

05 March 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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B. GS2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. [Pak. bans UNSC designated outfits; Delhi not convinced](#)

Context

- Facing severe pressure from the Financial Action Task Force, and calls from several countries to crack down on terror groups, especially after tensions with India, the Pakistan government has passed an order to effectively ban Lashkar-e-Taiba offshoots Jamat-ud Dawa and Falah-i-Insaniyat Foundation.

Details of the development

- India is still sceptical about the move, given Pakistan's attempts to ban these groups in the past, only to drop the ban over a period of time. In February 2018, Islamabad passed a similar order as a Presidential Ordinance, but then allowed it to lapse six months later.
- The Statutory Regulatory Order passed on March 4 says all "properties owned or controlled...directly or indirectly, by a designated entity or designated individual" and any income from the assets would be frozen or physically seized by the Pakistani authorities. Islamabad said it will "streamline" the banning of groups proscribed by the United Nations Security Council.
- The JuD and FiF were listed by the UNSC as aliases for the Hafiz Saeed-led Lashkar-e Taiba (LeT) that was banned in May 2005. However, Pakistan only had them on a watch list (Schedule-2) not the banned list (Schedule-1).
- Both the LeT and the Masood Azhar-led Jaish-e Mohammad (JeM) are amongst the 68 organisations presently on the list of proscribed organisations maintained by the National Counter-Terrorism Authority (NATCA) of Pakistan.
- At the FATF meeting last month, Pakistan was censured for not having aligned its legislative orders in line with the UNSC's orders.
- On February 21, even as the FATF meeting was underway, the Imran Khan government passed an order banning the JuD and FiF. But the order is yet to be included in the NATCA's latest listing that came out recently.

Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM)

- JeM is a Deobandi jihadist terrorist group active in Kashmir. The group's primary motive is to separate Kashmir from India and merge it into Pakistan.
- It has carried out several attacks primarily in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. It also maintained close relations with Taliban and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and continues to be allied to them.
- Jaish-e-Mohammed is viewed as the "deadliest" and "the principal terrorist organisation in Jammu and Kashmir".
- In 2001, 38 people were killed when a three-member JeM squad blew up a car outside the J&K Assembly.
- In 2016, Jaish was suspected of being responsible for an attack on the Pathankot airbase in India. The Indian government, and some other sources, accused Pakistan of assisting Jaish in conducting the attack. Pakistan denied assisting Jaish, and arrested several members of Jaish in connection with the attack, who were then released by the security establishment

Tracing the roots

▪ In 1986/87, Markaz al-Dawah Irshad (MDI) came into being after Zaki ur Rehman Lakhvi's Ahl-e-Hadees militant group merged with Jamaat-ud Dawa (JuD) founded by Hafiz Saeed (in photo) and Zafar Iqbal



▪ Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) was set up in 1989/90 by Hafiz Saeed as the armed wing of MDI

▪ LeT was designated as a terrorist organisation by the U.S. in December 2001

▪ Pakistan announced a ban on JuD and its charity wing in February 2019

Financial Action Task Force (FATF)

- The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is an inter-governmental body established in 1989 on the initiative of the G7.
- It is a “policy-making body” which works to generate the necessary political will to bring about national legislative and regulatory reforms in various areas.
- The FATF Secretariat is housed at the OECD headquarters in Paris.
- The objectives of the FATF are to set standards and promote effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering, terrorist financing and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system.
- The FATF monitors the progress of its members in implementing necessary measures, reviews money laundering and terrorist financing techniques and counter-measures, and promotes the adoption and implementation of appropriate measures globally.
- In collaboration with other international stakeholders, the FATF works to identify national-level vulnerabilities with the aim of protecting the international financial system from misuse.

C. GS3 Related

Category: ENVIRONMENT

1. India to tie-up with 4 nations to save rhinos

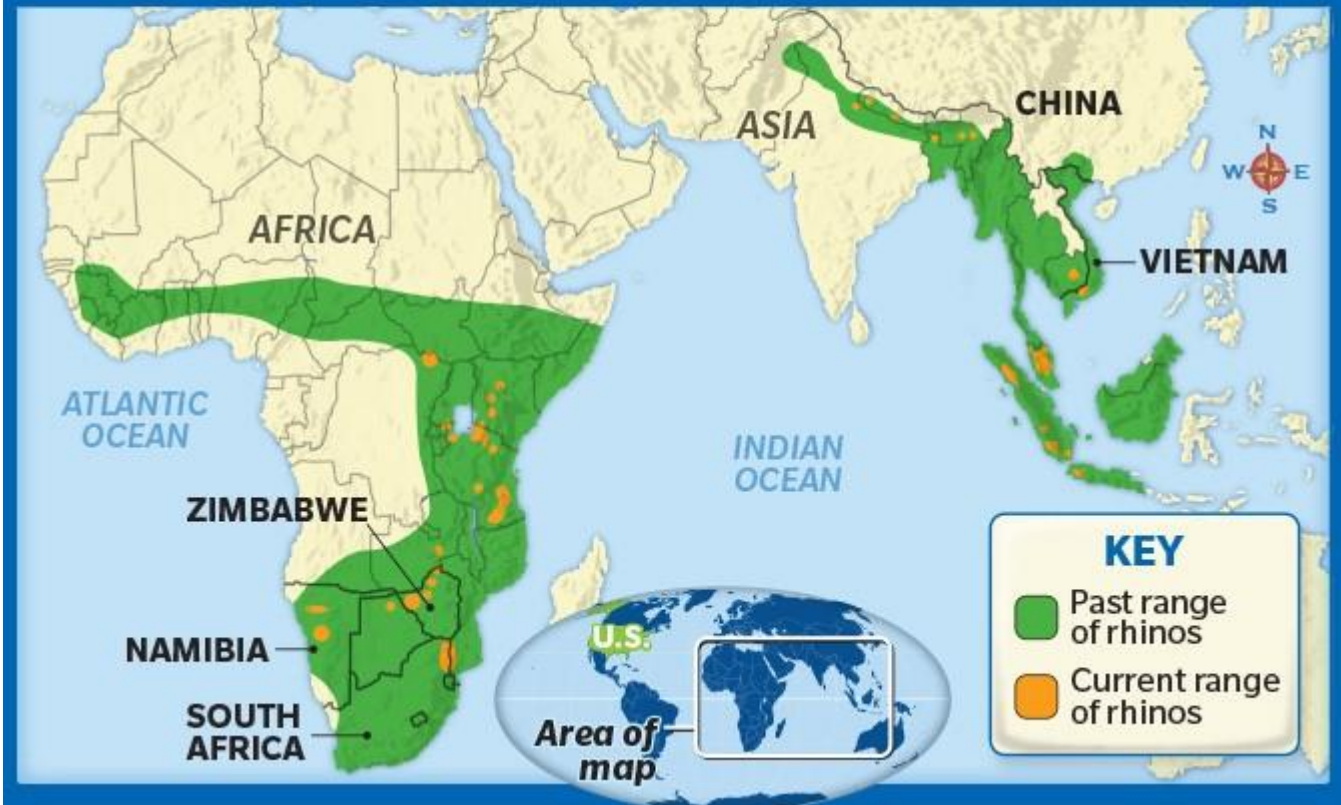
Context

- India will collaborate with Bhutan, Nepal, Indonesia and Malaysia to increase the population of three species of Asian rhinos, including the Greater one-horned rhinoceros found in the Indian sub-continent.
- The five rhino range nations signed a declaration ‘The Declaration on Asian Rhinos 2019’ for the conservation and protection of the species at the recently held Second Asian Rhino Range Countries meeting.
- The declaration includes undertaking studies on health issues of the rhinos, their potential diseases and taking necessary steps; collaborating and strengthening wildlife forensics and strengthening of transboundary collaboration among India, Nepal and Bhutan for conservation of the Greater one-horned rhino.

- The declaration was signed to conserve and review the population of the Greater one-horned, Javan and Sumatran rhinos every four years to reassess the need for joint actions to secure their future.

The Range of Rhinos

Two rhino species, black rhinos and white rhinos, live only in Africa. Three other types of rhinos are found in countries in Asia.



Asian Rhinos

- There are three Asian rhino species, all of which have been pushed to the brink of extinction. The greater one-horned is slowly recovering thanks to years of successful conservation efforts but the Sumatran and Javan rhinos remain at great risk.
- Poaching for their horns and habitat loss are the two greatest threats to the survival of Asia's remaining rhinos.
- Rhinos have been around for millions of years and have a major impact on the structure of their habitat and the health of their ecosystem.
- For example, the greater one-horned rhino helps to maintain close-cropped grasslands near rivers, which are preferable feeding spots for small herbivores. Asian rhinos also disperse the seeds of plants and fruit they've eaten, through their faeces.
- Many other animals – and people – depend on healthy rhino habitats, so protecting the rhino and its habitat helps other wildlife and people.
- All the folds in their skin give Asian rhinos a more armoured look than their counterparts in Africa. The greater one-horned rhino and Javan rhino have one horn, while the Sumatran rhino has two.

- Despite their hefty appearance, Asian rhinos are excellent swimmers and can easily swim across rivers. They're vegetarians, grazing on tall grasses, shrubs, leaves and some fruits.

Category: HEALTH

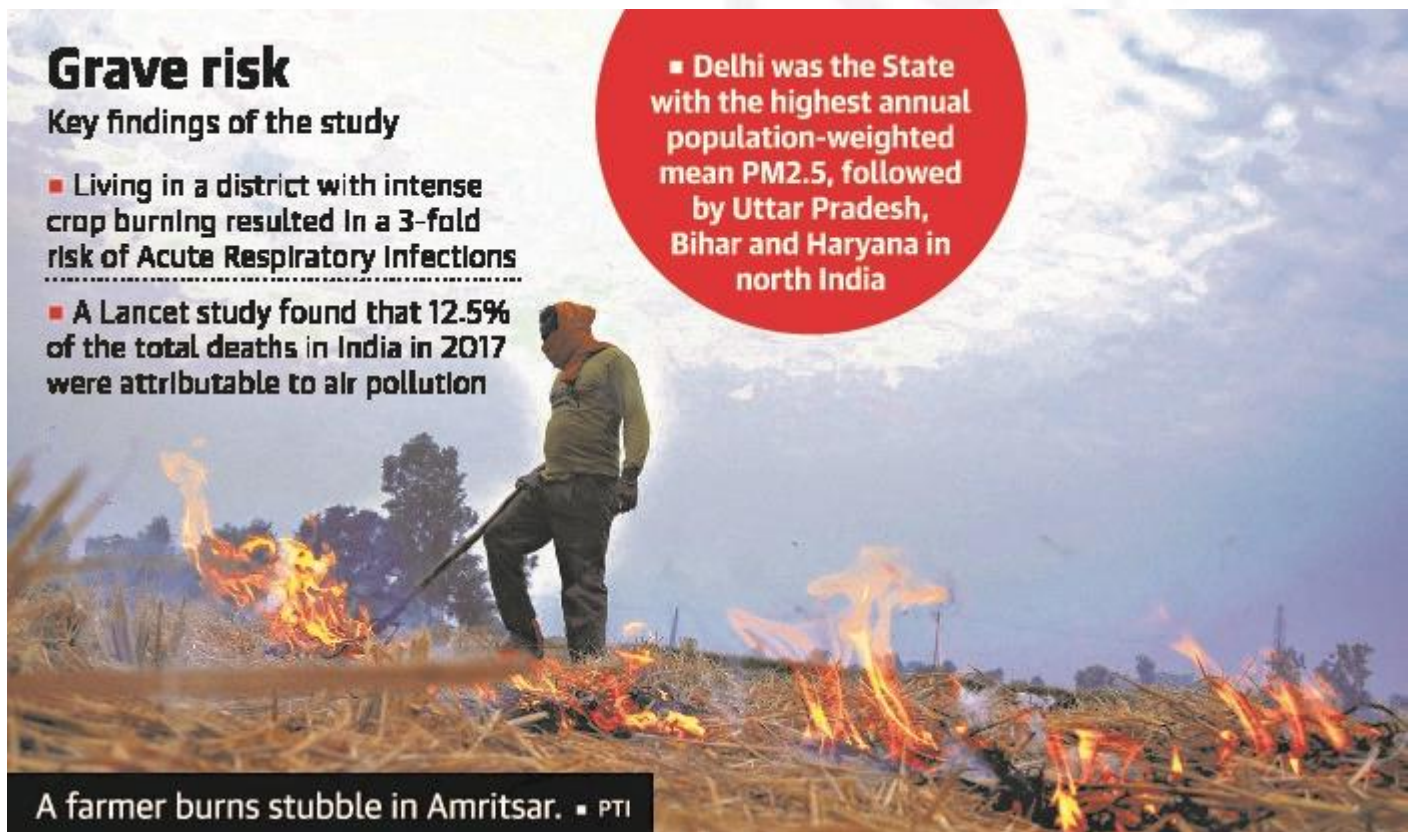
1. Crop burning raises risk of respiratory illness threefold, says IFPRI study

Context

- The burning of agricultural residue — a contributor to north India's winter pollution — increases the risk of respiratory illnesses threefold for those who experience it. It may also be responsible for an annual \$30 billion (approximately ₹2 trillion) loss in terms of days of work lost in States affected by crop burning, according to a study by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI).

Details of the Study

- The findings were based on a study of the health records of 250,000 people in Haryana (which sees a spike in crop burning episodes in winter), and Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, which don't see similar burning episodes. The study is to appear in the peer-reviewed International Journal of Epidemiology.
- The researchers used health records and satellite data from September 2013-February 2014. The satellite data was for crop-burning fires detected by the Moderate-Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer (MODIS) Terra satellite, managed by the National Aeronautics Space Administration (NASA).



- In Haryana, 5.4% of surveyed individuals reported suffering from ARI (Acute Respiratory Infection) whereas the reported ARI symptoms in southern States was only 0.1%.
- Among those who reported suffering from ARI, 83% also reported receiving treatment for ARI at a private or public medical facility.
- Whereas high-intensity fire exposure was virtually absent in south India, 17.5% of individuals in Haryana lived in a district where 100 or more fires per day were observed by the satellite.

- For about a decade now, Delhi has been complaining about the practice of stubble burning, holding it responsible for the abysmal air quality in the capital in winter.
- In 2013, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) issued a directive to Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, asking them to ban stubble burning.
- The Environment Ministers of these States as well as top officials at the Centre declared a “zero tolerance” policy on the burning of stubble, which has been estimated to contribute anywhere from 7% to 78% of the particulate matter-emission load in Delhi during winter.

Crop Residue Burning

- Stubble burning refers to the use of a controlled fire to clear the crop residue that remains in the paddock after harvest and could more accurately be called ‘crop residue burning’.
- It is mainly carried out in Haryana and Punjab.
- Open burning of husk produces harmful smoke that causes pollution. Open burning of husk is of incomplete combustion in nature. Hence large amount of toxic pollutants are emitted in the atmosphere. Pollutants contain harmful gases like Methane, Carbon Monoxide (CO), Volatile organic compound (VOC) and carcinogenic polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons.

What is combine harvesting?

- Combines are machines that harvest, thresh i.e separate the grain, and also clean the separated grain, all at once.
- The problem, however, is that the machine doesn’t cut close enough to the ground, leaving stubble behind that the farmer has no use for.
- There is pressure on the farmer to sow the next crop in time for it to achieve a full yield. The quickest and cheapest solution, therefore, is to clear the field by burning the stubble.

Why do Farmers Burn?

- Cost Factor: The straw management equipment is costly and process is time consuming. Also, the cost of stubble management is not taken into account while determining the minimum support price (MSP).
- Increasing mechanization of agriculture: Stubble problem was not as severe when paddy was harvested manually because the farmers use to cut it as close to the ground as possible. Due to mechanization the crop residue that remains in the field is of larger quantity. Labour costs are very high now
- Those who want fodder have to get the stubble removed manually or use specialised machines to do the job. But that is costly.
- Time Factor: Delay in sowing means yield decline, this leaves very little time to clear the farm for sowing.
- Unlike wheat stalks that are used as animal fodder, the paddy straw has high silica content that animals can’t digest.
- Since farmers need to sow wheat within a fortnight of harvesting paddy, they burn the straw to save time, labour and money.

D. GS4 Related

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E. Editorials

Category: INDIAN ECONOMY

1. Solar powerhouse (Generating solar power using unutilized space on rooftops in buildings)

<https://byjus.com>

Larger Background:

- A large potential is available for generating solar power using unutilized space on rooftops in buildings.
- Solar power generated by each individual household, industrial, institutional, commercial or any other type of buildings can be used to partly fulfil the requirement of the building occupants and surplus, if any, can be fed into the grid.
- Today it is possible to generate solar power from the solar rooftop systems. This is cheaper than the diesel gen-sets based electricity generation.
- It is also cheaper than the cost at which most DISCOMs would make power available to the industrial, commercial and high-end domestic consumers.

Steps taken by the Government: A Perspective

- Under the present rooftop solar programme, which was approved by the Government in December 2015, an aggregated capacity of 2100 MW is targeted to be achieved in residential, institutional, social and Government sector through central financial assistance by the year 2019-20.
- While no formal study has been commissioned to study the rooftop solar scenario, the Government is taking a number of steps to promote rooftop solar in the country, these include:
 1. Providing central financial assistance (CFA) for residential/institutional/social sectors and achievement linked incentives for Government sectors through Rooftop Solar (RTS) Scheme.
 2. Persuading states to notify the net/gross metering regulations for RTS projects. Now all the 36 States/UTs/SERCs have notified such regulations and/or tariff orders.
 3. Prepared model MoU, PPA (Power Purchase Agreement) and Capex (Capital Expenditure) Agreement for expeditious implementation of RTS projects in Govt. Sector.
 4. Allocate Ministry-wise expert PSUs for handholding and support in implementation of RTS projects in various Ministries/Departments.
 5. Suryamitra program is being implemented for creation of a qualified technical workforce.
 6. Initiated DG S&D rate contract for solar rooftop systems.
 7. Creation of SPIN-an online platform for expediting project approval, report submission and monitoring progress of implementation of RTS projects.
 8. Initiated Geo-tagging of RTS project, in co-ordination with ISRO, for traceability and transparency.
 9. Facilitated availability of concessional loans from World Bank and Asian Development Bank (ADB) to SBI and PNB respectively, for disbursal of loans to industrial and commercial sectors, where CFA/incentive is not being provided by the Ministry.

Solar Panels on Roof Top of Trains: Recent Developments

- Indian Railways have already provided solar panels on roof top of 19 Narrow Gauge coaches on Trains in Kalka – Shimla and Kangra Valley in Northern Railway.
- It has also provided solar panels on roof top of 23 Broad Gauge non-air conditioned coaches in service. These include 13 coaches in 2 trains of Northern Railway, 7 coaches in 1 train of Southern Railway, 2 coaches in 1 train of Konkan Railway and 1 coach in 1 train of West Central Railway.
- It is important to note that the Solar system generates battery backup of approx. 4 to 5 hours. The solar system does not work properly during fog/rain and winter season; the battery backup goes down to 2 to 3 hours depending upon weather condition.
- The Indian Railways have also taken the decision to provide solar panel on roof top of general coaches of two number of day running intercity trains in Northern and Southern Railway and 50% Narrow Gauge coaches plying on Pathankot-Joginder Nagar route in Kangra Valley section and Kalka-Shimla section of Northern Railway for conducting extended trials for one year in all weather conditions.

Solar Rooftop System provides following technical benefits:

- Utilization of available vacant roof space;

- Low gestation period;
- Lower transmission and distribution losses;
- Improvement in the tail-end grid voltages and reduction of system congestion;
- Loss mitigation by utilization of distribution network as a source of storage through net metering;
- Long term energy and ecological security by reduction in carbon emission;
- Abatement of about 60 million tonnes of CO per year over its life cycle;
- Better Management of daytime peak loads by DISCOM/ utility;
- Meeting of the renewable purchase obligations (RPOs) of obligated entities which are targeted at 8% of electricity consumption;
- Minimal technical losses as power consumption and generation are co-located.

Editorial Analysis:

- In February, 2019 the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved phase 2 of the grid-connected rooftop solar programme, with a focus on the residential sector.
- It is important to note that India has set an ambitious target of achieving 40 GW of rooftop solar capacity by 2022. However, while there has been progress on rooftop solar installations among industries and commercial consumers, the uptake among residential consumers has been slow.
- ***Urban residential electricity consumers are still hesitant to consider rooftop solar power for their homes.***
- This is because they don't have enough information about it, according to a 2018 study by the ***World Resources Institute*** in five cities — Bengaluru, Chandigarh, Chennai, Jaipur and Nagpur.

Limited access to information:

- For residential urban consumers, one of the key barriers to installing rooftop solar systems is that they do not know who to contact to understand the processes to be followed and permissions required.
- Further, there is no single source to access information, evaluate benefits and disadvantages, and examine if any government support (such as a financial subsidy) is available.
- As a matter of fact, most of the technical information provided by various sources, including the government, tends to be Internet-based.
- The 2018 study by the ***World Resources Institute*** also shows that less than 20% of respondents rely on the Internet to make a decision concerning rooftop solar systems.
- Further, a significant majority of consumers seek face-to-face discussions and recommendations from friends and family.

What needs to be done?

- It is important to note that devising simple, well-designed and creative ways to disseminate information is important to help consumers make informed decisions.
- Information must be made easily available to the consumers on the amount of shadow-free roof area needed for generating a unit of electricity and pricing; operating the system, after-sales maintenance and support; and reliable rooftop solar vendors.
- ***The local electricity linesmen, electricity inspectors, and other nodal officials in the electricity department also have key roles to play.*** It is important to note that building their capacities to disseminate such information and handle consumer queries and concerns, and providing basic training in billing and metering for solar power can go a long way in improving consumers' experience.
- Further, objective information must be put out through various avenues, so that it is accessible to all segments of the population and in local languages.
- Such awareness drives will reach larger audiences.

- Also, information kiosks can be set up in public institutions like banks to offer information on the technology, as well as on practical issues such as guidance on selecting vendors.
- A robust feedback mechanism can be put in place for consumers to share their experiences with others.

A Welcome Trend:

- Consumer rights groups, rooftop solar system vendors, and resident welfare associations (RWAs) in larger cities are beginning to organise campaigns and workshops to generate awareness and create a dialogue with consumers.
- In November 2018, for instance, the Bangalore Apartments' Federation held a workshop on residential rooftop solar to sensitise their members.
- Several RWAs have initiated discussions with residents to explore collective installation of rooftop solar, starting with common facilities like lifts and water pumps.

Concluding Remarks: Lessons to learn

- Since the market for residential rooftop solar power is nascent, there are opportunities to learn from more mature consumer durable markets.
- For example, RWAs can tie up with vendors to organise demonstration programmes, so that consumers can observe, operate and understand how the system works.
- It is important to also acknowledge that enthusiasm for rooftop solar energy largely comes from those with higher disposable incomes and who live in their own houses.
- This is one of the several reasons that electricity utilities are not very supportive of consumers generating their own power, as this would impact their revenues.
- ***Rooftop solar is a promising energy source for everyone, including socio-economically weaker consumers. However, awareness building sessions need to be socially inclusive and should take place during periods when consumers are likely to be at home.***
- Lastly, the uptake of rooftop solar across economic categories is also contingent on policies that make it more accessible and affordable.
- Consumer groups and development organisations have a significant role in systematically following key policies and institutional procedures and ensuring that consumers' concerns in accessing reliable information are addressed.
- Raising awareness and building consumer capacity to engage with the sector are crucial for ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all and for India to achieve its rooftop solar targets.

2. Chinese cheer for Indian exports

Note to Students:

This article is taken from the Hindu BusinessLine.

Editorial Analysis:

- Amidst growing concerns about the trends in India's export growth over the coming months, due to perceptible signs of a cooling global economy, is an unexpected area of cheer.
- This unexpected area of cheer is the dynamics of India's trade with its largest trade partner, China. As a matter of fact, India's trade dynamics with China are showing surprisingly good results in the current fiscal.

A Look at Specifics:

- In the first nine months of 2018-19, India's exports to China have grown by an impressive 34 per cent (as against less than 10 per cent overall), while imports from its northern neighbour have declined by nearly 4.5 per cent (as against an increase of 14 per cent overall).
- This combination of positive export growth and negative import growth is a rare occurrence in India-China trade, having occurred only twice earlier since the middle of the previous decade.
- One of these included 2009, the year in which the Chinese economy had felt the impact of economic downturn.
- As a result of the export upswing being witnessed in recent months, India's trade deficit with China during April to December 2018 was \$41.3 billion, down from nearly \$47 billion in the corresponding period in the previous fiscal.
- ***This is the steepest decline in trade deficit for the first nine months of any financial year.***

Reasons to Cheer:

- India thus seems poised to register the sharpest decline in its trade deficit with China for an entire financial year.
- This would also reverse the rising trend in trade deficit, which had touched an all-time high of \$63 billion in 2017-18.
- ***What was remarkable about this figure of trade deficit is that it accounted for nearly 40 per cent of India's overall trade deficit.***

A Brief Look at the Past:

- Over the past two decades, India-China trade has changed drastically.
- At the turn of the millennium, China was outside the list of top five import sources for India, having a share of less than 3 per cent in India's total imports.
- In 2000-01, India's imports were \$1.5 billion and exports were \$831 million, and the trade deficit was a modest \$671 million.
- Imports from China recorded dramatic increase from 2003-04, up from \$4 billion to \$32 billion in 2008-09.
- By 2014-15, imports from China had exceeded \$60 billion, and in the previous financial year, imports were over \$76 billion.
- On the other hand, India's exports to China remained extremely sluggish. From \$3 billion in 2003-04, exports reached \$10 billion in 2007-08. Indian exports peaked at \$18 billion in 2012-13, but five years thereafter it could export no more than \$13 billion. Consequently, the trade deficit expanded drastically to over \$63 billion in 2017-18.

Perspective on Electronics and Pharmaceuticals:

- More than the increase in imports, it is the composition of India's trade with China that is of real concern.
- Imports from China are primarily in two commodity groups — electrical and electronic equipment and pharmaceuticals.
- In 2017-18, almost 60 per cent of India's import requirements of electrical and electronic equipment were met by China, as were more than 75 per cent of the active pharmaceutical ingredients, the raw material used by India's generic pharmaceutical industry.
- China supplied more than 80 per cent of the antibiotics imported by India, and well above 60 per cent of electronic products and components.
- Thus, some of the key sectors of the Indian economy are critically dependent on China.

- *In sharp contrast, India's top exports were mostly intermediate products and raw materials. These included cathodes, petroleum oils, intermediate products for the producing films and plastics and iron ore and concentrates.*
- The broad sectoral trends of the exports of China and India show that for the latest year, manufactured products constituted 55 per cent of India's non-oil exports to China, while the corresponding figure for China was as high as 95 per cent.
- This implies that primary commodities had a significant share of India's exports, which is consistent with China's strategy to source raw materials from its trading partners.
- Now that India's exports have jumped by more than a third in April-December 2018, as compared to the corresponding period in the previous year, an important question arises: has the commodity composition also changed in India's favour?

Concluding Remarks:

- The product group contributing the most to the increased exports to China was petroleum products.
- In terms of volume, the increase was by over two and a half times during April-December 2018 as compared to the previous year.
- Favourable movement in product prices in most of 2018 resulted in a three-fold increase in value of exports.
- Augmentation of Reliance Industries' aromatic production capacities over the past couple of years has positioned the company as one of the major producers of paraxylene, orthoxylene and benzene (the building blocks for polyester fibres and several other petrochemical intermediates).
- This increased production has found its way into the export market; China emerging as one of the major destinations.
- *Among the group of products pushing India's exports to China in the recent months are two primary products — fish and crustaceans and raw cotton.*
- Exports of both these product groups in the current fiscal increased by at least three-fold as compared to 2017-18.
- Although India's exports to China have registered impressive increase, and have also contributed to the lowering of the trade deficit with its largest trade partner, there remains a significant area of concern.
- This stems from the fact that the recent export trends merely reinforce India's role as a supplier of raw materials and intermediates to China.
- *Thus, in the absence of adequate manufacturing facilities that could have helped in processing the increased production of raw materials and intermediates, these products are being exported and India is foregoing domestic value addition.*
- Lastly, with the government failing in its attempt to incentivise "making" in India, increased exports to China should, therefore, be seen as a stream of opportunities missed for creating jobs in the country and adding additional incomes in Indian hands.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. The Gulf as a channel of peace (International Relations)

Note to Students:

This article is taken from the Indian Express.

Editorial Analysis:

- Experts have opined that there has been a significant activism of the Gulf countries to help defuse the current tensions between India and Pakistan.
- Media reports, for example, suggest that Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) pressed Pakistan to release Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman who was downed after a dogfight in the air with Pakistan Air Force recently.
- In the past, many parts of the Gulf and Middle East tended to act as Pakistan's strategic depth. For decades, shared religious identity and common approach to regional affairs gave Pakistan a political edge over India in the region.
- However, in recent years, Delhi has begun to correct that imbalance.

The Gulf Countries as a Diplomatic Lever:

- As many Gulf countries, especially Saudi Arabia and the UAE, develop stronger economic and security bonds with India, they could become potential allies in nudging Pakistan towards political moderation and regional accommodation in the Subcontinent.
- The precarious state of its economy and dependence on financial bailouts from the UAE and Saudi Arabia has made Pakistan more amenable to such an outcome.
- It is important to note that ***the security of the Indian Subcontinent and the Gulf region have always been inter-linked.***
- The nature of that interdependence has, of course, varied over time and space.
- But independent India has tended to underestimate the importance of this strategic intimacy with the Gulf, thanks to Delhi's entrenched ideological approach to the Middle East.

A Brief Look at History:

1. Pre-Independence Perspective:

- In the colonial era, undivided India loomed large over the Gulf.
- During that era, the Raj offered security protection, a framework for commerce and some administrative support.
- ***The Gulf and other locations in the Middle East were critical links in the larger architecture of Great Britain's Imperial defence system in the eastern hemisphere centred on undivided India.***
- The armies of India had to embark on repeated expeditionary operations in the Gulf and the Middle East through the 19th and early 20th centuries.
- The Indian army played a key role in the Middle Eastern theatre in both the World Wars.

2. Post-Independence Perspective:

- After Independence, India pulled out of any security role in the Gulf and the Middle East.
- Pakistan, however, joined the Anglo-American effort to replace the security vacuum created by the Indian withdrawal.
- It became a member of short-lived regional military alliance called the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO). Its regional members included Pakistan, Iran, Iraq and Turkey. While ***India aligned with the nationalist and non-aligned governments like Egypt, Pakistan embraced conservative and pro-Western regimes.***
- While CENTO did not survive, it provided the basis for Pakistan's external and internal security cooperation with a number of countries in the Gulf region.
- Some of them like ***Jordan, Iran and Turkey backed Pakistan during its wars with India in 1965 and 1971.***

- It is important to note that as the Arab nationalist regimes steadily weakened in relation to the regional conservatives, India steadily lost political ground to Pakistan in the 1970s.
- ***Matters got worse in the 1980s as India remained silent on the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and the Gulf regimes joined Pakistan in promoting jihad against the Soviet Union.***
- Further, while India's energy and economic dependence on the Gulf grew, its political vulnerability was shockingly visible when Delhi's lone friend in the region, Saddam Hussein, invaded Kuwait and annexed it in 1990.
- As key countries in the region rallied behind the US to roll back Saddam Hussein's aggression, India scrambled to evacuate thousands of expatriates from the region. More significantly, ***India seemed unable to navigate the rapidly changing Middle East with its old slogans.***

Perspective from the 1990's:

- The 1990s also saw Pakistan mobilise significant support within the Middle East, including at the OIC and other international forums, to castigate India's internal policies.
- As a matter of fact, the attack on the Babri Masjid and India's troubles in the Kashmir valley gave ample political ammunition to Pakistan.
- Paradoxically, the nuclear tests by India and Pakistan in May 1998 and the Kargil crisis in the summer of 1999, opened the possibilities for restructuring South Asia's relations with the Gulf.
- ***The strategic dialogue between Jaswant Singh and the US Deputy Secretary Strobe Talbott during 1998-2000 opened an influential new channel to the Gulf.***
- More important, the US mobilised Saudi Arabia during the Kargil War to encourage Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to accept the Indian demand to pull Pakistan's army back to the Line of Control. Sharif, fearful of the army chief Pervez Musharraf, wanted an American cover.
- The influential Saudi ambassador in Washington, Bandar Bin Sultan, arranged a meeting for Sharif at the White House with President Bill Clinton on July 4, 1999.
- Prince Bandar received Sharif at the Dulles Airport and prepared him for the meeting next morning with Clinton. After he signed the controversial agreement (in Pakistan) to restore the Line of Control in accordance with the Simla Agreement, Prince Bandar had a Saudi Royal accompany a nervous Nawaz Sharif back home.

Concluding Remarks: Events Post Kargil

- After Kargil, the NDA government brought a new self-confidence and intensity to the engagement with the Gulf and the Middle East.
- The fact that Jaswant Singh was the first Indian foreign minister to ever visit Saudi Arabia in late 2000, underlined how far Delhi and Riyadh had drifted in the decades before.
- The bilateral relationship with Saudi Arabia that steadily improved in the UPA decade, acquired a fresh momentum under Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- Two decades ago, Jaswant Singh sought to lift the Pakistan constraint on the bilateral relationship with Saudi Arabia.
- ***Today the House of Saud is becoming a valuable partner for Delhi in promoting regional security in the Subcontinent and beyond.***

F. Tidbits

1. Centre to incentivise work-from-home jobs

- The government is working on a scheme to push work-from-home jobs in the IT sector by offering financial incentives to both employees and employers.
- Incentivising work-from-home jobs through policy-level initiatives can help in creating jobs in the ITES domain while increasing the available talent pool for the sector. This will create employment opportunities in the IT/ITES industry, especially for women and differently-abled persons
- Currently, the scheme is proposed for a three-year period till March 31, 2022, with an outlay of about ₹270 crore to create about 50,000 work-from-home jobs.
- The initiative is likely to be launched as phase II of the IT Ministry's India BPO Promotion Scheme that incentivises firms to set up operations in tier-2 and tier-3 cities in the country. The scheme, launched in 2016, had an outlay of about ₹500 crore with an objective to create about 1.45 lakh jobs.
- There is abundant talent pool in the country, especially women, who are not able to join full-time office jobs. The scheme envisages incentives for both employers as well as employees
- Pointing out that companies do not recruit people for work-from-home jobs on part-time basis, but on contract due to stringent labour laws, the official said, "For contract-based jobs, companies don't need to provide PF and other job benefits."
- The 'work-from-home' policy may extend relaxation in labour laws similar to that given to start-ups under the Startup India programme. In 2016, the government had announced exemption for start-ups from nine labour laws, including the Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972.
- Besides, it is proposed that employees be provided support for 50% of the cost of a laptop (₹10,000 cap) or smartphone (up to ₹5,000), along with up to ₹350 per month for broadband.
- "We are also thinking about offering salary-based incentives to incentivise employees to stick to work-from-home jobs," the official said, adding that additional incentive would be given to women employees, differently-abled, SC/ST or those from aspirational (backward) districts.
- To avail benefits under the work-from-home scheme, employees will need to have an Aadhaar-linked Universal Account Number.
- For employers, among other things, the policy proposes to provide 50% of the actual expenditure on technical infrastructure required for enabling such jobs, with a cap of ₹10,000 per job.

2. Poetry saves man from the noose

- The government is working on a scheme to push work-from-home jobs in the IT sector by offering financial incentives to both employees and employers.
- Incentivising work-from-home jobs through policy-level initiatives can help in creating jobs in the ITES domain while increasing the available talent pool for the sector. This will create employment opportunities in the IT/ITES industry, especially for women and differently-abled persons
- Currently, the scheme is proposed for a three-year period till March 31, 2022, with an outlay of about ₹270 crore to create about 50,000 work-from-home jobs.
- The initiative is likely to be launched as phase II of the IT Ministry's India BPO Promotion Scheme that incentivises firms to set up operations in tier-2 and tier-3 cities in the country. The scheme, launched in 2016, had an outlay of about ₹500 crore with an objective to create about 1.45 lakh jobs.
- There is abundant talent pool in the country, especially women, who are not able to join full-time office jobs. The scheme envisages incentives for both employers as well as employees
- Pointing out that companies do not recruit people for work-from-home jobs on part-time basis, but on contract due to stringent labour laws, the official said, "For contract-based jobs, companies don't need to provide PF and other job benefits."
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G. Prelims Facts

1. 1 crore devotees take holy dip at Sangam

Context

- Even before midnight, devotees from different walks of life began to pour into Prayagraj to take the holy dip on Mahashivratri, the great night of Lord Shiva and the last bathing day in 45 day long Kumbh Mela.
- The bathing ghats brimmed with colour in the morning. Late-night showers in parts of the holy city failed to dampen the spirit of the pilgrims, visitors said. “Till evening, as many as 1.10 crore devotees have taken a dip in the Sangam area. With Mahashivratri’s bath, so far more than 24.05 crore devotees have taken a dip during this year’s Kumbh,” said Vijay Kiran Anand, an official.
- Till March 3, the number of devotees who had taken the dip during the Kumbh stood at 22.95 crore, an official said.
- Mahashivratri marks the culmination of the Kumbh. This year it fell on a Monday, the day dedicated to Lord Shiva, after a long time,” said Ashutosh Varshney, an astrologer.

Prayagraj Kumbh Mela 2019

- Prayagraj Kumbh Mela 2019, a religious fair that was held from January 15, 2019 to March 4, 2019.

Kumbh Mela

- The Kumbh Mela (the festival of the sacred pitcher) is anchored in Hindu mythology.
- It is the largest public gathering and collective act of faith, anywhere in the world.
- The Mela draws tens of millions of pilgrims over the course of approximately 55 auspicious days to bathe at the sacred confluence of the Ganga, the Yamuna, and the mystical Sarasvati. Primarily, this congregation includes Ascetics, Saints, Sadhus, Sadhvis, Kalpvasis, and Pilgrims from all walks of life.

Kumbh Mela is a religious pilgrimage that is celebrated four times over a course of 12 years. The geographical location of Kumbh Mela spans over four locations in India and the Mela site keeps rotating between one of the four pilgrimage places on four sacred rivers as listed below:

- Haridwar on the Ganges in Uttarakhand.
- Ujjain on the Shipra in Madhya Pradesh.
- Nashik on the Godavari in Maharashtra.
- Prayagraj at the confluence of the Ganges, the Yamuna, and the mythical Sarasvati in Uttar Pradesh.

2. Modern monetary theory

- This refers to an economic theory which argues that a government that borrows in its own currency can technically never default on any of its liabilities.
- This is because these governments can simply print fresh money to pay off their debt.
- Many supporters of modern monetary theory believe that governments should simply stop worrying about fiscal deficits.
- Instead, they argue, governments should increase their social spending through programmes like universal basic income and other forms of social welfare.
- Critics of modern monetary theory, however, say that such a policy will lead to higher price inflation, which is simply an indirect tax on citizens.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Question 1. Consider the following statements regarding Domestic Violence Act - 2005:

1. The definition of domestic violence includes only the actual abuse against the victim
2. The act does not cover “live-in” partners and is limited to wives, divorcee or widows

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

Question 2. Consider the following statements regarding Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana:

1. It provides complete compensation for the wage loss in terms of cash incentives
2. All Pregnant Women and Lactating Mothers including those in regular employment with the Central Government or the State Governments are eligible for the scheme
3. It is implemented in all the districts of the country in accordance with the provision of the National Food Security Act, 2013.

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

- a. Only 1 and 2
- b. Only 2 and 3
- c. Only 3
- d. All of the above

Question 3. Consider the following statements

1. India has yet not ratified the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No 182) of the ILO
2. Conventions of ILO are legally binding international treaties that may be ratified by member states

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

I. UPSC Mains practice Questions

1. Gender equality is a critical component of economic growth. Analyse this statement in the context of recently published World Bank's Women, Business and the Law 2019 Report. (12.5 Marks; 200 words)
2. While making hospitalisation affordable brings readily noticeable relief, there is no alternative to strengthening primary health care in the pursuit of an effective and efficient health system. Discuss (12.5 Marks; 200 words)

See previous [CNA](#)