

30 Mar 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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B. GS2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. India fears misuse of Kartarpur corridor

Issue:

India has fresh concerns about the safety and security of pilgrims and misuse of the corridor for anti-India activities.

Kartarpur Corridor:

- Kartarpur corridor is a proposed border corridor between the neighbouring nations of India and Pakistan, connecting the Sikh shrines of Dera Baba Nanak Sahib (located in Punjab, India) and Gurdwara Darbar Sahib Kartarpur (in Punjab, Pakistan).
- Currently under planning, the corridor is intended to allow religious devotees from India to visit the Gurdwara in Kartarpur, 4.7 kilometres (2.9 miles) from the Pakistan-India border, without a visa.

Background:

- The Kartarpur Corridor was first proposed in early 1999 by the prime ministers of Pakistan and India, Nawaz Sharif and Atal Bihari Vajpayee, respectively, as part of the Delhi–Lahore Bus diplomacy.
- In 2018, the foundation stone for the Kartarpur corridor was laid down on the Indian side. Two days later the foundation stone for the corridor was laid down on the Pakistani side. The corridor was initially intended to be completed before the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev in November 2019.
- The prime minister of India, Narendra Modi, compared the decision to go ahead with the corridor by the two countries to the fall of the Berlin Wall, saying that the project may help in easing tensions between the two countries.
- Currently pilgrims from India have to take a bus to Lahore to get to Kartarpur, which is a 125 km journey, despite the fact that people on the Indian side of the border can physically see Gurdwara Darbar Sahib Kartarpur on the Pakistani side. An elevated platform has also been constructed for the same on the Indian side, where people use binoculars to get a good view

Details:

- A senior government official said that recent reports that Gopal Singh Chawla, close aide of internationally designated terrorist Hafiz Saeed, was being made a member of the 10-member committee for managing the Kartarpur Sahib Corridor, had raised “fresh concerns about the safety and security of pilgrims and misuse of the corridor for anti-India activities.”
- The official cited these concerns and India’s stand that Pakistan respond to its demand for a lifting the cap on the number of pilgrims and a waiver of the proposed fee as conditions to hold the second delegation-level talks scheduled to be held at Wagah.
- India said that depending on the response received from Pakistan, the next meeting would be scheduled to take the discussions forward. The first meeting was held on March 14 at Attari.
- The official said reports had also surfaced about the association of anti-India elements with the Kartarpur Corridor such as Bison Singh, Kuljit Singh, Maninder Singh, and others.
- The official however, said that to expedite the infrastructure development for the corridor, India has proposed to hold another meeting of technical experts in mid-April to resolve outstanding issues at the “zero point.”

C. GS3 Related

Category: SECURITY

1. Government sets up group to monitor terror sympathisers

Context:

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) announced the setting up of a Terror Monitoring Group (TMG) aimed at taking “coordinated action against terror funding.

Details:

- To take action against “hard core sympathisers among government employees, including teachers, who are providing covert or overt support” to terror-related activities, the Ministry of Home Affairs has formed a Terror Monitoring Group (TMG).
- The order by Director of Jammu and Kashmir Department in MHA, says that in order to ensure synergised and concerted action against terror financing and other related activities in Jammu and Kashmir, a multi-disciplinary monitoring group comprising eight members has been constituted.

Concerted action:

- The TMG has to take coordinated action in all registered cases that relate to terror financing and terror-related activities and bring them to a logical conclusion.
- It will identify all key persons, including leaders of the organisation(s), who are involved in supporting terrorism in any form and take concerted action against them.
- The TMG will “investigate the networks of various channels being used to fund terror and terror activities and take coordinated action to stop flow of such funds,” the order reads.
- The group will meet on a weekly basis and submit action-taken report regularly to the MHA.
- The TMG will be chaired by Additional Director General of Police, CID of J&K Police, and include Inspector General of Police of J&K and Additional Director of Intelligence Bureau, J&K, as members.
- It will also have representatives from the Central Bureau of Investigation, National Investigation Agency, Central Board of Direct Taxes and Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs.

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**1. Debris from anti-satellite test to disintegrate in 45 days: official****Context:**

The satellite targeted with an Anti-Satellite (ASAT) missile under Mission Shakti has broken up into at least 270 pieces, most of which are expected to disintegrate within 45 days, Defence sources said.

Details:

- The satellite has disintegrated into at least 270 pieces which has also been confirmed by the North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD).
- One of them is a large piece that has been deorbited and is estimated to be completely degraded by April 5,” the official said. The rest of the pieces are estimated to disintegrate in less than 45 days, he stated.
- Being in the Low Earth Orbit, the debris would fall towards earth and burn up as soon as they enter the atmosphere.
- Officials identified the targeted satellite as Microsat-R, an imaging satellite that was launched by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) on January 24 using a Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle. The satellite, weighing 740 kg, was placed in an orbit of 274 km above earth.
- DRDO shot down Microsat-R with a modified exo-atmospheric missile of the ballistic missile defence at an altitude of 300 km.
- The ASAT test was tracked by sensors of various agencies. Upon impact, data transmission from the satellite stopped and electro-optic systems confirmed an explosion.

Issue:

Debris pose significant risk to satellites and other systems launched into orbit as they last for a long time especially in higher orbits. For instance, China's 2007 ASAT test in an orbit of around 800 km created around 3,000 pieces of debris, of which 616 have decayed. The rest are still in orbit.

Clearing the air

Two days after India tested an anti-satellite (ASAT) missile, questions have been raised about the space debris it has left behind. A brief look at the current situation

- The ASAT missile hit an imaging satellite, Microsat-R, in Low Earth Orbit of 300 km
- At least 270 pieces of debris were generated
- Most of them are expected to disintegrate within 45 days

- The biggest piece has been deorbited and is expected to degrade by April 5
- U.S. has confirmed that the debris do not pose threat to the International Space Station or other satellites in low earth orbit

2007 TEST

- China's 2007 ASAT test in an orbit of 800 km created around 3,000 pieces of debris
- 616 have disintegrated
- The rest are still in orbit



What are Low-Earth Orbit satellites?

- The Indian satellite that was shot down was a Low-Earth Orbit (LEO) satellite. These are satellites roughly at an altitude of 2,000 kilometres from the earth and that's the region where majority of satellites are concentrated.
- A database from the Union of Concerned Scientists, a non-government organisation based in the United States, says that there are at least 5 known Indian satellites in LEO: India PiSat, Resourcesat 2, Radar Imaging Satellites 1 and 2 and SRMsat.

Category: ECONOMY

1. Share pledges on the rise as funds dry up

Context:

NBFCs see a sharp increase in shares pledged with them as mutual funds reduce their exposure.

Details:

- A volatile stock market with an underlying weak trend has made fund raising difficult for companies forcing promoters to increasingly resort to pledging their shares to raise finance
- Data show that for the first time the number of companies, wherein at least some part of promoter share is pledged, has crossed the 500-mark on the National Stock Exchange (NSE) that has a little more than 1,900 companies listed.
- Many companies have almost all the promoter shares pledged.

What is Promoter pledging?

Promoter pledging refers to the practice of promoters giving their shares as collateral to financial institutions — banks, non-banking finance companies (NBFCs), and mutual funds— to raise funds to meet short-term

capital requirements or, at times, even for capital expansion when other avenues are difficult to tap.

Concern:

- The share of pledged shares held by NBFCs has touched an all-time high of nearly 42% as mutual funds try to reduce their exposure in the segment.
- The share of banks has also touched an all-time high of 13.73%.
- Mutual funds have been in focus recently especially in terms of their exposure towards pledged shares as stocks of Zee Group entities, Dewan Housing Finance and Anil Ambani Group, among others, saw a steep decline in their share prices.

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) is examining the exposure of fund houses in this segment while mulling whether the regulations for mutual funds' exposure towards pledged shares need to be tightened.

Given the increased focus on mutual funds as also the stress which NBFCs are under in the last few months due to the [IL&FS issue](#), market share seems to be moving to banks. While the share of banks is on the rise, banks are tightly regulated in terms of their exposure towards loans against shares.

Way forward:

- SEBI should review the rules for disclosures related to pledging. The current framework makes it mandatory for the entities to disclose a pledge.
- The whole aspect of pledging needs to be revisited. Currently, the entity discloses that a pledge has been created. There is, however, no disclosure about the objective or reason for the pledge.
- Clarity must be sought about the reason or the purpose for which shares have been pledged.

2. Five varieties of Indian coffee awarded GI certification

Context:

The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India has recently awarded Geographical Indication (GI) to five varieties of Indian coffee.

Details:

The five varieties of coffee awarded with GI tag are:

- **Coorg Arabica coffee** grown specifically in the region of Kodagu district in Karnataka.
- **Wayanad Robusta coffee** grown specifically in the region of Wayanad district which is situated on the eastern portion of Kerala.
- **Chikmagalur Arabica coffee** grown specifically in the region of Chikmagalur district and it is situated in the Deccan plateau, belongs to the Malnad region of Karnataka.
- **Araku Valley Arabica coffee** described as coffee from the hilly tracks of Visakhapatnam district of Andhra Pradesh and Odisha region. The coffee produce of Araku, by the tribals, follows an organic approach in which they emphasise management practices involving substantial use of organic manures, green manuring and organic pest management practices.
- **Bababudangiris Arabica coffee** grown specifically in the birthplace of coffee in India and the region is situated in the central portion of Chikmagalur district. Selectively hand-picked and processed by natural fermentation, the cup exhibits full body, acidity, mild flavour and striking aroma with a note of chocolate. This coffee is also called high grown coffee which slowly ripens in the mild climate and thereby the bean acquires a special taste and aroma.

The Monsooned Malabar Robusta Coffee, a unique specialty coffee from India, was given GI certification earlier.

What is a Geographical Indication (GI) tag?

A name or sign used on certain products which coincides to a specific geographical location or origin (e.g. a town, region, or country) is a **geographical indication (GI)**. The purpose of a geographical indication may act as admittance that the product possesses certain attributes, is made according to traditional methods, or enjoys a certain prominence due to its geographical origin. Geographical indications are typically granted for agricultural products, foodstuffs, wine and spirit drinks, handicrafts, and industrial products.

What are the benefits of Geographical Indication Status?

The GI registration confers:

1. Legal protection to the products.
2. Prevents unauthorised use of a GI tag products by others.
3. Helps consumers to get quality products of desired traits and is assured of the authenticity.
4. Promotes economic prosperity of producers of GI tag goods by enhancing their demand in national and international markets.

How is it significant?

The recognition and protection that comes with GI certification will allow the coffee producers of India to invest in maintaining the specific qualities of the coffee grown in that particular region. It will also enhance the visibility of Indian coffee in the world and allow growers to get maximum price for their premium coffee.

D. GS4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. A reality check

What's in the news?

- Recently, the U.S. has made a move to take a listing request for Jaish-e-Mohammad founder Masood Azhar directly to the UN Security Council.
- Experts opine that this action of the U.S. is an indicator of the frustration of a majority of the Council's permanent members with China's refusal to budge on the issue.

Editorial Analysis

Reasons to ban Azhar?

- The many obvious reasons to ban Azhar have been repeated often: the JeM was banned in 2001 with a listing at the UNSC that names Azhar as its founder and financier; he was accused of working with

al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden; and he was seen by the entire world on TV screens as he was exchanged for hostages at Kandahar following the 1999 Indian Airlines hijack, after being released from an Indian prison where he was held on charges of terrorism.

- Since 2001, the JeM and Azhar have claimed responsibility for several terror attacks that resulted in the deaths of dozens of innocent persons, including, most recently, the February 14 attack on a CRPF convoy in Pulwama.

China's Actions:

- Even so, China has used its veto on Azhar's listing at the 1267 UNSC Sanctions Committee four times in the past decade, evidently to protect Pakistan.
- China's stand on Azhar is at variance with the otherwise tough stand on terror in Xinjiang province.
- Also, it has allowed terrorists and groups based in Pakistan to be listed at the UNSC since 2001 and agreed to "grey list" Pakistan at the Financial Action Task Force for terror financing.
- Just on 28th March, 2019, it joined other UNSC members in passing a resolution against terror financing.

Implications of the latest proposal:

- With the latest proposal, the U.S. plans to "shame" China by bringing the Azhar listing to a public debate at the UNSC. And if that fails, it is reportedly considering a UN General Assembly statement condemning Azhar.
- It is important to note that the listing of Azhar is an unfinished task India is justified in pursuing.
- However, the latest U.S. move comes with some concerns.
- To begin with, there is no indication that China is ready to change its stand, particularly in the face of coercion or threat from the U.S., and it could veto this proposal as well.
- Also, there appears to be little to be gained at present by forcing China further into Pakistan's corner, especially as New Delhi has said it would pursue the Azhar listing with China with "patience and persistence", in keeping with its desire not to sacrifice the bilateral relationship over the issue.
- It is equally unlikely that a world power like China would be moved by the threat of public humiliation.

Concluding Remarks:

- New Delhi must applaud the strong support the U.S. and the other UNSC members have provided on the issue of cross-border terror threats, and on the vexed issue of Azhar's listing.
- But it must be careful not to stake too much on an immediate win at the UNSC vis-a-vis China, and keep its expectations realistic.

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. A stop sign

What's in the news?

- Recently, the International Energy Agency found that India's carbon emissions grew by 4.8% during 2018, in spite of the national focus on climate change in energy policy.

Editorial Analysis:

- It is important to note that there is wide recognition of the fact that Indians are not historically responsible for the problem, and it is the rich nations led by the U.S. that have pumped in the stock

of carbon dioxide linked to extreme climate impacts being witnessed around the globe.

- As the IEA points out, India's emissions have grown, but per capita they remain less than 40% of the global average.
- Equity among nations is therefore at the centre of the discussion on energy emissions, and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities is central to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
- Reassuring as this may be, the universal challenge of climate change has grown to such proportions that urgent action to sharply cut carbon emissions is crucial, and all countries, including India, must act quickly.
- Further, it is important to note that intensive measures in key sectors such as scaling up renewables to raise their share in the energy mix, greening transport, updating building codes and raising energy efficiency — will help meet the national pledge under the Paris Agreement to cut energy intensity of GDP by 33-35% by 2030, over 2005 levels.
- At the global level, renewable sources of energy grew by 7% during 2018, but that pace is grossly insufficient, considering the rise in demand.
- Moreover, it was China and Europe that contributed the bulk of those savings, in large measure from solar and wind power, indicating that India needs to ramp up its capacity in this area.

Concluding Remarks: Steps India Can Take

- In fact, as the founder of the International Solar Alliance, India should lead the renewables effort.
- Yet, in spite of falling prices and rising efficiency, the potential of rooftop solar photovoltaics remains poorly utilised.
- **It is time State power utilities are made responsible for defined rates of growth in the installation of rooftop systems.**
- A second priority area is the cleaning up of coal power plants, some of which are young and have decades of use ahead. This process should be aided by the UNFCCC, which can help transfer the best technologies for carbon capture, use and storage, and provide financial linkage from the \$100 billion annual climate fund proposed for 2020.
- Unfortunately, India's record in promoting green transport has been uninspiring, and emissions from fossil fuels and the resulting pollution are rising rapidly.
- The Centre's plan to expand electric mobility through financial incentives for buses, taxis and two-wheelers needs to be pursued vigorously, especially in the large cities.
- Inevitably, India will have to raise its ambition on emissions reduction, and participate in the global stocktaking of country-level action in 2023.
- It has the rare opportunity to choose green growth, shunning fossil fuels for future energy pathways and infrastructure.

Category: ECONOMY

1. Pathways to an income guarantee

Note to Students:

- The below editorial analysis focuses on the larger issue of 'Universal Basic Income'.

We at BYJU'S have covered a detailed lecture on 'Universal Basic Income' as part of our YouTube video release.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vEMDVYqfq2Q>

The issue of Universal Basic Income has been in the news for quite some time now, and is a topical issue

these days. In this editorial analysis, we include some of the perspectives covered in the previous articles published in the Hindu. Here we take into account an article titled, “Maximum Gambit” that was featured in the Hindu on the 27th of March, 2019 as well as the article published in the Hindu titled, “Pathways to an Income Guarantee” featured in the Hindu on the 30th of March, 2019.

Why in the news?

Recently, the Indian National Congress made a promise of transferring ₹6,000 a month to poor households.

Larger Background:

- UBI (Universal Basic Income) is a form of social security where all citizens receive an unconditional sum of money.
- It was originally considered for one of two reasons; as we are moving towards a more technologically competent world, a large portion of the workforce in various sectors, such as agriculture, may become redundant.
- As a result, UBI would be granted in order to compensate for the losses to make ends meet.
- Whereas in a developing world, UBI was proposed to help reduce the overall inequality levels.
- The Indian Ministry of Finance’s 2016–17 Economic Survey provides the most exhaustive treatment thus far of implementing an Indian UBI. It finds that India’s largest welfare schemes are poorly targeted; in comparison, it argues that a UBI distributed directly into bank accounts will limit pilferage, be easier to administer, and prove a more effective antipoverty intervention.

A Perspective on Certain Alternatives:

- There have been alternatives suggested that could be implemented alongside UBI.
- For example, the introduction of a negative income tax (NIT) as a social policy could help bolster the tax base.
- Currently, under 2% of the Indian population pays income tax.
- Simply put, as agricultural activity in the country is not taxable, a significant proportion of people are employed in the informal sector.
- As over 90% of Indians earn less than Rs 2.5 lakh annually and are hence exempt from paying income tax, a significant tax base doesn’t exist.
- The lack of adherence from certain sections of the population due to tax morale also plays a vital role in creating the difference between the number of citizens registered under the taxable bracket and those who file for income tax.
- The introduction of NIT would register people under a tax bracket, even though they would not be liable to pay taxes.
- In order to avail accrued benefits, individuals will have to register their income levels.
- In this regard itself, some experts take the view that an NIT is superior to a generic UBI.

A Look at Certain Specifics:

- Some experts have opined that it would be easy to dismiss the Congress party’s promise of transferring ₹6,000 a month to poor households as just a pre-poll gimmick by an Opposition party seeking to be one up on the ruling regime’s minimal cash transfer scheme in the form of PM-KISAN.
- For now however, the party has not fully spelt out the details of its minimum income guarantee scheme, Nyuntam Aay Yojana (NYAY), and has limited itself to saying this would be a flat transfer of ₹6,000 a month to identified poor households.
- **Currently, there has been little word on how the Congress party expects to finance (Nyuntam Aay Yojana) NYAY.**
- A ballpark estimate of the fiscal expenditure, to transfer ₹72,000 every year to the poorest 20% of the approximately 25 crore Indian households, would be ₹3.6 lakh crore.

- This is twice the estimated amount set aside for food subsidy and five times that for fertilizer subsidy in the 2019-20 Union Budget.

Certain Questions that need to be answered:

- It is not clear whether the Congress, should it come to power, will cut back on other subsidies and programmes in order to finance NYAY.
- There is also the additional problem of the identification of the poor — the Socio-Economic and Caste Census of 2011 is the most comprehensive exercise for this, but it has been split apart by reliability and authenticity issues and has only been partially released to the public as yet.
- Further, by having an inbuilt provision of targeting the beneficiaries, NYAY can fall short as other programmes have, such as the targeted public distribution system.
- It is important to note that the idea behind NYAY is not entirely unsound.
- An unconditional transfer of a specified minimum income support to the poor will go a long way in helping address immediate needs related to health, education and indebtedness.
- A large section of the targeted poor would include landless workers and marginal farmers in rural areas, and unemployed youth in families engaged in menial labour in urban areas.
- Besides shoring up income to meet such basic needs and pushing wages upwards, the transfer scheme can help spur demand and consumption in rural areas in particular.
- There are disincentives inherent in the scheme as well.
- A section of the beneficiaries could withdraw themselves from employment but this could be mitigated by the expected overall spur in demand in the economy through consumption, and by the rise in real wages consequent to the shrinking of the labour market.
- Limited cash transfers in the form of direct farm income support in States such as Telangana and Odisha have helped ameliorate agrarian crises. This was the reason why the BJP-led government came up with the PM-KISAN Yojana as a countrywide scheme.
- It is important to note that a massive programme such as NYAY, however, has no precedent.

Editorial Analysis:

- The idea of a minimum income guarantee (MIG) has caught up with political parties.
- A MIG requires the government to pay the targeted set of citizens a fixed amount of money on a regular basis.
- With the promise of the **Nyuntam Aay Yojana (NYAY)** by the Congress party, it is clear that the MIG is going to be a major political issue for the coming general election.
- A limited version of the MIG in the form of the PM KISAN Yojana is already being implemented by the NDA government at the Centre.
- It is important to note that State governments in Odisha and Telangana have their own versions of the MIG.
- The NYAY is the most ambitious of these MIG schemes. It promises annual income transfers of ₹72,000 to each of the poorest five crore families comprising approximately 25 crore individuals.
- If implemented, it will cost the exchequer ₹3.6 lakh crore per annum.

Some Important questions that arise:

- Several questions arise. These are as follows:
 1. Is there a case for additional spending of such a large sum on the poor? The answer is yes.
 2. Can government finances afford it? No.
 3. Even if the government can mobilise the required sum, is the scheme a good way of spending money on the poor? No.
- It is important to note that many landless labourers, agricultural workers and marginal farmers suffer

from multi-dimensional poverty.

- Benefits of high economic growth during the last three decades have not percolated to these groups. Welfare schemes have also failed to bring them out of destitution. They have remained the poorest of Indians. Contract and informal sector workers in urban areas face a similar problem.
- Due to rapid mechanisation of low-skill jobs in the construction and retail sectors, employment prospects for them appear increasingly dismal.
- These groups are forced to borrow from moneylenders and adhatiyas (middlemen) at usurious rates of 24-60% per annum.
- For instance, for marginal and small farmers, institutional lending accounts for only about 30% of their total borrowing. The corresponding figure for landless agricultural workers is even worse at 15%. **There is a strong case for direct income transfers to these groups. The additional income can reduce their indebtedness and help them get by without falling into the clutches of the moneylender.**
- However, the fiscal space is limited. The Congress's scheme will cost about 1.92% of the GDP. No government can afford it unless several existing welfare schemes are converted into direct income transfers, or the fiscal deficit is allowed to shoot up way above its existing level, 3.4% the GDP.

Shape of the scheme:

- The welfare of the poor and downtrodden trumps concerns over the fiscal burden.
- Nonetheless, the form of an income transfer scheme should be decided carefully.
- **We know very little about the aggregate effects of unconditional cash transfers at the large scale conceived under NYAY.**
- On the one hand, income transfers will surely reduce income inequalities and help bring a large number of households out of the poverty trap or prevent them from falling into it in the event of shocks such as illness or death of an earner.
- It is important to note that the poor spend most of their income, and a boost in their income will provide a boost to economic activities by increasing overall demand. On the other hand, large income transfers can be inflationary, which will hurt the poor more than the rich.
- The effect of cash transfers on the workforce is also a moot point.
- In principle, the income supplement can come in handy as interest-free working capital for several categories of beneficiaries such as fruit and vegetable vendors and small artisans, and promote their businesses and employment. At the same time, large cash transfers can result in withdrawal of beneficiaries from the labour force.
- **Crucially, a MIG can also provide legitimacy to the state's withdrawal of provisions of the basic services.**
- There are very few studies on these issues. Existing studies have dealt with limited income transfers to only a small set of the poor. In the absence of empirical evidence regarding the aggregate effects of large income transfers, it will be irresponsible to dismiss the concern over such issues as elitist.

A Possible Route the Scheme can Adopt:

- Some experts have opined that the scheme should be launched in incremental steps.
- An income support of, say, ₹15,000 per annum can be a good start. This amount equals 30% of the annual income of marginal farmers; and more than one-fourth of the average consumption of the poorest 40% of households.
- Studies show that even a small income supplement can improve nutrient intake at high levels of impoverishment.
- Besides, it can increase school attendance for students coming from poor households. This would mean improved health and educational outcomes, which in turn will make the working population more productive. **Moreover, with a modest income support the risk of beneficiaries opting out of the workforce will also be small.**
- Besides, a moderate income support can be extended to a larger set of poor households. For the

lowest 40% (about 10 crore households), income is less than their consumption expenditure. In other words, on an average these households have to borrow to meet their expenses. These people can surely do with additional income support.

Identifying the beneficiaries:

- According to the **Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011**, around six crore households suffer from multidimensional poverty.
- These include the homeless, tribal groups, the landless, families without an adult bread-earner or a pucca house.
- Within this group it is almost impossible to exactly identify the poorest five crore households to be covered under the NYAY.
- However, the SECC along with the Agriculture Census of 2015-16 can help identify a larger set of poor based on verifiable criteria; namely, multidimensional poverty, landlessness and the marginal farmer.
- Together, these criteria cover the bottom 40%, approximately 10 crore households.
- Drawing upon the experiences with the poor-centric welfare schemes such as MNREGA, Saubhagya and Ujjwala and PM-KISAN, datasets can be prepared and used to update the list of needy households.
- For these 10 crore households, to start with, the scheme will require ₹1.5 lakh crore per annum. The PM KISAN Yojana can be aligned to meet a part of the outlay.
- Moreover, the tax collection would need to be increased by reintroducing the tax for the super-rich.
- Nonetheless, the required amount is beyond the Centre's fiscal capacity at the moment.
- Therefore, the cost will have to be shared by the States. Still the scheme would have to be rolled out in phases, as was done for MGNREGA.

Concluding Remarks:

- All considered, no income transfer scheme can be a substitute for universal basic services.
- The direct income support to the poor can deliver the intended benefits only if it comes as a supplement to the 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.
- Moreover, universal health and life insurance are equally important, and so is the case with crop insurance.
- Each year, medical shocks and crop failures push many families into the poverty trap.
- The scope of Ayushman Bharat needs to be expanded to include outdoor patient treatments.
- Some experts opine that the PM Fasal Bima Yojana can be made more comprehensive by providing free and wider insurance coverage.
- Lastly, there is a strong case for spending ₹3.6 lakh crore on the poor. But let's do so carefully.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. The irrelevance of secularism

Note to Students:

The article featured in the Hindu titled, "The irrelevance of secularism" has been critically worded. From a UPSC point of view, it is important to understand the idea of the western model of secularism as well as the India idea of secularism. These distinctions are extremely important from a UPSC point of view. We have taken the liberty of sharing these distinctions and perspectives with you. The same has also been covered in

Larger Background:

The Western Model of Secularism:

- All secular states have one thing in common: they are neither theocratic nor do they establish a religion. However, in most commonly prevalent conceptions, inspired mainly by the American model, separation of religion and state is understood as mutual exclusion: the state will not intervene in the affairs of religion and, in the same manner; religion will not interfere in the affairs of the state.
- Each has a separate sphere of its own with independent jurisdiction. No policy of the state can have an exclusively religious rationale. No religious classification can be the basis of any public policy. If this happened there is illegitimate intrusion of religion in the state. Similarly, the state cannot aid any religious institution. It cannot give financial support to educational institutions run by religious communities. Nor can it hinder the activities of religious communities, as long as they are within the broad limits set by the law of the land. For example, if a religious institution forbids a woman from becoming a priest, then the state can do little about it. If a religious community excommunicates its dissenters, the state can only be a silent witness. If a particular religion forbids the entry of some of its members in the sanctum of its temple, then the state has no option but to let the matter rest exactly where it is. On this view, religion is a private matter, not a matter of state policy or law.
- This common conception interprets freedom and equality in an individualist manner. Liberty is the liberty of individuals. Equality is equality between individuals. There is no scope for the idea that a community has the liberty to follow practices of its own choosing. There is little scope for community-based rights or minority rights. The history of western societies tells us why this is so. Except for the presence of the Jews, most western societies were marked by a great deal of religious homogeneity. Given this fact, they naturally focused on intra-religious domination. While strict separation of the state from the church is emphasized to realize among other things, individual freedom, issues of inter-religious (and therefore of minority rights) equality are often neglected.
- Finally, this form of mainstream secularism has no place for the idea of state supported religious reform. This feature follows directly from its understanding that the separation of state from church/ religion entails a relationship of mutual exclusion.

Indian Model of Secularism

Sometimes it is said that Indian secularism is an imitation of western secularism. But a careful reading of our Constitution shows that this is not the case. Indian secularism is fundamentally different from Western secularism.

Indian secularism does not focus only on church-state separation and the idea of inter-religious equality is crucial to the Indian conception. Let us elaborate this further. What makes Indian secularism distinctive? For a start it arose in the context of deep religious diversity that predated the advent of Western modern ideas and nationalism. There was already a culture of inter-religious 'tolerance' in India. However, we must not forget that tolerance is compatible with religious domination. It may allow some space to everyone but such freedom is usually limited. Besides, tolerance allows you to put up with people whom you find deeply repugnant. This is a great virtue if a society is recovering from a major civil war but not in times of peace where people are struggling for equal dignity and respect.

The advent of western modernity brought to the fore hitherto neglected and marginalized notions of equality in Indian thought. It sharpened these ideas and helped us to focus on equality within the community. It also ushered ideas of inter-community equality to replace the notion of hierarchy. Thus Indian secularism took on a distinct form as a result of an interaction between what already existed in a society that had religious diversity and the ideas that came from the west. It resulted in equal focus on intra-religious and

interreligious domination.

Indian secularism equally opposed the oppression of dalits and women within Hinduism, the discrimination against women within Indian Islam or Christianity, and the possible threats that a majority community might pose to the rights of the minority religious communities. This is its first important difference from mainstream western secularism.

Connected to it is the second difference. Indian secularism deals not only with religious freedom of individuals but also with religious freedom of minority communities. Within it, an individual has the right to profess the religion of his or her choice. Likewise, religious minorities also have a right to exist and to maintain their own culture and educational institutions.

A third difference is this. Since a secular state must be concerned equally with intra-religious domination, Indian secularism has made room for and is compatible with the idea of state-supported religious reform. Thus, the Indian constitution bans untouchability. The Indian state has enacted several laws abolishing child marriage and lifting the taboo on inter-caste marriage sanctioned by Hinduism.

The question however that arises is: can a state initiate or even support religious reforms and yet be secular? Can a state claim to be secular and not maintain separation of religion from state? The secular character of the Indian state is established by virtue of the fact that it is neither theocratic nor has it established any one or multiple religions. Beyond that it has adopted a very sophisticated policy in pursuit of religious equality. This allows it either to disengage with religion in American style, or engage with it if required.

The Indian state may engage with religion negatively to oppose religious tyranny. This is reflected in such actions as the ban on untouchability. It may also choose a positive mode of engagement. Thus, the Indian Constitution grants all religious minorities the right to establish and maintain their own educational institutions which may receive assistance from the state. All these complex strategies can be adopted by the state to promote the values of peace, freedom and equality.

It should be clear by now why the complexity of Indian secularism cannot be captured by the phrase “equal respect for all religions”. If by this phrase is meant peaceful coexistence of all religions or interreligious toleration, then this will not be enough because secularism is much more than mere peaceful coexistence or toleration. If this phrase means equal feeling of respect towards all established religions and their practices, then there is an ambiguity that needs clearing. Indian secularism allows for principled state intervention in all religions. Such intervention betrays disrespect to some aspects of every religion. For example, religiously sanctioned caste-hierarchies are not acceptable within Indian secularism. The secular state does not have to treat every aspect of every religion with equal respect. It allows equal disrespect for some aspects of organized religions.

Editorial Analysis:

- A debate has flared up, especially after the Supreme Court’s Sabarimala judgment, on whether the state should leave religion alone.
- It is important to note that the relevance of this question is underscored by the unique definition of secularism espoused by the founding fathers of the Constitution, namely that the Indian state must be equidistant from all religions while allowing religions equal space in the public sphere.

Question of definition

- For several reasons this definition of secularism has created a lot of confusion as to what the term stands for.
- Some critics take the view that the formulation was impractical, given the huge numerical disparity in the religious composition of the Indian nation.

- These critics point out that it is this demographic inequality that paved the way for the intrusion, and now proliferation, of majoritarian religious symbols, idioms and practices in the state's domain.
- Second, given the congenitally religious nature of Indian society and the consequent political import of identity based on religion, political parties, almost without exception, found it convenient to use religious sectarianism to advance their fortunes.
- As a matter of fact, the success of the Muslim League in hiving off Muslim majority areas from the rest of the country in 1947 on the basis of a religio-sectarian agenda gave a major fillip to Hindu nationalist organisations, such as the Hindu Mahasabha and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).
- These parties were already active in the pre-Partition political arena but were of marginal importance during the freedom movement.
- The demographic transformation of independent India, as a consequence of Partition, into a Hindu majority of around 80% paved the way for the emergence of Hindu nationalist parties spawned by the RSS — first the Jan Sangh and then the BJP — as major political players in the country.
- The Congress itself had a Hindu nationalist component that had been overshadowed by the ideology of composite nationalism because of the towering personality of its leading exponent, Jawaharlal Nehru. This ideology began to decline from the early 1960s with the deterioration in Nehru's health. The decline was temporarily halted in the late 1960s during the first few years of Indira Gandhi's tenure as Prime Minister by the influence on her of her mentor, P.N. Haksar, an uncompromising secularist.
- However, it became clear that she was not above playing the religio-sectarian card. She did so successfully in order to return to power in 1980.
- Rajiv Gandhi continued in his mother's footsteps in the aftermath of her assassination and subsequently followed a policy of dual appeasement: first getting Parliament to overturn the Supreme Court's ruling in the Shah Bano case and then by opening the Babri Masjid, which had remained closed since 1949, to allow Hindu religious rites to be conducted in its premises.
- Currently, today, there are certain issues need to be addressed: for example the proliferation of cow vigilantism and the anti-Muslim rhetoric.
- Some critics take the view that the formula that the state must remain equidistant from all religions, the unique Indian definition of secularism, is unworkable.
- As a matter of fact, these critics also take the view that the framers of the Constitution, Nehru and B.R. Ambedkar included, failed to erect an unbreachable firewall between state and religion that would clearly prevent the intrusion of religious idioms, practices and agendas into the political arena and insulate the state from the religious sphere.

F. Tidbits

1. A blockchain-enabled marketplace app for coffee

With a view to enabling growers find better price for their produce, the Coffee Board has launched Coffee Blockchain, a marketplace app, developed in coordination with Eka Software Solutions.

- The pilot project has about 20 participants, including 14 coffee growers, and will run for four-to-six months.
- The blockchain-enabled marketplace is aimed at reducing growers' dependency on intermediaries, bring in trust and efficiency in the chain, help farmers with market access, and ensure traceability. The aim is also to bring in more transparency and price discovery for farmers.
- Anyone willing to participate in the marketplace will have to register on the app and will get a smart contract number.

2. Scientists identify genetic mutation in a woman who feels no pain

- Doctors have identified a new mutation in a woman who is barely able to feel pain or stress after a surgeon who was baffled by her recovery from an operation referred her for genetic testing.
- Jo Cameron, 71, has a mutation in a previously unknown gene which scientists believe must play a major role in pain signalling, mood and memory.
- In the stress and depression tests she scored zero.
- The scientists found two notable mutations. Together, they suppress pain and anxiety, while boosting happiness and, apparently, forgetfulness and wound healing.
- The first mutation the scientists spotted is common in the general population. It dampens down the activity of a gene called FAAH. The gene makes an enzyme that breaks down anandamide, a chemical in the body that is central to pain sensation, mood and memory.
- Anandamide works in a similar way to the active ingredients of cannabis. The less it is broken down, the more its analgesic and other effects are felt.
- The second mutation was a missing chunk of DNA that mystified scientists at first. Further analysis showed that the “deletion” chopped the front off a nearby, previously unknown gene the scientists named FAAH-OUT.
- The researchers think this new gene works like a volume control on the FAAH gene. FAAH falls silent with a mutation. The upshot is that anandamide, a natural cannabinoid, builds up in the system. Cameron has twice as much anandamide as those in the general population.
- James Cox, a researcher on the study, said that in extreme cases, mutations can lead people to feel no pain whatsoever.
- The discovery has boosted hopes of new treatments for chronic pain which affects millions of people globally.

G. Prelims Facts

1. Earth Day award for Nagaland forest guard

- The services of Alemba Yimchunger, a forest guard at the Fakim Wildlife Sanctuary have been recognised with Earth Day Network Star.
- It is an award by a U.S.-based international environment organisation that engages with green groups in 195 countries.
- Fakim Wildlife Sanctuary is in Nagaland’s Kiphire district. Situated close to the India Myanmar border in the Pungro circle headquarter in Nagaland.
- Forest of the district is tropical to sub-tropical.
- Throughout the year, the region experiences heavy rainfall because of which forests are full of undergrowth.
- In his 30 years of service, Mr. Yimchunger has played a major role in protection of forests and wild animals in and around Fakim sanctuary.

H. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. The craft forms of Warangal Dhurries and Adilabad Dhokra have a Geographical Indication Tag (GI Tag).
2. Both the craft forms are from the state of Andhra Pradesh.

Which of the statement/s given is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2

Answer: a

Explanation:

The craft forms of Warangal Dhurries and Adilabad Dhokra from Telangana have been awarded a Geographical Indication Tag (GI Tag) by the Geographical Indication Registry based in Chennai. Warangal Dhurries is a famous variety of traditional rug made out of cotton and Adilabad Dhokra is an ancient bell metal craft.

Q2. Which of the following is NOT correctly matched?

- a. Tirupati Laddu: Andhra Pradesh
- b. Muga Silk: Assam
- c. Dindigul Lock: Karnataka
- d. Gadwal Sarees: Telangana

Answer: c

Explanation:

Dindigul Lock of Tamil Nadu has been awarded GI Tag. A geographical indication right facilitates those who have the right to use the indication to prohibit its usage by a third party whose product does not conform to the applicable standards.

Q3. Consider the following with respect to "Electoral Bonds":

1. Electoral bonds will be valid for 6 months during which they could be used to make donations to registered political parties.
2. Only those political parties that have secured not less than 1% of votes polled in the previous Lok Sabha elections or general election to the Assembly can avail funding through these bonds.
3. Electoral bonds are interest-free banking instruments.
4. India is the first country to introduce bonds for electoral funding.

Which of the following statements is/are true?

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. 2, 3 and 4 only
- d. All of the above

Answer: c

Explanation:

The electoral bonds scheme was announced in Union Budget 2017 with an aim for increasing transparency in political funding. It makes India first country in the world to have such unique bonds for electoral funding. It will have a life of **15 days** during which they can be used to make donations to registered political parties. The bond can be encashed by an eligible political party only through a designated bank account with the authorised bank. Electoral bonds will be bearer instrument in nature of promissory note and an interest-free banking instrument. Political parties that have secured not less than 1% of votes polled in

last general election to Lok Sabha or Assembly can avail funding through these bonds.

Q4. Consider the following with respect to FAME India Scheme:

1. The objective of the scheme is providing monetary and fiscal incentives for market creation and adoption of electric & hybrid technology vehicles in the country.
2. It is a part of the National Electric Mobility Mission Plan 2020.
3. It intends to achieve about 9500 million litres of cumulative fuel savings, which would result in the reduction of emission of Greenhouse Gasses and pollution of 2 million tonnes.
4. The scheme was formulated by the Department of Heavy Industry under the Ministry of Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises.

Which of the statement/s are incorrect?

- a. 2 only
- b. 3 only
- c. 1 and 2 only
- d. 4 only

Answer: b

Explanation:

FAME -India [Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid & Electric Vehicles in India] scheme was formulated by the Department of Heavy Industry under the Ministry of Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises, as a part of the National Electric Mobility Mission Plan 2020. The objective of the scheme is providing monetary and fiscal incentives for market creation and adoption of electric & hybrid technology vehicles in the country. The key areas of focus under the scheme are infrastructure development, pilot projects, technology development and demand creation. It will provide a major push for early adoption and market creation of both hybrid and electric technologies vehicles in the country.

National Electric Mobility Mission Plan (NEMMP) 2020

The National Electric Mobility Mission Plan 2020 was unveiled in 2013 considering the environmental pollution and need for fuel security in the country, with an aim to promote electric mobility in the country. It has an ambitious target of achieving sales of six to seven million electric and hybrid electric vehicles every year beginning from 2020. It intends to achieve about 9500 million litres of cumulative fuel savings, which would result in the reduction of emission of Greenhouse Gasses and pollution of 2 million tonnes.

Q5. Consider the following statements:

1. World Monuments Fund (WMF) is a private, international, non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of historic architecture and cultural heritage sites
2. WMF publishes the World Monuments Watch two year once.

Choose the correct answer from the options given below:

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Neither 1 nor 2
- d. Both 1 and 2

Answer: d

Explanation:

World Monuments Fund (WMF) is a private, international, non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of historic architecture and cultural heritage sites around the world through fieldwork, advocacy, grant making, education, and training. Every two years WMF publishes the **World Monuments Watch** (formerly the World Monuments Watch List of 100 Most Endangered Sites).

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Geographical Indication Tags have the potential to expedite India's Economic Growth. Elucidate (10 Marks)
2. Draw a contrast between the Indian and Western concept of Secularism. Comment on India's dilemma on secularism and suggest the way forward. (10 Marks)