

22 June 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Amid protests, triple talaq Bill introduced

What's in the news?

- In a recent development, the Narendra Modi government introduced **The Muslim Women**

(Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2019, also known as the triple talaq Bill, in the Lok Sabha, amid protests by Opposition members who said it violated the Constitution.

- The Bill, which is the BJP-led government's first legislation in the second term, was introduced after the Opposition asked for a division of votes.
- **The treasury won with 186 “ayes” to the 74 Opposition “nays”.**

Large number of cases of triple talaq reported in the country:

- Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad, who introduced the Bill, said the legislation was meant to ensure gender justice and equality.
- The Bill was not about religion but a **“question of dignity of women and we are committed to safeguarding [it]”**.
- **There were 543 cases of triple talaq reported in the country.**
- Even after the Supreme Court banned the practice, over 200 cases were reported and this necessitated, in his view, a Bill that addressed the issue.
- Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said, **“The job of Parliament is to legislate, and it is up to courts to interpret the law.”**

Opposition that the bill faced in Parliament:

- Several Opposition members stood up to protest as soon as Mr. Prasad was asked by Speaker Om Birla to table the Bill.
- The Speaker asked Shashi Tharoor of the Congress, N.K. Premachandran of the Revolutionary Socialist Party and Asaduddin Owaisi of the the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) to present their views.
- **Opposition by Shashi Tharoor:**
- Tharoor said he was against triple talaq, already voided by the Supreme Court, but **opposed the Bill as it conflated civil and criminal laws.**
- The Bill was a “textbook example of class legislation” as it was pointed at one community — the Muslims.
- **Opposition by Mr. Owaisi:**
- Owaisi said the BJP's “affection” for Muslim women and its advocacy of gender justice were suspect, considering the party's opposition to the entry of Hindu women into the Sabarimala temple.
- The Bill violated constitutional rights as it stipulated a three-year jail term for men, whereas a similar offence by non-Muslim men attracted only a year in jail.
- **Opposition by Mr. Premachandran:**
- Premachandran made similar points against the Bill, which had faced objections from Opposition parties from the beginning.
- They had claimed that jail term for a man for divorcing his wife was legally untenable.

2. Jumbo ‘yatra’ comes in for flak

What's in the news?

- An animal rights group recently filed a public interest litigation petition in the Gauhati High Court challenging the Assam government's decision to transport four juvenile elephants, two of them females, in railway wagons to Ahmedabad in Gujarat for the annual Rath Yatra festival at the Jagannath temple.
- Urmi Mala Das and Nandini Baruah, representing NGO Avinava Prayash, **filed the PIL petition under Article 226 of the Constitution giving High Courts power to issue certain writs.**
- “Permission has been granted to list the PIL on Monday,” said Bhaskar Dev Konwar, appearing for the petitioners.
- Further, another petition against the shifting of elephants was filed by Sangeeta Iyer, a Canada-based

activist, before the High Court via email. The petition is yet to be accepted.

- The order for dispatching the elephants is being processed by the Conservator of Forests (Eastern Assam Circle) after it was signed by Ranjana Gupta, the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife).
- **The elephants are to be transported from eastern Assam's Tinsukia by train to Ahmedabad, covering 3,106 km.**

Case of Violation of Norms:

- The petitioners have contended that the decision of the State government is in violation of the relevant provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and relevant orders of the Supreme Court in this regard.
- **Moreover, the dispatch of the elephants in railway wagons in the prevailing heatwave conditions in north Indian States, would subject the animals to extreme stress, pain and cruelty and they may not survive the long journey.**

What did the Petitioners Say?

- “The four elephants belong to private owners. It appears that two of the elephants were not captive born but were caught from the wild and domesticated. Microchips were implanted on the two elephants in June 2015 and ownership certificates for the said elephants have also been issued specially to facilitate their transportation to Ahmedabad.”
- **The petitioners also contended that 53 elephants from Assam given on lease to other States haven't been returned.** The growth of a “big black marketing racket in regard to transportation of elephants from Assam and Arunachal Pradesh” has come to light, they said.
- Further, it is important to note that the elephants in question are being transferred to Ahmedabad on a six-month lease.

A Brief Note on the Indian Elephant:

- The Indian elephant is a Schedule-I animal under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, and Section 9 of the Act prohibits their capture from the wild.
- Capturing of wild elephants is permitted only under very limited circumstances as provided in Section 11 and 12 of the Act.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. India likely to raise terror, financial crimes at G20 meet

What's in the news?

- In a recent development, it has emerged that **India is likely to raise issues of terrorism, energy security and climate change financing, and call for stricter international laws on economic fugitives when Prime Minister Narendra Modi visits Osaka for the G20 summit of the world's largest economies.**
- This summit is scheduled to be held on June 28-29th, 2019.
- Former Commerce Minister Suresh Prabhu indicated that the government might still be open to negotiation on the two major issues of e-commerce and data localisation.
- As a matter of fact, Mr. Suresh Prabhu said that both policies, which have come in for severe attack from several western countries, were still being debated within the country.
- Suresh Prabhu also went on to add that “We have certain views on e-commerce and data localisation. Those issues are being debated and discussed at various forums within the country. As far as G20 is

concerned, we will put forward our views as they are emanating from the discussion within the country.”

Theme of this year’s Summit:

- This year’s summit under Japanese Presidency has the theme of “**Human centred future society**” and will take up digital economy, artificial intelligence, global health, ageing and marine plastic waste as subjects of deliberation.
- Japan’s Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, in a speech made recently, laid the agenda for the summit and highlighted the global nature of data as opposed to its localisation.
- It is important to note that **the Government of India is bracing for pressure on its data localisation guidelines at the G20 summit, given an outcry particularly from the United States and Japan on the Reserve Bank’s circular last year (2018) that stipulated that all “data relating to payment systems” must be “stored in a system only in India.”**
- Abe announced that he would push for a “**Data Free Flow with Trust,**” or **DFFT system.** Making a veiled reference to the Indian plan of a “single closed-off room”, he said data localisation would result in “immeasurable losses”.
- Diplomatic sources confirmed that the DFFT would be on the agenda to be adopted by the G20 nations.
- India has also faced bilateral backlash from the U.S. on the guidelines. While the State Department denied reports that it would link data localisation laws to curbing H1-B visas, U.S. officials have made it clear to New Delhi that they expect a change in the guidelines proposed by the RBI.

2. U.S. keen to accelerate ties in wake of huge Modi mandate

What’s in the news?

- The U.S. wants to use Secretary of State Michael Pompeo’s visit to New Delhi to capitalise on the early days of Modi 2.0 and accelerate its ties with India.
- However, **trade concerns and India’s planned purchase of the S-400 missile shield from Russia remain problematic.**

Important Statements Made:

- “We’re at a high point in the U.S.-India Strategic Partnership, and we think we have an unprecedented opportunity to broaden and deepen that relationship,” a Senior State Department official, who did not want to be named, told reporters on a briefing call recently.
- “And so we want to seize this moment early in his second administration to accelerate what has been the upward trajectory of our relationship and to set some ambitious goals,” the official said, referring to Prime Minister Narendra Modi having secured a strong mandate after the recent elections.
- The State Department confirmed that Mr. Pompeo will hold talks with Prime Minister Modi and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, who was described by the official as “**one of the visionaries behind the expansion of the U.S.-India Strategic Partnership.**”
- **It is important to note that Mr. Pompeo will also deliver a speech on the future of the relationship in New Delhi and discuss economic aspects of the relationship with business leaders and industry members.**
- “Our companies have concerns over market access and the lack of a level playing field in important sectors, and recent Indian government measures, such as increasing tariffs on a range of products, restricting e-commerce operations, and limiting the free flow of data are particularly problematic – not just for U.S. companies, I would say, but for Indian companies and their long-term competitiveness,” the official said. “We want both of our nations to thrive.”
- With regard to Iran, **Pompeo is expected to discuss oil and India’s development of Iran’s**

3. Iran insists U.S. drone violated air space, vows to defend borders

What's in the news?

- Iran vowed recently to defend its borders after downing a U.S. drone it insisted had violated the country's airspace, after it emerged that President Donald Trump had approved and then called off retaliatory strikes on Iranian targets.
- The downing of the drone — which Washington insists was above international waters but Iran says was within its airspace — **has seen tensions between the two countries spike further after a series of attacks on tankers in the Gulf which the U.S. has blamed on Tehran.**
- The commander of the aerospace arm of Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards said the **drone was warned twice before it was downed over the Gulf of Oman.**

Actions Taken by the U.S. President:

- Under pressure to respond to the high-stakes incident near the strategic Strait of Hormuz, Mr. Trump issued orders for retaliatory strikes, but then called it off.
- The U.S. President had struck a combative tone in his public comments before rowing back. **"Iran made a very big mistake!"** he tweeted in response to news Iran had shot down the Global Hawk surveillance aircraft.
- "This country will not stand for it, that I can tell you," he said later at the White House.

Growing fears of an open conflict:

- But as the pre-dawn incident whipped up fears of open conflict between the U.S. and its declared foe Iran, Mr. Trump moved swiftly to dial back tensions. "I find it hard to believe it was intentional, if you want to know the truth," Mr. Trump said.
- Following the President's mixed message, the U.S. special representative on Iran, Brian Hook, said, "Our diplomacy does not give Iran the right to respond with military force." He gave this statement to reporters in Saudi Arabia. "Iran needs to meet diplomacy with diplomacy, not military force."
- Iran said it had called in the Swiss Ambassador, whose country has represented U.S. interests since the severance of diplomatic relations in the aftermath of the Islamic revolution of 1979, to issue a formal protest.
- Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi provided the Ambassador with "indisputable" evidence that the drone had violated Iranian airspace, the Foreign Ministry said.
- Araghchi "reiterated that Iran does not seek a war and conflict in the Persian Gulf", but warned: **"The Islamic Republic of Iran would not hesitate for a moment to decisively defend its territory against any aggression."**
- Iranian television later broadcast images of what it said was "debris" of the downed drone recovered from Iran's territorial waters.
- "The debris was floating. We recovered it from the sea inside our territorial waters," a general said.

Case of an 'Unprovoked attack'?

- The Pentagon denounced the "unprovoked attack," claiming that the Navy drone was 34 km from Iran when destroyed by a surface-to-air missile.
- It published a map showing the flight path of the drone, which indicated that it travelled outside of Iranian waters and included a photograph showing coordinates when it was downed.
- Zarif provided different coordinates for the downing of the drone by a domestically-manufactured Khordad 3 air defence battery.
- **The drone's downing came at a time when Iran was already accused by Washington of**

carrying out attacks on tankers in the congested shipping lanes heading out of the Gulf through the Strait of Hormuz.

4. FATF warns Pak., but keeps it off the blacklist

What's in the news?

- Pakistan has avoided being placed on the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) blacklist during the recently concluded multilateral financial watchdog's plenary meetings in Orlando, Florida.
- However, Pakistan, which continued to remain on a greylist, was given a warning at the end of the plenary session and told that it lacked a proper understanding of transnational terrorist financing.

Indian efforts:

- The mention of transnational terrorist financing is significant in light of India's efforts to isolate Pakistan on the international stage in the context of its support for terror in Kashmir.
- **“The FATF expresses concern that not only did Pakistan fail to complete its action plan items with January deadlines, it also failed to complete its action plan items due May 2019. The FATF strongly urges Pakistan to swiftly complete its action plan by October 2019 when the last set of action plans are set to expire. Otherwise, the FATF will decide the next step at that time for insufficient progress,”** a FATF statement read.
- It is important to note that in June 2018, Pakistan was placed on a FATF greylist of countries whose laws do not adequately deal with money laundering and terrorist financing and agreed to a 10-point action plan to strengthen its anti-money laundering and combating the financing of terrorism and proliferation regime.
- The FATF said in a statement that while Pakistan had taken steps to improve its AML/CFT regime, “it does not demonstrate a proper understanding of Pakistan's transnational TF [terrorist financing] risk.”
- When the last FATF plenary session concluded in February 2019, days after a terrorist attack killed over forty Indian security personnel in Pulwama, Jammu and Kashmir, **Pakistan had avoided being blacklisted despite pressure from India.**
- Pakistan-based terror outfit, Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) claimed responsibility for the attack. However it also did not take Pakistan off of the greylist as the country had wanted.
- In April 2019, Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi had said that **being greylisted could cost Pakistan \$10 billion a year.**

Blacklist, greylist criteria:

- To stay off of the FATF blacklist, the support of at least three of a total of 36 (excluding two regional organisations) FATF members is required.
- Fifteen members need to support a country's move off of the greylist, as per the FATF charter.
- FATF continued to call for countermeasures against Iran and North Korea.
- The FATF noted that Iran had not completed its action plan which expired in January 2018 and listed seven points for Iran to complete, noting however that Iran had made progress, including by passing the Anti-Money Laundering Act.
- Countermeasures against Iran would continue to be suspended, a statement released said, with **“the exception of FATF calling upon members and urging all jurisdictions to require increased supervisory examination for branches and subsidiaries of financial institutions based in Iran, in line with the February 2019 Public Statement.”**

5. India placed on 'Tier 2' in human trafficking report

What's in the news?

- In a recent development, the U.S. State Department has released its 2019 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report, highlighting the need for action against domestic trafficking.
- **India continued to be placed in Tier 2 on the country trafficking scale.**
- The 2019 report highlights the national nature of trafficking: in 77% of the cases, victims are trafficked within their own countries of residence, rather than across borders.
- Victims of sex trafficking were more likely to be trafficked across borders while victims of forced labour were typically exploited within their own countries, the report says, citing International Labour Organisation (ILO) data.

A Look at the three categories:

- The report categorises countries into three groups based on the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), U.S. legislation enacted in 2000.
- The categorisation is based on efforts to meet minimum standards for the elimination of human trafficking.
- **India was placed (i.e., remained) in Tier 2, which comprises “countries whose governments do not fully meet the TVPA’s minimum standards but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards.”**
- The recommendations for India include amending the definition of trafficking in Section 370 of the Penal Code to “include forced labour trafficking and ensure that force, fraud, or coercion are not required to prove a child sex trafficking offence,” and to establish Anti-Human Trafficking Units in all districts with funding and clear mandates.

6. ‘No cap on H-1B visas in reprisal for data norms’

What's in the news?

- The U.S. State Department has said that it is not considering capping the number of H-1B visas for countries that adopt laws that restrict data being taken out of their borders (‘data localisation’).
- The comments are a reaction to a report by the news agency Reuters, which said the U.S. was considering capping H-1Bs at 10-15% of all H-1Bs for countries that had a data localisation policy.
- **“The U.S. has no plans to place caps on H-1B work visas for nations that force foreign companies to store data locally,”** a State Department spokesperson said.
- “The Trump Administration’s ‘**Buy American and Hire American**’ executive order called for a broad review of U.S. worker visa programmes, including the H-1B programme,” the statement from the spokesperson said, adding, “This review is not targeted at a specific country and is completely separate from our ongoing discussions with India about the importance of ensuring the free flow of data across borders.”

Permanent residency:

- It is important to note that **the H-1B visa allows temporary employment of foreign workers in U.S.- based firms, in occupations that “require the theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialised knowledge and a bachelor’s degree or higher in the specific specialty, or its equivalent,”** as per the U.S. Citizenship and Information Services (USCIS).
- The H-1B, while being a temporary visa, is a pathway to permanent residency (a “Green Card”) in the U.S.
- There is a Congressionally-mandated cap of 65,000 H-1B visas under the general category and a further 20,000 for advanced degree holders.
- However, there are no country-wise caps for H-1B.
- Some H-1Bs — such as those for academic, research jobs and non-profit organisation positions —

are cap exempt.

- The Trump administration had taken several steps to tighten the screws on the H-1B programme, since U.S. President Donald Trump signed the 'Buy American and Hire American' order in April 2017.
- Some of these changes have focussed on combating fraud (such as through site visits) and ensuring that the probability of higher qualified workers getting visas is increased (such as by reversing the order in which general and master's degree H-1B lotteries are conducted each year).

Less attractive:

- Other changes have made the H-1B programme less attractive.
- For instance, an attempt to prevent H-1B spouses from getting a work permits (an 'H4 EAD') is in the works and could severely alter family dynamics and the ability of foreign worker families in the U.S. to support themselves.
- The Reuters report came days before U.S. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo is due in New Delhi in preparation for talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi, U.S. President Donald Trump and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in Osaka, Japan on June 28-29, 2019, where they would discuss the strategy for the Indo-Pacific.
- **Pompeo's discussions in New Delhi are also expected to feature a list of contentious topics between India and the U.S., including data localisation, 5G telecommunication, India's plans to purchase the S-400 Triumf missile defence system from Russia.**

C. GS3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. GST Council eases returns filing process

What's in the news?

- The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council, at its 35th meeting recently, took a number of decisions aimed at easing the registration and returns filing process, including the **use of Aadhaar for registrations, introduction of e-invoicing and setting a deadline for the roll-out of the single-return filing system.**
- The meeting, chaired by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, decided to allow the use of Aadhaar as the identity and address proof for registration for the GST.
- As a matter of fact, **no other documents would be required, and authentication can be done using a one-time password.**

2. Kaleshwaram project inaugurated

What's in the news?

- The Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project (KLIP), which is claimed to be **the world's largest multi-stage and multi-purpose lift irrigation scheme**, was inaugurated recently by Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhara Reddy at Medigadda, in Jayashankar-Bhupalapally district, where the first barrage of the project is located.
- **It is meant to irrigate over 37 lakh acres of new and existing ayacuts (The area served by an irrigation project such as a canal, dam or a tank) and supply drinking water to Hyderabad and villages en route.**
- **The Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project (KLIP) is estimated at a little over Rs 80,000 crore. This will provide irrigation facility for two crops in a year. It will also supply 40 TMC of water**

to the ambitious Mission Bhagiratha drinking water supply project.

- It will also help in supplying drinking water to one crore population in Greater Hyderabad on a daily basis, as also 16 TMC of water to thousands of industries in the state.

Seeking National Status:

- The Telangana government has also requested the Centre to declare the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project, which will commence pumping shortly, **a national project and fund its entire cost.**
- The government took up the project, estimated at ₹88,000 crore, as the irrigation sector had been neglected in the combined State.
- Telangana also needed additional funds to complete the project, it said.
- Ramakrishna Rao, Principal Secretary, who represented the State at the pre-Budget meeting convened by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in New Delhi recently, said the cost of the mega project had been met from borrowings by the Kaleshwaram Corporation but the debt servicing burden was huge and thus, the State had requested the Centre to grant the project national status.

A Look at Other projects:

- Presenting other issues pertaining to the State, Mr. Ramakrishna Rao reminded that the NITI Aayog had recommended special assistance of ₹19,205 crore to **Mission Bhagiratha**, intended to supply piped drinking water to every household, and ₹5,000 crore to **Mission Kakatiya**, meant to restore over 45,000 tanks in the State.
- He urged the Centre to make a provision for the special assistance in the 2019-20 Union Budget. The State sought an assistance of ₹50 crore to each of the backward districts as promised under the **P. Reorganisation Act** and urged that the package be extended to all districts of the State as the erstwhile nine districts had now been divided into 32.
- Presenting the State's views on the coming Union Budget, **the Telangana government said investment in both the public and private sectors should be promoted to revive growth momentum, and sought greater involvement of the States as much of the economic activity would lie in the domain of the States.**

3. 'Only one in four received PM-KISAN money'

What's in the news?

- While the Union government has expanded the PM-KISAN scheme to all farmers with great fanfare, it is important to note that **only one in four of the intended beneficiaries have received income support from the scheme so far.**
- This important fact was pointed out by Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar when he told the Rajya Sabha recently.

An Assurance given by the Centre:

- With a long verification process delaying payments, the Centre has now announced that farmers will get benefits retrospectively from the time their names are uploaded in the database, rather than from the time their details are verified.
- The **Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi Scheme**, announced in the last interim budget of the previous government, provides an annual sum of ₹6000 to land-owning farmers in three instalments of ₹2,000 each.
- The new government has extended the scheme to larger farmers, raising the total number of beneficiaries to 14.5 crore families.
- So far, 3.29 crore farmers have received the first instalment, while 2.85 crore beneficiaries have

received the second, according to the data Mr. Tomar provided in Parliament.

- **In total, the Centre has disbursed ₹12,305 crore to farmers.**

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. SC halts road works through tiger reserves

What's in the news?

- The Supreme Court recently ordered an immediate halt to the construction of a road that passes through a corridor between the **Rajaji and Corbett Tiger Reserves**.
- “There appears to be numerous violations of the Forest Conservation Act,” it said.
- A Vacation Bench of Justices Deepak Gupta and Surya Kant issued notice to the Uttarakhand government, asking it to reply, within three weeks, to a report filed by the court-appointed Central Empowered Committee (CEC).

What did the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) say in its report?

- **The road, which traverses a “critical” corridor between the Rajaji Tiger Reserve and the Corbett Tiger Reserve, is being built without the statutory approval of the National Board for Wildlife**, the CEC said in its report.
- “As per the 2014 data of All India Tiger Estimation, the area supports up to four tigers per 100 sq km...,” it said.
- The CEC sought an immediate halt to the construction activities in the Rajaji Tiger Reserve as it would “adversely impact the habitat and wildlife of the ecologically sensitive area”.
- The court found out that the neither the advice of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), nor permission form the Wildlife Board had been taken.

2. Forest cover up by 1%, says Javadekar

What's in the news?

- Union Minister for Environment Prakash Javadekar told the Lok Sabha that India's forest cover was up by 1% in the last one year, while former Minister and his own party's MP Maneka Gandhi disputed the fact, cautioning him that satellite imagery could be misleading, with sugar cane crops being mistaken for trees.
- Responding to supplementaries during Question Hour, Mr. Javadekar said **for one tree chopped for development work, three to four were planted either in the same area or elsewhere**.
- Responding to Ms. Gandhi, he said satellite imagery was taken at regular intervals and it was unlikely that sugar cane crops were counted as such.

A Look at some important figures:

- According to a latest report, over 24.39% of the country's geographical area now consists of green cover.
- 125 crore trees would be planted along highways to increase the green cover.
- Recently, a private weather agency's report on climate change observed that **11 out of 15 hottest places in the world are from India. This agency is named “El Dorado Weather”**.
- Javadekar clearly pointed out that the government of India did not agree with this private weather agency's report on climate change that 11 out of 15 hottest places in the world are from India. **He went on to add that the data on its website vary every day.**
- He said, “**The report of hottest places — 11 out of 15 hottest places in the world are from India**”

— is based on a newspaper article quoting a private weather forecasting agency El Dorado Weather. The agency in its webpage reports the 15 places with maximum temperature of the last 24 hours on a daily basis and the hottest places vary each day. The government does not agree with the findings.”

Category: INTERNAL SECURITY

1. NIA files chargesheet against IS module

What's in the news?

- In a recent development, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) filed a chargesheet against 10 people who were arrested from Delhi and Amroha in Uttar Pradesh last year (2018) for allegedly propagating the Islamic State ideology.
- The NIA said the accused were preparing to make remote-controlled IEDs and wanted to establish the 'IS Caliphate' by resorting to large scale terrorist attacks in and around the National Capital Region.
- The agency filed the chargesheet in a special NIA court at Patiala House in Delhi where it said “the group wanted to manufacture IEDs, to be detonated by remote-controlled devices, of more than 100 metres range.”
- It said two of the accused also recorded videos that were to be published after their suicide attacks.
- The accused against whom chargesheet was filed are Mufti Mohd Suhail (30) Anas Younus (21) Zubair Malik (22) Rashid Zafar Raq (24) Md. Saqib (26) Md. Absar, Said (24), Md. Gufran (25) Md. Faiz (25) and Naim Choudhary (22).
- **NIA had registered the case on December 20, 2018 against Mufti Suhail and others on the allegation that he had formed an IS module with others to commit terror activities and the module was amassing weapons and explosives.**
- “They had named this module as ‘Harkat-ul-Harb-E-Islam’ (Movement for War of Islam). This group owed its allegiance to IS and wanted to establish an IS Caliphate in India by resorting to large scale terrorist attacks in and around National Capital Region.
- The group carried out reconnaissance of some locations in and around NCR,” the agency said.
- Searches were conducted at 17 locations on December 26 last year (2018) in Delhi and U.P and 12 pistols, 163 assorted ammunition, one improvised missile launcher, 98 mobile devices/phones, 25 kg of explosive chemicals, hardware/electronic materials including 120 alarm clocks to make IEDs, and incriminating books/material were seized from the premises of the accused persons.
- The module was being guided by three IS handlers based abroad. “The module made extensive use of encrypted social media applications/chat platforms. These have been recovered from their mobile phones,” NIA said.

D. GS4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INDIAN CULTURE

1. Smart diplomacy in five moves

Editorial Analysis:

- Experts opine that the nature and dynamics of Southern Asian geopolitics are undergoing a radical transformation, slowly, steadily and in an irrevocable manner.
- As a matter of fact, one of the world's most volatile regions and hitherto dominated by the United States, Southern Asia is today at an inflection point with far-reaching implications for the states in the region, and for India in particular.
- Having said this, an important question arises: Is New Delhi adequately prepared to weather the incoming geopolitical storm?

A Look at the Prevailing Geopolitics:

(a) Challenges that the U.S. is facing:

- To begin with, there is a sharp, though often understated, great power competition in the region with the U.S. caught between its reluctance to part with its quickly fading glory on the one hand and unwillingness to do what it takes to maintain its regional influence on the other.
- And yet, when challenged by China and Russia in the regional geopolitical landscape, the U.S.'s superpower instinct is to push back, often leading to short-sighted decisions and confused policies.
- Importantly, the resultant geopolitical competition for space, power and influence in the regional scheme of things is undoing the traditional geopolitical certainties in Southern Asia.
- One also observes that Russia and China are jointly and individually challenging the U.S.'s pre-eminence and drafting smaller countries of the region into their bandwagons.

(b) Unipolarity or Multipolarity?

- Despite India's unease and traditional suspicion towards great power system shapers and managers, the simple fact is that a benign unipolarity or a balanced multipolarity with some amount of great power concert is generally better than unbalanced multipolarity.
- Unbalanced multipolarity when combined with a situation of power transition in the regional sub-system, as is perhaps the case today, might prove to be destabilising.
- Currently, we are perhaps at the cusp of such a moment in Southern Asia.

(c) The China pivot:

- It is important to note that Washington's role as the regional pivot and power manager is becoming a thing of the past with Beijing increasingly able and willing to assume that role.
- Regional geopolitics, from Iran to Central Asia and from the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean region, is increasingly being shaped by China.
- China is the new regional hegemon with states in the region jumping on its bandwagon without much resistance.
- When new powers are on an ascendance, its neighbours tend to recalibrate their policies and old partnerships and alliances.
- Regional holdouts and challengers such as India will need to balance themselves tactfully to steer clear of the rising hegemon's ire.

(d) Presence of an extreme trust deficit:

- Yet another feature of the current regional sub-system is the presence of an extreme trust deficit among the various actors in the region. That India and Pakistan, or China and India do not trust each other is not news, but a trust deficit exists between even seemingly congenial partners such as the U.S. and India, Russia and China, and among traditional partners such as Iran and India, and Russia and India.
- Experts opine that the varying degrees of trust deficit when combined with other factors such as unresolved conflicts, misunderstandings or the occurrence of a crisis could easily push the region

towards more conflict and friction, and obviously less cooperation and regional integration.

(e) **Rising war talk in the region:**

- The rising war talk in the region is yet another contemporary feature of the Southern Asian regional sub-system.
- The possibility of a military conflict between Iran and the U.S. (a path the hawks in Washington are pushing U.S. President Donald Trump to pursue) which in turn would draw many more countries in the region into it leading to widespread instability, potential for India-Pakistan border skirmishes and possible escalation, an escalating China-U.S. trade war, and the many proxy and cold wars in Afghanistan and West Asia will keep the temperature high in the region for the foreseeable future.
- In sum, a power transition in the Southern Asian sub-system, an extreme trust deficit and the escalating war talk pose ominous signs for the region.

Looking at the different layers of balancing acts India should take up:

- India is a country that is caught right in the middle of these tectonic developments and that habitually reacts to geopolitical developments with characteristic tardiness.
 - And yet, true to its DNA, India is likely to adopt a slew of balancing acts.
 - This is perhaps the most appropriate strategy to adopt under the circumstances provided it does so with a sense of clarity and purpose instead of merely reacting.
 - There are at least **five layers of balancing acts that India would need to adopt** in order to weather the incoming geopolitical storm.
1. At level one, it would need to balance its innate desire to get closer to the U.S. with the unavoidable necessities of not excessively provoking China both in the maritime and continental domains. Clearly, getting too close to the U.S. will provoke China, and vice versa.
 2. The second layer of this balancing game should drive India's West Asia policy. Here it would have to take care of its energy and other interests (including the Chabahar project) with Iran and not alienate the U.S., Saudi Arabia and Israel by doing so. While Iran's share in India's energy imports is steadily decreasing, alienating Iran might not suit India's strategic interests in the longer run.
 3. As a third balancing act, dealing with the Russia-China partnership will be crucial for India's continental strategy, be it with regard to arms sales, the Afghan question or checking Chinese dominance of the region. As a matter of fact, New Delhi should be clever enough to exploit the not-so-apparent fissures between Beijing and Moscow. A related concern should be the growing relationship between Pakistan and Russia which must be dealt with by smart diplomacy rather than outrage.
 4. Yet another layer that requires careful balancing by India is the strategic partnership between Pakistan and China. While Pakistan is the revisionist power in the region, China, being a rising superpower and an already status quoist power in the region, could potentially be persuaded to check Pakistan's revisionist tendencies. This again requires a great deal of subtle effort from New Delhi to convince Beijing that it has great stakes in regional strategic stability. **What must be noted is that both Beijing and New Delhi, despite their sharp differences and unavoidable strategic competition, share a stake in the region's stability. Therefore even a small measure of rapprochement between them, as it seemingly exists today, could stabilise the region to a great extent.**

Handling the issue of Afghanistan:

- Finally, if India is serious about having a say in Afghanistan's future, it would need to enact several balancing acts there: between Russia and China, China and Pakistan, the Taliban and Kabul, and the Taliban and Pakistan.
- In a constantly changing Afghan geopolitical landscape, the contents of India's interests should also

evolve.

- New Delhi should keep in mind that it must, by all means, be careful to avoid getting caught in a nutcracker geopolitical situation in the region.
- Engaging in a delicate balancing game is undeniably the need of the hour, and let us remember that balancing such seeming contradictions is what smart diplomacy is meant to achieve.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Why South Asia must cooperate

Editorial Analysis:

- It is important to note that **South Asia covers only about 3.5% of the world's land surface area but hosts a fourth of its population.**
- This fact makes South Asia a region of significant importance for international development.
- However, in spite of the geographic proximity that countries in this region enjoy and their common socio-cultural bonds, this is one of the world's least integrated regions.
- Intra-regional trade is a meagre 5% of the total trade these countries do globally, while intra-regional investment is less than 1% of the region's overall global investment.
- **South Asia's average GDP per capita is only about 9.64% of the global average.**
- Accounting for more than 30% of the world's poor, the region faces myriad economic and environmental challenges.

Lack of initiatives:

- While the countries share a host of common development challenges, economic cooperation remains less than adequate.
- While a few noteworthy regional initiatives such as the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) Initiative have been undertaken to bring the countries closer together, economically and socially, there is scope for much more.
- As a matter of fact, **for a region with common development challenges of inequality, poverty, weak governance and poor infrastructure, a shared vision of attaining the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provides enormous opportunities for cooperation, collaboration, and convergence (3C).**
- It is important to note that compared to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were a set of eight objectives to be achieved by developing nations with support from developed nations by 2015, **the SDGs are more universal, inclusive and integrated in nature.**
- The 17 goals and their 169 targets are inter-connected and cannot be implemented by countries working in isolation.
- Many are transnational in nature and require regional efforts.
- As a matter of fact, South Asian countries could benefit a lot by adopting a regional framework of cooperation that can support, strengthen and stimulate the SDGs.
- The SDGs highlight not only the importance of regional approach towards achieving the goals but also the regional synergy and resulting positive value additions towards achieving the SDG 2030 Agenda.
- **In the SDG Index 2018, which is an assessment of countries' progress, among 156 countries only two South Asian countries, Bhutan and Sri Lanka, are in the top 100. India is ranked 112th.**
- Most South Asian countries have made good progress in ending extreme poverty, but they face persistent challenges to goals related to industry, innovation and infrastructure, zero hunger, gender equality, education, sustainable cities and communities and decent work and economic growth.

- These apart, most of South Asia continues to be vulnerable to climate change and climate-induced natural disasters.

Varying performances:

- A closer look at the country-level data shows that **India is performing well in Goal 1 (no poverty), Goal 6 (clean water and sanitation), Goal 12 (sustainable consumption and production), Goal 13 (climate action) and Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions).**
- However, India is doing poorly in goal 2 (zero hunger), Goal 5 (gender equality) and Goal 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure).
- Like India, Bangladesh is doing well in Goals 1, 6, 12 and 13 but poorly in Goals 2 and 9, and lagging behind in Goal 7 (affordable and clean energy).
- Further, while doing well in Goals 1 and 12, Pakistan needs improvement in Goals 2, 4, 5 and 9, similar to India and Bangladesh. It also needs improved performance with respect to Goal 8 (decent work and economic growth).
- Furthermore, it is important to point out that there are a lot of similarities among these three big economies of South Asia with respect to achieving some specific SDGs as well as exhibiting poor performance in some common goals.
- **A regional strategic approach to tackle common development challenges can bring enormous benefits to South Asia.**
- SDGs related to energy, biodiversity, infrastructure, climate resilience and capacity development are transnational, and here policy harmonisation can play a pivotal role in reducing duplication and increasing efficiency.

Case in Point: Bangladesh

- In a study titled 'SDGs Needs Assessment and Financing Strategy: Bangladesh Perspective', Bangladesh has undertaken exemplary initiatives for analysing its available resources and additional funding requirements for SDG implementation, suggesting that the country requires an additional \$928 billion to fully implement the SDGs.
- The study identifies five possible sources for SDGs financing: public sector, private sector, public-private partnership, external sector and non-government organisations.
- On the other hand, data for many of the SDG targets and indicators for the Maldives are unavailable.
- Similarly, India has formulated some pragmatic plans and initiatives to improve food and nutrition security from which many of the neighbouring countries can benefit.
- Experts point out that to address institutional and infrastructural deficits, **South Asian countries need deeper regional cooperation.**
- On financing the SDGs in South Asia, countries can work towards increasing the flow of intra-regional FDI. The private sector too can play a vital role in resource mobilisation.

Concluding Remarks:

- The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the platform for regional economic cooperation in this region, has become moribund and remains unsuccessful in promoting regional economic cooperation.
- As a matter of fact, if the countries of South Asia, the fastest growing region of the world, can come to a common understanding on regional integration and cooperation in achieving the SDGs, it can unleash a powerful synergistic force that can finally make South Asia converge.
- **In conclusion, a convergence towards achieving a common socio-economic agenda gives hope that no one in South Asia will be left behind in the journey towards eradicating poverty and enduring dignity to all.**

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. A stable planet

Editorial Analysis:

- Experts point out that the key message from the **UN's World Population Prospects 2019 report** is that national leaders must redouble their efforts to raise education, health and living standards for people everywhere.

Looking at where India stands?

- It is important to note that India is projected to become the most populous country by 2027 surpassing China, and host 1.64 billion people by 2050.
- As a matter of fact, the world as a whole could be home to 8.5 billion people in just over a decade from now, and the number could go up to 9.7 billion by mid-century.
- The projections should be viewed in perspective, considering that alarmist Malthusian fears of inability to provide for more than a billion people on earth did not come true.
- Yet, there are strong arguments in favour of stabilising population numbers by raising the quality of life of people, and achieving sustainable development that will not destroy the environment.

What does the UN Report show?

- The UN report shows migration to countries with a falling ratio of working-age people to those above 65 will be steady, as those economies open up to workers to sustain economic production.
- Japan has the lowest such ratio, followed by Europe and the Caribbean; in over three decades, North America, Eastern and Southeastern Asia will join this group.

Looking at the Indian National Scene:

- India meanwhile will have a vast number of young people and insufficient natural resources left for exploitation.
- **However, preparing for the changes and opportunities migration offers will depend on a skills revolution.**
- At the national level, achieving a reduction in fertility rates in States such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh — which are high as per Sample Registration System data — is a challenge for India as it seeks to stabilise population growth.
- This is possible if the State governments set their minds to it.
- They must singularly focus on improving education and health access for women, both of which will help them be gainfully employed.
- On the other hand, a rise in life expectancy has brought with it a policy imperative that is bound to become even more important in coming decades.
- A growing population of older adults is a certainty, and it opens up prospects for employment in many new services catering to them.
- Next, urban facilities have to be reimaged, with an emphasis on access to good, affordable housing and mobility.

Concluding Remarks:

- The Sustainable Development Goals framework provides a roadmap to this new era.
- But progress in poverty reduction, greater equality, better nutrition, universal education and health care, needs state support and strong civil society institutions.

- Making agriculture remunerative and keeping food prices stable are crucial to ensure nutrition for all. India is set to become the most populous nation. For its leaders, improving the quality of life for its people will be a test of political will.

F. Tidbits

Nothing here for today!!!

G. Prelims Facts

Nothing here for today!!!

H. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is an inter-governmental body.
2. The objectives of the FATF are to set standards and promote effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering, terrorist financing and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system.

Which among the above statements is/are **correct**?

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

Ans: b

Explanation:

- The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is an inter-governmental body established in 1989 by the Ministers of its Member jurisdictions.
- The objectives of the FATF are to set standards and promote effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering, terrorist financing and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system.
- The FATF is therefore a “policy-making body” which works to generate the necessary political will to bring about national legislative and regulatory reforms in these areas.

Q2. Consider the following statements:

1. The Indian elephant is a Schedule-I animal under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
2. Section 9 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 prohibits their capture from the wild.

Which among the above statements is/are **correct**?

- a. 1 only
- b. Both 1 and 2
- c. 2 only

d. Neither 1 nor 2

Ans: b

Explanation:

- The Indian elephant is a Schedule-I animal under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
- Section 9 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 prohibits their capture from the wild.
- Capturing of wild elephants is permitted only under very limited circumstances as provided in Section 11 and 12 of the Act.

Q3. Consider the following statements:

1. The National Tiger Conservation Authority is a statutory body under the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change.
2. 'Project Tiger' is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme of the Environment, Forests and Climate Change, providing funding support to tiger range States, for in-situ conservation of tigers in designated tiger reserves.

Which among the above statements is/are *correct*?

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

Ans: b

Explanation:

- The National Tiger Conservation Authority has been fulfilling its mandate within the ambit of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 for strengthening tiger conservation in the country by retaining an oversight through advisories/normative guidelines, based on appraisal of tiger status, ongoing conservation initiatives and recommendations of specially constituted Committees.
- 'Project Tiger' is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme of the Environment, Forests and Climate Change, providing funding support to tiger range States, for in-situ conservation of tigers in designated tiger reserves, and has put the endangered tiger on an assured path of recovery by saving it from extinction.

Q4. What is the theme of the G20 Summit scheduled to be held in Osaka, Japan?

- a. "Human centred future society"
- b. "Inclusive Growth for All"
- c. "Technology and Innovation for All"
- d. "Sustainable and Holistic Development for mankind"

Ans: a

Explanation:

The theme of the G20 Summit to be held in Osaka is "Human centred future society".

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. A significant step in curbing terrorism would be to strike at its root, i.e. at terror funding. Examine. (12.5 Marks, 250 Words)
2. "National leaders must redouble their efforts to raise education, health and living standards for people everywhere." Examine this statement in light of the recently published UN's World Population Prospects 2019 report. (12.5 Marks, 250 Words)

