

# 07 June 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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## B. GS2 Related

### Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

#### 1. [South Asia is top priority: Jaishankar](#)

#### Context:

Building connectivity in the South Asian region and coordinating economic issues will be top priorities of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), its new Minister S. Jaishankar has said.

#### Details:

- It was indicated that the government had chosen to invite leaders of BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) rather than leaders

of SAARC(South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation), because there was a higher likelihood of making progress with BIMSTEC, as it doesn't include Pakistan.

- The minister highlighted the trade and connectivity issues in SAARC besides the terrorism issue.
- He also spoke about the need for more coordination between the MEA and economic ministries.
- He emphasised the need for more regional exchanges, saying India needed to “incentivise cooperation in the neighbourhood” by being “generous” to smaller neighbours.

#### **Other issues:**

- There are a few economic challenges that the government faces immediately, given the United States decision to withdraw India's 'GSP' preferential trade status
- Emerging costs of replacing Iranian oil after sanctions is another issue.

#### **BIMSTEC:**

- Bay of Bengal Initiative on Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is a sub-regional grouping involving seven countries in South Asia and South East Asia.
- The BIMSTEC states are those which are on the shore or are adjacent to the Bay of Bengal and are dependent on it.
- They are Thailand, Myanmar from South East Asia and Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal and India from South Asia.
- The international organization was formed on 6<sup>th</sup> of June 1997, through the Bangkok declaration and is headquartered at Dhaka in Bangladesh.

#### **SAARC:**

- SAARC is the acronym for an intergovernmental organisation of south Asian countries. It is a geopolitical body comprising of 8 members.
- It stands for the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation.
- It was established in Dhaka on 8 December 1985 and is headquartered in Kathmandu, Nepal.
- Its members include India, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

## **2. Defence cut won't affect response potential**

#### **Context:**

In an unprecedented voluntary move, Pakistan's military has decided to cut the defence budget for the next fiscal year amid an austerity drive launched by the government to solve the cash-strapped nation's economic woes.

#### **Details:**

- It was said that the funds saved will be used for the development of the newly-merged tribal areas as well as in Balochistan.
- Pakistan in 2018 was the 20th biggest military spender in the world with an expenditure of USD 11.4 billion, a report published by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (Sipri) said.
- The military spending of 2018 made up for four per cent of Pakistan's gross domestic product (GDP) which is the highest level since 2004, according to the report by the Sweden-based institute.
- The top military spender in the world is the United States, which spent USD 649 billion on its forces last year.
- The US military spending, however, has decreased by 17 per cent over the past decade, the report

## **Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE**

### **1. AIR may have to power off short wave transmissions**

#### **Context:**

Prasar Bharati has asked All India Radio to come up with a proposal to phase out Short Wave transmitters.

#### **Issue:**

- AIR is resisting the move arguing that it will curtail its global reach.
- The short wave is the only effective way to reach to any part of the world.
- FM and other modes don't work.
- Live streaming on web can't be complete substitute to this due to varied penetration of internet connectivity.

#### **Details:**

- According to Prasar Bharati's proposals, All India Radio will have to stop all global short wave transmissions — eighty years after it began international broadcasting in 1939.
- There are about 46 short wave transmitters that run both domestic and external services.
- Out of these, 28 are used for the external services alone. Barring three transmitters that were recently installed, all the others will have to be shut down over the next six-months.
- The external services are broadcast to 150 countries in 13 Indian languages and 15 foreign languages.
- Prasar Bharati felt that the short wave transmission did not bring in revenue and there was no way to assess the actual size of the audience that tune in to it. Questions were also raised about lack of editorial scrutiny.
- A study on short wave transmitters conducted by the Prasar Bharati had revealed that shutting down these transmitters would save the AIR nearly ₹60-70 crore.
- The majority of the transmitters were nearly 25 years old and obsolete.
- Prasar Bharati is of the view that Short Wave, as a mode of transmission, has very limited audience, which is further dwindling with time. The short wave network will be rationalised so we are able to invest more in content and in newer ways of broadcasting, like Internet streaming, digital radio and in future satellite radio. We will, however, preserve a limited set of short wave for strategic purposes and national interest.

#### **Prasar Bharati:**

- Prasar Bharati is the Public Service Broadcaster in India.
- Prasar Bharati came into existence on 1997.
- It is a statutory autonomous body established under the Prasar Bharati Act.

## **C. GS3 Related**

## **Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY**

### **1. Ecologists have 596 reasons to cheer**

**Context:**

224 new species of plants and 372 animal species have been discovered in India last year.

**Details:**

- Scientists and taxonomists have documented 596 new species of flora and fauna from India in the year 2018.
- The details of the discoveries were made public by the Botanical Survey of India (BSI) and the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) in the publications *Plant Discoveries 2018* and *Animal Discoveries 2018*.
- BSI has placed emphasis on molecular DNA technology and phylogeny to confirm the discoveries.
- About 31% of the plant species were discovered in the Himalayas.
- The plants discovered this year includes close wild relatives of many potential horticulture, agriculture, medicinal and ornamental plants.
- In the case of animals, the Western Ghats remained a biological hotspot from where about 50% of the species were found.
- Kerala recorded the highest number of discoveries with 59 species.
- West Bengal, a state with both Himalayan and coastal ecosystems, recorded 38 and Tamil Nadu recorded 26.

## 2. Ebb in the Yamuna flow

**Context:**

The Yamuna is one of the most polluted rivers in the world, especially in Delhi, and it is getting more polluted, experts have said.

**Reasons:**

- Both experts and a Monitoring Committee appointed by the National Green Tribunal state that less flow in the river is one of the main reasons for pollution.
- Three plans to augment the Yamuna's volume and flow have either missed deadlines or are progressing very slowly.
- The NCMG had last year ordered the National Institute of Hydrology, Roorkee, to conduct a study on the minimum flow needed in the river.
- It set a deadline of April 30, 2019, but the study is nowhere near completion.

**Details:**

- A National Mission for Clean Ganga-commissioned study on minimum flow needed in the Yamuna, a project to rejuvenate water bodies and recharge groundwater, and a plan to build an off-channel reservoir to store water along the river.
- An NGT judgment of 2015, had also sought the immediate preparation of a plan to ensure proper flow in the river.
- Cleaning of Yamuna is also part of the Namami Gange Mission and Government of India has been supplementing the efforts of the States for checking the rising level of pollution of river Yamuna, a tributary of River Ganga, by providing financial assistance to States of Haryana, Delhi and Uttar Pradesh in phased manner since 1993 under the Yamuna Action Plan (YAP).
- Presently the pollution in the Yamuna is far in excess and no impact on river quality is likely unless there a minimum environmental flow.

### Way forward:

Lack of sufficient number of sewage treatment plants has led to the increase in the polluted stretch of the Yamuna. A few steps to clean River Yamuna could be

- Installation of Sewage Treatment Plants (STP)
- Installation of Effluent Treatment Plants (ETP)
- Installation of Common Effluent Treatment Plants
- Yamuna Action Plan
- Environmental Awareness Campaign
- Apart from this water has to be checked regularly for its quality.
- Creating off-river reservoirs along the floodplain to increase the river's flow is believed to be another solution.

### River Yamuna:

- Yamuna River, also called Jumna, major river of northern India, primarily in Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh states.
- It is one of the country's most-sacred rivers.
- It is the second largest tributary of River Ganges.
- The Yamuna rises on the slopes of the Bandarpunch massif in the Great Himalayas near Yamnotri (Jamnotri) in western Uttarakhand.
- It merges with the Ganges at Triveni Sangam, Prayagraj (Prayagraj), which is a site of the Kumbh Mela, a Hindu festival held every 12 years.

### Category: SECURITY

#### 1. Centre to come up with policy on AI, cybersecurity soon

##### Context:

The Niti Aayog has come up with a policy on artificial intelligence and cyber security and it would be taken up by the Union Cabinet soon.

##### Details:

- It was said that the policy announcement was delayed owing to the recent elections.
- It is believed that, at a time when the government promoted the digitisation programme and India emerged the second country with most Internet access, the protection of data becomes crucial — be at home, workspace or institutions.
- The need for giving access to National Knowledge Network for setting up centres of excellence for research on AI for which funding would be provided by the Union Government has also been emphasised.
- This disruptive technology is used by various sectors, including agencies for crime control.

##### Concerns:

- Those wanting to cause harm are also becoming smarter with AI necessitating 24x7 protection of the entire command and control of data network.
- The main challenge to use AI is to get highly trained manpower.

## D. GS4 Related

*Nothing here for today!!!*

## E. Editorials

### Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

#### 1. Pakistan's blasphemy ordeal

##### Context:

Barely two weeks after Pakistani Christian Asia Naureen (usually referred to as Asia Bibi), whose ordeal over false blasphemy charges attracted international attention, was allowed to leave the country, Pakistan's blasphemy laws claimed new victims.

##### Background:

- Asia Bibi, a Christian woman was acquitted from the death sentence under Pakistan's blasphemy laws, was released from the jail and allowed to leave the country.
- She had spent most of the past eight years in solitary confinement.
- She was the first woman to be sentenced to death under Pakistan's blasphemy laws.

##### Details:

- A Hindu veterinary doctor, Ramesh Kumar, was arrested in Sindh province on May 27 after a local cleric filed a police complaint accusing him of committing blasphemy.
- As is often the case when blasphemy allegations are made in Pakistan, riots broke out in the area and an angry mob burnt down Mr. Kumar's establishment as well as other property belonging to him and his family.
- Junaid Hafeez, a visiting lecturer of English at Bahauddin Zakaria University in Multan, has been in prison for the last six years after being accused of blasphemy by Islamist student activists.
- He was charged because he invited a speaker to a seminar who had allegedly penned blasphemous passages in her book.
- His lawyer dropped him as a client after being mobbed by over 200 fellow lawyers; when human rights defender Rashid Rehman took up his case, he was shot dead in his office.
- The killer has never been apprehended and judges do not want to hear the case, which has been transferred since 2013.

##### Concerns:

- Asia Bibi's experience highlights the difficult path ahead for Mr. Kumar. Her relocation to Canada does not reflect substantive change in the persecuted state of Pakistan's religious minorities.
- Pakistan's draconian blasphemy laws remain in force, and there is no sign that the authorities plan to drop prosecution of hundreds of blasphemy cases.
- Blasphemy carries an automatic death penalty in Pakistan's legal system.
- Pakistan's strict blasphemy laws are often used maliciously.
- Between 1987 and 2012, Pakistani authorities prosecuted 1,170 people for blasphemy. That number has only increased over the years.
- The Pakistani legal system offers little protection to someone charged with blasphemy and mere accusation is tantamount to punishment.



- Judges and lawyers fear religious vigilantes who violently attack anyone they deem to be supporting a blasphemer.
- False accusations are made against Christians and Ahmadis, a tiny minority that reveres a modern-day prophet from India.
- In recent years, numerous minority neighborhoods and places of worship have been attacked by frenzied mobs, enraged by rumors that someone had torn or defaced a Koran.
- Blasphemy charges are filed routinely by Islamist extremists for political gain, by neighbours for revenge over a slight, and sometimes even by corrupt landlords for advantage in property disputes.
- Pakistan's blasphemy laws, which date back to the military dictatorship of General Zia-ul-Haq, have only encouraged the unleashing of extremist religious frenzy. According to an Amnesty International report, the mere accusation of blasphemy is tantamount to punishment. Several cases illustrate that point.

#### **Way forward:**

- For Pakistan's religious minorities to feel safe, Pakistan's blasphemy laws must be tackled, amended or removed as a crucial first step.
- After that, or alongside, must begin the decades-long process of removing the seed of hatred sowed soon after the death of Pakistan's founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah.
- This would involve an effort of mammoth proportions starting with the defanging of terrorist groups, changing school curriculum, and banning hate speech in all public venues.
- Political and religious leaders as well as the mass media must become a partner in confronting hate.

#### **Conclusion:**

Pakistan's all-powerful military and the civilian government installed last year are obsessed with improving Pakistan's international image, without really changing its reality. They wanted Ms. Bibi's flight to safety to be projected as reflecting a change in Pakistan's treatment of its minorities. It is nothing of the sort, as the persecution of Mr. Kumar amply indicates.

### **Category: ECONOMY**

#### **1. No surprises – On RBI's Monetary Policy**

##### **Context:**

The benchmark interest rate of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) fell below 6% for the first time since 2010 as the central bank's monetary policy committee (MPC) cut repo rates by 25 basis points (bps) to 5.75% in order to address growth concerns. The RBI has played conservative in announcing a rate cut of just 25 basis points.

##### **Details:**

- With inflation well under the benchmark figure of 4%, the stage was probably set for the RBI to spring a surprise but it chose to play conservative. Maybe the idea is to keep the powder dry for a further rate cut, if needed, in the next policy.
- Repo rate is the price commercial banks pay to the RBI for short-term funds.
- The stance of the policy has also been changed from neutral to accommodative, which means a hike in interest rates is ruled out.
- The decision to cut interest rate was unanimous among the MPC members.
- The RBI has revised GDP growth projection for the current financial year from 7.2% to 7%.

- The RBI's decision to do away with its charges on RTGS/ NEFT (Real Time Gross Settlement System/National Electronic Funds Transfer) transactions is welcome provided it can, again, ensure that banks pass on the benefit to customers.
- The central bank has also proposed measures such as a reduction in the leverage ratio under Basel norms for banks, which will increase their lendable resources.
- The headline inflation trajectory remains below the target even after taking into account the expected transmission of the past two policy rate cuts. Hence, there is scope to boost aggregate demand and, in particular, private investment activity, while remaining consistent with the mandate of flexible inflation targeting, the RBI Governor said.
- There is enough in the latest policy to indicate that the RBI's focus is now on growth.

### **What are the possible implications of the rate cut?**

- The rate cut could reduce EMIs on housing, vehicle and personal loans if banks pass on the benefit.
- In terms of the sectors, real estate, NBFC, banking and auto would be key beneficiaries of rate cut.
- A rate cut generally augers well for companies which are debt-laden (as it reduces interest cost).
- It is good for banks as well as NBFCs as it brings down the cost of funds for them.
- For the real estate sector, a fall in interest rates could also mean lower EMIs.
- Following the rate cut, the bond and the forex markets reacted positively.
- The yield on 10 year benchmark government bond fell.
- However, this is bad news, especially for senior citizens dependant on income from fixed income instruments.

### **Way forward:**

- The one area where the RBI has some work to do is in the transmission of rates. By its own admission, only 21 of the cumulative 50 basis points rate cut effected by the RBI in the February and April policies has been passed on to borrowers by banks.
- The excuse from banks, at least in the last few months, was that liquidity was tight and so deposit rates could not be cut. However, liquidity has considerably improved and more so with the new government loosening the purse strings.
- A pickup in the pace of monetary transmission would be one of the key drivers in supporting the growth estimates for the year.
- With the RBI having done its bit, the focus shifts to the Finance Ministry.

## **F. Tidbits**

### **1. Mega CCTV project draws flak**

- Raising concerns of the creation of a 'surveillance state' with the planned installation of up to 1.4 lakh CCTV cameras in Delhi, privacy advocacy group Internet Freedom Foundation (IFF) sent a legal notice to Chief Minister Kejriwal calling upon him to halt the project.
- The letter alleged that the policy was pushed through in an opaque manner without public consultation or feasibility studies.
- It highlighted the lack of legal standing for the 'Standard Operating Procedure', which acts as the governing framework for the policy.
- It also raised concerns on the lack of safeguards regarding whom the footage may be shared with, duration for which the footage will be stored, and the rights of residents to access or seek deletion of the footage.
- The absence of these safeguards will lead to the creation of a powerful surveillance architecture that will inevitably be prone to misuse it argued.
- It claimed that there is emerging global acknowledgement that CCTVs have little to no impact in



acting as a deterrent or reducing the incidence of crime.

## 2. NGT forms panel to discuss plea seeking ban on plastic packaging

- Following a plea seeking a ban on the plastic packaging of food products, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) has constituted an expert committee to ascertain whether further norms are required to restrict the use of plastic packaging.
- A Bench headed by NGT chairperson constituted the panel comprising representatives from the Central Pollution Control Board, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), Bureau of Indian Standards and the Directorate of Health Services.
- It directed the FSSAI to be the nodal agency for coordination and compliance of the order.
- The directions came when the green panel was hearing a plea moved by NGO Him Jagriti Uttaranchal Welfare Society that sought a ban on the use of plastic bottle and multi-layered or pet bottles.
- The NGO, however, contended that the Ministry had only focused on waste management and not on the issue of restrictions to be imposed on the use of plastic as packaging material.
- The NGT also noted the submissions made by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change pertaining to the fact that phasing out multi-layered plastic may not be immediately possible without alternatives.

## G. Prelims Facts

### 1. Sambar deer

- The sambar is a large deer native to the Indian subcontinent, southern China, and Southeast Asia
- Populations have declined substantially due to severe hunting, insurgency, and industrial exploitation of habitat.
- It is listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List since 2008.
- Sambar is a nocturnal animal.
- The name sambar is also sometimes used to refer to the Philippine deer, called the "Philippine sambar" and the Javan rusa, called the "Sunda sambar".

## H. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

Q1) Consider the following statements:

1. River Sabarmati originates in the Aravalli Range.
2. It is a major East flowing river.

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: a**

**Explanation:**

The Sabarmati River is one of the major west-flowing rivers in India. It originates in the Aravalli Range of

the Udaipur District of Rajasthan and meets the Gulf of Khambhat of Arabian Sea.

**Q2) Which of the following is a judicial writ issued as a command to an inferior court or ordering a person to perform a public or statutory duty?**

- a. Quo Warranto
- b. Certiorari
- c. Habeas Corpus
- d. Mandamus

**Answer: d**

**Explanation:**

Mandamus means “we command”. It is a judicial writ issued as a command to an inferior court or ordering a person to perform a public or statutory duty. This writ is a command issued by court to a public official, public body, corporation, inferior court, tribunal or government asking them to perform.

**Q3) Consider the following statements:**

- 1. The Demands for Grants are presented to the Rajya Sabha along with the Annual Financial Statement.
- 2. The Speaker shall decide whether or not a cut motion is admissible.

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

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

**Answer: b**

**Explanation:**

Article 113 of the Constitution mandates that the estimates of expenditure from the Consolidated Fund of India included in the Annual Financial Statement and required to be voted by the Lok Sabha are submitted in the form of Demands for Grants. The Demands for Grants are presented to the Lok Sabha along with the Annual Financial Statement. Parliament being the authority to check the expenditure of the government may not approve all demands. Cut motions are motions in the parliament moved to reduce the amount of demand.

**Q4) Mars Atmosphere and Volatile Evolution (MAVEN) mission was developed by**

- a. Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)
- b. National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)
- c. European Space Agency (ESA)
- d. Roscosmos State Corporation for Space Activities (Roscosmos)

**Answer: b**

**Explanation:**

Mars Atmosphere and Volatile Evolution (MAVEN) mission was developed by NASA to study the Martian atmosphere while orbiting Mars.

## I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Marginal Cost of Funds based Lending Rate (MCLR) has failed to perform as an effective and transparent policy transmission benchmark. Two previous interest rate cuts by the central bank have failed to meaningfully bring the lending rates down. Critically Analyse. (15 Marks, 250 Words)
2. Critically evaluate the National Education Policy 2019. (15 Marks, 250 Words)