

23 Nov 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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B. GS2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. 'Political settlement alone won't end violence in Afghanistan'

Context:

Afghanistan peace talks.

Details:

- A political settlement in Afghanistan will not mean that the violence would immediately cease.
- There will still be violent extremist groups like ISIS [Islamic State], and there will still be armed groups pursuing their own criminal or political objectives. **A comprehensive peace agreement** will, however, enable Afghans to work together to fight these common threats.

Background:

- The U.S., India and Afghanistan have all suffered from terrorism.
- **The 2017 US President's South Asia Strategy** acknowledged that military power alone will not bring peace to Afghanistan or stop the terrorist threat arising from that country.
- The military effort is designed to create conditions for a negotiated settlement. This effort involves military resolve in Afghanistan, with decisions based on conditions on the ground.
- A rapid exit of U.S. troops from Afghanistan would lead to unacceptable consequences wherein the progress made in Afghanistan over the years would be at

stake.

- Early in 2019, the Trump administration started negotiating a settlement with the Taliban, which would see the withdrawal of most U.S. troops in a phased manner, in return for security commitments from the Taliban.
- The Afghan government had felt sidelined by these talks and India had been wary of the exercise, as it has wanted an **“Afghan-owned, Afghan-led, and Afghan-controlled” peace process.**
- Talks collapsed when Mr Trump called off a meeting with the Taliban at Camp David after the insurgency group claimed responsibility for an attack in Afghanistan.

India’s role:

India’s major development works in Afghanistan include the construction of dams, roads, electrical lines, irrigation systems, and telecommunications infrastructure to building a stadium in Kandahar for Afghanistan’s cricket team. India has spent **\$3 billion** in Afghanistan since 2001.

Way forward:

- Despite the unpredictability of the **Peace talks**, the gains made since 2001 should be preserved. Democracy and constitutional order in Afghanistan are the major gains of the last 18 years, which are worth preserving.
- Afghanistan is a much different country than it was 20 years ago, with institutions, security forces, and a growing civic culture that makes it increasingly inhospitable to global terrorists. There has been a change in the ground realities of Afghanistan over the last two decades.
- The important role of the Afghan government in its country’s peace process must be duly acknowledged. A reduction in violence is necessary to move the peace process forward and for any **intra-Afghan negotiations** regarding a political settlement, to be successful.

For more information on the issue refer: [30th October Comprehensive News Analysis.](#)

2. ‘India’s reluctance to join RCEP understandable’

Context:

India’s decision to walk away from the RCEP trade deal.

Details:

- “The **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)** agreement looks like an extension of **China’s Belt and Road initiative**”, former Australian Prime Minister has said, adding that he understood India’s reluctance to join the pact.
- Just as the **Trans-Pacific Partnership** was the economic leg of **the U.S. pivot to the Asia Pacific**, RCEP is like the trade leg of the Belt and Road Initiative.
- One of India’s primary concerns about joining the RCEP pact was that its already-huge trade deficit with China would widen significantly.
- India opined that while it is important to promote freer trade, it is also important to ensure that it does not unduly benefit one country at the cost of another.

Indo-Australian relations:

- Australia was keen to see India join existing bodies, such as the **Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation agreement**. The existing entities would be better with India in them rather than without. If India was within APEC, it would be a stronger, more effective body.
- The potential of an Indo-Australian partnership needs to be harnessed with more bilateral interactions. **An India-Australia bilateral deal** must be considered.
- With India opting out of RCEP, pursuing bilateral deals with significant trading partners should be considered. The India-Australia trade deal got subsumed in the RCEP negotiations. The discussions on the bilateral trade deal should be expedited and enhanced.

3. RCEP still on Japan’s agenda

Context:

India’s decision to not sign the RCEP trade deal.

Details:

- Japanese officials are going to make another attempt to make India revise its decision not to join the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).
- Japan Prime Minister Mr Abe is expected to pitch for India to rejoin the **ASEAN-led Free Trade Agreement - RCEP** during the annual summit. The other members of the 15-nation RCEP grouping had also asked the Japanese government to try and ensure India reconsidered its position.

Indo-Japan Relations:

- The **Indo-pacific policy** finds overlapping interests of India and Japan.
- India and Japan have joined forces to implement Joint projects in Sri Lanka, the Maldives and other countries. **Asia Africa growth corridor** is a notable effort in this direction.
- Indo-Japanese maritime and military initiatives have received impetus, of late.
- The **annual India-Japan summit** hosted alternatively in India and Japan has often resulted in big ticket announcements and has strengthened year over year.
- The **Inaugural '2+2' ministerial-level India-Japan dialogue**, which will include the Foreign and Defence Ministers is a step in the direction to further strengthening of the India-Japan strategic partnership, special and global partnership.

For more information on India Japan relations refer: [India –Japan Relations](#)

C. GS3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. GDP slump will hit \$5 tn target, warns NITI Aayog

Context:

In the backdrop of slowing economic growth rate, NITI Aayog has warned the government that the road to a \$5 trillion economy by 2025 is beset with many speed breakers.

Details:

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in her Budget presentation, had said that the government would work to **make India a \$5 trillion economy by 2025**.

Concerns:

- The **nominal GDP growth — a measure of growth without accounting for inflation** — has to be at least 12.4% on an average, if the set target has to be reached, according to a presentation made by NITI Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant. However, the growth rate was 8% in the first quarter (April to June) of the current financial year (2019-20).
- Experts estimate that growth will dip in Q2 (July to September) compared to Q1 in both real and nominal terms. While GDP growth in real terms in Q1 stood at 5%, State Bank of India recently estimated that this could dip to 4.2% in Q2, with a corresponding dip in nominal growth as well. **Real GDP growth accounts for inflation.**

- **Domestic investment and consumption are the only dependable drivers for sustainable re-acceleration (of the economy).** However, a deceleration in investment is visible, primarily in the household sector, almost entirely due to real estate.
- Gross fixed capital formation in the sub-sector of 'dwellings, other buildings and structures' fell from 12.8% of GDP in 2011-12 to 6.9% in 2017-18.
- The slowdown in the domestic market is also because of the limited availability of capital with the banks which are tied down due to high non-performing assets in heavy industry and infrastructure.
- In the power sector, there is a high **cross-subsidisation** in favour of residential tariff leading to very high industrial tariffs. The electric power transmission and distribution (T&D) losses in India stand at 19%, higher than that of Bangladesh and Vietnam. This undue burden on industries is affecting their profitability.

Way forward:

There is a need for **“structural changes”** in the economy and in this direction India needs to focus on the export of high-value technology and manufacturing goods.

2. GST Council, finance panel should work in tandem

Context:

Chairman of the **Fifteenth Finance Commission** N.K. Singh has called for symmetry in the working of the GST Council and the Finance Commission.

Details:

- The finance commission recommends distribution of revenues between Union and States, and thereafter among the States, further to the third tier.
- While the Finance Commission looks at projections of expenditure and revenue, the issue of GST rates exemptions, changes, and implementation of the indirect taxes is within the domain of the **GST Council**.
- This leads to unsettled questions on the ways to monitor, scrutinise and optimise revenue outcomes. In such a scenario the **coordination mechanism between the Finance Commission and the GST council is an inescapable necessity**.
- **For the first five years of GST, a 14% guaranteed compensation was provided to the States, and this would end in 2022.** Many States are seeking an extension of this mechanism even after 2022.
- The future roadmap on this has a bearing on the recommendations which the

Commission is expected to make on the likely revenues of States, sustainable growth rates, and the **Revenue Deficit of Grants under Article 275**.

Way forward:

There is scope for coordination between the two constitutional bodies given the overlapping nature of their mandates. Such a coordination must be based on well-defined terms.

Category: ENVIRONMENT

1. 'Will take lesser time than Beijing to improve Delhi air'

Context:

A debate on air pollution and climate change, especially with reference to the national capital.

Details:

Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar told the Lok Sabha that China's capital took 15 years to improve its air quality but India will do the same in Delhi in much lesser time.

Measures Taken in Delhi to tackle pollution:

- Round-the-clock monitoring.
- Ban on the use of furnace oil and stricter emission norms for industries in the capital region.
- Five times the number of trees that were cut during the construction of Delhi Metro have been planted, recognizing the importance of afforestation.
- The introduction of the **Air Quality Index (AQI)** was an important step given that the solution to the problem of air pollution would come only when the pollution could be measured.

Way forward:

- A mass movement is needed to curb pollution and arrest the adverse impact of climate change. Awareness needs to be created among the masses. There is a need to introduce **climate literacy**.
- There has to be a concerted effort to deal with the problem and the Centre and the State governments should work together.
- India needs a **climate-smart economy** which could ensure sustainable economic

growth for India.

- **India's green cover has been increasing** and this needs to be further enhanced given the role of trees in maintaining ecological balance.

Category: **INFRASTRUCTURE**

1. Policy to hasten piped gas infra on the cards

Context:

Constitution of a high-level panel to evaluate progress in the City Gas Distribution programme and to frame a national policy on City Gas Distribution.

Details:

- **A national policy on City Gas Distribution (CGD)** to speed up the development of infrastructure for the supply of piped natural gas to households, as well as CNG for automobiles and industrial units, is on the cards.
- The **Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB)** has formed a high-level committee comprising its senior officials and those of CGD entities. The committee will undertake a detailed review of all the issues to expedite the development of piped gas networks and draft such a policy.
- The decision assumes significance considering challenges, especially delay in getting approvals at the State level, that industry sources say CGD entities in certain geographical areas (GAs) are facing.
- Though the issues cited by the entities mostly come under the purview of the State governments, it was felt that **a national CGD policy** would serve as a guide for the States to formulate their own policy.
- The regulator has been inviting inputs for the draft policy.

Significant progress:

- The CGD industry has witnessed significant progress in the last two years in terms of authorisation of GAs.
- The number of such GAs has increased from 78 at the end of 2017 to 229 at present, covering 71% of the country's population as against 20%, two years ago.
- Most firms that were awarded authorisation had taken steps towards the development of infrastructure. The various authorities at the Central and State governments as well as local authorities have generally been helpful and have been

working along with CGD entities in resolving the issues.

Way forward:

- The draft policy should consider important aspects, including the appointment of a nodal agency/officer by State governments to co-ordinate for granting single-window clearances in a time-bound manner. This would expedite the whole process and increase the ease of doing business for the CGD entities.
- The important aspects the policy should consider is standardisation of road restoration/permission charges across the country to ensure synergy in the process and the procedure for timely availability of permissions from NHAI and Railways. This would cut the delay time in seeking permissions for the work.

D. GS4 Related

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E. Editorials

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. The opacity around electoral bonds

Context:

Concerns regarding the electoral bonds.

Details:

- The Election Commission (EC) and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had expressed reservations about the **Electoral Bonds scheme** prior to its introduction.
- Objections were overruled and the scheme was passed in the Lok Sabha as part of the Finance Bill so that it would not have to go through the Rajya Sabha where the then-government lacked a majority.
- There is no other country in the world where such a scheme exists.

Need for funds:

- In the 21st century, money plays an increasingly large role in elections. Today, **India spends more on elections than the U.S. with a per capita GDP that is 3% of the U.S.**
- Some party may win a one-off election by spending very little, but sustaining victory over several elections requires funds.
- To reach voters, candidates and parties use hoardings and advertisements on printed, electronic and social media. They hold election rallies. They travel and have

to pay party workers.

- In India, there is the added expenditure of buying votes through distribution of gifts, money, liquor and so on.
- Given that money is required, a central issue is whether a winning candidate or party will work for the public or for those who have funded them.

International best practices:

- Some countries have public funding of elections.
- Campaign funding laws and reforms are a constantly evolving subject internationally. They **focus on public funding, limits on expenditure, limits on donations, transparency in funding and penalties for non-compliance.**

Concerns:

- Even a glance at the best international laws and rules shows that India is lagging far behind. The gaps between the stated purpose of the electoral bonds scheme and the letter of law are glaring.
- The voter does not know who is funding whom through electoral bonds. Though this is supposed to protect the donors from harassment from the authorities, it has brought in **opaqueness in electoral funding.**
- In case of Electoral bonds, the bank knows the purchaser of the bonds as well as the party that cashed it. The law agencies can obtain this information whenever they want. This makes it possible for the ruling party to use this information to demand donations for itself, prevent donations to others, and use the law enforcement agencies to harass those who donate to rival parties. There is nothing in the electoral bonds scheme or existing laws to prevent this from happening. The ruling party gets nearly all the funds.
- In 2017, the then RBI Governor had warned that allowing any entity other than the central bank to **issue bearer bonds**, which are currency-like instruments, is fraught with considerable risk and is unprecedented (even with conditions applicable to electoral bonds).
- **Donation limits have been removed.** In theory, a large corporate could buy the government using electoral bonds. This would not be possible in any other country.
- It is true that black money cannot be used to buy electoral bonds. However, black money can be used outside the scheme during elections. The reduction in cash donations from Rs. 20,000 to Rs. 2,000 is not good enough. There are parties with hundreds of crores of declared income that claim that all the funds were received

from small cash donations of Rs. 100 or less. This cannot be prevented by merely reducing the cash limits. In short, electoral bonds cannot eliminate black money.

- The EC had warned that electoral bonds would allow illegal foreign funds to be routed to political parties.
- The real danger, however, is long-term. If big money entirely funds elections in an opaque way, this would be a setback to democracy.

Way forward:

- The electoral bonds scheme needs to be evaluated. The Supreme Court is hearing a petition on this issue.
- Various commissions, including the Election Commission, have given detailed recommendations on suitable remedies. But, to date, no government has acted on them.
- We need to **benchmark ourselves against the best international practices and laws on campaign funding**.
- **Complete transparency** in all funding is required. Political party can voluntarily choose to disclose its funds and sources. There is no law that prevents them from doing so. They can also state publicly that they will henceforth not use black money.
- **Political parties need to be under the Right to Information Act**. The Central Information Commission ruled that they were, but the parties refuse to follow its directions.
- There must be **spending limits as well as donation limits**, especially in a highly unequal society like that in India, and strict penalties for flouting rules and the law.
- **Public funding** needs to be examined and introduced with proper checks and balances.
- Voters need to demand changes and we need **voter awareness campaigns**. If voters reject candidates and parties that overspend or bribe them, we would have moved democracy one level higher.

For more information on Electoral bonds refer. [Click here](#)

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. No light at the end of the Brexit deadlock

Context:

Second general election in Britain since the Brexit referendum.

Details:

- Even after more than three years after the United Kingdom voted, by a narrow margin, to leave the **European Union (EU)**, there has been no solution to this problem.
- The biggest casualty, has been clarity about the country's future as Britain continues to rehash the tactical battles of the 2016 referendum on whether or not to remain in the EU, the destination of 45% of the U.K.'s exports and the source of 53% of its imports, including half of its food supplies.
- The U.K. is now a country more divided than ever into tribes of 'Leavers' and 'Remainers', divisions that cut across traditional political lines.
- At one extreme are the most ardent 'Remainers', who would like to cancel Brexit altogether, whether through a second referendum or by voting in a government that will revoke the process of leaving the EU.
- Gathered at the opposite pole are the hardcore 'Brexiters' who wish to see Britain cut all its ties with the EU on exit day, in order to start creating new trading relationships with a clean slate.
- Brexit has become representative of sovereignty to be upheld and defended at all costs. For too long, the Brexiteer argument goes that the U.K. has been subservient to ever-expanding EU rules and regulations. Brexiteers believe that a democratic state ought to be able to set its own rules about, among other areas, food standards, pet well-being, road safety, banking regulations, and, most importantly, immigration limits.

Challenges for Britain:

- Withdrawing from the EU will be the start of a long process of redefining Britain. No other country has yet disentangled itself from a trading relationship with its largest trade partner, even in such times of protectionist tendencies that appear to be affecting the desire for future trading relationships.
- Britain's exit from the EU, from the ever-closer ties that have bound this island nation to its continent since it joined the European Communities (the EU's predecessor) in 1973, is not an event but a process of dissociation and re-association. These, and many other regulations, will not just disappear overnight once Britain leaves the EU. They are written into British law, and Parliament will need to decide on whether and how to replace them.
- The fact that two Prime Ministers have tried and failed to negotiate an acceptable withdrawal agreement — something that will govern U.K.-EU relations until the two

entities can agree on a new trading relationship — is a testament to the **complexity** of this uncoupling. There has not even been a common ground to begin negotiations.

- Further, through the EU, Britain is currently part of trading arrangements with about 70 other countries. After Brexit, the U.K. will need to replace these with bilateral pacts.
- As British delegations set forth to **negotiate new trade deals with other countries**, they will confront tough questions about what Britain can offer to say, U.S., India and China. What the U.K. is willing to concede is likely to be equally difficult. London would have to open up British markets to American and Chinese products. Having defended its right to control immigration through Brexit, U.K. may not be willing to grant more visas to Indian workers which is likely to be India's main demands in bilateral trade deals.
- Complicating matters is the fact that Brexit is increasingly becoming an English obsession that is threatening the **unity of the United Kingdom**. Scotland and Northern Ireland (the former by a decisive margin) voted to remain in the EU in 2016. Though Wales voted narrowly to leave, the sentiment appears to be shifting. Divisions over Brexit have fuelled Scottish nationalism, with the Scottish Nationalist Party demanding another independence referendum. In a 2014 referendum on independence, Scotland had voted 55% to 45% to remain in the U.K., primarily because remaining in the union gave it access to the EU.

For more information on Brexit refer, [click here](#).

2. Occupation rewards

Context:

The Trump administration's announcement that it no longer considers Israeli settlements in the West Bank, illegal.

Background:

- The recent decision is in line with President Donald Trump's Israel policy, which has unconditionally favoured the Jewish nation.
- In December 2017, Mr. Trump announced that the U.S. would recognise Jerusalem, a disputed city, as Israel's capital, breaking with an international consensus that the status of Jerusalem should be settled as part of a peace agreement.
- In March 2019, the administration recognised the Golan Heights, which Israel seized from Syria in the 1967 war and has occupied ever since, as part of Israel.
- The present de facto recognition of the Jewish settlements on the West Bank,

Washington has given a shot in the arm to Israel's religious right, which wants the settlements to be annexed.

Concerns:

- The UN General Assembly, the Security Council and the International Court of Justice have all stated that the Israeli settlements on the West Bank are illegal.
- The Trump administration's declaration that the Israeli settlements on the West Bank are not illegal not only challenges international laws and consensus on the issue but also complicates the already-stalled peace process between the Israelis and the Palestinians.
- According to the Fourth Geneva convention, an occupying power "shall not transfer parts of its civilian population into the territory it occupies". But Israel has been doing just that for decades. There are around 4,00,000 Israeli settlers on the West Bank.
- The 'security barrier' Israel has built, has cut deeper into the West Bank to incorporate some of the settlements, and the check-points Israel has set up across the West Bank restrict the movement of Palestinians.
- Israel has already taken effective control of a huge chunk of the West Bank through the settlements. The UN Security Council has asked Israel to stall the settlement activities, but Israel has hardly paid any attention to the international opinion.
- The Trump administration's recent announcement has only boosted Israel's claim over the disputed territories. If Israel goes ahead with annexation of the settlements, the call for which is gaining political traction in the country, that will be the last nail in the coffin of the **two-state solution**.
- The Palestinians have made it clear that the two-state solution could be implemented only based on the 1967 border, with East Jerusalem as the capital of a future state of Palestine.
- The right of return of the Palestinian refugees forced from their homes during the 1948 war, border of a future Palestinian state remain to be the contentious issues.
- The recent events have made the "two state" solution more difficult to negotiate and implement.

The issue has been covered in 20th November 2019 Comprehensive News Analysis. [Click here](#) to read.

F. Tidbits

1. Navy gives Shivangi wings to follow her dreams

- Sub Lieutenant Shivangi will earn her 'wings' by the end of 2019 and make history as the first-ever woman to steer an Indian naval aircraft to the skies.

G. Prelims Facts

1. Building bridges of friendship across oceans

- **Milan** is a multilateral naval exercise hosted by the **Indian Navy** under the aegis of the Andaman and Nicobar Command.
- The biennial event is held in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and features professional exercises and seminars, social events and sporting fixtures between participating nations.
- Milan was first held in 1995. Seventeen nations, including India, participated in Milan 2014 making it the biggest edition of the event ever. The most recent edition of Milan was held at Port Blair in 2018.

2. Venkaiah warns MPs on notices, disruptions

- Members can raise any issue of national importance during Zero Hour between 11 a.m. and noon.
- Giving a dressing-down to MPs, Rajya Sabha Chairman M. Venkaiah Naidu said that notices given by members for raising issues of public importance during Zero Hour will lapse if the proceedings in the morning session are adjourned over disruptions.
- The Rajya Sabha chairman has stated that serious action will be taken against those members who defy the Chair's order. It was the Chairman's prerogative to allow or disallow discussions under a particular rule.

Read more on [Zero Hour](#).

3. Bill to make cleanliness a fundamental duty moved

- A **private member's Bill** was recently moved in the Rajya Sabha seeking a constitutional amendment to make participation in a mass cleanliness movement and spreading the message of Swachh Bharat a fundamental duty.
- It was proposed to amend **Article 51 A** to add another duty under the fundamental duties of citizens.

4. 28 private member's Bills introduced in Lok Sabha

- A private member's bill, in a parliamentary system of government, is a bill (proposed law) introduced into a legislature by a legislator who is not acting on behalf of the executive branch.

- The designation "private member's bill" is used in most Westminster System jurisdictions, in which a "private member" is any member of parliament (MP) who is not a member of the cabinet (executive).
- In presidential systems with the separation of the executive from the legislature, the concept does not arise since the executive cannot initiate legislation, and bills are introduced by individual legislators (or sometimes by popular initiative).

H. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

Q1. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct with respect to a private member bill?

1. Any bill introduced by a member other than a minister is known as a private member bill.
2. Private member bills are tabled on Fridays when the Parliament is in session.
3. So far no private members bill have been passed in India.

Options:

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

Any bill introduced by a member other than a minister is known as a private member bill. Private member bills are tabled on Fridays when the Parliament is in session. 14 private member bills have become laws since the first Lok Sabha in 1952, and none in nearly five decades.

Q2. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct regarding the 'Zero hour'?

1. In both the Houses of the Parliament, the period, just after the question hour between 12 noon and 1 PM, is called the Zero Hour.
2. Zero Hour is the Indian innovation in the field of parliamentary procedures and has been in existence since 1962 and does not find mention in the rules of procedure.
3. During zero hour, questions are asked about issues of public importance without prior permission.

Options:

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

Self-explanatory.

Q3. Which of the following is/are incorrect?

- 1. Mineral fuels including oil constitute a major share of export value from India.
- 2. Mineral fuels including oil constitute a major share of import into India.

Choose the correct option:

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

Mineral fuels including oil form around 14.9% of total exports. India imports crude oil and exports processed oil to its neighboring countries. Mineral fuels including oil account for around 33.2% of total imports.

Q4. If one is travelling from Agartala to Panaji by road, what is the minimum number of states that he/she would have to pass through including the states in which the respective states lie?

- a. 7
- b. 6
- c. 5
- d. 4

Answer: a

Explanation:



Tripura, Assam, West Bengal, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Goa.

I. Practice Questions for UPSC Mains Exam

1. What are the concerns associated with the electoral bonds, in political funding in India. Suggest suitable reforms for electoral funding in the country. (150 words, 10 marks).
2. India-Japan strategic partnership has strengthened over time with increasing depth and width of engagements. Comment. Discuss the significance of the bilateral relation for the two countries. (150 words, 10 marks).