

22 May 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A. GS1 Related

SOCIAL ISSUES

1. [Plug and pray: Parsi priests go high tech](#)

B. GS2 Related

HEALTH

1. [West Nile fever cases in Kozhikode go unnoticed?](#)

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. [Chinese-built drones may steal data, warns U.S.](#)
2. [Pakistani fishing vessel caught after hot pursuit, 200 kg heroin seized](#)

C. GS3 Related

ECONOMY

1. [Haryana to discourage paddy crop](#)
2. [UN lowers India's FY20 GDP growth forecast](#)
3. [RBI to create regulatory cadre](#)

D. GS4 Related

E. Editorials

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. [Jokowi's balancing act](#)
2. [The IBSA task list](#)

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. [Being responsive](#)
2. [The aftermath of a nasty election](#)

F. Tidbits

1. [All for a gur cause: Muzaffarnagar to host jaggery fest](#)
2. [After 12 deaths, A.P. issues heatwave warning](#)
3. [NGO to the rescue of over 900 banyan trees](#)
4. [Nepal bans Chinese digital wallets](#)

G. Prelims Facts

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

A. GS1 Related

Category: SOCIAL ISSUES

1. Plug and pray: Parsi priests go high tech

Context:

With a decline in its population, the Parsi community is innovating to save its age-old traditions.

Details:

- It has digitised its prayers, and Parsis can now plug in their earphones or tap their phone screens to learn them.
- The range covers advanced ones recited by priests to everyday chants for households.
- The exercise aims to not just improve access for the young and the elderly, but to provide a reference for priests.

- The digitised version also has a video of the entire Yasna ritual, one of the most intricate ceremonies. Navjote prayers can also be memorised with the help of just this audio.
- The Parsi effort matches other global projects to digitise traditions.

Memory of The World Programme:

- The UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) runs the 'Memory of The World Programme' to preserve rare archival material.
- There is a lot of recording taking place to preserve history and traditions.
- Institutions across the world are taking up projects.

B. GS2 Related

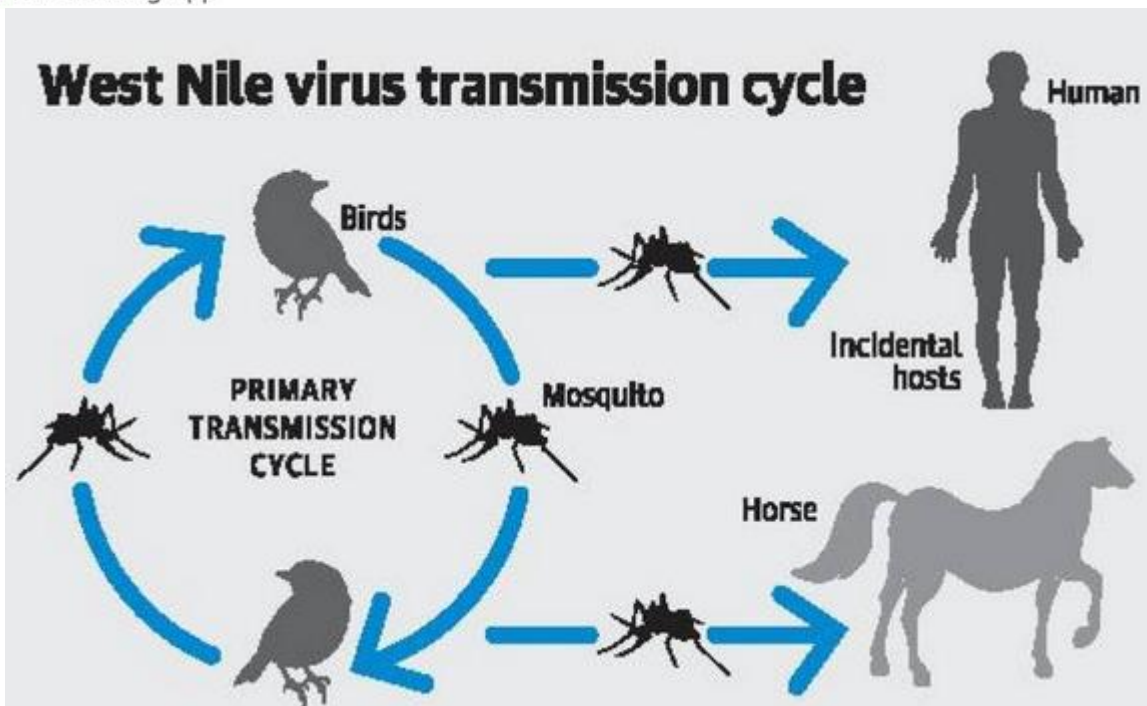
Category: HEALTH

1. West Nile fever cases in Kozhikode go unnoticed?

Context:

West Nile Fever:

- West Nile Virus (WNV) is a member of the flavivirus genus and belongs to the Japanese encephalitis antigenic complex of the family Flaviviridae.
- West Nile virus can cause a fatal neurological disease in humans. However, approximately 80% of people who are infected will not show any symptoms.
- It is mainly transmitted to people through the bites of infected mosquitoes.
- The virus can cause severe disease and death in horses.
- Vaccines are available for use in horses but not yet available for people.
- Birds are the natural hosts of West Nile virus.
- West Nile Virus (WNV) can cause neurological disease and death in people.
- It is commonly found in Africa, Europe, the Middle East, North America and West Asia.
- WNV is maintained in nature in a cycle involving transmission between birds and mosquitoes. Humans, horses and other mammals can be infected.



Details:

- The Health Department is clueless about the source of the West Nile infection in Malappuram as the samples of dead crows and mosquitoes collected from the premises turned negative.
- There could have been more unreported cases of the disease as 80% of the infected people do not show any symptoms, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).
- Human infection is most often the result of bites from infected mosquitoes of the Culex genus.

Steps taken:

- Mosquito eradication works have been taken up in areas from where these cases were reported.
- Steps are also taken to create awareness among local residents.
- The department had formed a drastic response team and devised a treatment protocol after over 60 encephalitis cases were reported from Malappuram.

Conclusion:

- Viruses are known to adapt for both greater virulence and more efficient transmission.
- It is important to note that urbanisation and land-use changes are bringing the virus's zoonotic hosts, such as birds, in more frequent contact with humans.
- Given increased mobility, viruses can hitch a ride to new regions via infected humans and vectors. All this makes the WNV a formidable foe.
- India's best defence is better surveillance, which will help doctors reach patients early to prevent complications.
- Kerala could not prevent the death in Malappuram, but other States should adopt its model of heightened surveillance.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Chinese-built drones may steal data, warns U.S.

Context:

Washington has warned that Chinese-made drones could be giving spy agencies in Beijing unrestricted access to stolen data, according to a report in American media.

Background:

- Washington has cranked up the heat on China's Huawei by banning American companies from selling or transferring U.S. technology to the telecoms giant, though the U.S. Commerce Department has granted the firm a 90-day reprieve.
- U.S. intelligence believes Huawei is backed by the Chinese military and that its equipment could provide Beijing's spy agencies with a backdoor into the communications networks of other countries.
- U.S. has also pushed its closest allies to reject Huawei technology.

Details:

- The warning comes as China's tech sector attracts unprecedented scrutiny amid China-US trade war.
- The Department of Homeland Security sent out alert flagging drones built in China as a potential risk to an organisation's information.
- The DHS report did not name any specific Chinese manufacturers, but China-based DJI produces about 70% of the world's commercial drones.
- The Pentagon has banned the military from using DJI drones for security reasons since 2017.

2. Pakistani fishing vessel caught after hot pursuit, 200 kg heroin seized**Context:**

The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) seized heroin estimated to be worth between Rs. 800 and Rs. 1,000 crore in the international market from a Pakistani fishing vessel off the Gujarat coast.

Big haul off Gujarat

Tracing the path that the smugglers took until they were apprehended

• Source of the heroin: **Afghanistan**

• Port of departure: **Karachi, between May 18-19**

• Point of handover: **8 nautical miles off Jakhau, Gujarat on May 21**



In this PIB handout, an Indian Coast Guard ship is seen behind a Pakistani fishing boat, *Al Madina* off the Gujarat coast. The boat was confiscated with a huge cache of heroin. • PTI



Mission tracker

▪ On May 19, the Coast Guard received inputs from the National Technical Research Organisation about a Pakistani ship trying to enter Indian waters

▪ On May 20, the maritime security agency received similar inputs from the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence. Following this, the search operation was intensified

▪ The Coast Guard deployed *Anirjay*, a fast patrol vessel, two interceptor boats and an aircraft for the operation

Past cases of narcotics smuggling by sea (This is the third such case in the last 3 years)

2017: 1.5 tons narcotics worth **₹8,000 crore**

March 27, 2019: 100 kg worth **₹500 crore**

May 21, 2019: 200 kg worth **₹800-1,000 crore**

Details:

- Despite evasive maneuvers carried out by the crew of *Al Madina* and rough sea conditions, it was intercepted within Indian waters.
- During hot pursuit, the crew threw bags containing suspicious material into the sea.
- The Coast Guard team upon boarding the vessel took six crew members into custody and retrieved the material from the sea.
- The Pakistani vessel crew are being interrogated and the boat is being searched by various agencies.
- 13 Indian fishermen hailing from Veraval and Okha in Gujarat were also arrested. These fishermen on an Indian vessel were supposed to receive the consignment.

C. GS3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. Haryana to discourage paddy crop

Context:

Haryana Chief Minister said the government has decided to discourage paddy crop sowing as the State was staring at a water crisis due to depleting groundwater level.

Details:

- A pilot project will be launched where sowing of maize and 'tur' pulses would be promoted by giving incentives to farmers.
- The scheme has been formulated keeping in mind the interest of farmers and water conservation.
- Water depletion has led to 60 dark zones in the State, including 21 critical ones in 10 districts.
- By diversifying the area of non-basmati paddy into maize under this scheme, the total saving of water is expected to be 0.71 crore cm (1 cm = 1 lakh litres of water).
- Under the new scheme, the identified farmers will be provided seeds free of cost.
- A financial assistance of ₹2,000 per acre will be provided in two parts.
- The maize crop insurance premium of ₹766 per hectare will also be borne by the government under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana.
- Maize produce will be procured by government agencies such as HAFED, Food, and Supply Department at Minimum Support Price. Likewise, 'tur' seeds will also be provided free of cost to the farmers along with financial incentive.

Conclusion:

Crop diversification is need of the day for the State as it saves water, electricity and improves soil health.

2. UN lowers India's FY20 GDP growth forecast

Context:

The United Nations (UN) has lowered its forecast for India's GDP growth in 2019-20 to 7.1% from its estimate in January of 7.5% citing an overall slowdown in global growth.

Details:

- The UN World Economic Situation and Prospects as of mid-2019 report said that the global economy is experiencing a broad-based growth slowdown led by slowing industrial production coupled with the weakening of international trade activity due in large part to the unresolved trade disputes between the U.S. and China.
- Across both developed and developing countries, growth projections for 2019 have been downgraded.
- The Indian economy, which generates two-thirds of the regional output, expanded by 7.2% in 2018. Strong domestic consumption and investment will continue to support growth, which is projected at 7% in 2019 and 7.1% in 2020, said the report.
- "India's exports remain more robust, as around half of exports are destined for faster growing Asian markets" the report said.

3. RBI to create regulatory cadre

Context:

The Reserve Bank of India's Central Board has decided to create a specialised supervisory and regulatory cadre.

Details:

- The Reserve Bank of India's Central Board met and reviewed current economic situation, global and domestic challenges and various areas of operations of the central bank.
- RBI Board reviewed present structure of supervision in the central bank in the context of the growing diversity, complexities and interconnectedness within the Indian financial sector.

- Board also discussed issues related to currency management Banker to Government functions of the RBI.
- The cadre is being created with a view to strengthening the supervision and regulation of commercial banks, urban cooperative banks and non-banking financial companies.

D. GS4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Jokowi's balancing act

Editorial Analysis:

- Experts opine that when Joko Widodo, or Jokowi as he is popularly known, was elected President of Indonesia in 2014, it was a moment pregnant with new beginnings for the region.
- As a matter of fact, democracies in Asia have usually been afflicted by the same inglorious cast of characters. These include:
 1. dynastic heirs,
 2. military strongmen,
 3. corporate tycoons and
 4. religious hardliners
- Contrary to this, Widodo's victory indicated the possibility of renewal via the democratic process even in a large, developing, Muslim-majority country.
- As a matter of fact, he came across as a novel breed of leader: middle-class and humble, with a pluralistic outlook and commitment to clean government.

Islam, a mainstream force:

- In 2019, Mr. Widodo is back at the helm of Indonesia, having once again beaten back his rival, Prabowo Subianto, a former military general dogged by accusations of human rights abuses.
- However, this time the political prognosis is more sobering.
- Widodo's years in power have witnessed a shift in the role that political Islam plays in the public life of the world's third largest democracy, from a relatively marginal factor to a mainstream force that no political party can ignore.
- Experts opine that the President of Indonesia has proved no exception. The President has demonstrated a willingness to bend to religious considerations, even when they run contrary to his inclinations.
- As a matter of fact, during the long campaign season, both candidates tried to outdo each other in brandishing their Muslim credentials, despite the fact that neither is traditionally pious.
- The vow to support religious clerics became a central plank of Mr. Prabowo's campaign.
- His supporters are known to have carried out fake news campaigns portraying Mr. Widodo as a Christian or an atheist Communist, and at times even a logic-defying both.

Mr. Widodo's track record in office:

- Widodo's track record in office when it comes to pandering to Islamists has been chequered.
- He has taken on some religious extremists, banning the Hizb ut-Tahrir, a radical group that aimed to establish a global caliphate.
- He also walked back a decision to allow Abu Bakar Bashir, spiritual leader of the terrorist organisation Jemaah Islamiyah to walk free from prison on humanitarian grounds.
- However, the latter decision was only taken following a huge international outcry.
- Experts opine that the President's greatest failure was his silence during the movement to charge his former deputy, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, with blasphemy.
- On the economic front, Mr. Widodo's first term as President was adequate, if unspectacular.
- Annual growth averaged 5%, well below the 7% target, in part because he caved in to pressure and backtracked on difficult reforms like reining in fuel subsidies.
- On the plus side, he lined up more than \$300 billion of infrastructure projects, including the opening of Jakarta's first subway line after 34 years of planning.
- He also rolled out a popular national health-insurance scheme and pumped money into education.

What lies ahead:

- Going forward, Mr. Widodo has his work cut out trying to get increased foreign investment amid a climate of economic nationalism.
- It also remains to be seen if, and how, he decides to tackle the thorny issue of restrictive labour laws.
- A final challenge will entail finessing Indonesia's response to China's growing economic clout in the archipelago.
- It is important to note that **China has emerged as a major foreign investor in Indonesia**, but there are worries about the consequences.
- A recurrent theme of the Prabowo campaign was the claim that under Mr. Widodo, Chinese goods and workers had flooded the nation.
- However, it is protecting minority rights that will remain Mr. Widodo's greatest and most fraught test.

A land of remarkable diversity:

- Forging a unified national identity out of its fractured ethnic and religious demography has been a remarkable achievement for Indonesia.
- Seven out of eight Indonesians self-identify as Muslims; more Muslims live in Indonesia than in any other country. And yet the state also recognises five other religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Protestantism, Catholicism and Confucianism.
- The archipelago is home to 719 languages, spoken by people from over 360 ethnic groups.
- Given term limits, this will be Mr. Widodo's final stint as President.
- The optimistic scenario is one where he is able to slough off electoral considerations and finally tackle the liberal reforms and policies many still assume are close to his heart.
- However, taking his record into consideration, it seems more probable that he will continue to co-opt his opponents rather than confront them.
- He has emerged as a tinkerer and incrementalist, rather than a visionary.
- To an extent, this is both necessary and even advantageous in a political landscape characterised by coalitions and consensus-building.
- Widodo leads a 10-party alliance and needs to garner support from a polarised Parliament. However, there is a fine line between pragmatism and opportunism, and the jury is out on which side of this line he will eventually come down.
- Widodo has one more chance to go down in the history books as a great President.

2. The IBSA task list

Larger Background:

- Established in June 2003, IBSA is a coordinating mechanism amongst three emerging countries, three multi ethnic and multicultural democracies, which are determined to:
 - contribute to the construction of a new international architecture
 - bring their voice together on global issues
 - deepen their ties in various areas
- IBSA also opens itself to concrete projects of cooperation and partnership with less developed countries.
- The establishment of IBSA was formalised by the Brasilia Declaration of 6 June 2003, which mentions India, Brazil and South Africa's democratic credentials, their condition as developing nations and their capacity of acting on a global scale as the main reasons for the three countries to come together. Their status as middle powers, their common need to address social inequalities within their borders and the existence of consolidated industrial areas in the three countries are often mentioned as additional elements that bring convergence among the members of the Forum.
- The principles, norms and values underpinning the IBSA Dialogue Forum are participatory democracy, respect for human rights and the Rule of Law. The strength of IBSA is the shared vision of the three countries that democracy and development are mutually reinforcing and key to sustainable peace and stability.
- IBSA keeps an open and flexible structure. IBSA does not have a headquarters or a permanent executive secretariat. At the highest level, it counts on the Summits of Heads of State and Government. Numerous Summits have been held with IBSA having concluded its first round of Summits of Heads of State and Government Summits in 2008. The Summits have been held as follows:
 - 1st IBSA Summit - 13 September 2006 - Brasilia, Brazil
 - 2nd IBSA Summit - 17 October, 2007 - Tshwane, South Africa
 - 3rd IBSA Summit - 15 October 2008, New Delhi, India
 - 4th IBSA Summit - 15 April 2010 - Brasilia, Brazil
 - 5th IBSA Summit - 18 October 2011 - Tshwane, South Africa
- Additionally, the Foreign Ministers meet about once a year to preside over the Trilateral Ministerial Commission meetings of the Forum. The following meetings have taken place to date:
 - 1st: March 5th, 2004, in New Delhi;
 - 2nd: March 3rd, 2005, in Cape Town;
 - 3rd: March 30th, 2006, in Rio de Janeiro;
 - 4th: July 16th and 17th, 2007, in New Delhi;
 - 5th: May 11th, 2008, in Somerset West;
 - 6th: August 31st to September 1st, 2009, in Brasília;
 - 7th: March 8th, 2011, in New Delhi
 - 8th: October 17th, 2017, in Durban
 - 9th: September 27th, 2018, in New York
- Over the years, IBSA has become an umbrella for various initiatives, both in the diplomatic field on the international stage and through sector cooperation in priority areas in numerous Working Groups.
- Civil-society cooperation is also an important element of the IBSA Dialogue Forum and IBSA has distinguished itself through its development cooperation projects in less-developed countries. Thus, the group has also become an instrument for connecting India, Brazil and South Africa at all levels, aiming not only to increase these countries' projection on the international scenario but to strengthen the relations among themselves.

Editorial Analysis:

- Even as two member-states (India and South Africa) of the IBSA Dialogue Forum have been busy with national elections and the third (Brazil) is settling down after its recent presidential elections, **their foreign policy mandarins met in Kochi, May 3-5, 2019.**
- The central goal was to develop a blueprint to rejuvenate IBSA, widely viewed as a unique voice for the Global South.
- An important question arises: Will this endeavour succeed?

A Look into Specifics:

- First, some candour and recall are needed to trace the past trajectory.
- The idea of creating a grouping composed of major democracies of three continents, Asia, Africa and South America, emerged from the disarray at the end of the 20th century, and the perceived need for developing countries to forge decisive leadership.
- IBSA was launched through the Brasilia Declaration in 2003. Its summits, between 2006 and 2011, gave it a special global profile.
- However, 2011 onwards, BRICS, the larger group comprising IBSA countries, China and Russia, started to overshadow IBSA.
- IBSA has been unable, until now, to hold its sixth summit. Nevertheless, a series of events marking its 15th anniversary, held during 2018-19, have imparted new momentum to the endeavour to revitalise IBSA.
- Throughout the period of its marginalisation by BRICS, a strong body of officials and experts in the three countries has held the view that IBSA is the true inheritor of solidarity among developing countries, which was nurtured from the Bandung Conference (1955) through UNCTAD and G-77 to the BAPA+40 Declaration (2018).
- It is the champion of South-South Cooperation, and the advocate of a coordinated response by developing economies to secure the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). **The glue that binds IBSA countries together is their faith in democracy, diversity, plurality, inclusivity, human rights and rule of law. This was reiterated through the IBSA Declaration on South-South Cooperation, issued in Pretoria in June 2018.**
- Notably IBSA remains determined to “step up advocacy for reforms of global governance institutions in multilateral fora”. In particular, it is strongly committed to the expansion of the UN Security Council.
- As Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj put it, “We three have to ensure that our collective voice is heard clearly in BRICS and other groups on UN Security Council reforms, since if we do not speak for our own interests, no one else will.”

Parleys in Kochi:

- Against this backdrop, IBSA Sherpas and senior officials of the three countries held detailed deliberations on all aspects of the grouping.
- The IBSA Academic Forum, comprising independent experts, held its sixth session in Kochi after a hiatus of over seven years.
- This forum hosted a candid and comprehensive exchange of views on the continuing relevance of IBSA; the need for a strategy to secure SDGs and cement South-South Cooperation; expanding trade cooperation; and the shared goal of enhancing academic collaboration on issues relating directly to the needs of democratic societies.
- In fact, IBSA has been notching up a number of quiet successes. First, the three Foreign Ministers have been meeting regularly to provide a coordinated leadership to the grouping.
- The last meeting of the Trilateral Ministerial Commission took place in New York in September 2018.
- Secondly, while the India, Brazil and South Africa Facility for Poverty and Hunger Alleviation (IBSA Fund) is small in monetary terms, it has succeeded in implementing 31 development projects in diverse countries: Burundi, Guinea-Bissau, State of Palestine, Cambodia and Vietnam, among

others.

- Next, India has been running an innovative IBSA Visiting Fellows Programme through the Delhi-based think tank, RIS or Research and Information System for Developing Countries.
- A strong case exists for expanding its reach. Experts opine that **both South Africa and Brazil should initiate their own editions of this programme, as an investment in building intellectual capital.**

Concluding Remarks:

- It is important to note that the idea of IBSA remains valid. The grouping has its tasks cut out.
- The special responsibilities it bears cannot be discharged by BRICS.
- In fact, strengthening IBSA could increase the effectiveness of BRICS and encourage it to follow a more balanced approach on key issues of interest to India, Brazil and South Africa.
- Hence, the current endeavours to infuse greater dynamism in IBSA are well-timed.
- They would need buy-in by the government that comes to power in India.
- **Support by Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro and South Africa's Cyril Ramaphosa, who has just won re-election as President, would be crucial.**
- An early convening of the next summit is the pressing priority.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Being responsive

What's in the news?

- Recently, the Government of India decided to shut down communication with UN Special Rapporteurs seeking to question India on alleged human rights violations in the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

Editorial Analysis:

- The government's decision may appear extreme, but is in line with its reaction to such international reports over the last few years.
- As a matter of fact, in a letter dated April 23, 2019, India's permanent mission to the UN in Geneva wrote to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights rejecting any reference to the UN's original June 2018 report on J&K as well as Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, and refused to respond to questions about deaths of 69 civilians between 2016 and 2018 in violence in the Valley.

What did India say in its objections?

- In its objections, the government of India said the report was "false and motivated", that its conclusions and recommendations were violative of India's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and accused the Special Rapporteurs preparing the report of "individual prejudices" against India.
- In addition, India drew notice to the Pulwama attack this year (2019), calling terrorism the "grossest" violation of human rights, not the allegations against the security forces.
- As a result, the government has decided to treat all allegations made by the UN Special Rapporteurs as a "closed chapter" and will not engage further on it.
- India's objections to the OHCHR report, the first of its kind when it was released in 2018, and the follow-up this year (2019) are understandable, given the often selective nature of allegations raised by the UN body.
- It is also clear that demands for action against Indian officials and amendment of laws can cross the line on Indian sovereignty. The call by the previous HCHR that the UN Human Rights Council set

up an independent and international tribunal to investigate India's record in Kashmir was seen to be invasive, and could be dismissed by New Delhi as well.

- However, it is important to note that the government cannot quell the troubling questions that the UN report and the Special Rapporteurs' submissions raise simply by rejecting them.
- To begin with, **most of the sources for the OHCHR report are official Indian authorities, State and national human rights commissions, international human rights agencies as well as reputed Indian NGOs.**
- This is therefore a view from within India, not some disengaged UN official, and must be taken very seriously.
- Further, two Kashmiri NGOs also released a report recently, documenting 432 specific cases of alleged brutality by security forces in Kashmir, including electrocution, 'water-boarding' and sexual torture of civilians, of which only about 27 were taken up by the State Human Rights Commission.

Concluding Remarks:

- The government must press for due process and justice in each of these.
- Experts opine that eventually, India will be judged not only by how close it stands to the world's most powerful countries, but how much the state extends itself to the most vulnerable within its own boundaries.

2. The aftermath of a nasty election

Editorial Analysis:

- Some experts have opined that the devastation caused by a vicious electoral campaign for the 17th Lok Sabha has cast a troublesome shadow on India's future.
- Citizens who have witnessed 10 or more elections in free India would readily agree that electoral politics has never sunk so low in the past as it has now.
- Truth and national interest were victims while destruction of the political enemy became the sole purpose of fighting the election. Yet there is one very bright side that needs celebration.

The redeeming feature of the election process:

- The redeeming feature has been the integrity of the election process and the mechanics of registering the choice of the voter.
- While the overall electoral turnout in this general election has been put at a tentative 67.11%, making it a historic one, **there have been no proven instances of booth capture.**
- Most importantly, there has been no credible evidence of any material failure of electronic voting machine (EVM) technology. However, this is evaluating democracy against a low bar.
- While the body of democracy might still be reasonably healthy, what must trouble every citizen is the deep corruption of the soul of democracy.

A look at some of the fissures:

What is the damage done to the future of India?

- Firstly, the credibility and effectiveness of Parliament, the very institution that we have so painstakingly sent our representatives to, is set to experience a further erosion.
- Further, the culture of aggressive disruption by the Opposition might get chronic, given that there has been no evidence that political parties will place the nation ahead of their political interests.
- Parliament can discharge its responsibility of law-making, only if parliamentarians rise above partisan interests.
- Secondly, while Indian foreign policy has remained somewhat underwhelming and defensive (with

the exception of the liberation of Bangladesh, and the Balakot attack), **the growing nexus between a rogue neighbour and an ascendant superpower in the region has highlighted the radical need for an assertive policy within the framework of non-aggrandisement.**

- This requires a risk-taking ability within a narrow space for manoeuvrability.
- It needs the government and the Opposition to stand as one.
- However, the behaviour of both national parties does little to inspire confidence in this direction.

An economic script:

- Thirdly, by all indications, the Indian economy will face strong headwinds.
- Consumption-led demand is slowing down and the rural economy continues to be in distress.
- Further, the 'twin balance sheet' problem is constraining new investments while the banking sector is in disarray.
- Yet, India can achieve at least a high single-digit growth.
- This will, however, depend on the government executing the next round of reforms in land and labour markets, further pruning unproductive subsidies, devising policies to attract foreign and private investments in infrastructure, and incentivising business to produce and service the world.
- Experts opine that the new government will have to sell to the public the necessity for some short-term pain for long-term gain.
- As a matter of fact, it will have to take bold financial decisions while being accountable and transparent.
- Election rhetoric and pre-election actions instead focussed on the opposite: doles, which are short-term gains; non-transparency in and witch hunting of procurement deals; and a systematic alienation of private enterprise.
- This is not the canvas on which a bold turnaround plan for the economy can be scripted.
- Fourthly, the nation has not only been sharply polarised but the elections have pushed it to react emotionally rather than rationally.
- As a matter of fact, social media has unleashed raw emotions. In election season, every social issue has been viewed through the prism of political ideology.

The need for constructive discourse:

- Despite India's glorious history of advanced thinking, realisation of our constitutional aspirations of equality and liberty has been stymied by inherited societal backwardness.
- Social reforms can happen only in an atmosphere of constructive debate and dissent and a shared vision of modernity.
- The discourse has to move away as much as possible from ideology to constitutional rights.
- Fifth, democracy has to be anchored in the system of checks and balances among autonomous institutions, the judiciary, the defence forces and the Election Commission of India as well as an independent media and civil society.
- It is important to note that despite the mutinous situation in some of these institutions and the disturbing circumstances in this election, there is no great fear that institutions have been permanently damaged.
- That cannot be said of the media, especially the visual and social media. Unfortunately, the polarisation of the media on political lines and the loss of neutrality appear almost complete.
- An important question arises: does this mean that we have collectively failed to safeguard our future? No, there is hope and we have to act quickly and responsibly.

The role for civil society:

- The time has come for civil society to offer that hope and shoulder the responsibility for corrective action.
- Participative democracy has to be kept alive through a vigilant and demanding civil society that

ensures restoration of the primacy of national interests.

- India has a very active and vast civil society that has several exemplars in the fields of advocacy, citizen rights, environment and philanthropy.
- There is a need and space for robust and credible civil organisations that act as bridges between the elected and the electorate.
- Leaders from different vocations such as business, arts and administration have to render public service through civil organisations.

Concluding Remarks:

- Indifferent silence and armchair commentaries are not responsible options. Second, relevant organisations have to come together to demand a proper and orderly functioning of Parliament and State legislatures.
- A worthwhile experiment would be having citizen organisations at the constituency level that act as monitors of elected representatives.
- Next, industry and trade organisations must demonstrate spine and pursue a vocal agenda of advocacy based on broader national interests and beyond narrow corporate gains.
- Further, India has had a long history of socially committed organisations leading societal transformation from the front. While Parliament might enact laws when it comes to closing the gap between legislative intent and social practices, much falls on the shoulders of a socially conscious citizenry. Civil society needs to rise to meet this challenge.
- Next, civil society should rise in force to safeguard the integrity and independence of autonomous institutions, should they face a threat.

F. Tidbits

1. All for a gur cause: Muzaffarnagar to host jaggery fest

- In what could be called a sweet initiative, Muzaffarnagar is hosting a first-of-its-kind Gur Mahotsav (jaggery festival)
- The three-day festival promises to bring together different stakeholders involved in the research, production and marketing of jaggery.
- The event is being organised under the State government's 'one district, one product' scheme, in partnership with private players, and will focus on issues such as packaging and marketing of jaggery and sugarcane juice, more efficient prototypes and working models of crushers and ways to increase the production of organic gur.
- Muzaffarnagar is arguably the biggest mandi (marketplace) of gur in Asia. Here the farmers produce around 60 varieties of gur.
- The festival is being used as an opportunity to update our data bank on the production of jaggery and the number of kolhus (crushers) in the district.
- The festival will address this gur versus sugar debate.

2. After 12 deaths, A.P. issues heatwave warning

- Weather agencies have forecast another spell of heatwave starting from May 25 across Andhra Pradesh.
- Andhra Pradesh Weather Forecasting & Early Disaster Warning (AWARE) centre of the Real-Time Governance Society (RTGS) has issued the five-day warning.
- Indicative of the impending rise in temperature, several stations across the State recorded a maximum temperature of above 45 degrees Celsius.
- RTGS officials say the dip in the humidity is going to cause sweltering weather and heatwave conditions.

- So far, 12 heat stroke deaths and 840 cases of hospitalisation have been reported, according to the A.P. State Disaster Management Authority (APSDMA).

Read more about [Heat Waves](#)

3. NGO to the rescue of over 900 banyan trees

- Decades-old trees numbering over 1,000, to be chopped for the expansion of the Hyderabad-Bijapur National Highway, will be spared the axe.
- A charitable organisation, Phoenix Foundation, has come forward to help translocate the trees, including over 900 banyan trees believed to be between 80 and 90 years old.
- The plan, as of now, is to dig out the trees, trim them and transport a majority of them to a reserve forest area in Moinabad where the Forest department and the Phoenix Foundation are proposing a 500-acre biosphere with variety of plants to serve as a carbon sink for the capital region.
- Banyan is a sturdy tree and even the branches when chopped for trimming could be used for growing fresh trees.
- All the branches would be used and transplanted in various urban parks proposed to be raised in the suburbs.

4. Nepal bans Chinese digital wallets

- Nepal banned popular Chinese digital wallets Alipay and WeChat to prevent the loss of foreign currency earnings from tens of thousands of Chinese tourists.
- Over 1,50,000 Chinese holidaymakers visited Nepal last year, many using digital wallets to pay in hotels, restaurants and shops in tourist areas especially in Chinese-run businesses.
- A spokesman for the central bank, said that Nepal was losing out since the actual transactions took place in China.

G. Prelims Facts

Nothing here for today!!!

H. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

Q1) Jakhau port is located in

- a. Maharashtra
- b. Gujarat
- c. Odisha
- d. Tamil Nadu

Answer: b

Explanation:

Jakhau Port is famous fishing port of Gujarat, where the fishing communities from almost all of the Gujarat Coast migrate during the eight months fishing season. Jakhau remained an important port till a new port at Mandvi was opened in the 16th century. The port traffic of Jakhau was then lost to Mandvi.

Q2) Consider the following statements with respect to Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-dhan:

1. It is a pension scheme of the government.
2. The scheme is applicable to workers in both organised as well as unorganised sector.
3. It is a central sector scheme.

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: b

Explanation:

The Scheme shall apply to the unorganised workers who are working or engaged as home-based workers, street vendors, mid-day meal workers, head loaders, brick kiln workers, cobblers, rag pickers, domestic workers, washer men, rickshaw pullers, landless labourers, own account workers, agricultural workers, construction workers, beedi workers, handloom workers, leather workers, audio-visual workers and similar other occupations. It is a Central Sector Scheme administered by the Ministry of Labour and Employment and implemented through Life Insurance Corporation of India and CSCs.

Q3. Consider the following statements with respect to Mission Shakti:

1. It is a joint programme of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).
2. As a part of the mission an A-SAT weapon targeted and destroyed a decommissioned Indian Satellite.

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:

Self-Explanatory

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Nuclear rivalry could break out in the West Asian region if the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action fell apart. Explain the role of signatories in negotiating a deal acceptable to all the parties. (15 Marks, 250 Words)
2. Coalitions governments allow a diversity of voices to be heard and keep fundamentalism at bay. Critically analyse with respect to the Indian political scenario. (15 Marks, 250 Word)

