

24 Apr 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

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Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. [Sri Lanka links Easter blasts to Christchurch mosque attacks](#)

Context

- The serial bomb attacks on Easter, which claimed over 320 lives in Sri Lanka, were a retaliation for the Christchurch mosque shootings in New Zealand, State Minister of Defence Ruwan Wijewardene told Parliament, based on “initial evidence” available with investigators.

Details

- The forces of the Islamic State may no longer control a swath of territory across Iraq and Syria, but the **coordinated attacks in Sri Lanka demonstrated that the resilient group can still sow carnage beyond the borders of its former “caliphate.”**
- The Islamic State also issued a formal communique asserting responsibility for the attacks, which it

said targeted Christians and “coalition countries.”

Concerns

- This exposes the **political dysfunction within the government** because of the animosity between President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe
 - Wickremesinghe has even said neither he nor his ministers were kept informed about the advance information on attacks, and there are reports that the prime minister hasn't been allowed to attend meetings of the Security Council
- Sri Lankan ministers have now acknowledged that **foreign intelligence agencies alerted Colombo** about possible attacks but nothing seems to have been done to thwart them

Who are the National Thowheeth Jama'ath, the group suspected to have carried out the coordinated terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka on Easter?

- **Towheeth groups are ideologically similar to the ISIS** which has its origins in the Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, a group that later became part of al-Qaeda.
- The NTJ, believed to be an extremely radical group, is said to be a breakaway faction of the Sri Lanka Thowheeth Jama'ath.
- Not much is known about the NTJ, but it has been on the radar of Sri Lanka's police since about 2017, when the Sinhalese Buddhist fundamentalist group Bodu Bala Sena — which was formed in 2012

So, does Sri Lanka have an Islamist jihadist problem that has not been widely recognised so far? Is there a broader Muslim-Buddhist conflict in the country?

- Sri Lanka's **Muslims** make up less than 10% of the country's 21 million people. An overwhelming 70% of the population is Sinhala-Buddhist. **Christians** are under 7%, and they are both Tamil and Sinhalese. **Hindus** are 12.6%, and are almost entirely Tamil.
- While there were no instances of Sri Lankan jihadist groups, or individual Sri Lankan jihadists going to join the war in Bosnia or Afghanistan, there were concerns from time to time in the 1990s that **Wahhabism was gaining ground in the country, especially in the Batticaloa and Ampara districts** of eastern Sri Lanka, which have a significant Muslim population.
- In the entire Eastern district, which includes Trincomalee, Muslims are one-third of the population — Tamils and Sinhalese too, are a third each in the Eastern province

If there is a Muslim-Buddhist problem in the country, why was the Christian minority targeted? What signals were being sent, and to whom?

- Targeting churches on Easter seemed designed to attract maximum international attention, as was the targeting of five-star hotels, frequented by high-end international tourists, diplomats, professionals and wealthy Sri Lankans.
- All the hotels were hosting a customary and popular Easter brunch at the time of the attacks.

How does Islamist extremism in Sri Lanka sit with similar impulses in the wider Indian Ocean region, specifically the Maldives?

- The Maldives has been a country of greater concern than Sri Lanka where Islamist radicalism is concerned. More than **200 Maldivian youth were believed to have joined the ISIS by the end of December 2015**.
 - Present estimates are not available, but the numbers have gone up. Considering that Maldives has a population of only 4,50,000, this is a huge number.
- The atolls have long been a playground for preachers of radical Islam, encouraged under the Gayoom

What are the takeaways for India from this situation with regard to jihadist extremism in the Indian Ocean region?

- First, it shows once again the **vulnerability of states and the ever-present nature of terrorism** as an asymmetrical threat. Whatever be the intelligence lapses, none of us are safe from suicide bombers, not America, not India.
- Second, though Sri Lanka may be the victim this time, the **need for intelligence-sharing and connecting the dots internationally is clear**. This has to include operational matters as well as tracking financial flows. All this is happening already, but professionals may learn new lessons as the investigations proceed and the plot unravels.
- Third, the use of social media is a critical factor. We have come to learn about the dangers of **radicalisation through social media. Experts have to devise strategies to counter it**. It will be safe to assume that consultations and cooperation between Sri Lanka and India will intensify though this will necessarily stay under the radar.
- Domestically, India has been confident about its own multicultural success story, which has prevented radical Islamist ideologies from taking root. There have been fewer than 100 ISIS recruits from India.
 - But the rise of militant Hindutva, the attacks on Muslims, and the gradual political marginalisation of the Indian Muslim population have been flagged by experts as potential flashpoints.
- Strategically, the destabilisation, for whatever reason, of Sri Lanka, a country that India counts as a close friend and ally despite the problems arising from competing Chinese interests, **undermines India's interests in the Indian Ocean region**.

Conclusion

- Clearly, the Sri Lankan government will have to get its act together, both to apprehend those responsible for Sunday's bombings and to prevent further attacks

Emergency

Who can initiate it?

- Under the **Public Security Ordinance (PSO)** of 1947, the **President can proclaim an emergency** for all or parts of Sri Lanka, if "he is of the opinion that it is expedient to do so in the interests of public security and the preservation of public order or for the maintenance of supplies and services essential to the life of the community".
- **Article 155(2) under Chapter XVIII (Public Security) of Sri Lanka's 1978 Constitution** says that "the power to make Emergency Regulations under the Public Security Ordinance... shall include the power to make regulations having the legal effect of over-riding, amending or suspending the operation of the provisions of any law, except the provisions of the Constitution".
- **Only the President can declare an emergency**, and his decision is not subject to judicial review. However, he must summon Parliament immediately to inform it of his decision.
- Parliament must approve of the proclamation within 14 days, failing which the proclamation expires at the end of one month.

Provisions under it

- Under the PSO, **Emergency Regulations allow for detentions of individuals**; entering, searching, and takeovers of private property; and for "amending any law, for suspending the operation of any law and for applying any law with or without modification".

- The Ordinance also grants **“Special Powers” to the President** to “call out all or any of the members of all or any of the armed forces for the maintenance of public order”, and to put restrictions on people’s movement.
- The **Sri Lankan Constitution** also permits restrictions on fundamental rights through the Emergency Regulations.

2. India may stop oil imports from Iran

Context

- Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said the country plans to increase imports from major oil producing nations other than Iran, indicating that it will be acceding to the U.S. plan to reduce Iran’s oil exports to zero

Details

- The U.S. announced that it would be cancelling the waivers from sanctions it had granted eight countries, including India, allowing them to import oil from Iran. Following the revocation of this waiver, **any country violating the ban would face U.S. sanctions.**
- The U.S. has made it clear that **Indian companies that continue to import oil from Iran would face severe secondary sanctions, including being taken out of the SWIFT international banking system** and a freeze on dollar transactions and U.S. assets.
- The shortfall will be made from alternate supply sources available in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE and Mexico.

Stats

- India was the second biggest buyer of Iranian crude oil after China.
- It bought some 24 million tonnes of crude oil from Iran in the fiscal ended March 31 (2018-19). Iran supplied more than a tenth of its oil needs.
- Iran in 2017-18 was its third-largest supplier after Iraq and Saudi Arabia and meets about 10 per cent of total needs.

India Iran relations could come under stress

- India has, in effect, now decided to cave in to U.S. pressure on the issue less than a year after External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj said that India would recognise only UN sanctions, not “unilateral” ones.
- Any direct backlash from Iran for its decision will also jeopardise India’s other interests in the country, including its considerable investment in the Chabahar port, which India is building as an alternative route for trade to Central Asia.

Other Concerns

- The big concern is that the substitute crude suppliers — Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, Nigeria and the US — **do not offer the attractive options that Iran does, including 60-day credit, and free insurance and shipping.**
- In the larger picture, India isn’t just testing its traditional ties with Iran, but also **giving in to President Donald Trump’s blatant bullying after his administration withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal.**
- During 2016-17, India imported oil at \$47.6 a barrel. At current prices, India will have to spend at least \$70 per barrel, which implies an annual outgo of an extra \$30 billion.
 - **It will damage the country’s s trade balance,** and may force the government to bring back

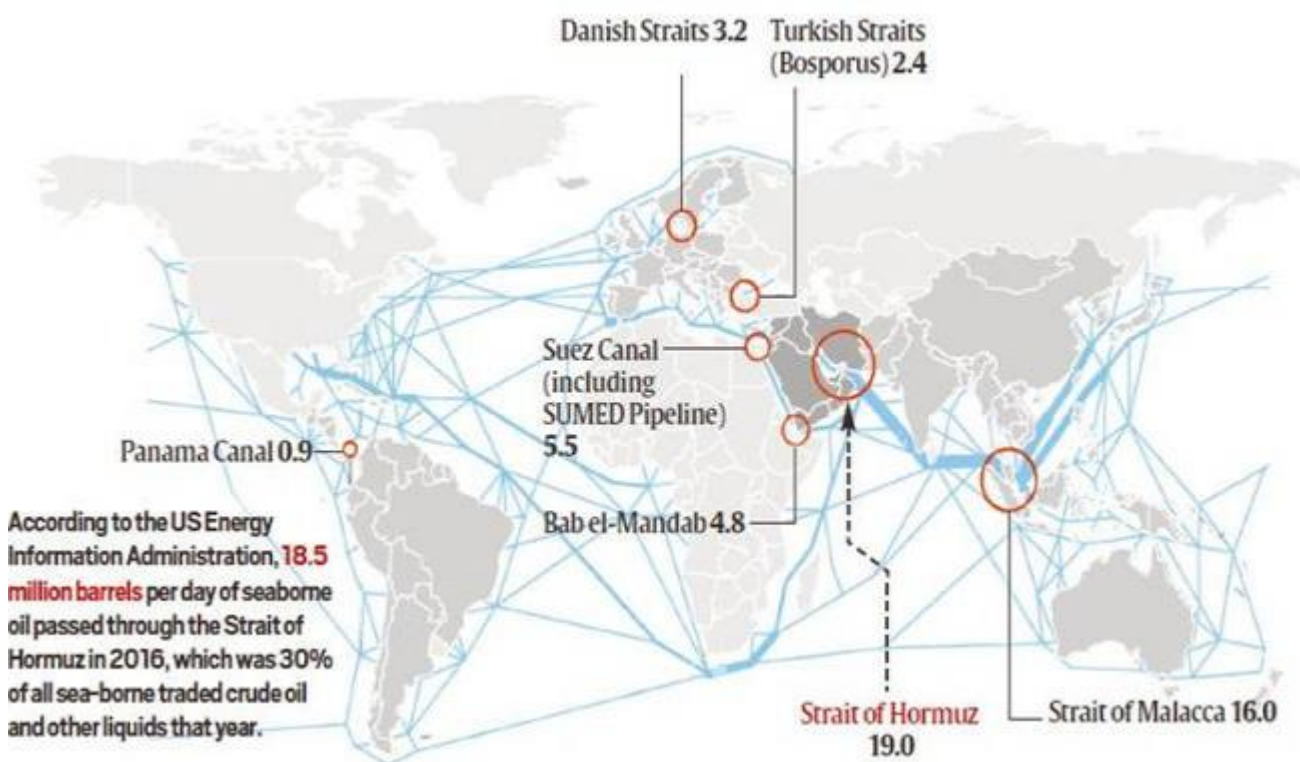
subsidies on petroleum products, such as diesel and petrol, as it happened from 2004-14. **This can also throw India's fiscal and trade deficit out of control.**

- **Rupee:** The currency could be impacted if the trade and current account deficits were to widen. An increase in the import bill will tend to put pressure on the rupee.
- The projected drop in Iranian exports **could further squeeze supply in a tight market — given the US has also sanctioned Venezuela**, and the OPEC and allied producers including Russia have voluntarily cut output, which has pushed up oil prices more than 35% this year.

Strait of Hormuz: world's most critical oil choke point

After the US said it would prevent five of Iran's biggest customers — including India — from buying its oil, **Tehran threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz, a neck of water between its southern coast and the northern tip of the sultanate of Oman**, and the lane through which a third of the world's seaborne oil passes every day. It is a threat that Iran has made earlier, too — and this strategic area has seen several flashpoints erupt in Tehran's fraught relationship with the West over the years.

- Blocking them can lead to huge increases in energy costs and world energy prices.
- Choke points are also the places where tankers are most vulnerable to pirates, terrorist attacks, political unrest, war, and shipping accidents.



- Iran **cannot legally close the waterway** unilaterally because part of it is in Oman's territorial waters
 - However, ships pass through Iranian waters, which Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Navy controls
- **Annual war games by Iran involve missile tests.** The Guards have warned that the security of the US and US interests are in Iranian hands
- The **US fifth fleet in Bahrain protects commercial shipping in the area.** The US has said closing the Hormuz Strait would amount to crossing a "red line"
- Massive stakes give Iran leverage, but closing the **Hormuz Strait will amount to an escalation with unknown fallout** — this is one reason Iran has, in 40 years of hostility with the West, never yet acted on its threats to close the Strait.

What could have been done?

- Instead of engaging in what appear to have been fruitless negotiations with the U.S. over the past year, India, China, the EU and other affected entities could have spent their time more productively in **building a counter with an alternative financial architecture, immune to the U.S.'s arbitrary moves.**

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E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. The permanence of Arab uprisings

Note to Students:

- Although this article primarily focusses on the lessons learnt from the respective space programmes followed by the erstwhile Soviet Union and the United States of America, with a special emphasis on the times during the days of the Cold War, many of the points discussed here can help students in the Essay Paper as well as in GS- Paper 2 (International Relations).

What's in the news?

- Experts point out that eight years after protests swept through the Arab street toppling several dictators, anti-government demonstrations erupted in Sudan and Algeria in recent months.
- As a matter of fact, in the month of April, 2019, both Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who had ruled Algeria for 20 years, and Omar al-Bashir, who had been at the helm in Sudan for three decades, quit amid public anger, reviving memories of the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings earlier.

Editorial Analysis:

- It is important to note that when protests broke out in Tunisia in late 2010 and spread to other countries, there were hopes that the Arab world was in for massive changes.
- The expectation was that in countries where people rose, such as Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya, Bahrain and Syria, the old autocracies would be replaced with new democracies.
- However, except Tunisia, the country-specific stories of the Arab uprising were tragic.
- **These tragedies, however, did not kill the revolutionary spirit of the Arab youth, as the protests in Sudan and Algeria show.**
- Rather, there's continuity from Tunis to Khartoum and Algiers.

Arab Spring: Taking a Look Back

- It is important to note that **the Arab uprising was originally triggered by a combination of**

factors. These factors are outlined as below:

1. The economic model based on patronage was crumbling in these countries.
2. The rulers had been in power for decades, and there was popular longing for freedom from their repressive regimes.
3. More important, the protests were transnational in nature, though the targets of the revolutionaries were their respective national governments.
4. The driving force behind the protests was a **pan-Arabist anger against the old system**. That's why it spread like wildfire from Tunis to Cairo, Benghazi and Manama. **They may have failed to reshape the Arab political order, but the embers of the uprisings appear to have survived the tragedy of 'Arab Spring'.**

Fertile Ground for an Arab Spring 2.0?

- It is important to note that most Arab economies are beset with economic woes.
- The rentier system Arab monarchs and dictators built is in a bad shape.
- Arab rulers for years bought loyalty of the masses in return for patronage, which was then buttressed by the fear factor. This model is no more viable.
- If Arab countries were shaken by the 2010-11 protests, they would be thrown into another crisis in 2014, with the fall in oil prices. Having touched \$140 a barrel in 2008, the price of oil collapsed to \$30 in 2016. This impacted both oil-producing and oil-importing countries.
- Producers, reeling under the price fall, had cut spending — both public spending and aid for other Arab countries.
- Further, non-oil-producing Arab economies such as Jordan and Egypt saw aid that they were dependent on drying up. In May 2018, there were massive protests in Jordan against a proposed tax law and rising fuel prices. Demonstrators left the streets only after Prime Minister Hani Mulki resigned, his successor withdrew the legislation and King Abdullah II made an intervention to freeze the price hike.

Regime changers:

- In Sudan and Algeria, protesters have gone a step ahead, demanding regime change, like their comrades in Egypt and Tunisia did in late 2010 and early 2011.
- Algeria, whose economy is heavily dependent on the hydrocarbon sector, took a hit after the post-2014 commodity meltdown.
- Further, while GDP growth slowed from 4% in 2014 to 1.6% in 2017, youth unemployment soared to 29%.
- This economic downturn was happening at a time when Mr. Bouteflika was missing from public engagement. A stroke had paralysed him in 2013. But when he announced candidacy for this year's presidential election, seeking another five-year term, it infuriated the public.
- In a matter of days, protests spread across the country, which culminated in his resignation on April 2, 2019.
- Sudan's case is not different. The northeast African country is also battling a serious economic crisis. Mr. Bashir and his military clique ruled the country through fear for three decades.
- However, the split of South Sudan in 2011, with three-fourths of the undivided country's oil reserves, broke the back of the junta.
- **Post-2014, Sudan fell into a deeper crisis, often seeking aid from richer Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and even Qatar, the Saudi bloc's regional rival.**
- Inflation is at 73%. Sudan is also grappling with fuel and cash shortages.
- Discontent first boiled over in the northeastern city Atbara in mid-December over the rising price of bread, and the protests soon spread into a nationwide movement.
- Bashir tried everything he could to calm the streets — from declaring a state of emergency to

sacking his entire cabinet — but protesters demanded nothing less than regime change. Finally the army stepped in, removing him from power.

Counter-revolutionaries:

- Like in the case of 2010-11, the 2018-19 protests are also transnational — they spread from Amman to Khartoum and Algiers in a matter of months.
- The pan-Arabist anger against national governments remains the main driving force behind the protests, which should set alarm bells ringing across Arab capitals. But in all these countries, the counter-revolutionary forces are so strong that protesters often stop short of achieving their main goal — a clear break with the past. They manage to get rid of the dictators, but the system those dictators built survives somehow, and sometimes in a moral brutal fashion. There are two main counter-revolutionary forces in these countries. The first are the main guardians of the old system, either the monarchy or the army. Tunisia is the only country where the revolutionaries outwitted the counter-revolutionaries. They overthrew Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's dictatorship, and the country transitioned to a multi-party democracy. In Egypt, the army made a comeback and further tightened its grip on the state and society through violence and repression. In Jordan, the monarch always acts as a bulwark against revolutionary tendencies.
- The second are geopolitical actors. **In Libya, the foreign intervention removed Muammar Qaddafi, but the war destroyed the Libyan state and institutions, leaving the country in the hands of competing militias.**
- Libya is yet to recover from the anarchy triggered by the intervention.
- **In Syria, with foreign intervention, the protests first turned into an armed civil war and then the country itself became a theatre of wars for global players.**
- **In Yemen, protests turned into a sectarian civil conflict, with foreign powers taking different sides.**
- In Bahrain, Saudi Arabia made a direct military intervention, on behalf of its rulers, to violently end the protests in Manama's Pearl Square.
- The same could happen in Algeria and Sudan as well. In both countries, the army let the Presidents fall, but retained its grip on power, despite pressure from protesters. They don't want regime change. They are dressing up the fall of the dictator as a revolution and selling it to the protesters, just as the Egyptian military did eight years ago.

Concluding Remarks:

- Experts point out that **currently, Sudan faces the heat of geopolitical intervention as well.**
- As soon as the military council directly took power, Saudi Arabia, the U.A.E. and Egypt offered support to the military, at a time when protests continue in Khartoum demanding an immediate handover of power to a civilian government. The Saudis have also announced an aid package to the new junta, making it clear who they prefer.
- This is the challenge before the Arab protesters. They are angry. They want the system to be changed. But they are the multitudes. There's no vanguard of the revolution. While they keep rising up against the system, they are constantly being pushed back by the counter-revolutionaries.

2. A natural next step

What's in the news?

- The Australian and Indian Navy have concluded a two-week long bilateral maritime exercise code-named AUSINDEX on 14th Apr 2019.
- Personnel from the Eastern Fleet bid farewell to Her Majesty's Australian Ships Canberra, Newcastle, Paramatta and Success with a promise to meet again.
- **The current edition of the exercise had the participation of the highest number of units thus far**

with four frontline ships with integral helicopters, one submarine and a variety of aircraft including P8I and P8A long-range Maritime Reconnaissance Anti-Submarine Warfare aircraft took part from both navies.

- For the first time, 55 American and 20 New Zealand military personnel embarked onboard the RAN ships and witnessed the exercises during AUSINDEX-19.
- The third edition of the exercise which commenced on 02 Apr 19 included a series of advanced warfare drills in all three dimensions comprising anti-submarine warfare exercises, air defense exercises, anti-surface warfare exercises including live-fire drills, replenishment at sea, and cross deck flying.
- **The bilateral exercise was aimed “to strengthen and enhance mutual cooperation and interoperability between the IN and RAN, providing opportunities for interaction and exchange of professional views between the personnel of the two navies”.**

Editorial Analysis:

- The month of April 2019, was a historic moment in the India-Australia bilateral relationship.
- Under the joint naval exercise known as AUSINDEX, one witnessed the largest ever peacetime deployment of Australian defence assets and personnel to India.
- The third iteration of the bilateral naval exercise, AUSINDEX, which has just concluded (April 2-16, 2019), builds on a fourfold increase in the defence engagement between the two countries— from 11 defence exercises, meetings and activities in 2014 to 38 in 2018.
- The Indian Navy’s Eastern Naval Command hosted an impressive array of high-end Australian military hardware, including the Royal Australian Navy’s flagship, HMAS Canberra and the submarine, HMAS Collins.

A Brief Note on the HMAS Canberra:

- The Canberra is the size of a small aircraft carrier. She can carry over 1,000 troops and 16 helicopters. These vessels were joined by frigates, aircraft and around 1,200 sailors, soldiers and airmen and women.

Unique Element of AUSINDEX:

- As well as being Australia’s largest defence deployment to India, the exercise was the most complex ever carried out between the defence forces of Australia and India.
- For the first time, our navies undertook anti-submarine warfare exercises. And in a similar show of trust and cooperation, Indian and Australian maritime patrol P-8 aircraft flew coordinated missions over the Bay of Bengal.

A Mark of greater alignment:

- The strategic trust on display during AUSINDEX is representative of a deepening strategic alignment between Australia and India.
- When Australia’s Foreign Minister, Marise Payne, visited India earlier this year (2019), in January, she emphasised the shared outlook that Australia and India have as free, open and independent democracies, as champions of international law, as supporters of an open and inclusive Indo-Pacific and as firm believers that ‘might is not right’. These shared values underline the deepening cooperation which Australia and India have.

Scope for Partnership:

- **A key element of Australia’s Indo-Pacific strategy is partnering with India in the vibrant Indian Ocean Region.**

- India is a leader in this region and Australia is a natural partner for addressing shared challenges.
- **Australia and India must continue to work together to combat transnational crime, terrorism, people smuggling, and illegal fishing, in order that we may all enjoy a peaceful and prosperous Indian Ocean Region.**
- As the nation with one of the longest Indian Ocean coastlines and with more than 50% goods trade departing Indian Ocean ports, **Australia is committed to addressing humanitarian and environmental challenges in the Indian Ocean neighbourhood.**
- Australia is playing its part in the Indo-Pacific region through major new initiatives in Southeast Asia and the Pacific.
- Australia is undertaking a substantial step up in its support for Pacific Island countries.
- In November 2018, Australia announced the **Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility** for the Pacific. **This AU\$2 billion initiative will boost Australia's support for infrastructure development in Pacific countries.**
- Indo-Australian security relationships with Pacific Island countries have also been enhanced. The Australian Government plans to establish a **Pacific Fusion Centre** to provide real-time surveillance data for countries across the region as well as enhancing policing and military training both bilaterally and through regional centres.
- Australia and India are also building on its significant diplomatic and economic relationships with Southeast Asia to build resilience and prosperity in the region. India and Australia recently announced the **Southeast Asia Economic Governance and Infrastructure Initiative**, worth AU\$121 million, which will help unlock Southeast Asia's next wave of economic growth.

Concluding Remarks:

- It is important to note that all this activity is happening against the backdrop of a rapidly expanding India-Australia relationship.
- Our people-to-people and economic links are on the rise. The Indian diaspora in Australia is both strong and growing. **One in 50 Australians today was born in India; almost 90,000 Indian students studied in Australia last year (2018); and over 350,000 tourists visited Australia from India in 2018.**
- **Australia and India are working together to see India become a top three trading partner for Australia by 2035.**
- So, on the one hand, we should welcome the successful AUSINDEX exercise as a step up in our strategic partnership. **At the same time, we should recognise it also as the natural next step in a friendship between Australia and India that is marked by growing trust, understanding and camaraderie.** That is really something to celebrate.

3. How China is replacing America as Asia's military titan

Note to the Students:

This article is taken from the "Explained" section of the Indian Express published on the 24th of April, 2019.

What's in the news?

- A scenario considered unthinkable not so long ago in Asia is now possible.
- According to retired Admiral Gary Roughead, who held the top job in the U.S. Navy, **America "could lose" in a regional war with China over Taiwan.**

Editorial Analysis:

- Some experts opine that Chinese President Xi Jinping is refashioning his country's military into a potent fighting force that in some critical areas now surpasses the U.S. armed forces, making an American victory over China in a regional war far from assured.

- A scenario considered unthinkable not so long ago in Asia is now possible.
- According to retired Admiral Gary Roughead, who held the top job in the U.S. Navy, America “could lose” in a regional war with China over Taiwan.
- Recent reports reveal how the dramatic advances made by China’s People’s Liberation Army, many of them under Xi, are **ending decades of American supremacy in Asia and reshaping the global order.**
- Experts point out that **China now has a conventional missile arsenal that in some cases outperforms that of the United States and the output of its naval shipyards is about twice that of America’s.**
- Reports also suggest that **China has succeeded in upgrading its ballistic missile submarine capability, bolstering its nuclear deterrence by giving it a more reliable second-strike option.**
- It is important to note that **Xi Jinping’s overhaul of the People’s Liberation Army is the most far-reaching since the People’s Republic of China was founded in 1949.**
- **Xi Jinping** has purged more than 100 generals and installed a coterie of staunch allies in the uppermost echelons of the defense establishment. The new chain of command created by Xi reports directly to him.

Shifting Nature of America’s Approach to China:

- Under U.S. President Donald Trump, America’s strategic approach to China is shifting. After decades of seeking engagement with Beijing, the United States is now boosting defense spending, rebuilding its navy and developing new weapons, largely in response to the challenge posed by Xi.
- Xi’s willingness to challenge U.S. dominance in Asia has amazed many.
- As a matter of fact, Xi slowly and quietly ascended the Communist Party and state bureaucracy, making his emergence as a dominant leader and “risk taker,” as a former Taiwanese defense minister described him, “a surprise to many.”
- Now, he regularly dons fatigues as he tours army bases and inspects warships, telling the troops they must be ready to fight and win.

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. Outer space lessons

Editorial Analysis:

- Experts point out that as scientists at the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) work toward ‘Mission Gaganyaan’, to send three Indian astronauts into space, one can’t but make comparisons with the U.S.’s lunar mission in the 1960s.

Space Exploration during the Cold War:

- At the time, U.S. President John F. Kennedy made a public statement about his administration’s determination to place an American on the moon by the end of that decade.
- His speech was against the backdrop of the Soviet Union’s progress as the foremost power in space, and **after cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin’s feat of becoming the first human being in space (April 1961).**
- **The U.S.’s objective, therefore, was to have a definite public-relations edge over the U.S.S.R. in the space race, which was marked then by intense rivalry between two Cold War powers. A breakthrough in space was thus a matter of prestige.**

Lessons for India:

- In the context of ISRO's plan, the prestige value of 'Mission Gaganyaan' is sky-high, possibly in the same league as the American National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Apollo Mission to the moon.
- Experts opine that **a key lesson for India from NASA's lunar mission is that a programme of that scale and magnitude often comes at a steep cost, monetary and non-monetary.**
- More than the monetary loss, it is the non-monetary loss that matters more, as it can lend currency to the idea that such a failure indicates a waste of time and resources.
- A failed mission deeply hurts the image of the country in the eyes of the outside world. It raises doubts about the capability of the nation-state in question. No nation-state ever wants to such face such a dilemma. This is because such a development would play to the advantage of adversaries, politically and diplomatically.
- **Politically, a failed mission of such magnitude could give voices in the opposition an opportunity to level criticism, perhaps weakening the incumbent domestically.**
- The diplomatic costs arise from the fact that losses in space missions can seriously impact the future of cooperation between space powers.
- **For instance, during the Cold War, both the U.S. and the then U.S.S.R. exaggerated each other's failures in space missions considerably in order to influence the overall mood among and inclinations of other nations in their favour.** This was most easily achieved by making the rival look as weak as possible. Historically, the media played an active role in participating in such an agenda-driven propaganda.

Concluding Remarks:

- It is important to note that **outer space is often referred to as the 'final frontier' by major world powers, with the prize for conquering it being even more greatness on the world stage.**
- While India's credentials were bolstered after the successful anti-satellite mission recently, significant success in 'Mission Gaganyaan' might provide India with that stamp of authority in outer space that it so keenly desires.
- For that to happen, the lessons from the experiences of other space powers must be heeded.

Category: ECONOMY

1. Will India become a big importer of food?

Note to Students:

This article is taken from the Hindu Business Line and was published on the 23rd of April, 2019.

Editorial Analysis:

- India is, today, a country of about 1.35 billion people. United Nations' population projections of 2017 say that India is likely to surpass China's population by 2024 and reach 1.5 billion by 2030, making it the most populous nation on the planet.
- About two-thirds of Indians are below 35 years of age.
- India's GDP has been growing at around 7 per cent annually for the last two decades, and likely to continue at this pace for at least another decade.
- With population growth gradually declining to 1.1 per cent now and continuing in that direction, per capita incomes in India are likely to grow at around 6 per cent annually for the next decade.
- The 2011 consumption expenditure survey conducted by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) revealed that an average Indian household spent about 45 per cent of its total monthly expenditure on food, implying that the demand for food in India is going to spike in the coming years.
- **This raises a fundamental question: Can India feed itself or will it become a large importer of**

food? This question is pertinent as India has limited cultivated land (net sown area hovers around 140 million hectares) and its groundwater table is under tremendous pressure, at places depleting at the rate of almost one meter a year. Climate change predictions indicate rising temperatures and greater frequency and intensity of droughts.

A Look at some of the revolutions

- Historically, India has had a tough time feeding its population.
- In 1943, during the British rule in India, the Bengal famine is said to have taken 1.5-3 million lives.
- However, since Independence in 1947, although widespread deaths have not been reported due to starvation, India faced “ship to mouth” situations during two successive droughts in the mid-1960s.
- Massive imports of wheat (about 11 million tonnes/year) from the US under Public Law 480 saved the day for India.
- But it also taught the country a lesson: **“Everything else can wait, but not agriculture.”**
- The result was the famous **Green Revolution in the late 1960s** through miracle seeds, fathered by **Norman Borlaug**.
- **Today, India is not only self-sufficient in basic staples but also a net exporter.**
- From 2012-13 to 2014-15, India exported a total of 63 million tonnes of cereals, and today, India is the largest exporter of rice.
- **Milk is India’s largest agri-commodity.**
- Its production (about 177 million tonnes in 2017-18) in value terms exceeds that of rice and wheat combined.
- The famous “white revolution,” steered by Verghese Kurien during late 1970s through 1980s, was achieved through an innovative method of milk collection from small holders homogenising, pasteurising, and sending milk to urban areas as far as 1,200 miles away in milk tankers designed to keep milk at 39 degrees Fahrenheit, and distributing it through an organised retail network.
- Thereafter, India achieved several other revolutions in agriculture: blue revolution (fisheries), red revolution (meat, especially poultry), golden revolution (fruits and vegetables), and gene revolution (cotton).
- All these agri-revolutions, triggered by innovations in technologies and institutions, made India a net exporter of agri-produce.
- However, one thing that had not surfaced much in this evolutionary process is the issue of farmers’ incentives.

The Issue of Farmers’ Incomes:

- While the “tonnage” issue has been settled for the time being, the issue of farmers’ incomes is a burning one right now as India is undergoing the biggest ever democratic elections on this planet, involving 900 million voters.
- The ruling BJP has promised to double farmers’ incomes by 2022-23 in its 2019 manifesto.
- It has tried to address farm distress by announcing higher minimum support prices (MSPs) for about 23 major commodities in 2018-19, but in the absence of a large scale procurement mechanism by the government, the market prices for most commodities have remained 10-30 per cent below the announced MSPs.
- Sensing political unrest by farmers, the BJP has promised a direct income transfer to farmers’ accounts, which may cost about ₹87,600 crore (\$12.5 billion).
- However, it would constitute just 5 per cent of farmers’ incomes. Doubling of farmers’ incomes by 2022-23 would require much bolder reforms in agri-marketing.
- India’s political economy has operated in a way that has restricted exports of agri-produce whenever domestic prices have spiked, be it onions, wheat, or rice.
- The private sector has not been allowed to hold large stocks, and sometimes even inter-State movements are restricted through the Essential Commodities Act (ECA) of 1955.
- This has not allowed the building of efficient pan-India value chains due to a lack of investments by

the private sector.

A Perspective on Some of the Restrictive practices:

- It is important to note that **Agri-marketing is further restricted through the Agricultural Produce and Marketing Committee (APMC) that binds farmers to sell their produce only through these markets.**
- **These markets have been rigged by commission agents taking away an unduly high share of consumers' rupees in the value chain.**
- As a result of these restrictive trade and marketing policies, India's farmers have been implicitly "net taxed" despite large input subsidies.
- The 2018 OECD-ICRIER report on India's Agriculture Policies estimated that the Producer Support Estimates (PSEs) for 2000-01 to 2016-17 was minus (-) 14.4 per cent of the value of gross farm receipts. This amounts to an implicit "net tax" of about ₹2.65-lakh crore (\$38 billion) annually to farmers.
- In comparison, China supported its farmers by \$212 billion in 2016, and the OECD as a group supported its farmers by \$235 billion per year in 2016.
- **What all this reflects is that India has a huge consumer bias in its food and agri-policies that implicitly taxes its farmers.**

The Lesson Learnt:

- The lesson from these research findings is that **if India can reform its policy structure in a way that at least ensures farmers a "level playing field" with consumers, then Indian farmers can get much better incentives and higher profitability, encouraging them to adopt better technologies, raise yields, and make India much more competitive.**
- Experts point out that the best way to do this would be through fundamentally reforming, among others, the ECA, the APMC Act, and the exports policy.
- If India does that, it can not only feed its population but can also create surpluses for exports.
- However, if India can't, she runs the risk of becoming an overall importer of food soon.

Concluding Remarks:

- Lastly, it is important to point out that in the cacophony of the ongoing elections, the Congress party has explicitly promised to carry out agri-marketing reforms along with a direct income support to the bottom 20 per cent of the population, many of whom would be small and marginal farmers, tenants, and landless agri-labourers.
- The cost of this is likely to be ₹3.6-lakh crores (\$51 billion) per year.
- However, the BJP has been somewhat lukewarm on agri-marketing reforms but promised direct income support to farmers of about \$12.5 billion.
- In conclusion, it is important to note that **whichever political party comes to power by the end of May 2019, one thing is clear: India is poised for some sort of direct income support to farmers, and that may help keep India feeding its population well, at least until 2030.**

F. Tidbits

1. 'Price controls hurting FDI in medical devices'

Context

- According to industry insiders blanket implementation of price controls by the Govt, has contributed to a drastic fall in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the medical device sector, as there has been a

reduction from \$439 million in 2016 to \$66 million in 2018.

FDI Rules

- In 2015 the Centre approved 100% FDI in the medical devices sector via automatic route.
- Previously medical devices, which came under the pharma sector, could take in 100% FDI through automatic route only in case of new ventures. Further approval of Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB) was needed in case of acquisition of existing companies.

Issue Area

- Data released by the Government Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade clearly shows its decline which has happened even though FDI is allowed through automatic route.
- There are others who also comment fall in this sector, cannot be attributed only to the price control in India as during election year there is usually fall in FDI in all sectors.

G. Prelims Facts

1. Reang

- Also known in Mizoram as Brus, are scheduled tribes of Tripura.
- However, they may also be found in Mizoram, Assam, Manipur
- They speak the Reang dialect of Bru language which is of Tibeto-Burmese origin and is locally referred to as Kau Bru.
- The Reangs are primarily an agrarian tribe. In the past, they mostly practised the Huk or Jhum cultivation like most other Tripuri tribes
- Dance is an integral part of Reang life. The Hojagiri folk dance of Reang sub tribe is well known
- The majority of the Reang belongs to the Vaishnav school of Hinduism and claim Kshatriya status.

2. Global Talent Competitiveness Index (GTCI)

- Launched for the first time in 2013, the GTCI is a comprehensive **annual benchmarking** measuring how countries and cities grow, **attract and retain talent**, providing a unique resource for decision makers to understand the global talent competitiveness picture and develop strategies for boosting their competitiveness.
- It is based on research conducted by **INSEAD in partnership with The Adecco Group and Tata Communications**.

2019

- The **theme, 'Entrepreneurial Talent and Global Competitiveness'**, attempts to identify ways in which companies, countries and cities can foster entrepreneurial talent.
- The report measures levels of Global Talent Competitiveness **by looking at 68 variables**.
- The 2019 index covers 125 national economies and 114 cities (respectively 119 and 90 in 2018) across all groups of income and levels of development.

India

- It is placed in the 80th position in the 2019 GTCI.
- **India scores well on growing talent**, which is the only pillar where the country is positioned above the median.
- India's biggest challenge lies in improving its ability to attract and retain talent.

- There is a need to address its **poor level of Internal Openness in particular with respect to weak gender equality and low tolerances towards minorities** and immigrants—and its disappointing showing in lifestyle indicators.

Ranking of countries

- In this sixth edition, **Switzerland continues to lead** the 2019 Global Talent Competitiveness index, while **Singapore and the United States** come in second and third respectively as they did in 2018. The top three is followed by Scandinavian countries, Norway (4th), Denmark (5th), Finland (6th), and Sweden (7th).
- Yemen has finished at the bottom of this year's index at 125th, just below Congo (124th) and Burundi (123rd).
- GTCI report reveals that **Switzerland, Singapore and the United States** continue to lead the world in talent competitiveness, while countries **in Asia, Latin America and Africa are seeing a progressive erosion** of their talent base.
- China emerged as the best performer among the BRICS countries, with an overall position of 45th.

What does the report say?

- The report confirms **that talent issues have become a mainstream concern for firms, nations and cities**, with talent performance seen as a critical factor to growth and prosperity.
- The report also reveals that **cities rather than countries are developing stronger roles as talent hubs** and will be crucial to reshaping the global talent scene.
- This growing importance of cities is due to their **greater flexibility and ability to adapt to new trends** and patterns – as nimble economic units where policy can be changed more swiftly, cities are thus more attractive for talent, especially entrepreneurial talent.
- **Policies and practices that bring about talent competitiveness in more developed countries are less susceptible to political and socioeconomic fluctuations.** High-income economies have the stability to invest in lifelong learning, reinforcing skills, and attracting and retaining global talent.

H. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

Q1) The Chief Information Commissioner and the Information Commissioners are appointed by the President on the recommendations of a committee consisting of:

1. Prime Minister
2. Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha
3. Chief Justice of India
4. Union Cabinet Minister nominated by the PM

Choose the correct answer:

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

The Central Information Commission (CIC) is the highest appeal body available to applicants seeking

information under the RTI Act. The Chief Information Commissioner and the Information Commissioners are appointed by the President on the recommendations of a committee consisting of the Prime Minister, Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha and a Union Cabinet Minister nominated by the PM.

Q2) Consider the following statements with respect to Pradhan Mantri Urja Ganga Project:

1. It is a project of the Ministry of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation.
2. The project is being implemented by National Mission for Clean Ganga.

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

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- It is an ambitious gas pipeline project which aims to provide piped cooking (PNG) gas to residents of the eastern region of the country and CNG gas for the vehicles.
- The project is being implemented by state-run gas utility GAIL.

Q3) Consider the following statements:

1. Chabahar Port is Iran's only oceanic port.
2. It is located at the mouth of Strait of Hormuz.

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

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

The Chabahar port located on the Makran coast of Sistan and Baluchistan Province, next to the Gulf of Oman and at the mouth of Strait of Hormuz is the only Iranian port with direct access to the Indian Ocean. It is easily accessible from India's western coast and is increasingly seen as a counter to Pakistan's Gwadar port located at distance of around 80 km from Chabahar. The Chabahar port is being considered as a gateway to golden opportunities for trade by India, Iran, and Afghanistan with central Asian countries, besides ramping up trade among the three countries.

Q4) Consider the following statements with respect to Ryotwari System:

1. The government of Lord William Bentinck introduced the Ryotwari system of land revenue.
2. Under the system, the taxes were directly collected by the government from the peasants.

3. The system recognised the peasants or cultivators as the owners of the land.

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

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

Ryotwari system of land revenue was instituted in the late 18th century by Sir Thomas Munro, Governor of Madras in 1820.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. The Srilankan Crisis will have spill over effects on India. What should India do to insulate itself from radicalism spilling over to its territories? Suggest Measures.
2. With USA expecting countries to follow its directives, warning countries that it will lead to sanctions if trade continues, is it a violation of Sovereign principle? What are various concerns arising as a result of this move. Discuss its implications on India.