

18 July 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. ‘Housing project’ for stray cows

Context:

As part of ‘Project Gaushala’, the State government of Madhya Pradesh plans to move 7 lakh stray cows and

bulls to shelters close to villages.

Details:

- Each gaushala(cow shelter) is being developed at a cost of Rs.30 lakh on an acre or more of land donated by temples, individuals and informal groups.
- Newborn calves would be tended to in special, intensive-care sheds.
- Cow urine and dung would be stocked in tanks for use later as ingredients in different products.
- Vermicompost pits and bio-gas units would be set up in the compound.
- Each cow will be provided not less than Rs. 20 worth sawdust and fodder from deep mangers every day. For this, the State government in this year's budget has set aside Rs. 132 crore.
- Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme workers have been roped in to build the gaushalas at a cost of Rs. 300 crore, being drawn from the scheme.
- Under the watch of gram panchayats, self-help groups and NGOs working for the welfare of cows will manage the shelters, once their bid to operate them is approved by Zila Gaupalan Samitis headed by District Collectors.
- This would help government remove the stray cattle from the main roads.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Review Jadhav sentence, grant consular access, ICJ tells Pak.

Context:

International Court of Justice (ICJ) has directed Pakistan to review conviction order of Kulbhushan Jadhav and, put his death sentence on hold. Islamabad has been directed by ICJ to allow New Delhi consular access at the earliest.

Background:

- Jadhav was arrested by the Pakistani government for 'spying' and allegedly plotting terror acts in Balochistan.
- Subsequently, Pakistan held a secret trial of Mr. Jadhav in a military court, where evidence and processes were not made public.
- Pakistan had argued, unsuccessfully, that Article 36 of the Vienna Convention does not apply to people involved in espionage.
- On May 8, 2017, after the Pakistani court convicted and sentenced Mr. Jadhav, India went to the ICJ as a last resort of appeal.
- India approached the ICJ in May 2017, following Jadhav's death sentence by Pakistani military court, in which India accused Pakistan of "egregious violations of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations".
- The same month, ICJ put a stay on Jadhav's death sentence and asked both countries to make their final cases by December 2017.
- In that month, after months of requests by India, Pakistan allowed Jadhav's mother and wife to meet him.

India's focused strategy:

- India's strategy in this case has been to exploit increasing international acceptance that Pakistan was an emerging 'rogue' state.
- Laying stress on Pakistan's scant regard for Article 36 of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations — it deals with the arrest, detention and trial of a foreign citizen — India's counsel, Harish

Salve, highlighted two compelling arguments.

- First was the arrest process, which was not accompanied by an immediate notification to Indian consular officials in Islamabad. There was a delay of over three weeks before India was informed, and it was during this period, according to reliable sources from within Pakistan, that Mr. Jadhav was subjected to all means of coercion and forced to sign a ‘confession taken under custody’ without adequate legal representation.
- Second was the two-way denial of access and communication by any means between Mr. Jadhav and consular officials and a failure to inform him of the rights he enjoyed under the convention.
- The legitimacy of military courts has always been controversial within the international legal system that emerged in the post-World War II era as a fast-track system of delivering skewed justice by authoritarian regimes and military dictatorships.
- Purportedly set up in Pakistan in 2015 as a counter-terrorist and anti-corruption initiative, Mr. Jadhav’s sentencing in April 2017 was based on confessions taken in captivity and is part of several arbitrary sentences by Pakistan’s Military Court.

ICJ judgement:

- The 16 judge ICJ panel ruled 15-1 in India’s favour. Pakistani Judge, Justice Jilani, was the lone dissenter on those rulings.
- The ICJ held that the denial of consular access constituted a “breach” of article 36 para 1(b) of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations (1963) which Pakistan is a signatory to, which stipulates that all foreign nationals arrested must be given access to their government or local embassy, and rejected Pakistan’s counter-claim that the Vienna convention didn’t apply in a case of espionage.
- It also upheld India’s contention that the Vienna convention overrides a 2008 bilateral agreement between India and Pakistan on consular access.
- The court, however, rejected India’s call to annul the military court decision and ensure his release and safe passage home.
- In reality, this judgment underlines that Jadhav must get access to consular and legal assistance but does not rule that he can be tried under the civilian court of law.
- On Pakistan’s argument that India has failed to prove Jadhav’s nationality, ICJ said it was satisfied that the evidence before it leaves no room for doubt that Jadhav is of Indian nationality.
- This is a major diplomatic and legal victory for India in Kulbhushan Jadhav case.

Other diplomatic wins for India against Pakistan:

The ICJ verdict needs to be seen in the context of a string of India’s diplomatic successes in the last few years — a culmination of the painstaking diplomatic and legal groundwork to isolate Pakistan.

- The ICJ’s verdict, granting consular access to Kulbhushan Jadhav and directing Islamabad to review and reconsider his conviction and sentencing, is being perceived as a major diplomatic and legal success for India, which has consistently tried to isolate Pakistan on the global stage over the last few years.
- The most recent was the listing of Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) chief Masood Azhar as a global terrorist at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).
- According to Indian officials, the pressure mounted against Pakistan on terrorism seems to have worked. Pakistan recently arrested Jamaat-ud-Dawa chief Hafiz Saeed on charges of terror financing.
- India’s attempt over the last two years to first “greylist” Pakistan, and then build pressure to “blacklist” Pakistan at the Financial Action Task Force, also seems to have worked.
- New Delhi also scored a major win after the Pulwama attack in February this year, when it got the UNSC to issue a statement condemning the attack. It was the first time that the UNSC condemned a terrorist attack on security personnel in Jammu and Kashmir, and named the Pakistan-based terrorist group JeM. What was equally important was that China also signed the statement, despite it being an

“iron brother” of Pakistan.

- And after the Balakot airstrikes deep inside Pakistan, India got a chorus of support from the international community. The release of IAF fighter pilot Abhinandan Varthaman was a case in point, where Delhi’s pressure seemed to have worked.
- Much before Pulwama, India got global support after the surgical strikes following the Uri attack in 2016. The SAARC countries rallied around India to boycott the summit in Pakistan.

Conclusion:

While a part of the argument in the Kulbhushan Jhadav case has been won, India still awaits the annulment of his death sentence. He is still in Pakistani custody. It is only after his safe return that we can celebrate.

Category: HEALTH

1. Ebola outbreak a global health emergency: WHO

Context:

The deadly Ebola outbreak in Congo has been declared an international health emergency by the World Health Organization after the virus spread this week to a city of two million people.

Details:

- On three previous occasions, a WHO expert committee had declined to advise the United Nations health agency to make the declaration for this outbreak, which other experts say has long met the conditions.
- More than 1,600 people have died since August in the second-deadliest Ebola outbreak in history, which is unfolding in a region described as a war zone.
- The current outbreak is spreading in a turbulent Congo border region where dozens of rebel groups are active and where Ebola had not been experienced before.
- Efforts to contain the virus have been hurt by mistrust by wary locals that has prompted deadly attacks on health workers.
- Some infected people have deliberately evaded health authorities.
- This is the fifth such declaration in history.
- Previous emergencies were declared for the devastating 2014-16 Ebola outbreak in West Africa that killed more than 11,000 people, the emergence of Zika in the Americas, the swine flu pandemic and polio eradication.

Significance of declaring a global health emergency:

- WHO defines a global emergency as an “extraordinary event” which constitutes a risk to other countries and requires a coordinated international response.
- A declaration of a global health emergency often brings greater international attention and aid.
- It serves as a call to the international community that they have to step up appropriate financial and technical support.

Concerns:

- There are concerns that nervous governments might overreact with border closures.
- Countries should be wary of imposing travel or trade restrictions.
- Those restrictions would actually restrict the flow of goods and health care workers into affected countries so they are counter-productive. Future emergency declarations might be perceived as

punishment and might result in other countries not reporting outbreaks in the future, which puts the world at greater risk.

Ebola:

- EVD is also called Ebola hemorrhagic fever (EHF).
- It is a viral hemorrhagic fever caused by the Ebolaviruses. Humans get infected with the virus when they acquire direct contact with the virus through broken skin, nose, mouth, or with blood, faeces, vomit, or bodily fluids of an infected person.
- The virus could also be present in semen and urine. People can also get infected when they make contact with contaminated bedding, clothing, etc. through broken skin.
- It is not an air-borne disease.
- Close contact with an infected person is needed to pass the virus on.
- The disease was first described in 1976 after its outbreak in DR Congo and present South Sudan.
- There were generally under 500 cases reported every year. Between 1979 and 1994, there were no cases reported at all.
- Symptoms start to show from two days to three weeks after contracting the virus. Some people also bleed internally and externally.
- The fatal rate for this disease is very high, with 25 – 90 % of the affected people dying.
- Death happens usually because of low blood pressure due to fluid loss and occurs 6 to 16 days after the symptoms appear. People can also die from multiple organ failure.

C. GS3 Related

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. Ingenious technique to eradicate mosquitoes

Context:

A breakthrough technique harnessing two methods to target disease-carrying mosquitoes was able to effectively eradicate mosquitoes in two test sites in China.

Details:

- The mosquitoes targeted are a type that is particularly difficult to control called *Aedes albopictus*, which are a major vector for diseases including Zika and dengue.
- Researchers harnessed two population control methods:
 - the use of radiation — which effectively sterilises mosquitoes — and
 - A strain of bacteria called *Wolbachia* that leaves mosquito eggs dead on arrival.
- They conducted a two-year trial at two sites on river islands in Guangzhou.
- The number of hatched mosquitoes eggs plunged by 94%, with not a single viable egg recorded for up to 13 weeks in some cases.
- The results were also borne out by a decline of nearly 97% in bites suffered by locals — which in turn shifted attitudes among residents, who were initially sceptical of the project's plan to release more mosquitoes into the local area.

Category: ECONOMY

1. RBI reserves: panel for transfer in tranches

Context:

Bimal Jalan committee report is expected within the next fortnight.

What is the committee's mandate?

- The Committee was set up in December 2018 following discussions between the finance ministry and the RBI about the manner in which the central banks' surplus can be shared with the government.
- The panel was entrusted to review best practices followed by central banks throughout the world in making assessment and provisions for risks.
- It was expected to submit its report within 90 days of its first meeting; in other words, by April 2019.
- The committee was set up to review status, need and justification of various provisions, reserves and buffers presently provided for by the RBI; and (to) review global best practices followed by the central banks in making assessment and provisions for risks which central bank balance sheets are subject to.
- While the committee is chaired by Bimal Jalan, former RBI Deputy Governor Rakesh Mohan, who is against transferring a higher surplus to the government, is the Vice Chairman of the committee.
- RBI Deputy Governor NS Vishwanathan and RBI Central Board Members Bharat Doshi and Sudhir Mankad are the other members of the panel.

What are the key contentious issues?

- First and foremost is the issue of transferring past reserves including unrealised gains in gold and currency revaluation accounts.
- It is believed that most of the committee members favoured a reduction in the RBI's excess reserves in a phased manner over 3 to 5 years, without any substantial additional annual transfer to the government.
- It is not immediately clear how much excess capital has the committee identified that can be shared with the government.
- It is learnt that there are differences between government nominee member on the committee — Finance Secretary Subhash Chandra Garg — and other panel members.
- The other big issue pertains to RBI's profits.

What is at stake?

- Prior to setting up of the committee, the finance ministry in its discussions with the RBI, had argued that the existing economic capital framework, which governs the RBI's capital requirements and terms for the transfer of its reserves to the government, is based on a very conservative assessment of risk by the central bank.
- The ministry had internally estimated RBI's excess reserves at Rs 3.6 lakh crore.
- According to Section 47 of the RBI Act, profits of the RBI are to be transferred to the government, after making various contingency provisions, public policy mandate of the RBI, including financial stability considerations.
- For the year ending June 2018, RBI had total reserves of Rs 9.59 lakh crore, comprising mainly currency and gold revaluation account (Rs 6.91 lakh crore) and contingency fund (Rs 2.32 lakh crore).
- Many economists and expert committees have in the past argued that the RBI is holding much higher capital that required to cover all its risks and contingencies.
- Former Chief Economic Adviser Arvind Subramanian said in Economic Survey 2016-17 that the RBI is "is already exceptionally highly capitalized" and nearly Rs 4 lakh crore of its capital transfer to the government can be used for recapitalising the banks and/or recapitalising a Public Sector Asset Rehabilitation Agency.

- This proposal was opposed by the then RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan.

D. GS4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. At the UNSC, a three point agenda

Background

- India has won the unanimous support of all countries in the 55-member Asia-Pacific Group at the United Nations in support of its bid for a non-permanent seat at the UN Security Council (UNSC) for a two-year term in 2021-22.
- Its representation in the UNSC has become rarer. It is to re-enter the Council after a gap of 10 years.
- The **previous time, in 2011-12, followed a gap of 20 years**. In total, India has been in the UNSC for 14 years, **representing roughly a fifth of the time the United Nations (UN) has existed**.
- India must leverage this latest opportunity to project itself as a responsible nation.

Turmoil, Disorder and chaos in the region's surrounding India

- India finds itself in a troubled region between **West and East Asia**, a region bristling with insurgencies, terrorism, human and narcotics trafficking, and great power rivalries.
- There has been cataclysmic dislocation in West Asia. The Gulf is in turmoil. Though the **Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (Daesh)** has been defeated, Iraq and Syria are not going to be the same as before.
- Surviving and dispersed Daesh foot soldiers are likely preparing new adventures, many in their countries of origin.
- The turbulence in West Asia is echoed in **North and South Asia, a consequence of the nuclear and missile tests** by the **Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Afghanistan's** slow but unmistakable unravelling from the support, sustenance and sanctuary provided in its contiguity to groups such as the Haqqani network, the Taliban, and al-Qaeda.
- Other problems in Asia include **strategic mistrust or misperception, unresolved borders and territorial disputes**, the absence of a pan-Asia security architecture, and competition over energy and strategic minerals.

A shift from Global order to Nationalism

- After the cold war ended there was a trend towards Internationalism which means that there was support for global unification and support for International system. Words like 'national interest' was seen with derogatory and insulting. But this has changed and the word Nationalism is now here to stay.
- Fear, populism, polarization, and ultra-nationalism have become the basis of politics in many countries.
- In fact Henry Kissinger in his work 'World Order', found the world to be in a greater state of disorder than at any time since the end of World War II.

Changes should be made and India should be represented permanently in UNSC

- A report by PricewaterhouseCoopers, “World in 2050”, predicts that by 2050, China will be the world’s number one economic power, followed by India.
- In China’s case, this is subject to its success in avoiding the middle-income trap.
- And in India’s, to more consistent economic performance than the experience of recent years.
- That said, one of the challenges of the international system today, and for India in the UNSC, is that this **profound impending change is largely unrecognised by the great powers and other countries.**

To this end, the permanent members (P-5) as also other UN members must consider it worth their while to reform the Council.

What should India aim to do?

- India will have to **increase its financial contribution**, as the apportionment of UN expenses for each of the P-5 countries is significantly larger than that for India.
- Even **Germany and Japan today contribute many times more than India.** Although India has been a leading provider of peacekeepers, its assessed contribution to UN peacekeeping operations is minuscule.
- At a time when there is a **deficit of international leadership** on global issues, especially on security, migrant movement, poverty, and climate change, India has an **opportunity to promote well-balanced, common solutions.**

Action plan for India

1. First, as a member of the UNSC, India must help guide the **Council away from the perils of invoking the principles of humanitarian interventionism or ‘Responsibility to Protect’.** The world has seen mayhem result from this.
 - And yet, there are regimes in undemocratic and repressive nations where this yardstick will never be applied.
 - Given the fragile and complex international system, which can become even more unpredictable and conflictual, **India should work towards a rules-based global order.**
 - **Sustainable development and promoting peoples’ welfare** should become its new drivers.
2. Second, **India should push to ensure that the UNSC Sanctions Committee targets all those individuals and entities warranting sanctions.**
 - Multilateral action by the UNSC has not been possible because of narrowly defined national interest.
 - As on May 21, 2019, **260 individuals and 84 entities are subject to UN sanctions**, pursuant to Council resolutions 1267, 1989, and 2253.
 - The **S. Department of Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control** maintains a larger list of individuals and entities subject to U.S. sanctions.
 - The **European Union** maintains its own sanctions list.
3. Third, having good relations with all the great powers, **India must lead the way by pursuing inclusion, the rule of law, constitutionalism, and rational internationalism.**
 - India should once again become a **consensus-builder, instead of the outlier** it has progressively become.
 - A harmonised response is the sine qua non for **dealing with global problems of climate change, disarmament, terrorism, trade, and development.**

- India could take on larger burdens to **maintain global public goods and build new regional public goods**.
- For example, India should take the lead in activating the UNSC's Military Staff Committee, which was never set into motion following the UN's inception. Without it, the UNSC's collective security and conflict-resolution roles will continue to remain limited.

Way forward

- A rules-based international order helps rather than hinders India, and embracing the multilateral ethic is the best way forward.
- Apolarity, unipolarity, a duopoly of powers or contending super-powers — none of these suit India. **India has a strong motive to embrace polycentrism**, which is anathema to hegemonic powers intent on carving out their exclusive spheres of influence.
- Finally, India cannot stride the global stage with confidence in the absence of stable relations with its neighbours. Besides whatever else is done within the UN and the UNSC, India must lift its game in South Asia and its larger neighbourhood.

[su_box title="Meanings" box_color="#7960a0" title_color="#ffffff"]

Middle-Income Trap

World Bank Classification

- The World Bank classifies the world's economies into four income groups — high, upper-middle, lower-middle, and low.
- It bases this assignment on **Gross National Income (GNI)** per capita (current US\$) calculated using the Atlas method.

Updated Thresholds

- **New thresholds are determined at the start of the World Bank's fiscal year in July** and remain fixed for 12 months regardless of subsequent revisions to estimates.

Trap

- This is a risk that emerging economies are said to be vulnerable to.
- As a **country runs out of new sources of growth after an initial burst of rapid expansion**, it finds itself unable to break into a higher-income league.
- Middle-Income Trap crystalizes the notion that **growing rapidly can become more difficult after a country moves up from low income to middle income**.
- The transition from middle income to high income is inherently more challenging than the transition from low income to middle income

Sanctions

- The Security Council can take action to **maintain or restore international peace and security**.
- Security Council sanctions have taken a number of different forms, in pursuit of a variety of goals.
- The measures have ranged from comprehensive economic and trade sanctions to more targeted measures such as **arms embargoes, travel bans, and financial or commodity restrictions**.

United Nations Military Staff Committee

- - The Military Staff Committee is a United Nations Security Council subsidiary body whose

role is to plan UN military operation and assist in the regulation of armaments. [/su_box]

2. Turkey's tilt towards Russia

Background

- In November 2015, a **Turkish F-16 shot down a Russian fighter jet** over the Syrian border, ratcheting up tensions between Moscow and Ankara.
- There were speculations that Russian President Vladimir Putin would retaliate. But Mr. Putin didn't take any military action against Turkey. Instead, he stayed focussed on his strategic goal of **defeating the anti-regime rebels and jihadists and bolstering Syria's existing state institutions.**
- Putin's strategy was not to attack Turkey, but to win over it. He exploited the cracks in the Atlantic alliance, especially in U.S.-Turkey relations. Evolving regional equations also favoured his bet.

Current Context

- On July 12, three and a half years after the Russian bomber was downed by the Turks, Ankara received the first batch of the S-400, Russia's most advanced missile defence systems, despite threats and warnings from the U.S. and NATO.

Why Turkey is important Geo Politics?

- Turkey is a NATO member and also hosts a **S. airbase in Incirlik.**
- Turkey's strategic location, in the intersection of southern Europe, Central Asia and West Asia, makes it a pricey catch in geopolitical games.
- During the Cold War, Turkey was a key buffer for the Atlantic powers against the Soviet Union.
- Even after the Soviet Union disintegrated, the U.S. continued to maintain a close alliance with Ankara.

But now a high-tech Russian missile system protects a NATO nation's airspace.

U.S. has raised several technical issues over Turkey acquiring the S-400

- It fears the **system will gather data from the latest radar-evading American bombers, F-35,** for which Turkey has placed an order.
- In response to Turkey's decision to go ahead with the S-400 deal, the U.S. has already **suspended training programmes for Turkish pilots.**
- Ankara could also **attract sanctions from Washington.** But beyond these issues, the political point of a NATO member defying NATO and a powerful member of the alliance to buy Russian weaponry is what makes the S-400 deal the **hottest post-Soviet weapons agreement.**

Why did Turkey defy the U.S., even risking sanctions when its economy is underperforming?

- A host of factors led President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to redirect foreign policy.
- The **fissures in U.S.-Turkey ties date back to the 2003 Iraq War** when Ankara refused to be a launchpad for the American invasion.
- **During the Syrian crisis, Turkey wanted the U.S. to interfere in Syria on behalf of the rebels and overthrow the Assad regime,** but the Obama administration refused to do that.
 - Turkey at that time was **betting on the Arab Spring as a foreign policy tool to expand its influence in West Asia and North Africa.**
 - The expectation was that the **dictatorships in the region would be replaced by Islamist**

political parties (say, the Muslim Brotherhood which is ideologically aligned with Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party). But this bet was counterproductive, especially in Syria.

- In the initial years of the Syrian crisis, the porous Syrian-Turkish border was a **crucial transit point for rebels and jihadists alike**. By the time **Turkey started sealing the border**, the Islamic State (IS) had established itself as a dominant player in Syria.
 - The **IS initially attacked Syrian government forces** and rebel groups.
 - But once it started facing the heat on the battlefield, **it turned against Turkey**, carrying out a host of terror attacks in 2016.
- Another consequence of **Turkey's failed Syrian bet was the empowerment of Syrian Kurdish rebels**, who have close ideological and military ties with the Kurdistan Workers' Party, which has been fighting the Turkish forces for decades.
 - When **Kurds fought the IS in the battlefield**, the U.S. started supporting them directly. So Turkey lost all sides in Syria.
 - It failed to **topple the Assad regime** as the Russians and Iranians came to the regime's rescue.
 - The porous border policy backfired as **jihadists turned against Turkey**.
- Finally, there is an **empowered Kurdistan across the border** controlled by battle-hardened Kurdish rebels, who Turkey sees as its primary enemies.

Turkey's benefits in conflict with the U.S.'s.

- Turkey accepted this new reality. **It gave up its demand to topple the Assad regime**, and shifted its focus to **creating a buffer between its border and Syrian Kurdistan**.
- For this it **needs Russian and Syrian help**, as the Syrian government also doesn't want to see the Kurds being empowered any further.
- But **Kurds were the U.S.'s partners in the war against the IS**, and over 2,000 U.S. troops are still stationed in Syrian Kurdistan.
- Ankara blames Fethullah Gulen, a U.S.-based Turkish cleric, for the 2016 failed coup bid against Mr. Erdogan, and wants him to be extradited to Turkey. The U.S. refused to give in to Turkey's demands.
- **Turkey also wanted to buy the Patriot missile defence system** from the U.S., but Washington initially was not keen on selling it to Ankara. As all these issues piled up, Turkey turned to a willing Russia.

Therefore Turkey's interests directly clash with the U.S.'s.

Putin's calculus

- For Mr. Putin, Turkey is a big win, a luxury which even his Soviet bosses didn't have.
- If it has Turkey on its side, **Russia will have seamless access to the Mediterranean Sea** from the Black Sea (where it has Naval bases) through the Bosphorus Strait.
- And if **Russia wants to deepen its engagement in West Asia in the long term**, Turkey's role would be critical.

This doesn't mean that Russia and Turkey have become new regional allies. There are still structural issues between them.

- In **Syria, where both countries continue to back rival sides**, the crisis remains unresolved.
- Turkish national security establishment has historically been aligned with the U.S. Russian and Turkish interests vary in several other countries, from Libya to Israel. But the unmistakable message that Turkey has sent is that the **S. is no longer an indispensable partner in its national security strategy**.
- Turkey has also told NATO that **it's ready to risk the organisation's ire over a defence deal with**

Russia. Turkey is tilting.

Conclusion

- The U.S. will have to either mend its ways to retain a drifting Turkey or take retaliatory steps against an ally.
- Either way, it's a “check” by Mr. Putin on the grand geopolitical chessboard.

Category: GOVERNANCE

1. World Press Freedom Index

- Published every year since 2002 by Reporters Without Borders (RSF)
- The Index ranks 180 countries and regions according to the level of freedom available to journalists.
- It is a snapshot of the media freedom situation based on an **evaluation of pluralism, independence of the media, quality of legislative framework and safety of journalists** in each country and region.
- It **does not rank public policies** even if governments obviously have a major impact on their country's ranking.
- **Nor is it an indicator of the quality of journalism** in each country or region.

Global Ranking

- **Norway** is ranked first in the 2019 Index for the third year, followed by Finland and Sweden.
- At the bottom of the Index, both Vietnam (176th) and China (177th) have fallen one place and **Turkmenistan** (down two at 180th) is now last, replacing North Korea (up one at 179th).
- **South Asia in general features poorly on the index**, with **Pakistan** dropping three places to 142, and **Bangladesh** dropping four places to 150.

India's ranking and reason's for its status

- India's rank fell by two places to 140 from 138 — in 2016 it was 133 and in 2017 it was 136.
- Violence against journalists including **police violence, attacks by Maoist fighters and reprisals by criminal groups** or corrupt politicians is one of the most striking characteristics of the current state of press freedom in India.
- At least six Indian journalists were killed in connection with their work in 2018.
 - These murders highlighted the many dangers that Indian journalists face, especially those working for non-English-language media outlets in rural areas
- It found that an alarming rate of **coordinated hate campaigns waged on social networks** against journalists who dare to speak or write about subjects that annoy Hindutva.
- **Women journalists** are particularly at the receiving end, and covering sensitive but important topics of public interest such as **separatism in Jammu and Kashmir and Maoist insurgency** has become more difficult.
- **Authorities use anachronistic sedition laws against journalists**, who also face the wrath of militants and criminal gangs.

Analysis of the report

- In India, the Centre and several State governments have not merely shown extreme intolerance towards objective and critical reporting but also taken **unprecedented measures to restrict journalism**.
- The Finance Minister's recent order **barring credentialed reporters** from the Ministry's premises is

a case in point.

- The finance ministry issued a notice which read, "Entry of media persons, including those holding a PIB accredited card **will be on the basis of prior appointment.**"
- Most PIB-accredited journalists – a privilege given only to journalists after a certain number of years in the profession
- The number of countries regarded as safe, where journalists can work in complete security, continues to decline, while authoritarian regimes continue to tighten their grip on the media

Way forward

- The expression of **concern by foreign countries or global bodies regarding human rights, religious violence or media freedom** is routinely dismissed as external interference in India's sovereignty, the government should also manage the perception in the globalised world as it matters.
- If India is concerned about its reputation in terms of business and investment, it should **be equally or even more concerned about its standing as a democratic, pluralist country with a free and dynamic press.**
- It is not necessarily for the inflow of investment or luring global corporations but for India's well-being.

Category: ECONOMY

1. Banning of Cryptocurrency and Regulation of Official Digital Currency Bill, 2019

Background

- A cryptocurrency is a digital or virtual currency **that uses cryptography for security** and is generally based on blockchain technology, a distributed ledger enforced by a disparate network of computers. Bitcoin is the most popular cryptocurrency in the world.
- Given the high chances of cryptocurrencies being **misused for money laundering**, various government bodies such as the Income Tax Department and the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) had endorsed banning of cryptocurrency

Features of Draft Bill

- This draft has **proposed 10-year prison sentence** for persons who "mine, generate, hold, sell, transfer, dispose, issue or deal in cryptocurrencies.
- Besides making it completely illegal, the bill makes holding of cryptos a **non-bailable offence.**

While it is important to put mechanisms in place to deter bad actors, a **blanket ban** on all forms of cryptocurrency transactions will **result in India missing out on what may become one of the biggest technology revolutions since the Internet.**

The potential of blockchain

- While an oversimplification, blockchain can be described as a way for people to share extra space and computational power in their computers to **create a global supercomputer that is accessible for everyone.**
- Every computer connected to a blockchain network **helps validate and record transactions.**
- People who connect their computers to a network are known as **validators** and receive transaction fees in the form of **tokens.**
- Blockchain technology has the potential to **create new industries and transform existing ones** in ways we cannot imagine.

- For instance, it has the capacity to facilitate nano-payments proportionate to an individual's contribution and value creation in the Internet, making it an ideal wealth redistribution tool for our digital age.
- Start-ups have already **built thousands of apps on blockchain platforms like Ethereum**. However, these apps aren't easily available to non-tech savvy consumers through an app store, and hence their usage remains low.
 - They also face technical **problems including scalability and slowing down** of the network when many people use these apps simultaneously.
 - New companies such as Algorand and CasperLabs are investing millions in research and development and are close to solving these issues.
- Even big technology companies have started to take blockchain applications seriously. Facebook, for instance, recently announced its own cryptocurrency to **facilitate payments globally with minimal fees and no dependency on a central bank**.
- Therefore a law to ban holding or transacting in cryptocurrency would not only prevent Indians from reaping economic benefits by participating in blockchain networks as validators and earning transaction fees, but also stifle any innovation related to this disruptive emerging technology.

Way forward- The European example

- The European Parliament and European Council are working on an **Anti-Money Laundering Directive, known as AMLD5**. The deadline for its implementation is January 2020.
- All crypto exchanges and wallet custodians operating in Europe will have to implement **strict know-your-customer (KYC) on-boarding procedures and need to register with local authorities**.
- They will also be required to **report suspicious activities to relevant bodies**.
- This will **not fully solve the problem since it is not always possible for the exchange to know a beneficiary's details**.
- The EU Commission is aware and has been mandated to present further set of amendment proposals regarding **self-declaration by virtual currency owners, the maintenance of central databases registering users' identities and wallet addresses, and norms** while using virtual currencies as payment or investment means by 2022. This is a more reasonable approach, and the Indian government could follow suit.

Category: POLITY

1. Karnataka Political Crisis

Context

- The Supreme Court gave the 15 dissident MLAs from Karnataka **complete freedom to opt out of the ongoing Assembly session** even as it **acknowledged the Speaker's discretion** to decide on their resignations as and when he considers it appropriate.

What does it mean for the rebel MLA's under Anti Defection law?

- It amounts to holding that provisions of the anti-defection law, under which **parties can issue whips to their members to vote in a particular way, will not be applicable to the 15 MLAs**.
- The free run given by the Supreme Court to the dissident legislators means **they can defy a party whip without fear of disqualification for defection under clause 2 (b) of the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution**.
- Clause 2 (b) mandates that a legislator is liable for defection if he or she "votes or abstains from voting in such House contrary to any direction issued by the political party to which he belongs or by

any person or authority authorized by it in this behalf...”

The order also permits the Speaker to decide on the resignation of these MLAs in a time-frame he considers appropriate.

- India’s constitutional democracy rests on a separation of powers. The legislature is indeed autonomous, subject to the Constitution, and it is **not the business of the judiciary to enter into its realm**.
- By recognising the Speaker’s authority to determine the fate of the resignations, **the court has abided by this principle**.

Questions before SC

One of the enquiries in the litigation is **whether it is resignation or disqualification that should get priority**.

- The objective of disqualifying the MLAs rather than allowing them to quit will not save the government, but it will **prevent them from taking oath as ministers in an alternative Cabinet**.
- The dissident MLAs now risk nothing other than their seats, certainly not the opportunity to join the Cabinet of a successor-government

Issues with the Judgment

- The order raises the concern whether it does not constitute a **perilous precedent for granting ad hoc judicial exceptions** from constitutional provisions on defection and set the tone for **future judicial intervention to suspend the operation of any whip** in respect of a few.
- Critics have pointed out that by doing so, **the court has undermined the principles which govern the anti-defection law** (for an MLA, even while being a member, is not bound by the whip in this case) and reflect overreach.

Alternatives that could have been looked at by the Judiciary

- The court, which is understandably reluctant to intervene in the Speaker’s power ahead of his decisions, **could have refrained from making any orders about the legislators’ presence during the trust vote**, and made it clear that any action against them arising out of their absence or manner of voting would be subject to judicial review.

Conclusion

- To be fair to the Supreme Court, it is being burdened with the task of unravelling political knots, which means that more partisan our supposedly independent political institutions act, the more active the judiciary will become. This is not healthy for democracy.

F. Tidbits

1. Judiciary should revisit conventional wisdom: CJI

- Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi addressing an inauguration said great institutions like the judiciary should be on their guard against the ones who work in their dark recesses to weaken these institutions in a deceptive manner.
- The Court also launched the translation of 100 of its English judgments in seven other languages.
- Talking about history has seen how even great nations have been brought down in an utterly

deceptive manner.

- “The threat from such people has always been the greatest to institutions like the judiciary, which do not pander to any particular interest or bow to powerful coteries that breed in the nooks and dark corners,” the CJI said.
- The Chief Justice also said there is a dire need for introspection among the stakeholders as to where and how they would like to see this institution in the decades ahead.
- In this context, the CJI said the court and all its constituents should revamp existing methodologies and revisit conventional wisdom and traditions.

G. Prelims Facts

1. Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)

The government of India in April 2016, launched the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) after scraping down the earlier insurance schemes viz. Modified National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (MNAIS), Weather-based Crop Insurance scheme and the National Agriculture Insurance Scheme (NAIS). Therefore, currently, Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana is the only flagship scheme of the government for agricultural insurance in India.

Details:

- Annual Commercial / Annual Horticultural crops, oilseeds and food crops (Cereals, Millets and Pulses) are covered under the scheme.
- The scheme is optional for the farmers who have not availed institutional credit, while all the farmers who have borrowed institutional loans from banks are covered under the scheme mandatorily.
- All the funds for the scheme come from the Krishi Kalyan Kosh.
- The scheme covers localized calamities such as hailstorms, landslides etc; yield losses such as droughts, dry spells, pests, floods etc; and post-harvest losses against specific perils of unseasonal rains, cyclonic rains, cyclones etc.
- However, the scheme does not cover perils such as war & kindred perils, nuclear risks, riots, malicious damage, theft, act of enmity, grazed and/or destroyed by domestic and/or wild animals
- It is proposed by the scheme to use remote sensing technology, smart phones or drones to expedite the crop loss estimation.

Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) aims at supporting sustainable production in agriculture sector by following ways:

- By providing financial support to farmers who suffer crop loss/damage that arise out of unforeseen events.
- By stabilizing farmers income to ensure that they continue their farming activities .
- By encouraging the farmers to adopt modern agricultural practices and also make use of innovative agricultural practices.
- Ensuring the flow of credit to the agriculture sector which contributes to food security, crop diversification and enhancing growth and competitiveness of agriculture sector besides protecting farmers from production risks.

H. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. The idea of the Preamble in the Constitution was taken from the UK.

2. It is explicitly proclaimed in the Preamble that India is a Secular state.

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

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

The idea of the Preamble in the Constitution was taken from the U.S.A.

Q2. Consider the following statements with respect to Carter Doctrine:

- 2. It is a policy by Russia.
- 3. It is a policy to use military force if necessary to defend the national interests in the Persian Gulf.

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

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

It is a policy by the U.S.A to use military force if necessary to defend the national interests in the Persian Gulf. It was proclaimed by President of the United States Jimmy Carter.

Q3. Krishonnati Yojana does not include which of the following?

- a. National Mission on Oilseeds and Oil Palm
- b. National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA)
- c. National Mission on Agricultural Extension and Technology
- d. National Mission on Silk and sericulture

Answer: d

Explanation:

Krishonnati Yojana is an umbrella scheme which includes the following:

- National Food Security Mission (NFSM)
- National Food Security Mission-Commercial Crops
- Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH)
- National Mission on Oilseeds and Oil Palm
- National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA)
- National Mission on Agricultural Extension and Technology

- Price Stabilization Fund for Cereals and Vegetables

Q4. Consider the following statements:

1. Chakmas are Hindu and Hajongs are Buddhist Refugees.
2. Chakmas' is close to Bengali-Assamese and Hajongs speak a Tibeto-Burman tongue written in Assamese.

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

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

Moderate

Answer: b

Explanation:

Chakmas mostly follow Theravada Buddhism while Hajongs are Hindus and observe Hindu rites and customs.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Worker safety in India's dynamic industrial sector is a black hole in our growth story. Is this addressed by new bills introduced by the Government? Critically examine. (15 Marks, 250 Words)
2. Motives behind the continued labelling of forest dwellers as forest destroyers even as evidence depicts that they have actively managed forests is a flawed approach to conserving forests. Examine. (10 Marks, 150 Words)

