

30 May 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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B. GS2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Plea seeks education regulation in religious schools

Context:

The Delhi High Court has sought response from the Centre on a plea seeking directions to it to regulate the



education being imparted in the madrasas, maktabahs and gurukuls in the country.

Issue:

- In India, there are more than 30,000 maktabahs and madrasas and approximately 2,000 gurukuls.
- Such maktabahs, madrasas and gurukuls are acting as primary source of education to more than 15 lakh young individuals in the country.
- But there exists a lacuna in the prevailing regulatory framework governing these institutes.
- The students educated in such institutes are generally not well-equipped for jobs in comparison to students educated in private and governmental schools which violates their right under Article 21A of Right to Education.
- This also severely impacts the job prospects of the students studying at these religious schools.

Details:

- The petition filed jointly by a Right to Information (RTI) activist and Congress MLA from West Bengal, has sought to establish uniform standards of proficiency and excellence with respect to education being imparted in all madrasas, maktabahs and gurukuls.
- The plea said that the young students are being educated at such institutes without any comprehensive and holistic framework, devoid of any standards of excellence.
- It pointed out that there is no clarity with respect to the recognition and status of the certificates issued by such institutes or their respective boards in respect of admission in universities and eligibility for appearing in various competitive exams such as the Civil Services, Banks, Defence Services and other such examinations.
- In a diverse country like India, the education imparted in such institutes would lead to the students having a parochial outlook devoid of scientific temper and lacking fraternity and brotherhood, petition further added.
- Additionally, State governments have taken different stands in respect to the certificates issued by their respective State madrasas boards thereby, creating confusion amongst students and jeopardising their future.
- The bench asked for response of the Ministries of Human Resource Development and Minority Affairs on the petition filed in public interest.

2. Aid to relative for buying property not a benami transaction: SC

Context:

In a recent judgement, the Supreme Court has held that mere financial assistance provided to purchase property for the welfare of family members cannot be classified as a benami transaction.

What are Benami Transactions?

- Benami transactions refer to those transactions in which the real beneficiary of the transaction and the person in whose name the transaction is made are different, specifically transactions relating to properties.
- The property is held by one person while the payment for purchasing the property is made by another. (The person on whose name the transaction is made is called Benamdar while the property involved in such a transaction is called Benami property).
- By doing so, public revenue is defrauded and the real owner is hidden.
- Benami property could include assets of any kind including legal documents, rights, assets, intangible assets, tangible assets, movable property or immovable property.
- It also includes financial securities and precious metals like Gold.
- However, a property held in the name of the spouse or children for which the amount is paid out of



known sources of income is not Benami. Similarly, joint property of siblings or other relatives for which amount is paid out of known resources of income is again not considered Benami property.

Details:

- A Bench led by Justice L. Nageswara Rao has upheld a Karnataka High Court order which dismissed a plea that the financial help given by G. Venkata Rao to his family members to purchase property was a benami transaction.
- Financial assistance or source of money cannot be sole determinative factor or circumstance to hold that a purchase of property is benami.
- The court reiterated its own precedents while considering the nature of benami transactions.
- "The source of money had never been the sole consideration. It is merely one of the relevant considerations but not determinative in character," Justice Rao wrote in the verdict.

Bhim Singh case:

- It referred to the apex court's judgment in the Thakur Bhim Singh's case, in which it had held that "while considering a particular transaction as benami, the intention of the person who contributed the purchase money is determinative of the nature of transaction."
- The Bench held that courts are usually guided by various circumstances to conclude the nature of a transaction as benami.
- These factors include the source from which the purchase money came; the nature and possession of the property, after the purchase; motive, if any, for giving the transaction a benami colour; the position of the parties and the relationship if any, between the claimant and the alleged benamidar; the custody of the title deeds after the sale and the conduct of the parties concerned in dealing with the property after the sale.

3. Dying words not clinching proof

Context:

The Supreme Court has held that a dying declaration given by a victim in a possible unfit state of mind needs to be corroborated by other evidence to secure conviction.

Details:

- Past judgments of the apex court were referred to, in order to observe that though a dying declaration
 is entitled to great weight, it is worthwhile to note that the accused has no power of crossexamination.
- "Such a power is essential for eliciting the truth as an obligation of oath could be. This is the reason the court also insists that the dying declaration should be of such a nature as to inspire full confidence of the court in its correctness. The court has to be on guard that the statement of deceased was not as a result of either tutoring or prompting or a product of imagination. The court must be further satisfied that the deceased was in a fit state of mind after a clear opportunity to observe and identify the assailant," the apex court said.
- Once the court is satisfied that the declaration was true and voluntary, undoubtedly, it can base its conviction without any further corroboration, the court quoted a precedent.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. India removed from currency monitoring list



Context:

In its semi-annual foreign exchange report presented to Congress, the US administration dropped the names of India and Switzerland from its currency monitoring list.

Background:

- India for the first time was placed by the US in its currency monitoring list of countries with potentially questionable foreign exchange policies in May 2018 along with five other countries China, Germany, Japan, South Korea and Switzerland.
- In its next report in October 2018, the Treasury had said that India has made improvements and its name would be removed from the currency manipulation list in the next report.

Details:

- India name was dropped from its currency monitoring list of major trading partners after certain
 developments and steps were taken by the country to avert concerns surrounding foreign exchange
 irregularities.
- The list currently includes China, Japan, South Korea, Germany, Italy, Ireland, Singapore, Malaysia, and Vietnam.

Significance:

- This is a positive development for India as it is out of the currency watch list radar, which could have ultimately led to a tag of being a currency manipulator.
- The US Department of Treasury releases the semi-annual report where it has to track developments in international economies and inspect foreign exchange rates. If any trade partner of the US meets a three-assessment review, bilateral talks are held to resolve the issues.
- Countries which indulge in manipulating the currency exchange rate for gaining unfair competitive advantage in international trade often end up with the tag of a currency manipulator.

C. GS3 Related

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. SpaceX satellites pose new headache for astronomers

Context:

SpaceX has launched the first 60 satellites of its "Starlink" constellation, which is intended to provide Internet from space in an array that could one day contain over 12,000 transponders. The 60 satellites mark the beginning of SpaceX's deployment of a global internet megaconstellation intended to generate more revenue to fuel the company's interplanetary ambitions.

Issue:

- An astronomer in the Netherlands captured footage of a train of brightly-lit SpaceX satellites ascending through the night sky.
- The sight has also provoked an outcry among astronomers who say the constellation, which so far consists of 60 broadband-beaming satellites but could one day grow to as many as 12,000, may threaten our view of the cosmos and deal a blow to scientific discovery.



Details:

- The satellites being visible to the naked eye is a new obstacle for researchers who already have to find workarounds to deal with objects cluttering their images of deep space.
- SpaceX is just one of a several companies looking to enter the fledgling space Internet sector.
- To put that into context, there are currently 2,100 active satellites orbiting our planet, according to the Satellite Industry Association.
- However, SpaceX founder Elon Musk argued that the work of giving billions of economically disadvantaged people high-speed Internet access through this network is the greater good.

D. GS4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. The second coming

Larger Background:

- The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is a regional organization comprising seven Member States lying in the littoral and adjacent areas of the Bay of Bengal constituting a contiguous regional unity.
- This sub-regional organization came into being on 6 June 1997 through the Bangkok Declaration.
- It constitutes seven Member States: five deriving from South Asia, including Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and two from Southeast Asia, including Myanmar and Thailand.
- Initially, the economic bloc was formed with four Member States with the acronym 'BIST-EC' (Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation).
- However, following the inclusion of Myanmar on 22 December 1997 during a special Ministerial Meeting in Bangkok, the Group was renamed 'BIMST-EC' (Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation).
- With the admission of Nepal and Bhutan at the 6th Ministerial Meeting (February 2004, Thailand), the name of the grouping was changed to 'Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation' (BIMSTEC).
- The regional group constitutes a bridge between South and South East Asia and represents a reinforcement of relations among these countries.
- BIMSTEC has also established a platform for intra-regional cooperation between SAARC and ASEAN members.
- The BIMSTEC region is home to around 1.5 billion people which constitute around 22% of the global population with a combined gross domestic product (GDP) of 2.7 trillion economy.
- In the last five years, BIMSTEC Member States have been able to sustain an average 6.5% economic growth trajectory despite global financial meltdown.

The Objective of Building such an Alliance:

- The objective of building such an alliance was to harness shared and accelerated growth through mutual cooperation in different areas of common interests by mitigating the onslaught of globalization and by utilizing regional resources and geographical advantages.
- Unlike many other regional groupings, BIMSTEC is a sector-driven cooperative organization.



Starting with six sectors—including trade, technology, energy, transport, tourism and fisheries—for sectoral cooperation in the late 1997, it expanded to embrace nine more sectors—including agriculture, public health, poverty alleviation, counter-terrorism, environment, culture, people to people contact and climate change—in 2008.

Editorial Analysis:

- Experts opine that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's decision to invite leaders of the other six BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) countries to the swearing-in ceremony of his Council of Ministers sends out several messages on his new government's foreign policy focus.
- To begin with, as the Foreign Ministry's announcement notes, the invitation to Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand is a continuation of the "neighbourhood first" policy behind Mr. Modi's invite to leaders of South Asia for his 2014 swearing-in ceremony.
- Secondly, by not inviting leaders of Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Maldives on this occasion, the government is underlining that its regional preferences have shifted from the SAARC grouping to BIMSTEC, given the logjam at SAARC because of India-Pakistan tensions.
- Further, unlike in 2014, when he invited Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif with an element of hope and a desire to turn the page on bitter bilateral ties, Mr. Modi is signalling that he does not hold the same optimism in 2019.
- Further, it is important to note that Thailand is not just a member of BIMSTEC but also holds the chair of ASEAN this year (2019), and an invitation is as much about India's "Act East" initiative and outreach to East Asia.
- Finally, the separate invitation to the **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation chairperson**, **President Sooronbay Jeenbekov of Kyrgyzstan**, indicates India's commitment to the Central Asian grouping led by China and Russia, with Mr. Modi slated to attend the SCO summit in June, 2019.
- The other separate invitation to **Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth of Mauritius**, who visited India in January this year (2019) as chief guest at the Pravasi Bharatiya conference, is an affirmation of the close affinity between the two countries. It would be unwise, however, to read meanings into Mr. Modi's choice of international dignitaries beyond this symbolism.
- It is important to note that India's engagement with both BIMSTEC and the SCO, which India joined as an observer in 2005, is at a promising but incipient stage.
- As a matter of fact, after its formation in 1997, BIMSTEC made very little progress and didn't even have a fully working secretariat until recently.
- Its deliberations on subregional connectivity have been delayed owing to concerns in Bhutan, while Nepal and Thailand sent only observers to the military exercises last year (2018) due to other misgivings.
- Even so, India sees BIMSTEC as a possible alternative to SAARC, which has failed to meet for five years. Further, the SCO, which inducted India and Pakistan as full members last year (2018), is yet to demonstrate its utility for India, but is seen as a possible balancer at a time when the U.S. is taking a more aggressive position on trade, sanctions against Iran, Venezuela and Russia, all of which are sources of concern for India.
- As a result, the attendance at Mr. Modi's swearing-in ceremony on the 30th of May, 2019, and the bilateral meetings that will follow on the very next day, may represent little by way of actual outcomes.
- Rather, it is a statement of intent on new avenues of India's multilateral engagements.

Category: ECONOMY

1. Why the integrity of data matters



Editorial Analysis:

- The recent announcement that the government has decided to merge the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) into and under the Central Statistics Office (CSO) has caused both surprise and concern.
- What exactly the 'merger' means remains unclear.
- As a matter of fact, recent attempts to question the veracity of National Sample Survey (NSS) data and the way the issue has been handled have given rise to apprehensions within academia, State governments and the media about the prospect of radical changes in the present system for deciding substantive issues of scope, design, scrutiny and validation of the surveys.

What happens under the present system?

- Under the present system, every year various departments of government send a list of subjects that they would like to be investigated by the NSSO.
- The requests are sent to the National Statistical Commission (NSC), which has respected economists, subject matter specialists and statisticians from government, including the head of the CSO and senior officials of the NSSO responsible for technical aspects of design and conduct of field work, as well as representatives of State governments.
- In addition to this, subject matter specialists in particular fields are also brought in.
- The proposals are discussed at length keeping in view the budget allocations, availability of trained field staff and supervisors.
- In doing so, the conduct of periodic surveys on important issues is also considered. (It should be noted that budget allocations, and personnel of the NSSO have always been under the Department of Statistics.)
- After providing for periodic repeat surveys (at quinquennial or decennial intervals) of some important aspects (notably **consumer expenditure**, **employment**, **social consumption**, **land holdings**, **rural savings and investments**), the subjects to be covered in a particular year and the scope of the inquiry are decided.
- The tasks of sampling design, the scope and content of information to be collected, design of schedules and protocols of field work are left to be decided by special working groups.
- These groups are chaired by experts from academia, and senior officials of the CSO and the NSSO, State government representatives as well as select non-official experts.
- These working groups are in continuous session from the inception of each round through all the subsequent steps. Discussions of concepts, questionnaire design, field work schedules and supervision are continuous, detailed and highly professional.
- Once the field work is over, the groups decide the detailed tabulation programme, and the tables to be prepared for publication. The tabulated results are discussed in detail by the NSC and are published after its approval.

What did the Government decide a few years back?

- After considerable hesitation and prodding, the government decided some years back to put all tabulations and the primary data on open access, especially to academic and other interested users.
- This decision has stimulated and facilitated the use of these data for intensive analyses by numerous researchers.
- As a matter of fact, they have been used extensively for monitoring of trends and critical assessment of several important aspects of the economy and society, such as poverty and inequality, consumption patterns, employment, household savings and investment, and health-seeking behaviour. They have spawned intense as well as creative controversies over survey methodology, quality of data, and interpretation of structure and trends.



• These have played an important role in shaping policy and in improving the surveys.

Credibility of NSSO Surveys:

- It is important to note that the NSSO surveys command wide respect among academics, State governments and non-governmental organisations as the most reliable and comparable basis for discussions in the public, policy and even political arenas.
- This is based on their well-earned reputation for professionalism, independence and integrity.
- Experts opine that the widespread apprehensions that the proposed absorption of NSSO into the CSO could compromise the surveys by subjecting their review and publication to government approval must therefore be allayed promptly in an unqualified manner.
- The existing institutional arrangement in which the NSC, as a professional body independent of government, has not only functioned smoothly but also commands confidence and respect both within the country and abroad must be maintained.
- Any attempt or even a suggestion that its substantive work, publication and free dissemination of
 data are subject to the department's approval will hugely dent the credibility of the Indian
 statistical system.

Scope for improvement:

- Urging this forcefully does not in any way suggest that the present institutional arrangements are flawless or that the NSSO is perfect.
- On the contrary, it is widely recognised that there is scope for improvement in the functioning of the institution and the way data are collected.
- These problems are well known. For example:
- 1. the NSSO doesn't have adequate budgetary allocations;
- 2. there is an acute shortage of trained field staff;
- 3. the scale of surveys is un-manageably large mainly because the users demand a degree of detail in content and regional disaggregation of estimates.

It is important to note that the NSC is fully conscious of these difficulties.

The solutions call for action by the institutions responsible for gathering data by investing in continuing research on improving sampling design, field survey methods and validation of data. Correcting these deficiencies is entirely in the domain of the government.

- However, there are also serious difficulties inherent in trying to get reliable and complete information through the interview method.
- Most respondents do not maintain any records or accounts of their transactions.
- Since most respondents rely on recall, it is unrealistic to expect them to provide reliable information on the scope and detail sought by questionnaires.
- Memory lapses and respondent fatigue lead to a high incidence of non-response, indifferent response
 and biased response. These problems are particularly serious among the more affluent and bettereducated sections of respondents.

Concluding Remarks:

- Increasing the role of CSO officials in running the NSSO will not solve these problems; however they can help by providing funds for specialised research on survey design and methodology.
- The necessity and importance of such research calls for far greater attention and resources than they receive at present.



2. Breaking out of the middle-growth orbit

Editorial Analysis:

- Experts opine that a challenging economic agenda awaits the new Finance Minister.
- It is important to note that important economic indicators are flashing red indicating a slowdown in the economy.

A cause for anxiety?

- The financial sector is gasping under a liquidity crunch.
- A crisis is building up in the NBFC space that could snowball across the entire sector and worse, even the economy itself.
- This, even as banks are still clawing their way back to health after digesting large write-offs.
- What compounds matters is the fact that policy-making has been at a standstill for more than two months since the election schedule was announced.
- Moreover, come May 31, 2019, we are likely to see a dismal set of fourth quarter GDP numbers being announced by the Central Statistics Office.
- It is important to note that going by the high-frequency data on the economy, it is likely that GDP growth in the fourth quarter of 2018-19 will be below 6.5%; it was 6.6% in the third quarter that ended December. At this rate, it might be difficult to touch the 7% mark for fiscal 2018-19.
- The picture is not as bad as it was when Narendra Modi assumed office as Prime Minister for the first time in May 2014 but there is no denying that there is cause for worry and the new government has to move quickly.

Priority areas for the new government:

(a) Rescuing NBFCs:

- This should be the first priority for the new Finance Minister.
- Even as banks are showing incipient signs of recovery from the non-performing assets (NPAs) issue, the non-banking financial sector seems to be lapsing into trouble.
- Beginning with the IL&FS collapse, the NBFC space has been hit by one problem after another and the thread running through them all is the drying up of liquidity.
- Even well-known NBFCs and housing finance companies have been hit by asset-liability mismatch; they have borrowed short-term funds and lent them to long-term projects leading to cash flow problems.
- As a result, they have been unable to meet commitments to their own lenders.
- It is important to note that the NBFCs have been crying hoarse for liquidity support from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), however, the regulator has been reluctant to do the one thing that will help them the most open an exclusive funding window.
- The central bank may have its own valid reasons for not conceding the demand but the truth is that there is a real crisis out there and a risk that the contagion will spread.
- The new Finance Minister will have to work with the RBI and banks to resolve this issue at the earliest.

Drop in Consumer Spending:

- The high-frequency data coming out over the last few months point to a demand slowdown in the economy.
- Commercial vehicle off-take has been in the negative territory for the last few months following a drop in freight volumes and also tariffs. Passenger car sales, that were weak through 2018-19 with growth of just 2.7%, actually fell by 17% in April, which is the sharpest drop in eight years. Two-



wheeler sales fell by 17% in 2018-19.

- Consumer durable and fast-moving consumer goods sales have been tepid too.
- Even domestic air traffic growth fell for the first time in six years in April, 2019.
- These trends are validated by the monthly factory output data after a flat, no-growth February, 2019, output contracted by 0.1% in March, 2019.
- In an economy such as India's excessively dependent on domestic consumption, a fall in consumer spending spells trouble.
- In its first term, the Modi government did an admirable job in pushing public investment to prop up growth; the new government should, in addition, push consumption spending.
- Experts opine that the best way to do that is to put more money in the hands of the people by cutting income tax sharply. It requires guts and gumption to do this though, considering the overall commitment to maintain fiscal discipline.
- Yet, this may be the much-needed fillip to consumption as it is the middle class which will go out and spend the extra money in its hands.
- This may also be shrewd politics as the middle class has backed the BJP in this election.
- In fact, this argument can be extended by suggesting a cut in corporate taxes as well to unleash the animal spirits in the economy.
- History bears witness to P. Chidambaram's "dream budget" of 1997 when he cut personal and corporate tax rates sharply and such a move spurred growth.
- Some experts opine that in this respect, the outgoing government much against its philosphical leanings has behaved more like the previous United Progressive Alliance governments by sticking to high tax rates and refusing to cut them.
- It is important to note that cutting taxes will be akin to administering a dose of steroids to private investment, which desperately needs a leg-up.
- In the 2018-19 Budget, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley cut corporate tax to 25% for companies with a turnover less than ₹250 crore, which account for 99% of those filing returns.
- As a matter of fact, it may not be a bad idea to extend the concession, at least partly to start with, to the remaining 1% that represents the cream of business.

A Perspective Key tasks ahead:

- It is important to note that a return of private investment is crucial to ensure the other important objective of this government, which is to create jobs.
- As businesses invest more to expand capacities, hopefully more jobs will be created.
- The introduction of Goods and Services Tax (GST) and demonetisation were in no small measure responsible for the slowdown in the economy.
- Despite frequent tweaks to rates, product classifications and procedures, the GST remains a work in progress and needs to be streamlined.
- Experts opine that the best that the new government can do is to quickly move to a set of just three rates from the six now.
- About 62% of goods and services are now taxed at 18% and above, which is rather high.
- The median rate should be reduced to 12% in phases certainly 16% to start with given that the GST is a regressive tool that taxes the rich and the poor alike.
- Next, revenues have stabilised at around ₹1 lakh crore a month now despite a number of products being moved to lower tax slabs over the last few months.
- Experts opine that the time is ripe to get bold and reduce rates to spur consumption.
- Widening the basket and stricter enforcement are better ways to increase revenues compared to high rates.

Concluding Remarks:

- Meanwhile, the farm sector is crying out for attention too.
- The new government will certainly be focussing on the crisis in agriculture, and the outcomes will



- determine the health of the rural economy.
- Lastly, Mr. Modi expended tremendous political capital in his first term on measures such as demonetisation which had questionable returns.
- He should use his renewed capital now to push through important reforms that will help the economy break out of the shackles of middling growth and push it into a high-growth sphere.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Foreign policy in an uncertain world

Note to the Students:

This article is taken from the Hindu Business Line and was published on the 30th of May, 2019.

Editorial Analysis:

- It is important to note that Prime Minister Modi's first-term was marked by his placing his own distinctive stamp on the conduct of Indian foreign policy.
- As a matter of fact, just a few weeks preceding commencement of the general election campaign, he received a message of greetings from President Putin, who conferred the "highest decoration" of the Russian Federation on him.
- This was accompanied by his being conferred with the highest award of the UAE by its ruler, Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed.
- The personal rapport that characterised Modi's relations with other leaders like Presidents Obama and Trump, French President Macron and Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, is also widely acknowledged.
- Further, just days before election results were officially announced, China's Global Times, praised Modi's policies in an article entitled: **Modi's Reelection Further Reinforces China-India Trust**. The Global Times lauded his meeting with President Xi Jinping in Wuhan and his role in resolving tensions over Doklam.
- It also praised him for India joining the Asian Infrastructure Bank, in the face of opposition from the US and Japan.
- This Chinese approach, hopefully, signals encouraging prospects for continuance of cooperative efforts by India and China, to maintain peace along the border.
- Having said this, one cannot, however, be sanguine about any significant narrowing of divergent approaches by New Delhi and Beijing on regional security issues, including China's military and nuclear support for its "all weather friend." Pakistan.
- Experts opine that promoting India's interests in a growingly uncertain world order is going to be a far more challenging task for Modi than what he experienced in his first term.
- An important factor behind these uncertainties and tensions is the volatility that has been introduced in global relations, by the mercurial President Donald Trump.

A Look at Trade under Trump:

- The Trump Administration has rocked relations with close allies in Europe, like France and Germany. Even the British are wary of him.
- He strained trade relations with neighbouring Canada and Mexico, by imposing duties on steel and aluminum, which were withdrawn after retaliation by them.
- India too has faced similar challenges on bilateral trade, which would need careful handling, bilaterally and in the WTO.
- It is important to note that US relations with China are now under severe strain, because of punitive duties placed on a vast range of China's exports.



- Trump has also placed stiff sanctions on China's communications giant, Huawei, which can cause severe damage to China's vital electronics industry.
- It is believed that such moves will inevitably result in a setback to the efforts of President Xi Jinping to make China the most important and influential power, globally.
- These are, however, actions that Trump can justify internationally, given China's propensity to blatantly violate international norms on trade and patents.
- Moreover, the US Pacific Fleet is now defying China's untenable maritime boundary claims, across the Pacific Ocean.
- India has to deal with this situation carefully, backing friends like Vietnam and Indonesia against untenable Chinese maritime boundary claims, without being perceived to be acting at American behest.

Perspective on Arms deals:

- India appears confident of settling its differences on trade with the US bilaterally, and through the WTO.
- It is important to note that strains in bilateral relations with the US could well arise, because of American sanctions on arms purchases from Russia.
- The US can grant sanctions waivers on specific arms purchases from Russia, like it has done in the case of the S400 Air Defence Missiles which India is acquiring from Moscow.
- There also appears to be no intention to place sanctions on purchases of spare parts for equipment already acquired from Russia.
- However, India is preparing for large purchases from Russia of weapons systems including submarines, tanks, fighter aircraft, frigates and AK 203 assault rifles, for indigenous manufacture.
- Experts opine that while it was stated during the Putin visit that India had banking arrangements in place to deal with Russian acquisitions, it is not clear how and whether this could be done, in the present circumstances.
- Further, American banking sanctions are also rendering the purchase of oil from Iran almost impossible.
- While Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the UAE can enable India to meet her requirements, Iranian oil is cheaper and its transportation costs lower than oil from other sources.
- The European Union, Russia and China do not accept the legality of US sanctions on Iran.
- The US sanctions are unilateral and in violation of the agreement to end all nuclear sanctions on Iran, which all these powers signed.
- While most countries worldwide regard these US sanctions abhorrent, it would be useful for India, Russia and China to discuss measures on how they can be overcome or bypassed.
- Consultations with the EU, which is chary of challenging the US, are also essential. It would be only prudent not to take any unilateral steps on this issue.

A Perspective on Regional initiatives:

- India's bilateral and regional initiatives in the recent past have enhanced its influence across the entire Indian Ocean Region, from the Straits of Malacca to the Straits of Aden.
- As a matter of fact, while ASEAN has been weakened and divided by China's actions, viable policies are being devised to balance growing Chinese influence and assertiveness, involving subtle diplomacy with countries like Japan, Indonesia and Vietnam, together with enhanced interaction with the US.
- The vast improvement in India's relations with the Arab Gulf countries where over six million Indians live remitting back over \$60 billion annually has been remarkable.
- Indian workers are welcomed and our professionals are steadily replacing their western counterparts, across this region.
- Finally, in the sub-continent, Pakistan has excluded itself from economic integration within South Asia, by its aversion to promoting economic ties with India and denying India transit



rights to Afghanistan.

Concluding Remarks:

- While India need not rush into any high profile "composite dialogue" with Pakistan, we should discreetly engage its government and army.
- International pressure has increased on Pakistan after the Balakot airstrike.
- Prime Minister Modi has called Pakistan's nuclear bluff.
- The opening of the Kartarpur corridor should be accompanied by initiatives to expand educational and cultural ties and moves to promote group tourism to religious shrines and historical sites.
- Such moves will be welcomed by people in Pakistan, and by the world at large.

F. Tidbits

1. Home most unsafe for children: childline report

- Childline Kozhikode is planning to launch a new project titled 'Safe neighbourhood for every child' in the district soon, in view of the increasing physical and sexual offences on children in the district.
- The project will be implemented with the help of various agencies including residents associations and Kudumbashree.
- A recent data released by Childline shows that close relatives and neighbours are the key offenders in most of the sexual and physical abuse cases in which children are victims.
- Members of the family are behind at least one-third of the total abuse cases.
- Of the 130 physical abuse and corporal punishment cases reported in the city in 2017-18, family members were the accused in 43 cases.
- While uncles, cousins and grandparents coming into the picture occasionally, in a large number of cases it is either of the parents who abuse the child.
- Of the 120 sexual abuse cases reported, the abuser is a relative in 28 cases while it is a neighbour in 43 cases. Parents and step-parents too have been found guilty in 7 cases.
- It has also been noticed that parental conflicts often leads to abuse of the children caught in between in many houses.

2. New approach sought to deal with juveniles in conflict with law

- The figures released at a workshop on "Child protection and dealing with children in contact with railways" states that:
 - o About 28% of children in Rajasthan in the age group of 6 to 10 go missing.
 - o Among the juveniles of 11 to 15 years, one out of three runs away from home.
 - These children constitute 27% of those who need care and protection under the law.
- Rajasthan State Legal Services Authority's Member-Secretary said an informal system was necessary
 for understanding the concept of juvenile justice, rather than the formal or traditional processes of the
 justice system.
- It is because children aged between 16 and 18, forming 16% to 17% of juveniles, are often found to be aggressive.
- The Railway Board has signed a memorandum of understanding with Prayas JAC Society to work towards care and protection of helpless children coming in contact with railways.

For a holistic understanding of the **Juvenile Justice Act**, Watch:

3. Male invites PM Modi to visit country in June

• In his first visit abroad since being re-elected to office, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will travel to



the Maldives and address the Parliament.

- It will also mark Mr. Modi's first state visit to the island nation, about six months after he attended Maldivian President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih's swearing-in ceremony.
- A close cooperation between India and the Maldives is in the interests of both countries, and helps bring stability to the Indian Ocean region.
- The visit is expected to strengthen ties, in addition to reaffirming India's neighbourhood-first policy.
- Both nations are founding members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the South Asian Economic Union and signatories to the South Asia Free Trade Agreement.

4. India's biggest STP to come up at Okhla

- The Delhi Jal Board (DJB) has approved setting up of a new sewage treatment plant (STP) at Okhla which, it claimed, will be the largest such plant in India.
- The plant will be able to treat 124 million gallons of waste water per day
- The new STP will be set up under the Yamuna Action Plan III scheme.
- The plant will treat the waste water that goes into the Yamuna directly.
- It's a major step towards cleaning the river.
- Now, untreated waste is being dumped into the Yamuna. Treated water from the plant will be redirected to the Yamuna, which will help in cleaning the river.

5. 84 cities submit plans for improving air quality by 2024

- One hundred and two cities, considered India's most polluted, have been tasked with reducing PM (particulate matter) 10 and PM 2.5 levels by 2024, as part of the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP).
- This was made public in January this year.
- Eighty-four out of the 102 cities that have been tasked with reducing toxic particulate matter levels by 20%-30% by 2024 have submitted proposals for improving Air Quality.
- The States in which the cities are located are expected to produce plans that include increasing the number of monitoring stations, providing technology support, conducting source apportionment studies, and strengthening enforcement.
- For achieving the NCAP targets, cities would be expected to calculate the reduction in pollution, keeping 2017's average annual PM levels as the base year.
- As part of its public-outreach campaign, the Ministry has collaborated with the Bhamla Foundation, as well as artistes from Bollywood, to develop a theme song Hawa aane de ('Let the air in'). The song is a call to action for all to come together to combat air pollution.

6. New species of wasp identified in Goa

- A new species of wasp from the genus Kudakrumia has been recently identified by scientists in Goa.
- The wasp, Kudakrumia rangnekari, has been named after Goa-based researcher Parag Rangnekar.
- In India, the wasp is found in Goa and Kerala and outside the country it is also found in neighbouring Sri Lanka.
- The types of the new species and specimens of known species are deposited in the 'National Zoological Collections' of the Western Ghat Regional Centre of Zoological Survey of India located at Kozhikode.

G. Prelims Facts

1. Masala bonds



- Masala bonds are bonds issued outside India but denominated in Indian Rupees, rather than the local currency.
- The term was used by the International Finance Corporation (IFC) to evoke the culture and cuisine of India.
- Unlike dollar bonds, where the borrower takes the currency risk, masala bond makes the investors bear the risk.
- The first Masala bond was issued by the World Bank- backed IFC in 2014.

2. Pregnancy and Infant Cohort Monitoring and Evaluation

- Pregnancy and Infant Cohort Monitoring and Evaluation (PICME) is a project implemented by the Directorate of Public Health and Preventive Medicine.
- It is mandatory for pregnant women to register themselves on PICME.
- The registration would help track and monitor pregnant women.
- If a pregnant woman is due for check-up and does not turn up, the software automatically throws up the detail, and the health staff visit her.
- After delivery, it also monitors the vaccination status of the baby.

3. National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (NCDRC)

- The National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (NCDRC), India is a quasi-judicial commission in India.
- It was set up in 1988 under the Consumer Protection Act of 1986.
- The Consumer Protection Act, 1986 is a social legislation that lays down the rights of the consumers and provides for promotion and protection of the rights of the consumers.
- Its head office is in New Delhi.
- The commission is headed by a sitting or retired judge of the Supreme Court of India.
- Section 21 of Consumer Protection Act, 1986 states that the NCDRC shall have jurisdiction to entertain a complaint valued more than one crore and also have Appellate and Revisional jurisdiction from the orders of State Commissions or the District fora
- Section 23 of the Act, provides that any person aggrieved by an order of NCDRC, may prefer an Appeal against such order to Supreme Court of India within a period of 30 days.

H. Practice Ouestions for UPSC Prelims Exam

Q1) Which of the following is/are Mosquito-borne disease/s?

- 1. Filariasis
- 2. Malaria
- 3. West Nile Fever
- 4. Japanese encephalitis

Choose the correct option:

a. 2 only

b. 1 and 2 only

c. 1, 2 and 4

d. 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: d



Explanation:

All the given diseases are transmitted by mosquitoes.

Q2) Consider the following statements:

- 1. ACROSS scheme pertains to the atmospheric science programs.
- 2. It is an umbrella scheme comprising of nine sub programmes.
- 3. The scheme will be implemented by the Ministry of Earth Sciences.

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

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

ACROSS scheme pertains to the atmospheric science programs of the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) and addresses different aspects of weather and climate services, which includes warnings for cyclone, storm surges, heat waves, thunderstorms etc. The ACROSS scheme consists of nine sub-programmes which are multi-disciplinary and multi institutional in nature and will be implemented in an integrated manner through. India Meteorological Department (IMD), Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting (NCMRWF), and Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Service(INCOIS).

Q3) Consider the following statements:

- 1. National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission is a constitutional body.
- 2. It has jurisdiction to entertain complaints valued at one lakh or more.

Which of the given statement/s is/are not correct?

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

The National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (NCDRC), India is a quasi-judicial commission in India. It was set up in 1988 under the Consumer Protection Act of 1986. Section 21 of Consumer Protection Act, 1986 states that the NCDRC shall have jurisdiction to entertain a complaint valued more than one crore and also have Appellate and Revisional jurisdiction from the orders of State Commissions or the District fora.



I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

- 1. India–Japanrelations have traditionally been strong. Both the countries have so many potential areas to tap jointly. Discuss. (15 Marks, 250 Words)
- 2. In fiscal devolution, cooperative federalism stops at the level of the state government. Essentially, co-operative federalism needs to go deeper, below the state level. (15 Marks, 250 Words)