

02 March 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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GS1 Related

Nothing here today!!!

GS2 Related

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Order on surveillance meant to protect privacy, govt. tells SC

Context

- The Centre told the Supreme Court that its December 20, 2018 notification allowing 10 central agencies to snoop on people is in fact a measure to protect citizens' privacy.
- The government was responding to a PIL filed by advocate M.L. Sharma, challenging the December 20 notification as a violation of the fundamental right to privacy.

Details of the issue

- The order allows central agencies, from the Intelligence Bureau to the Central Board of Direct Taxes to the Cabinet Secretariat (RAW) to the Commissioner of Delhi Police, to intercept, monitor and de-crypt "any information" generated, transmitted, received or stored in "any computer resource".
- The order is based on Section 69 (1) of the Information Technology Act of 2000 and Rule 4 of the Information Technology 2009 Rules (Procedure and Safeguards for Interception, Monitoring and Decryption of Information) Rules, 2009.

Section 69 of the Information Technology Amendment Act 2008

- Section 69 empowers the Central Government/State Government/ its authorized agency to intercept, monitor or decrypt any information generated, transmitted, received or stored in any computer resource if it is necessary or expedient so to do in the interest of the sovereignty or integrity of India, defence of India, security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States or public order or for preventing incitement to the commission of any cognizable offence or for investigation of any offence.
- They can also secure assistance from computer personnel in decrypting data, under penalty of imprisonment.

For public order

The Centre says its December 20 order derives statutory justification from Section 69 of the Information Technology Act of 2000



- Section 69 gives the govt. the power to intercept, monitor or decrypt any information through any computer resource
- It says surveillance can be done if authorities are "satisfied that it is necessary or expedient to do so in the interest of the sovereignty or integrity of India, defence of India, security of the state,

friendly relations with foreign states or public order or for preventing incitement to the commission of any cognizable offence or for investigation of any offence"

- The reasons for surveillance have to be recorded in an order in writing

- The subscriber or intermediary or any person in-charge of the computer resource shall provide access to the computer resource to the government. Lack of co-operation shall be punished with a prison term which may extend to 7 years and a penalty

Central Government's Arguments

- What has been done under the December 20 order is in fact restricting the exercise of powers, removing a possible vagueness and specifying the agencies/organisations who only would have the powers to utilise the powers of section 69 of the Act
- It said the very purpose of the December 20 order is to ensure that surveillance is done as per due process of law; that any interception, monitoring, decryption of computer resource is done only by authorised agencies and with approval of competent authority; to prevent unauthorised use of these powers by any agency, individual or intermediary so that the right to privacy of citizen is not violated.
- Surveillance is necessary in the modern world where modern tools of information communication, including encryption are used. Surveillance is done only in the defence of India, to maintain public order, etc.
- There is no blanket permission to any agency. Permission for surveillance needs to be got from the Union Home Secretary. Besides, the law mandates the Centre and States to constitute a review committee with the Cabinet Secretary.
- There are grave threats to the country from terrorism, radicalisation, cross border terrorism, cyber crime, drug cartels", and these cannot be ignored or under-stated. There is a need for "speedy collection of actionable intelligence" to counter threat to national interests.

- It is therefore imperative that requests for lawful interception or monitoring must be dealt with by the executive authority to maintain speed in taking decisions. A well laid down procedure for oversight by a panel headed by the Cabinet secretary doubtlessly ensures that provisions of law, rules and SOP are adhered to

Related concept – Landmark judgement right to privacy – 2017

- Nine-bench constitutional bench in Justice KS Puttaswamy (Retd) Vs. the Union of India delivered landmark judgement and unanimously declared that the Right to Privacy is part of Fundamental Rights.
- Right to Privacy is part of Right to life and personal dignity under Article-21 of Indian Constitution. As other fundamental rights, Right to Privacy is also not absolute and there may be some 'reasonable' restrictions.
- Unity and Integrity of the nation cannot be ensured without ensuring the dignity of an individual through privacy.
- The bench also argued that the state does not have right to decide what one eats, what one should wear; as they are part of his/her Right to Privacy.
- The bench also displayed concern about the weak data protection mechanism in India and directed the state to come out with strong data security infrastructure and data protection laws.
- The judgement of the Constitutional bench is truly the landmark. This has opened doors to review many other points from a different angle. This also showed that conformist judgements may be a threat to the basic structure of the Constitution and Rights of citizens.
- Freedom is an inherent right. If it is provided by the state than it doubles enjoyment of life. Because we have "govt of the people, by the people, for the people" said by great freedom fighter Abraham Lincoln.

2. 'Penkoottu' to take up 'right to sit' campaign in Kerala

Context

- 'Penkoottu' is planning a two-month campaign to ensure that the women workers' right to sit, which they earned through a relentless struggle, becomes a reality in all shops across the State.
- The campaign will start on March 8, International Women's Day, and end on May 1, Labour Day.

- It may be noted that the 'right to sit' campaign gained strength during the same period in 2014.

Details of the Campaign

- Women make up a majority of the workforce in commercial retail shops but they are often unprotected by the law. Working conditions can be poor, wages paltry and benefits scant.

The shop owners have extremely harsh rules for their employees to follow

- They forbid their employees from sitting during work-hours;
- Even leaning against a wall is penalised with a pay cut;
- Lunch is no more than 30 minutes;
- Washrooms breaks are monitored and usually not more than twice a day;
- Talking to colleagues is forbidden, and if found talking, it could result in loss of pay.

While the amendment to the Kerala Shops and Commercial Establishments Act prevents sexual exploitation of women on the job, it lacks some very basic rights to women, which include a clause allowing female employees to sit throughout the day.

- During the two months, 'Penkoottu' volunteers will monitor shops to see if the 'right to sit' is being implemented. In case of a problem, the employees will be sensitised regarding their rights and the employer will be warned. In case of opposition, the organisation plans to take the issue to court and present the findings before the authorities.
- 'Penkoottu', an organisation of women working in SM Street, the commercial hub of Kozhikode, has been in the forefront of the 'right to sit' campaign as it was found that employees, mostly women, in many shops, especially textile shops, were not allowed to sit during their working hours.
- Its relentless struggle resulted in the State government enacting an amendment to the Kerala shops and Establishments Act in July 2018, which made it mandatory for employers to provide a chair or stool to the employees and also limit their working hours to eight.
- Viji, secretary of 'Penkoottu', was recognised by the BBC as one of the 100 women who created positive changes in the world for her role in the campaign.

GS3 Related Environment

1. Fires are a crucial component of some forest systems, says group of scientists

Context

- Six scientists who study fire-prone forest systems across India have written an open letter on the importance of “fighting fire with fire.”
- The letter, signed by Dr. Abi Tamim Vanak, Dr. Ankila Hiremath and Dr. Nitin Rai of the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE); Dr. Raman Sukumar of the Indian Institute of Science (IISc); Dr. Jayashree Ratnam of the National Centre for Biological Sciences’ (NCBS); and Tarsh Thekaekara of The Shola Trust

Highlights of the Open Letter

- Forest fires have been occurring in India from at least last 60,000 years, ever since modern humans appeared here.
- In fact, several native trees and plants in these landscapes have “co-evolved” with fire: fire helps revive dormant seeds of many species.
- Even young woody trees survive ground fires and have higher growth rates immediately post-fire, until they reach a certain height.
- Fires, along with seasonal droughts, which are again painted as problematic, are important drivers of dry deciduous tracts across Andhra Pradesh-Telangana, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.
- The concept of fires being entirely detrimental to these ecosystems has been derived from a colonial concept that looked at forests only for their timber potential. As a result, fire exclusion and suppression is the norm.
- Fires help in suppressing invasive species. For example – Hairy mistletoe — a parasitic shrub that affects mature trees — has thrived due to fire suppression. Studies corroborate this too: mistletoe-induced tree deaths are high and have resulted in the decline of wild gooseberry trees, which the Soligas rely upon for forest produce.
- High-intensity fires would have negative effects but they happen only because dry biomass has been allowed to build up and low-intensity controlled burning has been stopped.

- Fire is indeed an important tool in forest management. Controlled fires in areas that have huge fuel loads (dry litter and biomass on the forest floor) around December can help prevent as well as reduce the impact of large fires later in the season.
- If an area is continuously protected from fire, it could catch fire once in four years or so because of the high accumulation of grass, wood and twigs

In their letter, the signatory scientists request policy makers and Forest Departments “to push for changes in legislation that allow for more scientific and thoughtful management of forests”. They also suggest that NGOs and activists engage with these complexities and nuances about forest fires rather than advocating “blanket ‘stop forest fire’ campaigns.”

2. Transplanting trees, easier said than done

Context

- In its Budget the Delhi government set itself and several other agencies a tough target with a change in policy — of all the trees that are required to be cut for a project, permission (after due process) will be given only for a maximum of 20%, and the rest will have to be transplanted either on site or elsewhere.

Tree Transplantation

- Tree transplantation first came into public consciousness in Delhi when, in 2011, the voluntary organisation Green Circle helped remove five mulsari trees that were growing in front of the Bada Gumbad in Lodhi Garden.
- The trees were relocated inside the garden. Over the last several years, several businesses offering tree transplantation have cropped up.
- According to experts, it is a complicated process whose outcome cannot be predicted. Transplantation requires time, patience and expertise.
- The process of transplantation involves multiple steps and a tree cannot be transplanted from one location to another by just replacing it in another pit. A pit is first dug around the tree to isolate the roots. The big branches are lopped off, leaving only small shoots for regeneration. This is done to make transportation easier.
- The root system is covered with wet gunny bags to protect the roots and to keep the tree hydrated. The tree has to be sent to a nursery to acclimatise to a new kind of soil, and to regenerate. Once new shoots start sprouting, the tree is lowered into a ditch created in its new spot.
- It is after this that patience and luck come into play. The survival rate of a transplanted tree is about 50%. Growing a full canopy can take up to 10 years.

- According to Delhi Forest Department officials, the cost of transplanting an average-sized tree is around Rs 1 lakh, which includes post-transplantation care. For larger trees, the cost can go up to Rs 3 lakh. Private and voluntary organisations, however, claim that the cost is between Rs 5,000 and Rs 10,000.
- Another problem is that not all kinds of trees can be transplanted. While peepal, ficus, semal and sheesham are tolerant to transplantation, trees such as dak, palash, arjun, shahtoot and jhilmil are not. Any tree with a tap root system cannot be transplanted as the root goes deep into the soil, and it is not possible to isolate it without damage.
- A Forest Department official said transplanting any tree with a trunk girth of more than 80-90 cm is not advisable as the tree cannot bear the shock, and will eventually die.
- Soil type too, is an important consideration before transplantation. A tree growing on the Delhi Ridge will not easily acclimatise to soil in the Yamuna floodplain, as the ecosystem is different. In such a case, Delhi government and Delhi Development Authority, agencies at loggerheads over availability of land, would likely clash.

GS4 Related

Nothing here today!!!

Editorials

INDIAN ECONOMY

1. Ensure a minimum income for all (Universal Basic Income)

Larger Background:

- The idea of a universal basic income (UBI) is gaining ground globally.
- It has supporters among the political left and right, and among proponents as well as opponents of the free-market economy.

What is a Universal Basic Income?

- A UBI requires the government to pay every citizen a fixed amount of money on a regular basis and without any conditionalities.
- Crucial to the appeal for such a demand — for a UBI — is that millions of people remain unemployed and are extremely poor, despite rapid economic growth in the last three decades.

- The National Democratic Alliance government has already unfolded a limited version of the UBI in the form of the Pradhanmantri Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana (PM-KISAN) which promises ₹6,000 per annum to farmers who own less than 2 hectares of land.

Where it will work?

- Experts have opined that the UBI is neither an antidote to the vagaries of market forces nor a substitute for basic public services, especially health and education. Besides, there is no need to transfer money to middle- and high-income earners as well as large landowners.
- However, there is a strong case for direct income transfers to some groups: landless labourers, agricultural workers and marginal farmers who suffer from multi-dimensional poverty.
- These groups have not benefited from economic growth. They were and still are the poorest Indians. Various welfare schemes have also failed to bring them out of penury.
- A case in point is the access to institutional credit issued by banks and cooperative societies. According to National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) data from the 70th round, institutional credits account for less than 15% of the total borrowing by landless agricultural workers; the figure for marginal and small farmers is only 30%.
- These groups have to borrow from moneylenders and adhatiyas at exorbitant interest rates ranging from 24 to 60%. As a result, they do not stand to benefit much from the interest rate subsidy for the agriculture sector.
- Likewise, the benefits of subsidised fertilizers and power are enjoyed largely by big farmers. In urban areas, contract workers and those in the informal sector face a similar problem.
- The rapid pace of automation of low-skill jobs and formalisation of the retail sector mean the prospects of these groups are even bleaker.
- An income support of, say, ₹15,000 per annum can be a good supplement to their livelihoods — an amount worth more than a third of the average consumption of the poorest 25% households, and more than a fourth of the annual income of marginal farmers.
- This additional income can reduce the incidence of indebtedness among marginal farmers, thereby helping them escape moneylenders and adhatiyas.
- Besides, it can go a long way in helping the poor to make ends meet.

- ***Several studies have shown that at high levels of impoverishment, even a small income supplement can improve nutrient intake, and increase enrolment and school attendance for students coming from poor households.***

Better productivity

- In other words, income transfers to the poor will lead to improved health and educational outcomes, which in turn would lead to a more productive workforce.
- It seems to be a good idea to transfer the money into the bank accounts of women of the beneficiary households. ***Women tend to spend more of their income on health and the education of children.***
- The effect of an income transfer scheme on unemployment is a moot point. In principle, cash transfers can result in withdrawal of beneficiaries from the labour force.
- However, the income support suggested above is not too large to discourage beneficiaries from seeking work.
- In fact, it can promote employment and economic activities.
- For instance, income receipts can come in handy as interest-free working capital for several categories of beneficiaries (fruit and vegetable vendors and small artisans), thereby promoting their business and employment in the process.

Benefits of such a Scheme:

- Moreover, such a scheme will have three immediate benefits.
- One, it will help bring a large number of households out of the poverty trap or prevent them from falling into it in the event of exigencies such as illness. Two, it will reduce income inequalities. Three, since the poor spend most of their income, a boost in their income will increase demand and promote economic activities in rural areas.
- Nonetheless, an income transfer scheme cannot be a substitute for universal basic services.
- The direct income support to the poor will deliver the benefits mentioned only if it comes on top of public services such as primary health and education.
- This means that direct transfers should not be at the expense of public services for primary health and education. If anything, budgetary allocation for these services should be raised significantly.
- Some experts have opined that programmes such as the Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme should also stay.

- With direct income support, the demand for the programmes will come down naturally. However, in the interim, it will serve to screen the poorest in the country and give them a crucial safety net.

Using datasets

- If basic public services are maintained, there is limited fiscal space for direct income support. It will have to be restricted to the poorest of poor households.
- The Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011 can be used to identify the neediest. Groups suffering from multidimensional poverty such as the destitute, the shelter-less, manual scavengers, tribal groups, and former bonded labourers are automatically included.
- The dataset includes more than six crore landless labourers.
- It also includes many small farmers who face deprivation criteria such as families without any bread-earning adult member, and those without a pucca house.
- The other needy group, small farmers, missing from the SECC can be identified using the dataset from the Agriculture Census of 2015-16.
- Together, these two datasets can help identify the poorest Indians, especially in rural India.
- However, many households such as marginal farmers belong to both datasets. The Aadhaar identity can be used to rule out duplications and update the list of eligible households.

Concluding Remarks:

- As an approximation, experts opine that the number of eligible households is 10 crore.
- That is, even in its basic form, the scheme will require approximately ₹1.5 lakh crore per annum.
- The PM-KISAN Yojana can be aligned to meet a part of the cost. Moreover, the tax kitty can be expanded by reintroducing wealth tax.
- Nonetheless, the required amount is beyond the Centre's fiscal capacity at the moment.
- Therefore, the cost will have to be shared by States. States such as Telangana and Odisha are already providing direct income support to their farmers. These States can extend their schemes to include the 'non-farmer poor'. The other States too should join in.

- The income transfer scheme is costly. However, the cost of persistent poverty is much higher.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Hanoi hiccup (Talks between U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un)

Editorial Analysis:

What's in the news?

- Talks between U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in Hanoi, ended abruptly.
- Experts opine that the abrupt end of talks is clearly ***a setback to attempts to find a peaceful solution to the Korean nuclear crisis.***
- It is important to note that both sides cut short a two-day summit on the second day on the 28th of February, 2019, without even signing a joint communiqué.
- Further, they also gave conflicting versions on why the talks collapsed.

Reasons for the talks ending abruptly:

- Trump said Mr. Kim insisted on a full withdrawal of American sanctions in return for the closure of only one nuclear facility.
- However, North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Yong-ho later said Pyongyang had sought only partial sanctions relief in return for dismantling the Yongbyon nuclear site, the North's main facility.
- Whatever the actual reason, one thing is clear: the bonhomie between the two leaders after the 2018 Singapore summit was missing in Hanoi.
- After the Singapore meet, both sides had agreed to have "new U.S.-DPRK [North Korea] relations" and establish a "lasting and stable peace regime" on the Korean peninsula.
- Pyongyang had also promised to work toward "complete denuclearisation". No such comments about the future course of the peace process were issued this time.
- Further, the North Koreans have ruled out any immediate plans for a future meeting between the two sides.
- ***A part of the problem was the failure of both Washington and Pyongyang in following up on commitments made in Singapore.***

Occurrences before the commitments made in Singapore:

- A few weeks ahead of the Singapore summit held in June 2018, North Korea had announced a complete freeze on nuclear and missile tests as a reconciliatory gesture. It had asked the U.S. to reciprocate — its main demand was a formal declaration of an end to the 1950-53 Korean War, but the Trump administration refused to do so.
- Experts opine that a lack of confidence-building measures too blunted the momentum created in Singapore.

A Few Other Perspectives:

- When U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo first visited Pyongyang, Mr. Kim refused to meet him.
- Later, the American intelligence community reported that North Korea continued its ballistic missile programme after the first Trump-Kim summit.
- With these problems still in place, the second summit between the leaders was announced.
- Any hopes of clinching a big agreement in Hanoi fell as both sides stuck to their respective demands. However, the setback need not necessarily bring the peace process to a halt.
- Trump himself has said denuclearisation is a long process. The freeze on nuclear and missile tests that Mr. Kim announced is still in place.

Immediate Victim of the Failure of Talks:

- Experts have opined that South Korea is an immediate victim of the failed Hanoi summit. As a matter of fact, as soon as Trump abandoned the talks, the South Korean stock market fell dramatically.
- It is believed that if Kim now resumes missile tests, South Korea would be the nation most at threat.
- Further, it is important to note that even if Trump agrees eventually to lift the sanctions on North Korea, it would likely be South Korea that would have to provide most of the financial support to North Korea.
- Experts opine that the only immediate benefit for South Korea, if future negotiations between Kim and Trump go well, would be a diminished threat of war.

Concluding Remarks:

- The Korean peninsula has been calm, while inter-Korean relations have markedly improved.

- Before the Hanoi summit, there were reports that the U.S. would declare an end to the Korean war and that both countries would open liaison offices in each other's capitals as part of normalisation of ties.
- Experts believe that ***they should go ahead with such measures and build confidence and mutual trust while also taking a phased approach to dealing with more contentious issues such as denuclearisation.***

SECURITY

1. How the IAF compares with the PAF

Note to Students:

This editorial analysis is from the Hindu BusinessLine newspaper, published on the 2nd of March, 2019.

Editorial Analysis:

- India-Pakistan tensions have assumed an aerial dimension with the recent combat engagements between the Indian Air Force (IAF) and the Pakistan Air Force (PAF).
- Air power is the total military capability of a nation for use of aircraft and missiles.

How does the IAF compare with its arch rival the PAF?

- The IAF has maintained a numerical edge in terms of fighter aircraft over the PAF of almost 3:1.
- With depletion of numbers in the IAF's combat squadrons, this edge is currently down to around 1.4:1.
- Further, it is important to note that the strength of the combat squadrons will soon drop below 30 squadrons.
- Once the IAF gets back to its sanctioned strength of 42 squadrons, the edge should evolve to 2:1.
- An IAF fighter squadron has 18 operationally deployed aircraft with three in reserve. This totals to 900 fighter aircraft of which around two squadrons or 40 aircraft may cease to be fully operational every year as they reach the end of their life.
- *But the IAF is unlikely to get the 42 squadrons till 2035.*
- Today the IAF, with barely 31 fighter squadrons, possesses around 650 aircraft.

A Closer Perspective:

- The IAF's primary air superiority fighter is the Su-30MKI, of which 170 have been inducted against an order for 272.
- Currently under upgradation, the 66 MiG-29 air defence aircraft and 51 Mirage 2000 multi-role aircraft continue to be the backbone of the IAF and the upgraded MiG-21s (Bison) are also operational in significant numbers.
- The Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL)-built Light Combat Aircraft Tejas is supposed to replace the MiG-21. The 139 upgraded Jaguars and 60-odd MiG-27s are dedicated strike aircraft.
- Also, the Hawk Advanced Jet Trainers too have close air support capability to enable ground troops to wage war.
- ***The anticipated induction of the Rafale MMRCA will significantly enhance the IAF's combat capability.***
- The IAF fighter aircraft inventory has over 110 MiG-29 Fulcrums, which include 45 naval versions. Since the early 2010s, HAL, with MiG, Russia, upgraded about half the IAF's 69 MiG-29s.

A Look at Pakistan's Aircraft Inventory:

- The PAF currently has 22 fighter aircraft squadrons that translate into about 410 aircraft.
- These include around 70 JF-17s, 45 F-16s, 69 Mirage IIIs, 90 Mirage Vs and 136 F-7s.
- The JF-17, a China-designed aircraft, is claimed to be a fourth-generation, multi-role aircraft. It is reported that another 100 are on order.
- The PAF plans to acquire 250 aircraft to replace its Mirage IIIs and F-7s.
- Some of these would be Block 2 version with 4.5 generation features while some more would be Block 3 and are expected to have fifth-generation characteristics.
- The PAF is also said to have placed an order for 36 Chinese J-10s a 4.5 generation aircraft. The J-10 is expected to be inducted as the FC-20, an advanced PAF-specific variant.
- The PAF's fighter aircraft currently are of four types, which are planned to be reduced to three multi-role types, namely the F-16, JF-17 and FC-20 by 2025.
- ***Russia and Pakistan have also been talking about the possible purchase of the Sukhoi-35 air-superiority multi-role fighter.***

- The PAF plans to procure 30-40 Chinese FC-31 stealth fighter aircraft to replace the F-16 fighter jets.
- The FC-31 is designed to fly close air support, air interdiction and other missions. However, the PAF is more likely to employ conventional tactical aircraft rather than stealth aircraft in actual missions to support Pakistani ground forces.

The PAF: Seventh largest Airforce in the world

- The PAF with a smaller fighter aircraft inventory is the seventh largest air force in the world and the largest in the Islamic world.
- PAF pilots are well-trained, with battle experience and high morale.
- The PAF is also an inherently air-defence oriented force.
- As earlier, in an exclusive Indo-Pak war scenario, the PAF will be kept head-down by the IAF and is likely to be defeated. In the shadow of nuclear stand-off, a full-fledged war is less likely.

A Few More Critical Points:

- ***In a limited war as a follow-up to a trigger incident or a surgical strike, the IAF will be much better placed on account of its larger weapon inventory and superior platforms. There is a considerable scope for conventional offensive action short of the nuclear threshold.***
- Lately, the induction of Airborne Early Warning (AEW) aircraft into the subcontinent has altered the regional strategic environment.
- It enables the two sides to keep an eye on each other, and in India's case, Pakistan's ally China.
- These AEW aircraft provide low altitude coverage for both sides, looking into mountain valleys and across the horizon over the sea.
- Pakistan's diverse terrain, which includes sea, desert, glaciers and mountains, means monitoring these areas was 'patchy' because ground based air defence radars cannot cover the sea, and not always the land.
- While the PAF has two AEW aircraft, the IAF has two AWACS and three AEW aircraft, which will make air warfare that much more challenging in the subcontinent.

Prelims Facts

1. At OIC meet, India flays terror funding

Context

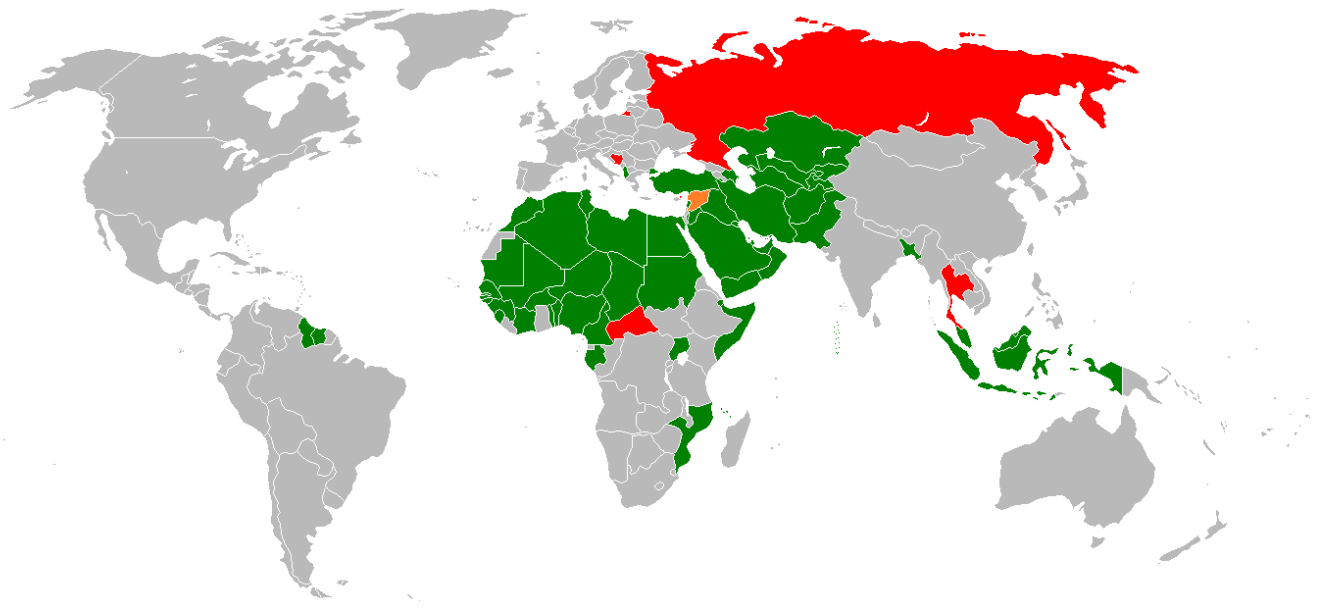
- In a major diplomatic move, India hit out at Pakistan during a meeting of Foreign Ministers at the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

Details of the Meeting

- India is not a member of the OIC, but was invited to the Abu Dhabi meeting as the guest of honour.
- India has never been invited to the OIC before and the latest development, coming at a time when the India-Pakistan tension is running high, is being seen as a diplomatic success.
- In a speech at the inaugural plenary of the 46th session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj stressed that the anti-terror fight was not a clash among civilisations.
- Swaraj said the fight against terrorism and extremism does not amount to a clash of cultures and instead described it as a fight between ideas. She presented India's pluralism and diversity as a source of strength and said Indian Muslims are a "microcosm" of India's larger diverse culture.
- "They speak Tamil and Telugu, Malayalam and Marathi, Bangla and Bhojpuri or any of the numerous languages of India. They have diverse culinary tastes, myriad choices of traditional attire, and they maintain strong cultural and linguistic heritage of the regions they loved and have lived for generations," Ms. Swaraj said, elaborating on India's vast Muslim community.

Organisation of Islamic Cooperation

- OIC is an international organization founded in 1969, consisting of 57 member states.
- It is the second largest inter-governmental organization after the United Nations.
- The organisation states that it is "the collective voice of the Muslim world" and works to "safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony".
- The OIC has permanent delegations to the United Nations and the European Union.



UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Question 1. Consider the following statements regarding a scheme

1. Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojana (RGGVY) scheme for village electrification has been subsumed in this scheme
2. Rural Electrification Corporation is the Nodal Agency for implementation of this scheme
3. It also provides for separation of agriculture and non-agriculture feeders in the rural areas

Which one of the following schemes has the features as mentioned above?

- a. Deendayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana (DDUGJY)
- b. Saubhagya
- c. UDAY scheme
- d. UJALA Scheme

Answer -a

Explanation: The Government of India has launched the scheme “Deendayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana” for rural electrification. The erstwhile Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojana (RGGVY) scheme for village electrification and providing electricity distribution

infrastructure in the rural areas has been subsumed in the DDUGJY scheme. Rural Electrification Corporation is the Nodal Agency for implementation of DDUGJY.

It has following components - Separation of agriculture and non-agriculture feeders facilitating judicious rostering of supply to agricultural & non- agricultural consumers in the rural areas; strengthening and augmentation of sub-transmission & distribution (ST&D) infrastructure in rural areas; and Rural electrification

Question 2. Consider the following statements:

1. The Constitution of India provides for reservation of women in legislative bodies at state level but not at union level
2. The percentage of women in the Lok Sabha has increased since independence

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

Answer - b

Explanation: The percentage of women in the Lok Sabha has gone up by only a small margin from 4.4% in 1951 to 11% in 2014. The Constitution (One Hundred and Eighth Amendment) Bill, 2008 was introduced in Rajya Sabha with an aim to reserve 33% seats in Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies for women. However, bill lapsed with the dissolution of the 15th Lok Sabha. Hence there is no such Constitutional provision. Thus statement 1 is wrong.

Question 3. “Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces” is a global initiative by-

- a. World Economic Forum
- b. World Bank
- c. European Union

d. United Nations

Answer - d

Explanation: UN Women's Global Flagship Initiative, "Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces," builds on its "Safe Cities Free of Violence against Women and Girls" Global Programme, launched in November 2010, with leading women's organizations, organizations, UN agencies, and more than 70 global and local partners. It is the first-ever global programme that develops, implements, and evaluates tools, policies and comprehensive approaches on the prevention of and response to sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence against women and girls across different settings.

UPSC Mains practice Questions

1. Common Services Centers (CSCs) are more than service delivery points in rural India. They are positioned as change agents, promoting rural entrepreneurship and building rural capacities and livelihoods. Discuss the statement (12.5 Marks; 200 words)
2. The National Mineral Policy 2019 is a more effective, meaningful and implementable policy that brings in further transparency, better regulation and enforcement, balanced social and economic growth as well as sustainable mining practice. Analyse the statement (12.5 Marks; 200 words)