

17 Apr 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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A. GS1 Related

Category: SOCIAL ISSUES

1. SC to decide on entry of women into mosques

Context:

A couple has moved the Supreme Court against the prohibition of entry of Muslim women into mosques, terming the bar as illegal, unconstitutional and a violation of their dignity.

Details:

- Presently, women are allowed to offer prayers at mosques under the Jamaat-e-Islami and Mujahid denominations. Women are barred from mosques under the predominant Sunni faction.
- Even in mosques where women are allowed, there are separate entrances and enclosures for worship for men and women.

- The petition argued that such a bar on Muslim women was “violative of Article 44 of the Constitution of India, which encourages the State to secure a Uniform Civil Code for all citizens, by eliminating discrepancies between various personal laws currently in force in the country”.
- The petition comes several months after the court upheld the dignity of women worshippers aged between 10 and 50 by lifting the bar on them to pray at the Sabarimala temple in Kerala.
- “The only reason we may hear you is because of our judgment on the Sabarimala temple issue,” a Bench of Justices S.A. Bobde and S. Abdul Nazeer observed orally. The court issued notice to the government and various bodies, including the National Commission for Women.
- Justice Bobde asked whether a petition seeking right to equality can be filed against individuals and non-state actors like people who pray in and manage mosques.

Applicability of Article 14:

- Justice Bobde asked whether a petition seeking right to equality can be filed against individuals and non-State actors like people who pray in and manage mosques. The fundamental right to equality under Article 14 of the Constitution was available only against the State, he observed.
- “Is a mosque a ‘state’? Is a church a ‘state’? Is a temple a ‘state’? We are not talking about the cement and mortar that make mosques but the people in them. Can the fundamental right of equality be imposed against another human being,” he asked.
- “Article 14 starts with the words ‘state shall not deny...’ The relief is against the state only,” Justice Bobde said, addressing the lawyer.
- “You do not want someone to enter your house. Can that person then get police help to enter your house? If persons in mosques don’t want you [women] to enter, can you agitate asserting the right to equality against them? **Fundamental right to equality is only available against the state and not individuals,**” Justice Bobde retorted.

Sabarimala case:

- In September last year, a Constitution Bench of the court lifted the age-old ban on women of menstrual age, between 10 and 50 years, entering the famed Sabarimala temple in Kerala.
- The decision created uproar. Multiple review petitions were filed, heard and reserved for judgment.
- The court had held that the Sabarimala ban amounted to discrimination and even the practice of untouchability. Women had equal right to worship in a ‘public’ temple, it had said.
- It had also played a key role in facilitating the entry of women into the sanctum of the Haji Ali dargah in Mumbai.

B. GS2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. After SC rap, EC ‘wakes up to its powers’

Context:

The Election Commission of India (ECI) passed a flurry of restraining orders against leading political candidates for their communally provocative and divisive speeches.

Details:

- Earlier, the Court had pulled up the EC for not doing enough to curb hate speeches.
- It had questioned the authority being exercised by the EC to act against the errant leaders, in particular when their speeches violate model code of conduct.

- The ECI orders came shortly after it invited the Supreme Court's wrath for describing itself as "toothless" in the face of hate.
- All four leaders were variously restrained from election campaigning for 48 to 72 hours.
- The action taken against the four leaders might be considered inadequate, too just a rap on the knuckles.
- The comments that they made were not just offences under the election rules but crimes under other laws relating to communal harmony, treatment of women, etc.
- Adityanath's comment was rabidly communal and Azam Khan's comment on actor Jaya Prada was abominable. Both are serial offenders, too.

Tackling hate speech

Some laws that can be used in speeches that are communally sensitive or incite religious feelings:

(i) Indian Penal Code, 1860

- Section 124A IPC penalises sedition
- Section 153A IPC penalises 'promotion of enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc., and acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony'

(ii) Representation of The People Act, 1951

- Section 123(3A) and Section 125 prohibits promotion of enmity on grounds of religion, race, caste, community or language in connection with election as a corrupt electoral practice and prohibits it

(iii) Cable Television Network Regulation Act, 1995

- Sections 5 and 6 of the Act prohibit transmission or re-transmission of a programme through cable network in contravention to the prescribed programme code or advertisement code

(vi) Cinematograph Act, 1952

- Sections 4, 5B and 7 empower the Board of Film Certification to prohibit and regulate the screening of a film

Conclusion:

There has been blatant violation of Model Code of Conduct and the electoral conduct has been deteriorating over the years. It is not just because the quality of human material in politics is getting poorer but because there is an inability or unwillingness on the part of democratic institutions and regulatory bodies to assert themselves and push back against pressure and coercion. The ECI must proactively take measure to deter the violation of Model Code of Conduct.

2. Bangladesh actor asked to leave India

Context:

Popular Bangladeshi actor Ferdous Ahmed has returned to his country following directions from Bangladeshi deputy high commission in Kolkata after he courted controversy by campaigning in the Lok Sabha elections for the Trinamul Congress (TMC) in North Bengal.

Details:

- Upon receiving a report about visa violations by the actor, the Ministry of Home Affairs cancelled his visa and issued him a notice to leave the country.
- He also has been blacklisted.
- Sources said none of the categories for visa allow for a foreigner to participate in a political campaign.
- MHA has sought a report from the West Bengal government and the local Foreigner Regional Registration Office, prompting FRRO to probe whether the actor had violated work visa rules.
- BJP lodged a complaint with the Election Commission claiming Ferdous's campaigning for

Trinamool violated the Model Code of Conduct.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Iran labels U.S. troops in West Asia as ‘terrorist’

Context:

Iran’s lawmakers overwhelmingly approved a bill labelling U.S. forces in the West Asia as terrorist, a day after the U.S. terrorism designation for Iran’s Revolutionary Guard formally took effect.

Details:

- Defense Minister Gen. Amir Hatami introduced the bill authorizing the government to act firmly in response to “terrorist actions” by U.S. forces.
- It demands authorities use “legal, political and diplomatic” measures to neutralize the American move, without elaborating.
- During the debate, some hard-liner lawmakers had demanded listing the entire U.S. Army and security forces as terrorist.
- However, it remains unclear how the bill’s passage in parliament would affect the Guard’s activities in the Persian Gulf, where the U.S. Navy has in the past accused Iranian patrol boats of harassing American warships.
- The United States officially designated Iran’s elite Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a foreign terrorist organization, according to a notice published in the U.S. Federal Register.
- The Revolutionary Guard has forces and wields influence in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen, and is in charge of Iranian missiles that have U.S. bases in their range.
- The Guard’s designation — the first-ever for an entire division of another government — adds another layer of sanctions to the powerful paramilitary force and makes it a crime under U.S. jurisdiction to provide it with material support.
- Depending on how broadly “material support” is interpreted, the designation may complicate U.S. diplomatic and military cooperation with certain third-country officials, notably in Iraq and Lebanon, who deal with the Guard.

2. Export of cotton textiles to China on the rise: Texprocil

Context:

Export of cotton textiles to China is seeing an upward trend, according to The Cotton Textiles Export Promotion Council (Texprocil).

Details:

- China is an important trading partner for India with an import of US\$ 65.22 billion worth of goods and export of US\$ 15.10 billion for the period April – February 2019, recording an all-time high in exports and sharp decline in imports from China.
- Trade balance between the two countries in the year 2017-18 was US\$ 63.05 billion in favour of China, which has now shrunk to US\$ 50.13 billion (from US\$ 57.87 billion for the period April – Feb 2018-19).
- Raw cotton and yarn exports increased last financial year (2018-19).
- India is trying to push the exports of fabric as well as higher trade would bring in investments to India.
- Between April 2018 and February 2019, exports of cotton textiles increased 69% compared with the

same period in 2017-18. This shows there is potential for textiles in China.

Need to address tariff issue:

- The chairman, Texprocil, said in a statement that export of cotton textiles had also contributed to reducing the trade deficit between the two countries.
- Welcoming the efforts taken by the Union government towards reducing the trade deficit, he said, export of cotton textiles could increase further if the tariff disadvantage of 3.5% to 10% suffered by India in comparison with Vietnam, Pakistan, and Indonesia on textile products was addressed.
- Higher export of cotton textiles, mainly fabrics and made-ups, could contribute significantly to further reduction of the trade imbalance and attract investments from Chinese industries that are keen to shift from China.

C. GS3 Related

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. Lakes are filled with liquid methane on Titan

Context:

On its final flyby of Saturn's largest moon in 2017, NASA's Cassini spacecraft gathered radar data revealing that the small liquid lakes in Titan's northern hemisphere are surprisingly deep, perched atop hills and filled with methane.

Details:

- The new findings, published recently in Nature Astronomy, are the first confirmation of just how deep some of Titan's lakes are (more than 300 feet, or 100 meters) and of their composition.
- They provide new information about the way liquid methane rains on, evaporates from and seeps into Titan — the only planetary body in our solar system other than Earth known to have stable liquid on its surface.
- Scientists have known that Titan's hydrologic cycle works similarly to Earth's — with one major difference. Instead of water evaporating from seas, forming clouds and rain, Titan does it all with methane and ethane. We tend to think of these hydrocarbons as a gas on Earth, unless they're pressurized in a tank.
- But Titan is so cold that they behave as liquids, like gasoline at room temperature on our planet.
- Scientists have known that the much larger northern seas are filled with methane, but finding the smaller northern lakes filled mostly with methane was a surprise.
- Previously, Cassini data measured Ontario Lacus, the only major lake in Titan's southern hemisphere. There they found a roughly equal mix of methane and ethane. Ethane is slightly heavier than methane, with more carbon and hydrogen atoms in its makeup.

Read more about: [Cassini Spacecraft](#).

D. GS4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Implications of the Indonesian vote

Note to Students:

- This analysis takes into account the perspectives reflected in the article featured by the Hindu on the 16th of April, 2019, titled, “A mammoth election”, as well as the points covered by the article “Implications of the Indonesian vote”, featured by the Hindu on the 17th of April, 2019.

What’s in the news?

- Indonesia’s single-day and complex elections are going to be held today (17th April, 2019).
- Experts also opine that it will test the popular mood on President Joko Widodo’s moderation, which has been under attack from the religious right.

Editorial Analysis:

- President Joko Widodo, popularly known as Jokowi, is seeking a second and final term, as Indonesia, the world’s largest Muslim-majority nation, approaches 75 years since gaining independence from the Netherlands in 1945.
- Jokowi, a former Jakarta governor, from the ruling Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle, faces Prabowo Subianto, a former army general, of the Great Indonesia Movement Party; they had clashed in the 2014 race too.

Winds in favour of Mr. Jokowi:

- Opinion polls show Mr. Jokowi winning comfortably.
- The roughly 5% rate of growth in GDP in the last few quarters is well below the President’s 7% target, but is still an improvement over previous years.
- Sentiment has also turned positive since the rupiah regained its value after the slide during the 2018 currency crises in emerging markets and the return of capital flows.

Some Causes for Concern:

- Jakarta’s current account deficit, owing to a slump in exports, could cause concern unless the U.S.-China trade dispute is settled amicably.
- However, the liberal-leaning President’s challenges are linked to the poll-time rise in religious tensions.
- In the 2014 contest, Mr. Jokowi’s opponents played the identity card by claiming that he, a Javanese Muslim, was a Christian and a communist.
- **In 2017, an ethnic Chinese and Christian successor of Mr. Jokowi as Jakarta governor was convicted of blasphemy soon after re-election.**
- The government’s subsequent ban on Hizb ut-Tahrir, an Islamist organisation wedded to the establishment of an international caliphate, underscored the difficulties in balancing conflicting political interests.
- Rising religious militancy in some regions of Indonesia has also endangered the rights of the LGBTQ community, denting the country’s record of respect for cultural pluralism and tolerance of heterodox social behaviour.

Some specifics on the election:

- **In a unique Indonesian electoral operation, votes for thousands of seats, fought by hundreds of thousands of candidates at various levels, are tabulated manually in full public view during daylight hours.**
- Final results of the April 17th, 2019 polls are expected after weeks.
- The complex nature of the process and provision for quick counts based on a sample of the actual votes cast have in the past led rival camps to trade accusations of manipulation and intimidation.

Analysis:

- The rematch, after 2014, between incumbent President Joko 'Jokowi' Widodo of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) and his challenger, Prabowo Subianto of the Great Indonesia Movement Party (Gerindra) will decide what trajectory the country will take over the next five years.
- Experts opine that the result will have an impact on the domestic economy and polity, with both candidates having fine-tuned their positions since 2014.
- Indonesian foreign engagements will also see a change depending on whether it pursues its own **Indo-Pacific strategy** and an **Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)-plus foreign policy**. Given its large population, mainly Muslim, its growing middle class and market and its strategic location, the election is of interest to the region.

A Brief Look at some Political Statistics:

- In 2019, the Election Commission approved 16 parties to run for parliament.
- Jokowi's coalition has 338 out of 560 current MPs to Mr. Subianto's 222 MPs.
- Indonesian law requires that political parties have at least 20% of the seats in Parliament, or 25% share of the popular vote, before they can nominate a presidential candidate in 2019.
- If the Democratic Party of former President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono had not supported Mr. Subianto's bid, his candidacy would have failed and Mr. Jokowi may have been the only candidate.
- The churning in parties like the Golkar and National Mandate Party (PAN) which were firmly with Mr. Subianto in 2014 has made a change in Indonesian politics.

What Mr. Jokowi stands for?

- Jokowi remains the man to beat, as he is still popular and seen to be sincere and honest even though he has not fulfilled all his campaign promises of 2014.
- **Jokowi is also seen to be pro-Chinese**, having pledged support for the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and being a vocal supporter of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
- As a matter of fact, some analysts feel that Mr. Jokowi could face problems for the largesse he shows to China.
- He has even handed over to China a prestigious high-speed railway that was proposed by the Japanese in 2015, but which has still not taken off.
- His support to Chinese overtures to build infrastructure for Indonesia has often seen others shut out, at Chinese behest, or by a tweaking of rules.
- Most Chinese engagement is through public sector entities, which are now in heavy debt since the sovereign guarantee route was not applied to keep up with constitutional norms of debt and deficits.
- Due to the slow pace of the BRI projects, many public sector units have serious debt issues.
- But these are not the ideas which win elections and Mr. Jokowi's finger on the popular pulse through welfare measures, including the 'Indonesia Health Card', has won him support.

What Mr. Subianto stands for?

- Subianto presents a more nationalistic image with an emphasis on security, balanced foreign policy, more local manufacturing, and a just social order.
- He is seen to be more open to partnerships with countries besides China, having said so at an

Indonesian economic summit in 2018.

- His support to business is seen through his choice of running mate for 2019, 'Sandi' Sandiaguno, 49, a wealthy former fund manager who was Jakarta Deputy Governor (2017-18). The latter is seen as pro-business, particularly the private sector.
- Being young and social media savvy, he could get the support of millennials, who form about 30% of the electorate.

Perspective on Indonesia and India-Indonesia Relations:

- Indonesia has a GDP of over \$1 trillion (2017 figures) and a growth rate of about 5%.
- Its population is nearly 270 million. Its diverse natural resources include abundant coal and palm oil.
- Changing trade rules are having an effect on the Indonesian rupiah.
- In the run-up to these elections and after, the dominant themes are the growing debt, social and economic inequalities, the role of Islam in politics as well as fake news.
- India and Indonesia have shared friendly relations. Mr. Jokowi paid a bilateral visit in 2016 and again in 2018 for an ASEAN commemorative summit in New Delhi.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid a visit to Jakarta last year (2018) as part of a three-nation tour.
- The two leaders have given shape to several ideas on infrastructure, strategic partnership, naval and army cooperation and trade and commerce.
- The dialogue among faiths is on, and there is closer cooperation on counter-terrorism and other non-traditional threats.
- They have different views on China, but it is not seen as a hindrance to the bilateral relationship.
- If Mr. Jokowi wins, as polls predict, the relationship will be on firmer footing than it is now.
- However, India need not worry too if Mr. Subianto wins. He sees many models in India's development that are worth emulating.
- He could, in fact, open more strategic space and markets for India, but he would need time to settle down as he has little prior experience in administration.

2. Indian elections, South Asian concerns

Note to Students:

- The points discussed in the paragraphs that follow will not only prove to be helpful while answering questions on the geopolitics of South Asia and its impact on India, but even in essays which warrant a mention of the same.

Editorial Analysis:

- Currently, the elections that are underway in India is being done at a staggering scale with just under a billion voters. Such an event is hard for the mind to grapple with, even in this densely populated neighbourhood that includes Bangladesh and Pakistan.
- As a matter of fact, India should be the bulwark against weakening democracy in a world of Bolsonaro (Brazil), Duterte (the Philippines), Erdoğan (Turkey), Putin (Russia) and Trump (the U.S.) not to mention the People's Republic of China.

Soft power and a look at South Asia:

- Parliamentary democracy is the governance procedure adopted by each and every country of South Asia, and the Indian practice has always been held up as the example.
- The precedents set by India's courts are studied elsewhere, the professionalism of the civil service is regarded as the benchmark, and everyone else seeks the aspirational welfare state set in motion in India in the middle of the 20th century.
- Some critics observe that currently, India seems preoccupied with 'managing' South Asian countries

when it should be commanding the global platforms on climate alteration, protection of pluralism and correcting imbalances in global wealth.

- Currently, Chinese goods flood the Indian market and Chinese research and development gallops ahead of India's, and Beijing convincingly moves to tackle environmental degradation.
- South Asia as a whole — much of it the historical 'India' — roots for Indian democracy even while welcoming Chinese investment, infrastructure loans and tourists.
- Also because it has the largest population in the Subcontinent, **India is expected to lead South Asia on myriad issues including the death-dealing Indo-Gangetic smog, fertilizer and pesticide use, cross-border vectors, arsenic poisoning, regional commerce and economic rationalisation, social inclusion and the Human Development Index and so on.**
- It is important to note that adjacent societies have successfully tackled great challenges — look at Bangladesh surging towards middle income country status.
- **Nepal has long been regarded by exasperated New Delhi policy-makers as the South Asian basket case sending out migrant labour to India. This much is true, but it also emerges that the Nepal economy is the seventh largest sender of remittance to India after the UAE, the U.S., Saudi Arabia, the U.K., Bangladesh and Canada.** Unlike these others, Nepal's remittances go to India's poorest parts, in Bihar, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

Regionalism's import

- India is indeed large and important, but the chest size of a country does not translate into equity, social justice or international standing.
- This is because a large section of humanity lives within its boundaries; when India falters, the pit of despair and the potential for violence open up wide and deep.
- Experts point out that the ideal South Asian regionalism is all about limiting the power of the national capitals, devolving power to federal units and strengthening local democracy.
- Further, when one looks at the start of the current central administration in India, we observe that an outreach was made to the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).
- However, after this, critics observe that the freeze put by India on the inter-governmental South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is only a cynical means to keep Pakistan out of the club.
- As a matter of fact, for its own security and prosperity, India must re-connect with South Asia.
- Subcontinental regionalism is also important to achieve New Delhi's ambitions on the world stage, including that coveted seat at the UN Security Council.
- On South Asian matters, the Gujral Doctrine needs to be dusted and re-examined.

A Look at the Gujral Doctrine:

- This doctrine is expression of the foreign policy initiated by Inder Kumar Gujral, the Foreign Minister in the Deve Gowda government which assumed office in June 1996.
- As a matter of fact, Inder Kumar Gujral himself later became Prime Minister.
- The Gujral Doctrine is a set of five principles which aims to guide the conduct of foreign relations with India's immediate neighbours as spelt out by I.K. Gujral.

A Look at the Principles:

1. With neighbours like Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka, India does not ask for reciprocity, but gives and accommodates what it can in good faith and trust.
2. No South Asian country should allow its territory to be used against the interest of another country of the region. (This is relatable to the second principle of the Panchsheel- Mutual non-aggression)
3. No country should interfere in the internal affairs of another. (This is relatable to the third principle of the Panchsheel- Mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs)
4. All South Asian countries must respect each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty. (First

Principle of Panchsheel- Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty)

5. They should settle all their disputes through peaceful bilateral negotiations. (Fourth and Fifth Principles of Panchsheel- Equality and mutual benefit & Peaceful co-existence)

Among other factors, **these five principles arise from the belief that India's stature and strength cannot be divorced from the quality of its relations with its neighbours.**

As a matter of fact, according to Gujral, these five principles, when scrupulously adhered to, would achieve a fundamental recasting of South Asia's regional relationships, including the difficult relationship between India and Pakistan.

Further, the implementation of these principles would generate a climate of close and mutually benign cooperation in the region, where the weight and size of India is regarded positively and as an asset by these countries.

The Gujral Doctrine was generally welcomed and appreciated not only within the country, but also by most of the neighbours and major powers.

Moreover, in the context of the changed international environment in a post-cold war world, the Gujral Doctrine become a new and important principle of India's foreign policy.

Positive Applications of this Doctrine- A Brief Look at the Past:

1. **Sharing of Ganga Water with Bangladesh:** It is in pursuance of this policy that late in 1996, India concluded an agreement with Bangladesh on sharing of Ganga Waters. As a matter of fact, this agreement enabled Bangladesh to draw, during the lean season, slightly more water than even the 1977 Agreement had provided.
2. **Freezing of Border Dispute with PRC:** The confidence building measures agreed upon by India and China in November 1996 were also a part of efforts made by the two countries to improve bilateral relations, and freeze, for the time being, the border dispute.
3. **Increasing People to People Contact with Pakistan:** Gujral advocated that people to people contacts, especially between India and Pakistan, can create an atmosphere that would enable the countries concerned to sort out their differences amicably. India unilaterally announced in 1997 several concessions to Pakistan tourists, particularly the elder citizens and cultural groups, in regard to visa fees and police reporting.
4. **“Confidence Building Measures” Talks with Pakistan:** The Gujral Doctrine assumed significance when at Foreign Secretary level talks between India and Pakistan in June 1997, the two countries identified eight areas for negotiation so as to build confidence and seek friendly resolution of all disputes.
5. **Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR):** India has undertaken many initiatives in the area of HADR in the neighbourhood. These include outreaches to Nepal (during the time of the earthquake in 2015), and the drinking water crisis in the Maldives.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Sealed disclosure

Note to Students:

We have covered the issue of electoral bonds in our CNA based video analysis on the 28th of March, 2019.

The link is as below:

- Students can watch this video from the 21st minute onwards (This covers some of the recent perspectives).

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

What's in the news?

- Some experts opine that the Supreme Court's interim order asking political parties to disclose, to the Election Commission in sealed covers, details of the donations they have received through anonymous electoral bonds is an inadequate and belated response to the serious concerns raised about the opaque scheme.

Editorial Analysis:

- The scheme, under which one can purchase bonds of various denominations from a designated bank and deposit them in the accounts of any political party, had been challenged in the apex court a year ago.
- However, when the matter was taken up recently, it was considered that the time available was too limited for an in-depth hearing. The order, unfortunately, preserves the status quo, and any effect that the possible asymmetry in political funding would have on the election process will stay as it is.
- **The only concession given to those concerned about the dangers of anonymous political funding is that the names would be available with the EC, albeit in sealed envelopes, until the court decides if they can be made public.**

Some Concerns:

- There is some concern that a disproportionately large segment of the bonds purchased by corporate donors has gone to the Bharatiya Janata Party.
- **Experts opine that this donor anonymity may end if the court decides that the EC should disclose the names at the end of the litigation, but the influence such donations would have had on the electoral outcome would remain undisturbed.**
- The court notes in its order that the case gives rise to **“weighty issues which have a tremendous bearing on the sanctity of the electoral process in the country”**.
- Given this premise, it could be asked whether the judicial intervention could not have come earlier. However, all it has done now is to ensure that its interim arrangement does not ‘tilt the balance’ in favour of either side.

Questions Raised Against the Scheme:

- The petitioners, the Association for Democratic Reforms, questioned the anonymity-based funding scheme on the grounds that it promotes opacity, opens up the possibility of black money being donated to parties through shell companies and empowers the ruling party, which alone is in a position to identify the donors and, therefore, well placed to discourage donations to other parties.
- The government, on the other hand, argued that electoral bonds would prevent unaccounted money from entering the system through funding of parties.
- **For the last two decades, the Supreme Court has been proactive in empowering voters and in infusing transparency in the system.** It has developed a body of jurisprudence that says the electoral process involves the voter being given information about candidates, their qualifications, assets and crime records, if any.

Concluding Remarks:

- **It is disappointing to hear the Attorney General arguing that voters do not have a right to know who funds parties.**
- Now that there is no stay on the operation of the scheme, the court must render an early verdict on the legality of the electoral bond scheme.

Category: ECONOMY

1. Clouds on the horizon

Editorial Analysis:

- At the recent spring meeting of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, Finance Ministers and central bank Governors by and large played down fears about a slowing global economy.
- Their optimism was based on the pause in the U.S.'s interest rate policy in February 2019, ease in the country's trade tensions with China, and receding risk of a hard Brexit.
- However, in stark contrast, **the IMF has consistently emphasised a cautious stance on the current growth trajectory for some months.**
- As the ultra-low interest rates of the post-crisis years have come to stay in many economies, the IMF has highlighted the limits of monetary policy in a future downturn.
- Its latest economic forecast cuts the outlook for growth in 2019 to 3.3% from estimates of 3.5% in January and 3.7% in October 2018, when it had cited concerns over trade protectionism and the flight of capital from vulnerable emerging economies.
- These projections were echoed by the IMF chief at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce earlier in the month of April, 2019.
- Christine Lagarde said that whereas two years ago, 75% of the global economy experienced an upswing, the expectation this annum is for a slump in 70% of the world economy.
- Contributing to the overall deceleration is the deteriorating trade climate of the last two years.
- The pace of exports and imports was 4.6% in 2017, the strongest since the rebound after the 2007-08 financial crisis. But the 2018 figures were a modest 3% and could fall much further this year, says the WTO.
- In the U.S., where year-on-year growth touched 2.9%, the fund's forecast is 2.3% in 2019 — a far cry from the 4% rate in the second quarter last year (2018). The Federal Reserve has also lowered its estimate from 2.3% to 2.1%, a sign possibly of the fading impact of President Donald Trump's 2017 corporate tax cuts.
- A more than anticipated fall in recent German imports and exports is said to reflect, among other things, the impact of the trade friction between the U.S. and China and growing uncertainty over Britain's exit from the European Union.
- While stopping short of projecting a global recession, the IMF forecasts growth to touch 3.6% in 2020, lower than earlier estimates. That would be underpinned by tepid growth in the advanced world and hopes of a stable Chinese environment. The potential for acceleration depends on Argentina and Turkey climbing out of a recession, besides a precarious rebound in other emerging and developing economies.
- During a recent meeting, the view among Finance Ministers was that the IMF was painting a rather grim picture of the world economy.
- The hope is that their optimism will be borne out by evidence. Equally, experts opine that a lasting resolution of the U.S.-China trade dispute would revive momentum in the global economy.

1. Women-run poll centres

- Haryana is all set to get 'Sakhi Matdan Kendras' in each Assembly segment to disseminate the message of women empowerment.
- These centres will be exclusively run by women and no male personnel would be present.
- Haryana's Chief Electoral Officer Rajeev Ranjan said that this initiative would go a long way in spreading the message in society that women could not only participate in the elections but also conducted them in an efficient manner.
- Extensive steps are being taken in Haryana to increase participation of women in the democratic system.

2. Fire at Notre-Dame cathedral

- A massive blaze at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris devastated large parts of the 850-year-old church.
- The cathedral is consecrated to the Virgin Mary and considered to be one of the finest examples of French Gothic architecture.
- Its innovative use of the rib vault and flying buttress, its enormous and colourful rose windows, and the naturalism and abundance of its sculptural decoration set it apart from the earlier Romanesque style.
- Notre-Dame Cathedral suffered damage and deterioration through the centuries. After the French Revolution it was rescued from possible destruction by Napoleon, who crowned himself emperor of the French in the cathedral in 1804.
- Notre-Dame underwent major restorations by the French architect Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc in the mid-19th century.
- The popularity of Victor Hugo's historical novel *Notre-Dame de Paris*(1831), wherein the cathedral is the setting, was said to have inspired the renovations.
- Recently during a restoration campaign, a fire broke out in the cathedral's attic, and the massive blaze destroyed most of the roof, Viollet-le-Duc's 19th-century spire, and some of the rib vaulting.

The treasures of Notre-Dame

The fire-gutted Notre-Dame cathedral contained some of the most sacred relics of the Christian faith, including the Holy Crown of Thorns, believed to have been worn by Jesus at his crucifixion



THE GREAT ORGAN

- Of the cathedral's three organs, the most impressive is the Great Organ with five key-boards, 109 stops and close to 8,000 pipes
- Built in the 15th century, the organ was progressively added to over the centuries to become one of the largest in France



HOLY RELICS

- Its most precious item, the Holy Crown of Thorns, is about 21 cm in diameter and made up of rushes braided together and bound by gold wire
- Firefighters rescued the crown as well as a tunic worn by the 13th-century French crusader king, Louis IX, who was made a saint
- Notre-Dame also held two other relics said to be from the crucifixion of Jesus – a piece of the cross on which he was nailed and one of the nails

37 FIGURES OF VIRGIN MARY

- A mid-14th century statue of the Virgin with Child, placed in the sanctuary, is the most famous of the 37 images of the Virgin Mary contained in the cathedral
- Another depicts Mary holding the body of her son descended from the cross, created by French sculptor Nicolas Coustou between 1712 and 1728 and positioned behind the choir altar



PAINTINGS

- Between 1630 and 1707, the Paris goldsmith guild presented the cathedral with a painting on every May 1. Of these, 76 works are called "The Mays"
- On the west wall of the Chapel of Saint-Guillaume is one of the most beautiful paintings in the cathedral, the "Visitation", by Jean-Baptiste Jouvenet (1716)

13-TONNE BELL

- The largest and oldest of the cathedral's bells is known as the Bourdon Emmanuel. Cast 300 years ago, it weighs 13 tonnes, its clapper alone weighing 500 kg
- The tenor bell is chimed only on special occasions and important Catholic events, and was joined in 2013 by nine new bells

In shock: People pray in Paris as the cathedral burns. * AP

3. Even remote peaks are not free of plastic

- A secluded mountain region thought to be free of plastic pollution is in fact blanketed by airborne microplastics on a scale comparable to a major city such as Paris, researchers have found.
- Over a five-month period in 2017-2018, an average of 365 tiny bits of plastic settled every day on each square metre of an uninhabited, high-altitude area in the Pyrenees straddling France and Spain, they reported in the journal Nature Geoscience.
- The study focused on microplastics mostly between 10 and 150 micrometres across, including fragments, fibres and sheet-like pieces of film.
- Plastic litter has emerged in the last few years as a major environmental problem. Up to 12 million tonnes of plastics are thought to enter the world's oceans every year, and millions more clog inland waterways and landfills.
- Plastic takes decades to break down, and even then continues to persist in the environment. Scientists are only now beginning to measure the damage to wildlife and potential impacts on human health.
- A study earlier this year uncovered plastic fragments in the guts of animals living more than 10 kilometres below the ocean surface.
- Microplastics have also been found in tap water around the world, and even the furthest reaches of Antarctica.
- The most significant finding is that microplastics are transported through the atmosphere and deposited in a remote, high-altitude mountain location far from any major city.

G. Prelims Facts

Nothing here for today!!!

H. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

Q1) Cassini Spacecraft Mission was aimed at exploring

- a. Saturn
- b. A dwarf planet Ceres
- c. Jupiter
- d. The asteroid belt

Answer: a

Explanation:

Self-explanatory

Q2) Consider the following statements:

1. Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana is applicable to the age groups 20 to 65 years.
2. The scheme comes under the ministry of Finance.

Which of the statement/s is/are correct?

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

Both the statements are correct. Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), is financial inclusion program of Government of India which is applicable to 20 to 65 years age group, that aims to expand and make affordable access to financial services such as bank accounts, remittances, credit, insurance and pensions.

Q3) Which of the following schemes have been subsumed under Ayushman Bharat - National Health Protection Mission (AB-NHPM)?

- a. Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana
- b. Senior Citizen Health Insurance Scheme
- c. National Life Insurance Scheme
- d. Both a and b

Answer: d

Explanation:

Ayushman Bharat -National Health Protection Mission (AB-NHPM) is a centrally sponsored scheme under Ayushman Bharat Mission. Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY) and the Senior Citizen Health Insurance Scheme (SCHIS) are both subsumed under Ayushman Bharat.

Q4) Which among the following is not a subsidiary of the RBI?

- a. National Housing Bank
- b. Small Industries Development Bank of India
- c. Bharatiya Reserve Bank Note Mudran Private Limited
- d. Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation

Answer: b

Explanation:

RBI has four subsidiaries viz. Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation, DICGC; National Housing Bank; Bharatiya Reserve Bank Note Mudran Private Limited (BRBNMPL) and NABARD.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Standards of public life and the norms of electoral conduct have deteriorated over the years and the benchmarks have steadily gone down. What are the powers of the Election Commission in the implementation of Model Code of Conduct? Suggest measures to strictly check and deter the violation of MCC. (10 Marks)
2. Strength, peace and security are considered to be the pillars of international relations. Elucidate. (10 Marks)