

25 June 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A. GS1 Related

B. GS2 Related

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. [House panel shies from quantifying black money](#)
2. [Where is NCRB report, asks Azad](#)
3. [Centre sticks to its guns on Special Category Status](#)

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. [Sanctions slapped on Iran's Khamenei](#)
2. [Pak. blacklisting absolutely a possibility: FATF president](#)

C. GS3 Related

ECONOMY

1. [RBI unveils online portal for filing grievances](#)

D. GS4 Related

E. Editorials

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. [A war of masks between Iran and the U.S.](#)

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. [Devoid of principle](#)
2. [Basic needs, basic rights](#)
3. [A sound foundation \(Draft National Policy on Education\)](#)

F. Tidbits

1. [Aadhaar Bill introduced amid Opposition protests](#)
2. [Defaulter count in PSBs has risen 60% since FY15](#)

G. Prelims Facts

1. [Passport Seva Project](#)
2. [NASA's Curiosity finds methane spike on Mars](#)

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

A. GS1 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

B. GS2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. House panel shies from quantifying black money

Context:

The Standing Committee on Finance is hesitant to estimating the quantum of black money in and outside India, stating that different methods by various agencies are yielding vastly differing figures.

Issue:

- The estimates by three institutes have varied significantly from 7% to 120% of the GDP.

- There is a lack of consensus with respect to the most suitable way of arriving at the estimates of unaccounted income in the country.
- The Chief Economic Adviser has opined that there is no scope for arriving at a common estimate of unaccounted income by combining estimates from the reports by these three agencies.

Details:

- The National Institute of Public Finance and Policy, the National Institute of Financial Management and the National Council of Applied Economic Research were relied upon by the standing committee to come up with the estimates of black money/ unaccounted income in India.
- The Standing Committee report has said that the paucity of time and the limited number of stakeholders that could be examined makes the findings only preliminary in nature.
- Various steps taken to curb the generation of black money were also quoted in the report.

Black money:

- Black money is a term used in to refer to money that is not fully legitimate in the hands of the owner or earned from illegal sources.
- The proceeds are usually received in cash from underground economic activity and, as such, are not taxed.
- Black money is one in which ownership is fully or partially illegal.
- Black money is generated in the economy through tax evasion, illegal activities such as money laundering, corruption, smuggling etc.
- It constitutes a financial leakage, as tax income from unreported earnings is not received by the government, thereby constituting a loss of revenue.

2. Where is NCRB report, asks Azad**Context:**

Senior Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad has accused the government of withholding the publication of the annual crime report compiled by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB).

National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB):

- NCRB is an Indian government agency responsible for collecting and analysing crime data as defined by the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Special and Local Laws (SLL).
- It is a part of the Ministry of Home Affairs and is headquartered in Delhi.
- Its primary objective is to create and maintain secure sharable National Databases on crimes and criminals for law enforcement agencies and promote their use for public service delivery.

Issue:

- The annual 'Crime in India' report for the year 2016 was last released in 2017.
- The reports of 2017 and 2018 are yet to be published.
- The leader also accused the government of not publishing reports such as the NCRB Report and the NSSO report that highlighted the unemployment rate in India at a 45-year-high.

Reasons for the delay:

- The government officials informed that 2 states had not sent requisite data for the compilation of the 2017 report while 27 others had sent.
- It was said that the lackadaisical response by West Bengal and Bihar in sending crime data were also

the contributing factors to the indefinite delay in final publication of the report.

- A status report maintained by the NCRB said that there were several inconsistencies and errors provided by States and Union Territories and they were requested to send correct data.

Details:

- In 2017-18, the NCRB in consultation with States and other stakeholders had revised the forms for the Crime in India report to add new categories.
- Earlier, as many as 35% crimes remained in the “unclassified” category.
- The addition of new “crime heads” reduced the unclassified category to 15% of overall crime data.
- Some of the new categories included were: crime against media persons, RTI and social activists, besides persons belonging to Northeast States.
- It will also include crimes by saints, khap panchayat, security guards, proclaimed offenders, persons of political party, illegal immigrants; those committed in schools; those committed by government officials, besides cyber crimes against women and children.
- For the first time, crimes by Northeast insurgents, Left Wing Extremists and Terrorists will be included in the report.

3. Centre sticks to its guns on Special Category Status

Context:

Odisha, Rajasthan, Bihar, Telangana, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and A.P. state governments have been sending requests to the Central government to consider granting them Special Category Status (SCS).

Details:

- In the present circumstances, it is believed that no more states can be given the status of a Special Category state.
- Confirming that the centre has been receiving requests with respect to the grant Special Category Status to the states, Union Finance Minister ruled out the possibility of granting the SCS to these states.
- Recognizing that some regions in the country were historically disadvantaged in contrast to the others, the 5th Finance Commission in 1969 introduced the concept of Special Category Status.
- The SCS for plan assistance was granted in the past by the National Development Council (NDC) to some States characterised by a number of features necessitating a special consideration.
- These features included: hilly and difficult terrain, low population density and/or sizeable share of tribal population, strategic location along borders with neighbouring countries, economic and infrastructural backwardness and non-viable nature of State finances.
- The Constitution of India does not include any provision for the categorization of any state in India as a Special Category State.
- The Finance Minister also made it clear that there is no link between SCS and industries and that SCS would not provide for any specific measure for growth of industries.

Benefits of a Special Category Status:

- Preferential treatment in getting central funds and tax breaks
- Concession on excise duty to attract industries to the state
- 30% of the Centre’s gross budget goes to special category states
- These states can avail the benefit of debt-swapping and debt relief schemes
- In the case of Centrally Sponsored Schemes and external aid, Special Category States get it in the ratio of 90% as grant, and 10% as loans. Other states, however, get 30% of their funds as grants

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Sanctions slapped on Iran's Khamenei

Context:

The United States imposed sanctions on Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and a string of military chiefs.

Background:

- Tensions between the US and Iran are at their highest level at present.
- The U.S - Iran dispute is bound up in a complex web of regional rivalries, with US allies Saudi Arabia and Israel long pushing Washington to act aggressively against Iran.
- Trump pulled out of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in 2017, seeking its collapse.
- Iran is currently crippled by existing US sanctions that include the blocking of most of its crucial oil exports
- Tensions are running high after Iran shot down a US spy drone.
- In its most recent move, the U.S has imposed sanctions on Iran's supreme leader Khamenei and others.

Details:

- The move tightens the pressure on the country that US President Donald Trump threatened with obliteration if it seeks war.
- Trump signed the punitive financial measures against the Islamic Republic calling them a strong and proportionate response to Iran's increasingly provocative actions.
- Sanctions imposed through the executive order would deny the Supreme Leader and the Supreme Leader's office, and those closely affiliated with him and the office, access to key financial resources and support.
- It is aimed at denying Iran's leadership access to financial resources, blocking them from using the United States financial system or having access to any assets in the United States.

2. Pak. blacklisting absolutely a possibility: FATF president

Context:

Financial Action Task Force's (FATF), outgoing president Marshall Billingslea has said there is "absolutely a possibility" that Pakistan could be on its blacklist after its next meeting in October in Paris.

Background:

- Pakistan has been on and off the grey list in the past.
- Incidentally, in June 2018, Pakistan was put on the FATF grey list for the 2nd time for failing to curb terror financing, courtesy – a concerted bilateral effort by India with the US, UK, France and Germany all through 2017. The country was lobbying hard to be removed from this list at this meeting in Paris.
- Islamabad had reportedly been given a 27-point action plan to implement by September 2019, failing which it would be put on the FATF black list alongside North Korea and Iran post the October 2019 FAFT meeting.
- Pakistan had reportedly landed on the grey list between 2012 and 2015.

Details:

- Pakistan had significant work to do and was, with regard to an action plan agreed in June 2018, lacking in almost every respect, Marshall Billingslea said.
- Pakistan was cautioned in February at the plenary that they had missed almost all of their January milestones.
- And they were urged to not fail to meet the milestones in May. Unfortunately, Pakistan has yet again missed its May milestones, he said.

FATF:

- The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is an inter-governmental body established in 1989 by the Ministers of its Member jurisdictions. It is headquartered at Paris.
- 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.
- It is the global standard-setting body for anti-money laundering and combating the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT).
- In order to protect the international financial system from money laundering and financing of terrorism (ML/FT) risks and to encourage greater compliance with the AML/CFT standards, the FATF identifies jurisdictions that have strategic deficiencies and works with them to address those deficiencies that pose a risk to the international financial system.
- Jurisdiction subject to a FATF call on its members and other jurisdictions to apply counter-measures to protect the international financial system from the ongoing and substantial money laundering and financing of terrorism risks.

What does getting black listed mean?

- The FATF blacklist means the country concerned is “non-cooperative” in the global fight against money laundering and terrorist financing.
- A black-list would mean enhanced financial scrutiny of its government, possible sanctions against its central bank, and a downgrade of its financial and credit institutions.

C. GS3 Related

Category: ECONOMY**1. RBI unveils online portal for filing grievances****Context:**

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has launched a Complaint Management System (CMS)

Details:

- Complaint Management System (CMS) is an online portal to facilitate bank customer grievance redressal processes.
- The CMS portal can be accessed on RBI's website and complaints can be lodged against any of the entities regulated by the central bank with public interface such as commercial banks, urban cooperative banks, Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs).
- The complaint would be directed to the appropriate office of the Ombudsman/Regional Office of the RBI.

- CMS provides features such as acknowledgement through SMS and email notification, status tracking through unique registration number, receipt of closure advises and filing of appeals, where applicable.
- The data from CMS can be leveraged by the RBI for analytics, which can be used for regulatory and supervisory interventions.
- The RBI also plans to introduce a dedicated Interactive Voice Response (IVR) System for tracking the status of complaints.

D. GS4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. A war of masks between Iran and the U.S.

Editorial Analysis:

- Recently, Iran and the United States came dangerously close to a direct armed conflict, with U.S. President Donald Trump reportedly ordering and then cancelling air strikes against Iran, after it shot down a high-tech U.S. drone over the Strait of Hormuz.
- As a matter of fact, a closer look at tensions between the two countries would make it seem as if the Iranian authorities were the ones attempting to escalate a regional crisis while avoiding a full-blown war with the U.S.
- Crucially, for the Trump administration, it has been about being careful not to be drawn into a West Asian conflict and having the loss of any U.S. service personnel on its conscience.

A Look at the many layers to the recent conflict:

- On one side, the **Ayatollahs and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) want to save their necks** by convincing the U.S.'s allies in Europe, West Asia and Asia to pressure Washington into easing the devastating economic and financial sanctions that have affected the Iranian economy.
- On the other side, the hawks in Washington, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and National Security Adviser John Bolton, have an ardent desire to restore U.S. deterrence by striking Iranian military infrastructure and nuclear installations.
- Whereas, in the middle, there are **a number of state and non-state actors** such as Israel, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which would be the prime targets for Iranian attacks, or which would get militarily engaged on the side of Iran and go after U.S. targets.

Situation that may unfold if war breaks out:

- Once in war with the Islamic Republic of Iran, the U.S. would have to contend with proxies backed by Tehran spreading across the region, armed with missiles, drones and as suicide bombers.
- It is also important to note that there is virtually no way for Saudi Arabia and the UAE to protect themselves from Iranian proxy attacks.

(a) Houthi Rebels:

- One can cite the example of Iranian-backed Houthi rebels, who have fought a coalition led by Saudi

Arabia to a stalemate on the battlefield since 2015 and have succeeded in launching missiles and rockets into Saudi territory.

(b) Iran's proxies in Lebanon and Iraq:

- In Lebanon and Iraq, the Iranian regime's proxies have killed hundreds of American soldiers since the early 1980s.
- As a matter of fact, recently, in a meeting with Iran-linked Iraqi militias in Baghdad, Major General Qassim Suleimani, the chief of Iran's Quds Force, which is a unit of the IRGC, asked them to prepare for a proxy war with the U.S.

(c) Hezbollah, a Shiite militia:

- In 1983, a group linked to the Iranian-backed Shiite militia, Hezbollah, claimed responsibility for lethal bombings of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut and a U.S. Marine barracks.

Purpose of Iran's Proxy War Effort:

- Experts point out that Iran's campaign of proxy war and sabotage will be designed to inflict some suffering on regional and international actors that have chosen to be with America in this conflict, while dissuading Mr. Trump and his advisers from taking military action against Iranian interests.

Case of giving peace a chance:

- Given that "maximum pressure" sanctions have achieved their goal and the Iranian authorities are desperate to find a way out of this crisis, the role of potential mediators will be crucial.
- Currently, the government of President Hassan Rouhani is quietly trying out all possibilities to find a diplomatic pathway out of the crisis.
- Having said this, a dialogue between Arab leaders and Iran could begin with more concrete help from Oman and Kuwait in order to de-escalate the war in Yemen and ensure maritime security in the Strait of Hormuz.
- Therefore, while Iran and the U.S. are on the edge of the abyss, global diplomacy behind closed doors has been working to find a way out.
- Historically, the removal of Russian missiles from Cuba was former U.S. President J.F. Kennedy's grandest success. However, during the Cuban missile crisis, he had two dangerous situations to deal with simultaneously — missile emplacements and impeachment.
- In the same way, Mr. Trump is trying to find a way out of the tensions while trying not to damage his chances of a second term in the White House.

Concluding Remarks:

- It is important to note that America's military and technological resources to break down the Islamic regime of Iran are limitless.
- The only matter to decide is whether it is intellectually wise and politically pragmatic to use all that might.
- Currently, both Iran and the U.S. are trying to avoid this war while winning a game of appearances.
- This game reminds us of the theatrical concept of persona, which gives both Iran and the U.S. a source of political agency and a stable public role to present themselves as being intransigent, inflexible and uncompromising.
- Consequently, both countries are trying to keep their masks on in order to inscribe themselves on the hearts of humanity.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Devoid of principle

Larger Background:

What is the anti-defection law?

- It is important to note that 'Aaya Ram Gaya Ram' was a phrase that became popular in Indian politics after a Haryana MLA Gaya Lal changed his party thrice within the same day in 1967.
- The anti-defection law sought to prevent such political defections which may be due to reward of office or other similar considerations.
- The Tenth Schedule was inserted in the Constitution of India in 1985.
- It lays down the process by which legislators may be disqualified on grounds of defection by the Presiding Officer of a legislature based on a petition by any other member of the House.
- A legislator is deemed to have defected if he either voluntarily gives up the membership of his party or disobeys the directives of the party leadership on a vote.
- This implies that a legislator defying (abstaining or voting against) the party whip on any issue can lose his membership of the House.
- The law applies to both Parliament and state assemblies.

Are there any exceptions under the law?

- Yes, legislators may change their party without the risk of disqualification in certain circumstances.
- The law allows a party to merge with or into another party provided that at least two-thirds of its legislators are in favour of the merger.
- In such a scenario, neither the members who decide to merge, nor the ones who stay with the original party will face disqualification.
- Various expert committees have recommended that rather than the Presiding Officer, the decision to disqualify a member should be made by the President (in case of MPs) or the Governor (in case of MLAs) on the advice of the Election Commission.
- This would be similar to the process followed for disqualification in case the person holds an office of profit (i.e. the person holds an office under the central or state government which carries a remuneration, and has not been excluded in a list made by the legislature).

How has the law been interpreted by the Courts while deciding on related matters?

The Supreme Court of India has interpreted different provisions of the law. The following paragraphs attempt at discussing a few of them.

- The phrase 'Voluntarily gives up his membership' has a wider connotation than resignation.
- The law provides for a member to be disqualified if he 'voluntarily gives up his membership'. However, the Supreme Court has interpreted that in the absence of a formal resignation by the member, the giving up of membership can be inferred by his conduct.
- In other judgments, members who have publicly expressed opposition to their party or support for another party were deemed to have resigned.

Decision of the Presiding Officer is subject to judicial review:

- The law initially stated that the decision of the Presiding Officer is not subject to judicial review. This condition was struck down by the Supreme Court in 1992, thereby allowing appeals against the Presiding Officer's decision in the High Court and Supreme Court.

- However, it held that there may not be any judicial intervention until the Presiding Officer gives his order.
- In 2015, the Hyderabad High Court, refused to intervene after hearing a petition which alleged that there had been delay by the Telangana Assembly Speaker in acting against a member under the anti-defection law.

Is there a time limit within which the Presiding Officer has to decide?

- The law does not specify a time-period for the Presiding Officer to decide on a disqualification plea. Given that courts can intervene only after the Presiding Officer has decided on the matter, the petitioner seeking disqualification has no option but to wait for this decision to be made.
- Importantly, there have been several cases where the Courts have expressed concern about the unnecessary delay in deciding such petitions.
- In some cases this delay in decision making has resulted in members, who have defected from their parties, continuing to be members of the House.
- There have also been instances where opposition members have been appointed ministers in the government while still retaining the membership of their original parties in the legislature.

Does the anti-defection law affect the ability of legislators to make decisions?

- The anti-defection law seeks to provide a stable government by ensuring the legislators do not switch sides.
- However, this law also restricts a legislator from voting in line with his conscience, judgement and interests of his electorate.
- Such a situation impedes the oversight function of the legislature over the government, by ensuring that members vote based on the decisions taken by the party leadership, and not what their constituents would like them to vote for.
- Political parties issue a direction to MPs on how to vote on most issues, irrespective of the nature of the issue.
- Several experts have suggested that the law should be valid only for those votes that determine the stability of the government (passage of the annual budget or no-confidence motions).

Critical View of the Anti- Defection Law:

- Our Constitution entrusts a Member of Parliament with certain functions.
- As a legislator, it is an MP's duty to discuss and deliberate on issues of national importance; and participate in lawmaking by debating bills.
- Critics point out that the Anti-Defection Law undermines their capacity to be an effective legislator.
- The law amended the Constitution to lay out the process of disqualifying a legislator on grounds of defection.
- The decision of this disqualification is taken by the Presiding Officer of the House of Parliament of state legislatures. If a complaint is received with respect to the defection of the Chairman or Speaker, a member of the House elected by that House shall take the decision.
- In a deliberative democracy, debate and discussion are key to framing strong laws.
- As a matter of fact, debates on the floor of the House are an opportunity for legislators to raise their concerns and voice their opinions on an issue.
- It is expected that in this capacity he must be able to determine public interest and contribute to the lawmaking process. **By weighing upon various factors he should determine his position on an issue and form an informed opinion.** These factors could be a combination of his ideologies, voters' preferences and his political affiliation.
- As per the law, a legislator could be disqualified if he votes against or abstains from voting, contrary to his party's direction. This means that if a legislator defies the party whip on any issue he is deemed to have defected and will lose his membership to the House. **A whip can be issued to all votes on**

bills, motions and resolutions.

Looking at some of the Specific Criticisms:

a) The Law does not provide sufficient incentive for an MP or MLA to examine an issue in depth and think through it to participate in the debate. With the issuance of a whip, **a member of the legislature is in effect reduced to a mere voting number in House.**

- He will finally have to obey the position determined by his party leadership.
- A free exchange of ideas, debate and dissent within political parties is curtailed.
- One has often seen Members of Parliament opposing a bill on the floor of the House during their speech, but falling in line to vote according to the party whip.
- Further, with such a law in place, there is no need or incentive for ministers piloting a proposal to individually reach out to legislators and persuade them about the merits of a legislation or a policy move.

b) When a government has a majority in the House, a minister can push through any policy or bill by issuing a whip without bipartisan support. Even if there is a need for bipartisan support, consensus building in such a case becomes an exercise limited to reaching out to the selected few leaders of other political parties.

c) In most developed democracies, lawmaking is a much more inclusive process. Ministers have to work hard to negotiate and convince legislators to support their proposal. For example, the United Kingdom does not have an Anti-Defection Law. In December 2017, the British Prime Minister Theresa May lost a key vote on EU Withdrawal Bill related to Brexit.

The Prime Minister lost by a close margin of 309-305 votes to an amendment tabled by a member of her own party.

d) Further, critics point out that the Anti-Defection Law in India weakens the systems of checks and balances inherent in a parliamentary democracy where the executive is accountable to the legislature and the legislature keeps oversight on the executive's actions.

- It is important to note that after being voted to office, the elected representative is accountable to his voters. He is held accountable by his constituents for his decisions and actions during his re-election bid for the next term.
- The Anti-Defection Law weakens this accountability as all his actions and decisions can simply be justified on the grounds of following party diktat. It breaks the link between the elected legislator and his electors. In sharp contrast, in other democracies, the individual candidate's position on issues, and past legislative voting patterns have to be justified to the voters and are central to electoral campaign and debate.

e) Next, the Anti-Defection Law was introduced with the intention to curb 'evils of political defections' and promote party discipline. Ironically, however, political defections continue to be common even today. **It has not been able to prevent defections.** In September 2016, the Arunachal Pradesh chief minister Pema Khandu, along with 43 MLAs defected from the Congress Party to join People's Party of Arunachal. There have been similar instances of defections in the states of Goa, Uttarakhand, Andhra Pradesh, Manipur, Nagaland and Telangana in recent years.

A Remedial Measure that has been suggested:

- Going forward, one of the immediate reforms needed to strengthen our legislature is to limit the Anti-Defection Law to votes which affect the stability of a government.
- These would include votes on No-Confidence Motions or Money Bills.

- A balance between ensuring party discipline and maintaining government stability on one hand; and empowering our legislators to exercise their judgement and vote as per their conscience, on the other, must be determined.
- This would be a starting point to a larger public debate about the need at all for such a law.

What's in the news?

- Recently, four Rajya Sabha MPs from the Telugu Desam Party defected to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party.
- This happened merely a month after simultaneous Assembly and Lok Sabha elections in Andhra Pradesh.

Editorial Analysis:

- Experts opine that the recent defection of four Rajya Sabha MPs from the Telugu Desam Party to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, merely a month after simultaneous Assembly and Lok Sabha elections in Andhra Pradesh, **can only be termed as political opportunism.**
- The fact that these MPs merged with the BJP as a group helped them stay clear of the anti-defection law, which stipulates that a breakaway group constitute at least two-thirds of a legislative party's strength and that it merge with another party.
- The TDP had been reduced to just 23 and two seats in the newly elected Andhra Pradesh and Telangana Assemblies, respectively.
- It now commands a much lower legislative profile with just two members in the Rajya Sabha and three in the Lok Sabha.
- Although there is a tendency among legislators to seek greener pastures at a time of crisis for their parties, but the nature of these defections suggests that this was not a simple case of leaving a party whose political strength had considerably diminished.
- The BJP is even more of a non-player in Andhra Pradesh as it does not hold a single seat in the current Assembly and its vote share dipped in comparison to the previous Assembly elections.

Possible Reasons for the Defections?

- The reasons for the defections appear to have little to do with the political equations in the parent State.
- Some of the defecting legislators have a cloud of suspicion over them as they were subjected to probes by Central Bureau of Investigation, Enforcement Directorate and Income Tax officials over financial transactions.
- It would be in order to ask whether the defections are aimed at currying favour with the government at the Centre in regard to the investigations.
- The NDA government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has promised zero tolerance on corruption, and it is to be hoped that the investigations against two of the defecting MPs continue unhindered.
- At the same time, the fact that the BJP has chosen to accommodate legislators the party had only months ago castigated for being corrupt, and against whom one of its own MPs had sought action from the Rajya Sabha ethics committee, suggests that the **benefits of accrual to its numbers outweighed even the pretence of principle.**
- The BJP has managed to increase its strength in the Rajya Sabha to 75 with the addition of the defectors from the TDP.
- It is important to note that fresh elections to the Rajya Sabha are due for a substantive number of seats by 2020, and defections such as these will help the ruling combine get closer to the majority mark in the 245-member Upper House.

Concluding Remarks:

- Experts point out that even if it is justified as an exercise to increase numbers, it does not reflect well on the BJP, which claims to be a party with a difference.
- Defections that are not based on ideology or principle undermine parliamentary democracy; a vibrant opposition is equally vital to ensure an efficient government.

2. Basic needs, basic rights

Editorial Analysis:

- There are a few thoughts and perspectives that spring to mind in the aftermath of the horrific tragedy in Muzaffarpur, Bihar, where the systemic failure of health care has killed over a hundred children.

A Look at some of these thoughts and perspectives:

- First, like the constitutional principle of a basic structure, **it is time to articulate an equally robust doctrine of basic rights.**
- Second, these basic rights must be viewed primarily as positive, rights not against interference from the state (negative rights) but to the provision of something by it.
- Thirdly, just as individuals are punished for legal violations, the government of the day must also be punished for the violation of these basic rights.
- This punishment need not await the next round of elections but must be meted out immediately, by the law itself.
- In short, **defaulting governments must be held legally accountable.**
- As a matter of fact, **the systematic violation of basic rights must be treated on a par with the breakdown of constitutional machinery.**

A Closer Examination of 'Basic Rights':

- Important questions emerge. What are basic rights? How are they different from other fundamental rights?
- Basic rights flow from basic needs such as physical security or subsistence.
- Needs are different from wants.
- For example: You may want a chocolate every morning but don't need it. Heavens won't fall if you don't get it. But **basic needs are different: their non-fulfilment can cause great harm, even kill.**
- The failure to get an antibiotic if you have a bacterial infection can hurt you very badly. Heavens will fall if you don't get it!
- Moreover, wants are subjective; you cannot be mistaken that you desire that chocolate. But you may be misguided, even unaware of what you need. You may not be able to tell if you need an antibiotic because your mind can't tell the difference between bacterial and viral infections. This determination is done by a more objective criterion.
- **Needs depend on the way human bodies are constituted.** As a matter of fact, they are a solid necessity; one cannot get on without them. Nor can they be fulfilled by substitutes. For us, nothing can take the place of water, food and air.
- It is true, of course, that though terribly important, basic needs are not what we live for.
- They don't make our life worth living.
- However, **anything really worth pursuing depends on the satisfaction of basic needs.**
- If we are continuously thirsty, cold, hungry, ill or homeless, we will be incapable of even framing a conception of worthwhile life, let alone pursue it.
- Imagine the plight of those who queue up for long hours to get a bucket of water or a place to bathe, dress or defecate.
- People suffer if basic needs are met inadequately or with delay. They are then denied a minimally

decent life.

- **When basic needs are not fully met, we feel vulnerable and helpless.**
- We grieve, cry for help, seek assistance. We complain and demand elementary justice from our community, especially from the state.
- Elementary justice requires that before anything else, the state does everything at its disposal to satisfy all basic needs of its citizens, particularly of those who cannot fend for themselves.
- We feel aggrieved when the state abdicates this responsibility.

The Perspective of Security and subsistence:

- Having said this, what does the language of rights add to the idea of basic needs?
- Firstly, a right is something that is owed to us; it is not a favour.
- So, rights help the recognition of anything that satisfies basic needs as an entitlement.

(a) Physical Security: The First Basic Right

- Basic rights are claims on the state to provide us with goods and services that satisfy our basic needs. Secondly, **when something is identified as a basic right, it puts the state under a duty to enable its exercise. The state becomes its guarantor.**
- For example, the right to physical security, the first basic right, is socially guaranteed when the state provides its people a well-trained, professional police force.
- When society and its government reneges on its commitment to do so, we hold them accountable.
- It follows that basic rights are a shield for the defenceless against the most damaging threats to their life which include starvation, pestilence and disease.
- As the philosopher Henry Shue, puts it, **it is ‘an attempt to give to the powerless a veto over some economic, social and political forces that harm them’.**
- These rights are basic also because many intrinsically valuable rights can be enjoyed only once these rights are secured.
- Imagine that we have a right to assemble freely in public but that just as one begins to exercise this right, one is threatened with assault, rape or murder. Most people will simply retreat. An important question area emerges, **is not a threat to physical security or bodily integrity, the commonest weapon wielded by goons, political thugs and oppressive governments?**

(b) Right to Minimum Security and Subsistence:

- The second is the **right to minimum economic security and subsistence** that includes clean air, uncontaminated water, nutritious food, clothing and shelter.
- By showing the devastation caused by its absence, the Muzaffarpur tragedy amply proves that the right to primary health care is also an integral part of the right to subsistence.
- A straightforward link exists between malnutrition and disease.
- As Dr. T. Jacob John explained in an article in The Hindu on June 19, 2019 (OpEd page, “Averting deaths in Muzaffarpur”), **encephalopathy, the biochemical disease that results from eating litchi fruit pulp, occurs only in malnourished children. It is common knowledge that malnourishment lowers resistance to disease. A similar link exists between disease, unemployment and poverty.**
- Credible threats to these rights can be reduced by the government by establishing institutions and practices that assist the vulnerable; for example, by setting up hospitals with adequate number of doctors, nurses, beds, medical equipment, intensive care units, essential drugs and emergency treatments.
- For this, proper budgetary allocation is required that depends in turn on getting one’s political priority and commitment right.
- It is important to note that **when a government fails to provide primary health care to those who**

can't afford it, it violates their basic rights.

(c) Vulnerability, accountability:

- To these two basic rights, one must add the right to free public expression of helplessness and frustration, if deprived of other basic rights.
- The scope of freedom of expression is large and one doesn't imagine all of it can be deemed basic. But the relevant part of it is.
- The right to make one's vulnerability public, be informed about the acts of commission and omission of the government regarding anything that adversely affects the satisfaction of basic needs, to critically examine them and to hold state officials publicly accountable is a basic right on a par with right to physical security and subsistence and inseparably linked to them.
- **It follows that governments must make arrangements for people to demand that their basic rights be satisfied, to complain when these demands are not met, to report lapses and omissions on the part of governments, point fingers at apathetic government officials, criticise the government for its failures and to do so without fear.**

Concluding Remarks:

- These three basic rights can be summed up in a single phrase, the right to a minimally decent life. This is a threshold right.
- A society may soar, strive for great collective achievement.
- There are no limits to the longing for a better life.
- However, the point of having a threshold of minimal decency is that our life must not fall below a certain level of existence.
- Anything short of a minimally decent life is simply not acceptable.
- It is this precisely that horrifies the citizenry about the callousness of the Bihar government in Muzaffarpur and governments in India more generally.
- This is why we must ask why governments are not immediately and severely penalised when they undermine the exercise of these basic rights.

3. A sound foundation (Draft National Policy on Education)

Editorial Analysis:

- The draft National Policy on Education is in the public domain for comments till June 30, 2019.
- A commendable reform suggested in the policy is creating a foundational stage as the first stage of school education.

What does the reform propose to bring?

- This reform proposes to bring the three years of pre-primary and the two years of Grades 1 and 2 into a composite unit with "a single curricular and pedagogical phase of play and discovery-based learning" between the ages of 3 and 8 years.
- This proposal suggests a significant departure from the present structure of school education, in which the pre-school stage of 3-6 years is delinked from Grades 1 and 2 and even kept out of the ambit of the Right To Education Act.
- It is currently under the Ministry of Women and Child Development.

Understanding the proposal's implications:

- The proposal's implications need to be understood from two perspectives.
- One, this implies that **Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)** for 3- to 6-year-olds will

become an integral part of the organised school structure, and thus become the responsibility of the education department.

- It should also make ECCE a justiciable right of all 3- to 6-year-olds.
- The committee considers ECCE to be “among the very best investments” that India could make in education since neuroscience evidence indicates that “over 85% of a child’s cumulative brain development occurs prior to the age of 6”.
- Secondly, the curriculum for Grades 1 and 2 will be developed in upward continuity with the pre-school curriculum, in terms of both content and pedagogy.
- If implemented well, this can have a positive impact on children’s learning as it would ensure a play-based, developmentally appropriate curriculum for children up to not just 6 but 8 years, which would give them a stronger foundation.
- This upward extension will further smoothen the transition from pre-school to the primary stage and consolidate the foundation for future learning.

Concerns that arise:

- However, two significant concerns identified from collaborative research by Ambedkar University and ASER Centre need to be addressed in implementation.
- The preschool curriculum was observed to be primarily a downward extension of the primary curriculum.
- Children were engaged for most of the time in copying or rote learning of alphabet and numbers, a practice which is developmentally inappropriate and can be counterproductive from the perspective of a sound foundation.

Perspective on Play-based learning and Issues that need to be factored:

- Children at this stage require a curriculum which emphasises play-based learning opportunities that promote engagement with play materials, picture books, building blocks, puzzles, etc. and include teacher-led storytelling, conversations, rhymes, emergent literacy and numeracy activities, outdoor and indoor play.
- These opportunities will enable children to acquire not only the right foundation for development of skills prioritised for the 21st century, i.e. creativity, critical thinking, communication, collaboration and self-confidence, but also an abiding interest in lifelong learning.
- The second issue is the **rigid structure of the primary grades’ curriculum, which changes annually with every grade, thus providing little or no opportunity for children to revisit the previous year’s curriculum.**
- This rigidity comes possibly from a mistaken assumption made by curriculum framers that all children enter pre-school or a school grade at the prescribed age and move annually into the next grade, so that each grade is age-wise homogeneous; the reality is very different.
- **Children tend to follow multiple pathways in these early years and it is difficult to predict at what age a child will be in which grade.**
- Participation trends tend to stabilise only by the time children are around eight years old, when most come into the primary stage, often still in different grades.
- This leads to multi-age, multi-level composition at each level.
- Since age is a significant factor in learning, this diversity creates incompatibility with the given grade-wise curriculum and creates learning gaps for many children. **This rigidity of the grade structure leads to cumulative learning deficits in children over time.**

Concluding Remarks:

- The foundational stage can address this rigidity, but for this the requirement would be to develop a progressive curriculum upward from pre-school to primary stage.
- Further, it has to be in a spiral, not linear, mode with adequate flexibility to enable children to revisit

concepts and learn at their own pace.

- Most importantly, basing the curriculum on play-based, developmentally appropriate content and pedagogy will help children to develop holistically and enjoy the learning process, an imperative for not only school learning but learning for life.

F. Tidbits

1. Aadhaar Bill introduced amid Opposition protests

- Amidst protests over the concerns over privacy, the Aadhaar and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2019 was introduced in the Lok Sabha by the Union Law Minister.
- The legislation would replace an ordinance issued in March 2019.
- It proposes to impose strict penalties for violation of norms.
- The opposition raised its concerns over the bill on three grounds that:
 1. It violates an earlier Supreme Court judgment.
 2. It allows for private agencies to store data.
 3. It violates fundamental rights.

2. Defaulter count in PSBs has risen 60% since FY15

- The number of wilful defaulters in nationalised banks has increased by more than 60% in March 2019 from 2014-15, the government said.
- A wilful defaulter is an entity or a person that has not paid a loan back despite the ability to repay it.
- In response to the question as to whether the cases of wilful defaulters of banks have increased in the last five years, it was said that the defaulter count has been rising consistently since 2014-15.
- The fact that the wilful defaulters are acted against comprehensively was also highlighted.
- As per RBI's instructions, wilful defaulters are not sanctioned any additional facilities by banks or financial institutions, and their unit is debarred from floating new ventures for five years.
- An amount of Rs. 7,654 crore has been recovered from their accounts in the period.

G. Prelims Facts

1. Passport Seva Project

- Passport Seva Project is a Mission Mode Project on Passports.
- It aims at providing all the Passport-related services to the citizens in a speedy, convenient and transparent manner.
- The entire process is online and streamlined including interface with the Indian police for verification of personal particulars of applicants and with India Post for tracking delivery of passports.
- This e-Governance initiative is part of the National e-Governance Plan.

2. NASA's Curiosity finds methane spike on Mars

- NASA Curiosity's Sample Analysis at Mars (SAM) has detected the highest ever levels of methane in the course of its mission on Mars.
- The discovery could point to the existence of microbial life on the planet.
- Methane, if it is there in the thin Martian air, is significant, because sunlight and chemical reactions would break up the molecules within a few centuries. Thus any methane detected now must have been released recently.
- One leading theory is that the methane is being released from underground reservoirs created by

ancient life forms.

- Though Mars has no active volcanoes like on Earth, it is possible that methane is being released from geological processes, involving reactions of carbon from carbonate rocks or carbon dioxide, with hydrogen from liquid water.
- There is a possibility that the methane could also be produced as a result of interactions between rocks and water.

H. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. Loktak lake is the largest fresh water lake in North Eastern India.
2. It has the only floating national park in the world.

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: c

Explanation:

Loktak Lake is the largest freshwater lake in Northeast India and is famous for the phumdis -heterogeneous mass of vegetation, soil and organic matter at various stages of decomposition, floating over it. Keibul Lamjao National Park in Loktak lake is the only floating national park in the world.

Q2. Consider the following statements:

1. GST council is a constitutional body.
2. In the GST council each state has one vote, irrespective of its population.
3. Centre has $1/3^{\text{rd}}$ voting rights and states have $2/3^{\text{rd}}$ voting rights in the GST council.

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

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

GST council is a constitutional body for making recommendations to the Union and State Government on issues related to Goods and Service Tax. As per Article 279A of the Indian Constitution, the GST Council will be a joint forum of the Centre and the States. The vote of the Centre would have a weightage of one third of the total votes cast, and the votes of all the State Governments taken together would have a weightage of two-thirds of the total votes cast, in that meeting. Each state, big or small, will have equal vote.

Q3. Consider the following statements:

1. Nitrification is the process by which ammonium is converted into nitrates by bacteria.
2. Nitrification is an aerobic process.

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: c

Explanation:

Nitrification is the biological oxidation of ammonia or ammonium to nitrite followed by the oxidation of the nitrite to nitrate. It is an aerobic process performed by small groups of autotrophic bacteria and archaea.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. The GST impact goes beyond revenues and rates of duty. It has transformed our federal polity for the good. Critically comment. (15 Marks, 250 Words)
2. The growing tensions between the U.S and Iran and the war-like situation is bound to hurt India. Discuss. (15 Marks, 250 Words)