, the story of two OIC fiascos

Note to Students:

- This article examines India’s participation at the recently concluded Organisation of Islamic Cooperation meeting, for which India’s Minister for External Affairs, Sushma Swaraj was invited as a guest of honour and to deliver a keynote speech.
- Since this issue has been in the news for some time now, we’ve taken a couple of opinion section contributions that have featured on this issue over the past couple of days- this would lend greater insight into the issue, and will touch upon the different perspectives that are needed for the examination.

Larger Background:

- The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is the second largest inter-governmental organization after the United Nations with a membership of 57 states spread over four continents.
- The Organization is the collective voice of the Muslim world.
- It endeavours to safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony among various people of the world.

Why in the news?

- External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj recently attended the inaugural plenary of the foreign ministers’ conclave of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) as the guest of honour.
- ***It is for the first time that India has been invited to a meeting of the OIC, which is an influential grouping of 57 Islamic countries.***
- India was invited to attend the OIC meeting in 1969 but Pakistan prevailed upon and got the invite withdrawn.

India’s Participation at the OIC Perspective:

- In a diplomatic move to isolate Pakistan, India’s External Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj said OIC nations must tell countries supporting terror to dismantle the infrastructure of terrorist camps and stop providing funding and shelter to terror outfits.
- Further, underlining that the fight against terrorism is not a confrontation against any religion, ***External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj told Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member countries Friday that India’s 185 million Muslims are “a microcosm of the diversity of India” and they “maintain strong cultural and linguistic heritage” and live in harmony with “each other and with their non-Muslim brethren”.***

- The first Indian minister to address the OIC, Swaraj quoted from the Quran and other religious scriptures to underscore India's diversity that "has ensured that very few Muslims in India have fallen prey to the poisonous propaganda of radical and extremist ideologies".
- And in a diplomatic move to isolate Pakistan, **Swaraj said OIC nations must tell countries supporting terror to dismantle the infrastructure of terrorist camps and stop providing funding and shelter to terror outfits.**
- It is important to note that Pakistan is a founding member of the OIC.
- Without naming Pakistan even once in her speech, Swaraj's remarks were clearly directed at Islamabad.
- **India's first participation at the OIC came despite strong demands by Pakistan to rescind Swaraj's invitation to address the grouping. This was turned down by the host nation, the UAE, and resulted in Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi boycotting the plenary.**
- Asserting that the fight against terrorism is not against any religion, Swaraj said: "We are witnessing the terrible daily destruction in senseless terrorist violence. It is destroying lives, destabilising regions and putting the world at great peril. The reach of terror is growing, its lethality is increasing and the toll it is taking, is rising."

Position Taken on Jammu and Kashmir:

- Rejecting a resolution by the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) on Jammu and Kashmir that referred to "Indian terrorism" and "mass blindings", the External Affairs Ministry said its stand on the matter was "well known".
- The resolution on Jammu and Kashmir, another on the "India-Pakistan Peace Process" that praised Pakistan for its "efforts", and a statement on "Muslim minorities" worldwide that called upon the Indian government to rebuild the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, came as an embarrassment for the government just a day after External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj had addressed the gathering.
- "We reaffirm that Jammu and Kashmir is an integral part of India and is a matter strictly internal to India," the Ministry said in a statement after the conclusion of the Council of Foreign Ministers in Abu Dhabi.
- The statement appreciated the invitation to Ms. Swaraj as a "historic gesture".
- Officials underplayed the statements and references to India, pointing out that there were no negative references to New Delhi in the "Abu Dhabi declaration" document, which is the main communiqué.
- Experts opine that the other resolutions "don't reflect or need a consensus" of the entire 57-nation group. **"They are essentially national positions of individual countries, and often go unopposed".**
- Foreign Minister of the UAE Sheikh Abdullah attempted to explain the statements from what he called a "positive angle". "I think the OIC has sent a very clear and positive sign to India and looks forward to strengthening such a relationship to a point where we can embrace India one day at the OIC," he said.

Perspective on the language of the statements issued:

- It is important to note that the language of the statements that were issued with Indian references are harsh, and while the OIC has regularly issued statements on the situation in Jammu and Kashmir that accuses Indian forces of atrocities, **the statement on the "peace process between India-Pakistan" is unusual**, not least given the tensions during the month of February, 2019 and the fact that there is no dialogue between the two countries at present.
- In one para, the resolution "condemns the trend of unprecedented escalation of ceasefire violations by Indian occupation (sic) forces".
- In the resolution on Jammu and Kashmir, the recommendations included an appeal to OIC members to "mobilise funds" for "humanitarian assistance to the Kashmiri people".

A Critical Take on India's Participation at the OIC:

- Some experts have opined that India's most recent encounter with the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) bears an uncanny resemblance to India's failed attempt to gain entry to the inaugural session of the same grouping held in Rabat, Morocco, in 1969 and for much the same reasons.
- In the earlier episode New Delhi lobbied fiercely to wangle an invitation to the meeting. However, on Pakistan's insistence the invitation that had been extended was withdrawn and India was denied membership of the OIC despite its insistence that as the country with the third largest Muslim population in the world it deserved a seat at the "Islamic" table.

Joining the OIC: Contrary to the idea of secularism?

- Some experts have opined that as India is a country whose foundational philosophy was based on secularism, it was inappropriate for India to join an organisation whose defining criterion was shared religious identity.
- In India's case this applied to all organisations that used religious criteria to define themselves, whether they be Muslim, Hindu, Christian or Buddhist.
- **Further, since India's membership of the OIC would be perceived as a powerful refutation of the basis on which Pakistan was created, it was bound to object stridently to India's induction into the organisation.**
- *It is important to note that Pakistan had great leverage with the conservative Arab monarchies for ideological reasons and because of the fact that its military was willing to provide the Arab monarchies with well-trained soldiers for hire that the latter needed to protect their insecure regimes.*
- Further, **Pakistan at that time also had close relations with Iran and Turkey with whom it shared membership of CENTO (Central Treaty Organisation, formerly the Baghdad Pact) and an anti-Soviet and pro-U.S. orientation.**
- As a consequence, Islamabad had much greater clout within OIC circles than did New Delhi and was in a position to thwart Indian attempts to attain OIC membership.
- Some experts have opined that New Delhi's attempt to gain OIC membership led to unnecessary humiliation that could have been avoided had South Block acted with greater forethought.

A Look at the Present Situation: Contrasting 1969 with 2019

- It is important to note that the situation today is both different and similar to 1969, and this was clearly reflected in India's latest experience with the OIC.
- In an apparent gesture of goodwill, the organisers of the OIC Foreign Ministers meeting in Abu Dhabi, which in effect meant the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia invited External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj as the guest of honour and keynote speaker, despite Pakistan's objections.
- This was both a reflection of India's growing economic and political stature internationally and the desire on the part of the Gulf monarchies to cultivate New Delhi in order to take advantage of the opportunities provided by India's expanding economy and its technologically skilled workforce.
- However, this is where the difference between 1969 and 2019 ends and the similarities kick in.
- It is important to note that the impact of Ms. Swaraj's speech, especially her denunciation of terrorism that was clearly aimed at Pakistan, was more than neutralised by a number of events that followed her address.

These are listed as below:

1. Firstly, the Abu Dhabi declaration issued at the end of the meeting did not contain even a simple expression of thanks to the Indian External Affairs Minister for addressing the plenary session of the assembly.
2. Furthermore, it failed to mention the fact that Ms. Swaraj was the guest of honour at the meeting and delivered the keynote speech. This omission was very glaring in view of the fact that the document mentioned all sorts of unimportant issues, such as the UAE hosting the 2020 Expo in Dubai.
3. Next, to add insult to injury, the document's only reference to the India-Pakistan stand-off stated that the OIC welcomes the "positive initiative undertaken by the Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan to hand over the Indian pilot as a gesture of goodwill to de-escalate tensions in the region". Thus, the Pakistani "initiative" was given a very positive twist by decontextualising it totally. There was not even an implicit reference to the primary reason that led to the most recent India-Pakistan conflagration, namely, Pakistani support for terrorism as witnessed most dramatically by the attack in Pulwama that killed 40 Central Reserve Police Force personnel.
4. Further, what was even more galling from the Indian perspective was the **resolution on Kashmir that accompanied the Abu Dhabi declaration**. This included the phrase "Indian terrorism in Kashmir" while condemning what it called "atrocities and human rights violations" in the State. It is clear from this sequence of events and the wording of the documents that emanated from the OIC meeting that **despite the invitation to Ms. Swaraj, Pakistani influence within the organisation has diminished only marginally.**

Concluding Perspectives:

- Experts opine that the Ministry of External Affairs, instead of prematurely celebrating the invitation to Ms. Swaraj to address the Abu Dhabi conference, should have thought long and hard before advising the Minister to accept the invitation.
- Further, it was particularly incumbent upon the Ministry of External Affairs to do so in light of the resolutions passed by the OIC over the years regarding Kashmir and India-Pakistan issues which had always favoured the Pakistani point of view.
- In conclusion, it appears from hindsight that the External Affairs Minister's participation in the OIC Foreign Ministers' conclave, like the Indian attempt to gain admission into the Rabat conference in 1969, was nothing short of an avoidable fiasco.

Category: INDIAN ECONOMY

1. Life without GSP (International Trade)

Editorial Analysis:

Why in the news?

- The U.S. has ultimately acted on its threat to withdraw concessions granted to Indian imports under the Generalised System of Preferences.
- President Trump indicated as much in a letter to the House of Representatives and Senate. With this development, Washington became the first to pull the trigger in a long trade stand-off between India and the U.S.

A Brief Look at the Recent Past:

- India-U.S. trade tensions escalated in the year 2018 when the U.S. took two consecutive decisions to increase import tariffs on steel and aluminium, and place India's eligibility for GSP benefits under review.
- As a matter of fact, shortly after, India said it would impose retaliatory tariffs on imports from the U.S. and even notified the list of items on which these would apply.
- Meanwhile, the U.S. stood fast on not exempting India from its tariff hikes, with Mr. Trump complaining about India's high import tariffs several times. The GSP review, however, stretched on, with the two countries holding frequent talks to address the concerns.
- India, for its part, postponed the deadline for the imposition of the retaliatory tariffs six times.

What prompted the U.S. to review India's GSP status?

- Washington's decision to review India's GSP status stemmed from complaints from American medical and dairy industries, both of which said India was not providing "equitable and reasonable access to its market".
- India has said it had tried hard to cater to most of the U.S. demands and reach an understanding, but key points of difference, especially regarding India's cultural concerns to do with dairy products, could not be accommodated.
- Given this, and the fact that the U.S. has been expressing discontent over India's policies to do with data localisation and FDI rules in e-commerce, the decision to withdraw the GSP status should not come as a surprise. The question is, how will New Delhi react?

Reaction by the Government of India:

- Following the U.S. announcement, the Commerce Ministry of the Government of India, was quick to downplay the impact, saying that the GSP benefits amounted to only \$190 million, while India's total exports under GSP to the U.S. stood at \$5.6 billion.
- It is also important to note that Indian officials have stressed that talks on the issue would still continue during the 60-day period after which the GSP decision would come into effect.

Concluding Remarks: Way Forward

- The other option the government can exercise is to impose retaliatory tariffs on U.S. goods.
- Experts have opined that the government's efforts to downplay the impact of the withdrawal of GSP status and express readiness for more talks, however, suggest it is not keen to take a decisively strong stance. It bears emphasis that while the actual amounts at stake are relatively small, with even India's proposed tariffs on the U.S. amounting to just \$900 million, the impact on small industries in the country could nevertheless be significant.
- Export bodies have already said that such industries would lose their market share in the U.S. without fiscal support to help them maintain their edge.
- In its absence, orders meant for India could go to other GSP countries, signs of which are already evident.

Category: SECURITY

1. 'India really needs to enhance its counterterrorism capabilities'

Note to Students:

- This editorial analysis is from an interview given by Shyam Saran, who is a senior fellow at the Centre for Policy Research, and is a former Foreign Secretary.
- He served as the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Nuclear Affairs and Climate Change and was also chairman of the National Security Advisory Board.
- Against the backdrop of post-Pulwama India-Pakistan tensions, Mr. Saran explains the important components of India's counterterrorism strategy, and says no one has the right to hand out nationalism and patriotism certificates, and calls the coverage on television of terrorism "reprehensible". The following paragraphs present the excerpts of the interview.

Editorial Analysis:

1. ***Considering where we are, what do you think is the future course of India-Pakistan relations?***
 - I cannot see much happening until the elections in India are over.
 - The nature of the political dispensation that emerges from the elections will decide the direction of bilateral ties later.
 - Pakistan evokes very strident public opinion in India. Do you think that might continue after the elections also, forcing the government's hand?
 - Over the years, Indians are getting more and more angry with the continuing support for terrorism by Pakistan, and the stridency can be explained by this fact. One should not be very surprised that there is a very negative perception about Pakistan in India.
 - Having said that, we have to think of how we can find a way out of this. You have to have a strategy that convinces decision makers in Islamabad that continuing with this policy will impose a high cost on Pakistan and it will not be in its interests. That cannot be achieved by angry rhetoric.
2. ***India tried to do that with the deep strikes in Pakistan. That was a message to Pakistan's decision makers. How are they taking this message?***
 - If you look at the situation objectively, whatever message we may have tried to convey to the Pakistani side, we have not been able to claim significant damage and casualties through evidence that is credible both domestically and internationally.
 - There is also a report — I don't know how credible that is — that our aircraft never crossed the LoC, let alone flew into sovereign Pakistani territory.
 - We have to wait and see what the government has to say on this particular aspect. If that is true, then the deep penetration was through precision-guided missiles and not with aircraft.
 - But still, one could argue that a target deep inside Pakistani territory has been hit and India has lowered the threshold for response. Has it changed the strategic calculus of Pakistan? I don't think so.
3. ***So, in the unfortunate event of another terror strike, India will have to better the last response.***

Are we now bound to an escalation ladder?

- That is based on the assumption that we really have no leverage beyond reacting militarily. I think the counterterrorism strategy of India, which has military response as a component, also has other important components.
 - For example, we really need to enhance our own counterterrorism capabilities — in terms of intelligence, neutralising targets, better SOPs for security forces, better technology.
 - Also, to do more efficiently what we are doing currently, to isolate Pakistan diplomatically.
 - Already, its reputation is at its lowest.
 - It is significant that despite tensions between the two countries, the OIC [Organisation of Islamic Cooperation] still went ahead with the invitation to [External Affairs Minister] Sushma Swaraj-ji.
 - So Pakistan is facing international pressure. Therefore, instead of merely looking at the military options, we need to have a much more comprehensive view on what our counterterrorism strategy should be. Efforts should be made to ensure that such an act of terrorism does not occur again.
4. ***There were a lot of initiatives following the 2008 Mumbai terror attack, to develop counterterrorism capabilities, such as the idea of a National Counter Terrorism Centre. Is the progress of these initiatives disappointing for you?***
- I think a lot of new mechanisms came into place. For example, the National Investigation Agency.
 - Our technical capabilities have also increased.
 - It should be appreciated that for a hundred successes that you have in preventing terrorist incidents from taking place, there is always the possibility of one failure.
 - That is the nature of the whole phenomenon of terrorism.
 - This fact needs to be appreciated, while we do all we can to make it more and more difficult for a terrorist to plan and carry out an attack. This is also the reason why we must focus on the vulnerabilities on our side.
 - For example, if we are not completely successful in stopping drug-smuggling across the India-Pakistan border, it should come as no surprise that a terrorist could also slip in. Here, counterterrorism is not merely military operations, but also of governance.
1. ***Talking of international response, how do you assess the responses of the U.S., China and Russia to the incident? They appear to be conscious of Pakistan's strategic value.***
- Well, this is a challenge you will have to deal with yourself.
 - Every country, including India, works according to its national interests. Currently, China has a higher — in fact, unprecedented — level of commitment to Pakistan than before because of the critical role the latter is playing in the Belt and Road Initiative [BRI].
 - They say that the CPEC [China-Pakistan Economic Corridor] is the flagship project for the BRI.
 - The current U.S. administration has taken some measures against Pakistan, but it also has compulsions connected to its plans for Afghanistan.
 - It has come to the conclusion, wrongly in my opinion, that Pakistan has an important role to play in that.
 - Even when countries are sympathetic to India, have good counterterrorism cooperation with India, they have other considerations too, and there may be limits beyond which they may not be ready to go in targeting Pakistan.
2. ***Is there is a new equilibrium between India and Pakistan after this round of conflict?***
- I don't accept the suggestion of any equilibrium between India and Pakistan.
 - India is a much bigger economic and military power. If you look at the trajectory of these two countries in recent years, the gap between them is only growing. India's growth story, its march towards the status of a great power, has not been impacted even remotely by Pakistan's activities against it.
 - Pakistan's efforts to 'bleed India through a thousand cuts' and derail India's economic success have

continuously failed.

- We should reflect on this fact in our sober moments.
 - On the other hand, by pursuing such a policy against India, Pakistan has ended up with a radicalised society and a vulnerable economy. It has also earned the reputation of being the breeding ground of global terrorism.
 - Pakistan is hurting itself, and today its per capita income is less than that of Bangladesh. So, there is no balance between India and Pakistan to speak of.
 - India should focus more on achieving some approximate balance with China, which is its real challenge. Pakistan, even with its use of cross-border terrorism as an instrument of state policy, is a distraction from dealing with the real issues confronting India in its march towards great power status.
3. ***That takes us to the question of the responses within India to terrorism. There is mass hysteria being sought on most mainstream television channels. How does this impact national security?***
- Well, what is happening on Indian television these days is reprehensible. At moments like these, we need to have a reasoned debate. We cannot have a situation where anyone who raises a question, or who has a different point of view, is immediately branded as an anti-national and non-patriotic. Who gave the right to an anchor or a political leader to give certificates to others on nationalism and patriotism? That is not acceptable to me as an ordinary citizen of this country.
4. ***High officials in the government, including the Prime Minister, have made such statements.***
- Wherever it comes from, it is not justifiable.
 - Yes, we are in the midst of an election season.
 - Even elections should be an occasion to have polite and civil conversations.
 - Democracy is something that we take pride in.
 - If that is going to be eroded, all of us will suffer.
5. ***In the last five years, the Government of India has discontinued engagement with Pakistan and separatists on the question of Kashmir and has continuously sought to undermine the regional political parties. How wise is that policy?***
- First of all, we have an issue with Pakistan to resolve on Kashmir, which is the return of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir [PoK]. It is illegal occupation.
 - Therefore, Jammu and Kashmir has to be part of the agenda of India-Pakistan engagement.
 - Secondly, while cross-border terrorism continues, there have been periods of relative peace that the security forces have achieved in the Valley which should have been utilised by the political class in order to resolve the political issues that are internal.
 - There have been repeated failures on the part of the political leadership on this question.
 - Instead of using the periods of peace to reach out to people and seek political solutions, the political class slips into complacency.
 - Any policy that pushes more and more political constituencies away in Jammu and Kashmir, by saying they are anti-nationals, unpatriotic, separatists — who are you then going to end up talking to?
 - You cannot have a solution to the Kashmir issue which is entirely dependent on security measures.
 - This is what our Army officials and paramilitary leadership will tell you: we can create some relative peace, but we are not the answer to the political issue
6. ***The approach of former Prime Ministers Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh went beyond merely seeking the return of PoK. They both sought to involve Pakistan in a resolution to the Kashmir conflict, right?***
- What Dr. Singh said about Kashmir is this: 'I do not have the mandate to change the border of India. But I do have the mandate to make the borders as open as possible to exchange goods and the movement of people.' That is not the final solution.

- While that final solution is still awaiting us, these are the things we can do to make life better for people on both sides of the LoC. That does not in any way compromise our claim over the whole of Jammu and Kashmir.

F. Tidbits

1. Six convicts on death row found innocent

- Ten years after condemning to death six nomadic tribe members in a rape and murder case, the Supreme Court found them innocent and ordered the Maharashtra police to hunt down the real criminals.
- They had been convicted of the murder of five members of a family, rape of a woman and her 15-year-old daughter and dacoity in Nashik. They spent over 16 years in jail.
- The court said the six were falsely implicated by the police. One of the six was a juvenile at the time of his arrest. Some of them had developed psychiatric problems owing to the long years in solitary confinement. They were not eligible for pardon or parole as they were condemned men.
- “Dr. Ashit Sheth, Shinde’s psychiatrist, opined that he lived under sub-human conditions for several years. He was kept in isolation in solitary confinement with very restricted human contact and under the perpetual fear of death. He was only allowed to meet his mother, and that too only infrequently. He was not even allowed to mix with other prisoners. Therefore, all the accused remained under constant stress and in the perpetual fear of death,” Justice Shah said.
- The court turned its ire on the State police force for the trauma it inflicted on the men, who belonged to both socially and financially backward communities. The court ordered the State government to pay each of the six men compensation of ₹5 lakh.
- The court highlighted how the police did not bother to even investigate the fact that eye-witnesses had, immediately after the crime was committed, identified four other men from the rogues’ gallery as the perpetrators of the crime.
- There had been no effort by the police to find these four. The court ordered the Maharashtra Chief Secretary to take disciplinary action against the probe officers within three months.
- The acquittal of the six men is however a U-turn for the Supreme Court too. In 2009, the court had dismissed their appeals and found them all guilty enough to be sent to the gallows.
- However, luck changed for the six men when they filed their review petitions against the 2009 judgment. In October 2018, the court decided to recall its 2009 verdict and hear their appeals afresh. This change of mind by the court has now finally proved their innocence.

2. Supreme Court seeks Centre’s response on immigrants

- The Supreme Court has sought a response from the Centre on a fresh plea seeking to quash a series of subordinate laws which allows the naturalisation of illegal immigrants who are Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians fleeing religious persecution from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan.
- The petitioners have urged the court to declare the amendments made through the Passport (Entry into India) Amendment Rules, 2015; the Foreigners (Amendment) Order, 2015 and the order issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs on December 26, 2016 under the Citizenship Act, allowing the naturalisation of illegal immigrants who are Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians, as “illegal and invalid”.
- They have contended that the leeway offered by the subordinate laws would further multiply the “uncontrolled influx of illegal migrants from Bangladesh to Assam”. The illegal immigration has caused huge demographic changes in the northeastern State, the petitioners claimed.
- A Bench, comprising Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi and Justice Sanjiv Khanna, issued notice on the plea filed by Assam State Jamiat Ulama E Hind and ordered its tagging with a similar pending petition of ‘Nagarikatawa Aain Songsudhan Birodhi Mancha’ (Forum Against Citizenship Act Amendment Bill).
- Earlier, the court had decided to wait till Parliament took a call on the new Citizenship (Amendment) Bill. The Bill was passed in the Lok Sabha on January 8.
- The Citizenship (Amendment) Bill proposed to amend the original Citizenship Act of 1955 vintage. It mandated that those who crossed the border to India from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan and belong to “minority communities”, namely, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians would

not be treated as illegal immigrants despite having entered India without valid travel documents.

- If the Bill is implemented, the immigrants from the minority communities from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan would not face deportation.

3. SC asks petitioners to clarify stand on 'green crackers'

- The Supreme Court has asked petitioners objecting to the use of chemicals like barium nitrate and potassium nitrate in the formulation of 'green crackers' to submit a reply detailing their stand on the issue.
- A Bench of Justices A.K. Sikri and S. Abdul Nazeer gave the direction in response to a request made by advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan, representing three toddlers who filed a writ petition against the toxic effects of firecrackers, urging that the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests examine the samples of green crackers which contain "conventional formulations" with barium nitrate and potassium nitrate as oxidisers.
- Sankaranarayanan had earlier submitted that these two components are among the several toxic ingredients which the Supreme Court had previously red-flagged. The usage of these chemicals in the improved/green crackers would be a violation of the Supreme Court's orders against the use of noxious firecrackers.
- On October 23, the court had struck a balance between the interests of the firecracker industry and the right to public health by allowing licensed traders to manufacture and sell "green" and reduced-emission or "improved" crackers while banning those which are loud and toxic to man, animal and the environment.
- The latest turn of events come after participants at a meeting of the CSIR-National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI) and fireworks' manufacturers reached agreement on commencing bulk production of green crackers by March 30, the minutes of the meeting show.
- As per the minutes, an agreement was reached for manufacturers to submit product approval documents by March 7. The Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation could then provide approval for the improved formulation by March 21, and production of the green fireworks could start by March 30.

4. China targets 6 to 6.5% growth in 2019

- China has set an economic growth target of 6%-6.5% for 2019, after factoring in a slew of headwinds, including the trade war with the U.S., and financial bottlenecks for its private enterprises.
- The growth rate estimate, which was lower than last year's projection of "about 6.5%", was revealed in the government work report, which was delivered by Prime Minister Li Keqiang during the opening session of the National People's Congress (NPC) — China's Parliament.
- China's GDP growth target will be tested when the full impact of the trade war with the U.S. is felt in the first half of this year. The Chinese government hopes to counter the downward pressure on the economy by shoring up domestic demand, using monetary and fiscal instruments at its command.
- Beijing has targeted creation of 11 million new urban jobs this year, compared to the actual 13.6 million jobs that were generated last year. China has already stepped up lending to stimulate domestic growth. The work report called upon commercial banks to increase loans to small- and medium-sized companies by 30% this year — a potential high growth segment.
- The work report targeted an urban unemployment rate of "about 5.5%", higher than the actual unemployment rate of 5.1% last year. The government also pledged to keep inflation under 3%.
- A separate budget report released at the start of the NPC session said China's 2019 defence spending will rise 7.5% from 2018.

G. Prelims Facts

1. Dhubri – Phulbari Bridge

Context

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs last week approved the construction of a four-lane bridge over the Brahmaputra. It will be the country's longest, and will boost connectivity and commerce in the region.
- The current longest road and rail-road bridges of the country are already over the Brahmaputra. The Dhola-Sadiya bridge (road) runs 9.15 km, and the Bogibeel bridge (rail-road) is 4.94 km.

How the bridge helps?

- At 19.28 km, it will connect Dhubri in Assam to Phulbari in Meghalaya. It is projected to reduce the travel distance between these two places from 205.3 km to 19.282 km, and travel time from 5 hours to 20 minutes.



- As of now, the only means of going directly from Dhubri to Phulbari is by boat. It takes approximately 3 hours, and while returning it takes 5 hours against the current. This will come down to 25-30 minutes at the most after the bridge comes up
- A Press Information Bureau (PIB) statement said the alignment will augment the transport network for the Northeast region, by providing the shortest link connecting western Meghalaya, as well as the southern NE states of Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura, with the rest of the country.
- The current longest road and rail-road bridges of the country are already over the Brahmaputra. The Dhola-Sadiya bridge (road) runs 9.15 km, and the Bogibeel bridge (rail-road) is 4.94 km.
- The Brahmaputra, running 670 km in Assam, is extremely wide at some places. It is the narrowest in Guwahati, say about 1 km, and the widest in Dibrugarh, over 15 km stretching to 20 km
- Assam is bisected by the Brahmaputra and its numerous tributaries. Naturally, people are handicapped when they have no means to cross the river. Bridges will be immensely helpful since distances will be reduced by hundreds of kilometers
- Inaugurating the Bogibeel bridge in 2018, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said three bridges over the Brahmaputra were completed in the last four-and-a-half years and another five were being built.
- The bridge will be built under the North-East Road Network Connectivity Project with loan assistance from Japan International Cooperation Agency.

2. 65% of hate crimes against Dalits: Amnesty

Context

- More than 200 alleged hate crimes against marginalised people, including 87 killings, were documented by Amnesty India's interactive "Halt the Hate" website in 2018. About 65% of the crimes were against

Dalits.

- Of the 218 documented incidents, 142 were against Dalits, 50 against Muslims, and eight each against Christians, adivasis and transgender people. There were 97 incidents of assault and 87 killings reported. Of the 40 incidents of sexual violence, Dalit women were victims in 33 cases.
- For the third straight year, Uttar Pradesh recorded the highest number of reported crimes, with 57 such incidents.

Amnesty International

- Amnesty International is a non-governmental organisation focused on human rights.
- The stated objective of the organisation is – to conduct research and generate action to prevent and end grave abuses of human rights, and to demand justice for those whose rights have been violated.
- The organisation was awarded the 1977 Nobel Peace Prize for its “campaign against torture,” and the United Nations Prize in the Field of Human Rights in 1978.
- In the field of international human rights organisations, Amnesty has the second longest history, after the International Federation for Human Rights and broadest name recognition.
- Amnesty International is a worldwide human rights organization run by its members. It is independent of all governments and all financial players. It is also independent of political convictions and religious faiths.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL



- Organization's logo – the lit candle surrounded by barbed wire – from a Chinese proverb, “It is better to light a light than to curse the darkness”.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Question 1. Which of the following provisions is/ are available against child labour?

1. Article 23 and 24
2. Article 39
3. PENCIL portal
4. National Child Labour Project Scheme

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- a. Only 1, 2 and 3
- b. Only 2 and 4
- c. Only 3 and 4

d. All of the above

See

Answer: d

Question 2. Consider the following statements regarding Rastriya Vayoshri Yojan a:

1. It provides Physical Aids and Assisted-Living devices for senior citizens belonging to BPL category.
2. It is a central sector scheme which is being implemented with the expenditure being met from "Senior Citizens' Welfare Fund".

Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?

- a. Only 1
- b. Only 2
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. None of the above

See

Answer: c

Question 3. Consider the following statements regarding Maintenance & Welfare o Parents and Senior Citizen Act 2007:

1. It defines the senior citizen as any person being a citizen of India, who has attained the age of 60 years and above.
2. There are no constitutional provisions in India to improve the quality of life of the senior citizens.

Which of the above statement(s) is/ are correct?

- a. Only 1
- b. Only 2
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. None of the above

See

Answer: a

I. UPSC Mains practice Questions

1. Evaluate the significance of Smart Cities in the development of new urban India. (10 Marks; 150 words)
2. Explain the importance of private participants in the Indian Space Industry. Discuss the challenges, opportunities, and strategic concerns associated with it. (15 Marks; 250 words)

