

14 March 2020 UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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B. GS 2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. RS nod for 'Vivad Se Vishwas' Bill

Context:

- Rajya Sabha has approved the **Direct Tax Vivad Se Vishwas Bill, 2020**.

Details:

- The bill will give taxpayers a chance to **settle tax disputes by paying their dues without any interest or penalty till March 31, 2020**. The Vivad Se Vishwas scheme **waives off interest and penalty** on pending tax if paid by March 31. For payments made after March 31 and till June 30, a 10% penalty would be charged.
- The scheme is not intended to give amnesty and those already being prosecuted under the **Income Tax Act** would be excluded from it. The 75% tax on undisclosed cash deposited at the time of demonetization would still apply.
- **A cap of Rs.5 crores in dues has been included in the scheme** to prevent large-scale evasion or fraud-related cases trying to take advantage of the scheme.

Additional information:

- **Article 348 (1)** of the Constitution of India provides that **all proceedings in the Supreme Court and every High court shall be in the English Language** until Parliament by law otherwise provides.
- **Under Article 348 (2), the Governor of the State may**, with the previous consent of the President, **authorize the use of the Hindi language or any other language** used for any official purpose of the State, in the proceedings of the High Court having its principal seat in that State provided that decrees, judgments or orders passed by such High Courts shall be in English.

2. Masks, sanitizers now essential commodities

Context:

- Masks and hand sanitizers have been declared as essential commodities by the central government.

Details:

- There have been reports of shortage in Masks and hand sanitizers, in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak.
- The Central government has notified the **order under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955** to declare 2 ply and 3 ply surgical masks, N95 masks, and hand sanitizers as essential commodities till June 30, 2020.
 - The decision would empower the States and the Central government to **regulate the production, quality, distribution, and sale of these items**, and carry out operations against those involved in **speculation, overpricing and black marketing**.
 - An offender under the Essential Commodities Act can be punished with **imprisonment up to seven years, or a fine**, or both.
- The Central government has also issued an **advisory under the Legal Metrology Act**, mandating the States to ensure that Masks and hand sanitizer are not sold for more than the Maximum Retail Price (MRP).

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. PM calls for SAARC videoconference on COVID

Context:

- Indian Prime Minister has called for a videoconference summit of leaders of **the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)** to discuss a **common strategy to tackle COVID-19**.

Background:

- **Set up in 1985, SAARC** is the first such inter-country grouping for the South Asian region.
- **SAARC has had no summit-level meeting since 2014.** The meetings have been called off due to **India-Pakistan tensions** and India's decision to not attend the summit in Islamabad on grounds of Pakistan's continued support to cross-border terrorism.
- **India had shifted focus to other regional groupings** that do not include Pakistan to ensure co-operation among the neighbor.
- The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (**BIMSTEC**), the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (**BBIN**) grouping, and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (**IORA**) have received increased attention from India.

Details:

- The Prime Minister of India has suggested that the leadership of SAARC nations should chalk out a **strong common strategy to fight the threat posed by the coronavirus** and has called for a video conference summit of leaders of the SAARC for discussions.
- The threat posed by coronavirus to the region is considerable.
- South Asia presently accounts for a small fraction of the total no of confirmed cases of COVID-19, but there are fears of an escalation in the numbers given the density of population in the region. **While SAARC member-states occupy just 3% of the world's landmass, they account for 21% of its population.**
- All countries in the regional grouping, except Pakistan, have welcomed India's idea of the SARS-CoV-2 video conference.

Significance:

- The inter-regional co-operation could help set **an example to the world**, and contribute to a healthier planet by coming up with a unified strategy to fight the virus in the region.
- The COVID-19 situation seems to have lent **an opportunity to mend differences within SAARC.** The new initiative may well lead to a revival of the SAARC forum itself.

Additional information:

- **The South Asia Satellite (designated GSAT-9)**, formerly known as SAARC Satellite, is a geostationary communication **and meteorology satellite** operated by ISRO for the SAARC region.
- The satellite was mooted by India as part of its **neighborhood first policy.**
- Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka are the users of the multi-dimensional facilities provided by the satellite.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. Bulls quarantine bears

Context:

- The stock exchange index of Sensex and Nifty's **recovery post the record fall.**

Details:

The fall in indices:

- Concerns on the global spread of COVID-19, especially in the EU and the resultant **impact on travel, tourism and business have impacted business sentiment** leading to **high Foreign Institutional Investments (FIIs) selling in Indian equity markets**, with foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) having sold shares in huge numbers.
- The virus-led **recession fears** have triggered panic selling. The exit of the foreign investors from India has affected the Investor sentiments, with Sensex and Nifty recording record declines. **Nifty hit the lower circuit breaker of 10%** as trading was halted in both exchanges for 45 minutes. This was the **first time in 12 years** that the markets have hit their lower circuit.
- The **India VIX index**, which had more than doubled in the recent past, further increased by 25%.
- **Similar trends were observed in other Asian economies** as well with Japan's Nikkei declining by over 6%, and the stock exchange benchmarks of Malaysia, South Korea, and Taiwan losing between 2% and 6% each.

Recovery:

- The resumption of trading, however, saw **buying support for stocks**. The markets recovered later in the day, registering growth compared to the previous day's numbers.
- The recovery in the markets was primarily **led by strong buying of equities by domestic institutional investors led by LIC**. This helped reverse the decline in the markets.

2. Rupee rebounds after RBI intervenes

Context:

- The **Indian rupee made a sharp recovery after touching a record low** of 74.50 a dollar, following **intervention and assurance of liquidity by the Reserve Bank of India**.

Background:

- Stock markets around the globe are facing volatility due to the **risk aversion behaviour of the investors**, who are resorting to large scale selling of their equities. India has also been witnessing the same trend over the recent past.
- **India is a highly dollarized economy** and currently, there is an **increased demand for U.S. dollars**. This has **led to the declining value of the Indian rupee**.

Details:

- Noting the **depreciation of the Indian rupee**, the RBI has stated that it is closely monitoring the rapidly evolving global situation and that it would take all necessary measures to ensure that **money, debt and forex markets remain adequately liquid** and stable.
- The RBI noted that the **mismatches in the U.S. dollar liquidity (supply v/s demand)** had become acute across the world. However, given the fact that **India's level of foreign exchange reserves remained at comfortable levels** to meet any exigency, RBI is confident of coming out of the crisis.
 - The latest data released by the RBI showed the country's foreign exchange at an **all-time high of \$487.23 billion** in the week to March 6, 2020 due to an increase in foreign currency assets.
- Recently, the RBI announced that it would open a **six-month dollar sell-buy swap window to pump in liquidity in the foreign exchange market**. The central bank will conduct the first round of U.S. dollar-rupee sell-buy swaps worth \$2 billion in its effort to fight market volatility.

- The swap is like a simple buy/sell foreign-exchange with the RBI. A **bank shall sell U.S. dollars to the RBI** and simultaneously agree to **buy the same amount of U.S. dollars with a 'forward' premium** at the end of the swap period. The premium would be determined through an auction.

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Govt. seeks city-level plans for clean air

Context:

- The Union Minister for Environment's statement in the Lok Sabha.

Details:

Air pollution:

- Given the fact that **every city has different pollutants and since the sources of pollution also vary**, the problem of air pollution is more effectively dealt with at the local level, hence **local action is very important** to curb the problem of air pollution.
- In this direction, the Union Ministry for Environment has asked for **city-level plans for the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)**.

Water pollution:

- The Minister has stated that water bodies in the country are polluted because **70% of sewage goes untreated**. There is an urgent need to set up **more sewage treatment plants in India**.
- Previously, the **Common Effluent Treatment Plants (CETP)** were being built and operated by different entities that created problems. To overcome this problem, **henceforth those who build and operate the sewage treatment plants will be the same**.

Polluting industries:

- The **Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)** had carried out inspections of industries for verification of compliance to environmental norms between April 2016 and March 2020.
- **342 out of 700 industries** inspected have been found **violating environmental norms** and causing pollution in the last four years.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: EDUCATION

1. Temples of critical thinking and debate

Context

- QS World University Subject Rankings, 2020 was released recently.

QS World University Rankings

- It is an annual publication of university rankings by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS).
- QS is a British company specializing in education and is most often known for its rankings of educational institutions.
- Its rankings are **considered among the top influential rankings in the world**, and the ranking is, therefore, a rather prestigious certification to acquire.
- QS uses four key metrics to compile the rankings including
 - Academic Reputation
 - Employer Reputation
 - Citations Per Paper
 - The h-index which measures how productive an institution's research faculty are.
- However, the precise weighting of each metric varies by subject to reflect differing publication cultures across disciplines.

Ranking

- **Technology**
 - In terms of institutes and subjects, India's highest-ranked programs included **Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bombay's** Mineral & Mining Engineering program at 41st rank globally, shared jointly with the **University of Delhi's Development Studies program**.
 - Top-50 ranks have also been attained by **IIT Kharagpur** (46) for Mineral & Mining Engineering, **IIT Delhi** (49) for Electrical & Electronic Engineering and **IIT Bombay** (50) for Chemical Engineering.
 - **IIT Bombay** emerged with more top-100 ranks than any other Indian university in QS World University Rankings by Subject 2020, followed by **IIT Delhi** with five programs in top-100 list.
- **Business and management studies subject category**
 - Both Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Ahmedabad and IIM Bangalore were ranked in the 51-100 band.

Global Ranking

- Globally, **Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)** emerged as the world's best-performing institution, achieving 12 number-one positions, followed by **Harvard University** with 11 number-one positions and **University of Oxford** with eight top ranked subjects.
- **QS's top 10 in overall terms** include five American universities (MIT, Stanford, Harvard, Caltech and Chicago), **four British universities** (Oxford, Cambridge, UCL and Imperial College) and **one Swiss university** (ETH Zurich).
 - All the **five American names** in this list are private universities, while the **British and Swiss institutions** are public universities which have nonetheless enjoyed significant autonomy from governmental control over decades.

How were they able to achieve this?

1. One common factor behind the success of the topmost universities is the **freedom with which they operate**.
 - They have been major centers of innovation in teaching and research; thanks to **independence from bureaucratic or corporate meddling and political intervention** by parties of the day.
 - They could remain centers of extraordinary excellence in a sustained way by according primacy to matters of the mind, i.e. intellectual ideas and solutions to problems, and avoiding becoming hostage to rigid thought.

2. All the **great universities of the world are ideologically pluralistic**, with a mix of right, left and center among their faculty and students.
 - There is **no institutional line or official position** on any issue.
 - Professors and students are free to choose whatever opinion they prefer.
 - **No one is penalized for holding a pro- or anti- view** on social, economic, political, cultural or scientific matters.
3. The top universities are also excellent at attracting and retaining talent. They **hire professors very selectively, based on outstanding scholarly abilities**.
 - They reject a large number of candidates for admission as students, and admit only the brightest and the most meritorious.
 - This ruthless streak comes at the expense of social inclusion and access considerations.
4. Top universities **incentivize publication and citation of research** in an unforgivingly rigorous way.
 - If an **Assistant Professor** does not produce brilliant publications in the most reputed journals of her field, she may lose her job and not get tenured as an Associate Professor.
 - By insisting on tough standards which are never lowered or relaxed, these universities **promote a meritocratic culture as a habit**.
5. Big universities also **inculcate critical thinking, debating and writing abilities in their students**.
 - They encourage students to look at issues through **interdisciplinary lenses** and to challenge their own professors. They award grades to students who are argumentative and who question conventional wisdom in the classroom and in assignments.
 - This type of **interactive pedagogy** produces champion graduates who have a reputation for cutting-edge skills and knowledge in the job market compared to peers from second- or third-tier universities.

The China example

- A muscular push from the government of China with **massive state funding has propelled Chinese universities into the top tiers** in barely two decades.
- In the QS world rankings on overall basis, Tsinghua University is ranked number 16, Peking University is at 22, Fudan University is at 40, and Zhejiang University is at 54. This is a miraculous leap forward.

Concerns

- There is not even a single Indian university which is featuring in the QS ranking of the world's top 150 in overall parameters.
 - The Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) of Bombay and Delhi are at the 152nd and 182nd places in the overall rankings, while IISc Bangalore appears at the 184th position.
 - There is much for India to learn from those who are miles ahead of us.
- In India, the government is cash-strapped and lacks the kind of resources which the Chinese state deployed to pump-prime Chinese universities

Way forward

- The government's decision to identify 20 Institutes of Eminence (IOEs) which will get maximum autonomy from bureaucracy in order to climb up the world rankings is a step in the right direction.
 - The selected IOEs must innovate with new degree programmes, expanded variety of faculty members and digital learning platforms.
- But India still has miles to go in higher education.
 - Our viable path to world class universities are in the form of enlightened private philanthropy and borrowing best practices from established iconic universities.
 - Avoiding politicisation, ideological rigidity and nepotism, and freeing our universities from excessive interference and over-regulation, are prerequisites for success.

1. Dominion over territory: On UTs and Lieutenant Governors

Context

- A Madras high court order restraining Puducherry lieutenant-governor Kiran Bedi from interfering in the day-to-day affairs of the elected government **was set aside by a division bench**, saying the **elected chief minister and the LG should work in unison**.

Background

CASE IN COURT

July 4, 2018 | A Puducherry legislator moves Madras HC challenging three communications of the Centre on powers of the Lt Governor to interfere with the elected government's affairs

April 30, 2019 | A single judge of the Madras HC restrains Puducherry Lt Governor Kiran Bedi from interfering with the daily affairs of the elected administration

May 2019 | Centre and Kiran Bedi move the Supreme Court against the verdict

July 2019 | SC directs the Centre and Bedi to approach a division bench of the Madras HC for relief

August 2019 | Centre and Bedi move an appeal in the Madras HC challenging the single judge order

March 11 | First bench of the Madras HC sets aside the single judge order

2019 Single Bench Judgment set aside

- It set aside a single bench judgment that had held that the **Lieutenant Governor (LG) does not have the right to interfere in the daily affairs of the elected government** of Puducherry.
 - While setting aside the single bench judgment, the court said that the basis of **parallel drawn between a State and a Union Territory by the Single judge was not appropriate**.
- Quashing the judgment of a single judge, the division bench said the **Centre was at liberty to take appropriate steps in the event of a reference being made to it**.
- The Union territory of Puducherry and its legislature as well as its system of governance is distinct. It, therefore, **cannot be given a status equivalent to that of a state** through a judicial verdict given its present Constitutional and legal structure.

National Capital Territory of Delhi Judgment

- To pass this judgment the Madras high court relied on the **exposition of the law by the Supreme Court** in relation to the National Capital Territory of Delhi.
- The apex court had emphasized on the **need for constitutional morality and constitutional trust** among high dignitaries, implying that Lt. Governors and Chief Ministers must work in unison as far as possible.

In the event of an unresolved difference of opinion, **the L-G should refer it to the President for a decision**.

1. The ambit and the limits of 'diaspora diplomacy'

Context

- This article deliberates about India's diaspora relationship. It looks into the contributions made by the Indian diaspora politically and restrictions in their influence.

A look at numbers

- India has the world's largest diaspora, about 17.5 million and receives the highest remittance of \$78.6 billion from Indians living abroad (Global Migration Report 2020).
- Members of the diaspora, often seen as more "successful" and therefore more influential, can have a big impact on their relatives back home and this makes for a potent combination for any politician.

Examples

- Howdy, Modi! and Namaste Trump rally in Ahmedabad saw the Indian diaspora not just as a part of India's "soft power", but a fully transferable political vote bank as well.
- Modi's joint rallies with former **U.K.** Prime Minister David Cameron, former **Canadian** Prime Minister Stephen Harper, **Israeli** Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu all included this promise, and saw those leaders make campaign pitches to the Indian community
- Mere presence does not mean conversion into votes. The population that comes out for the rallies doesn't represent the entire diaspora. Transferability of votes has not yet been proven conclusively.
 - Six months after the 2015 rally, Mr. Harper lost general elections in Canada.
 - Cameron lost the referendum on Brexit.
 - Netanyahu has had to face re-elections after failing to secure a majority.

Have the Indian diaspora always supported the Indian Government?

- The politically active members of the Indian diaspora **don't necessarily support the Indian government's actions**
 - Example: many have raised concerns about Kashmir and the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA).
- So the Govt must celebrate the fact that members of the Indian diaspora, from both sides of the political divide, are successful and influential.

Where should the Government draw the line?

- The government must ensure that its focus on the diaspora **doesn't become a factor in its bilateral relations.**
- While it is perfectly legitimate and laudable to **ensure the safety and well-being of Indian citizens** in different parts of the world, as the Modi government has done, it must tread more lightly on issues that concern foreign citizens of Indian origin.
 - In 2017, the Ministry of External Affairs raised the issue of **attacks on Indians strongly with the U.S. government**, after three incidents of suspected hate crimes. Only one of the three was an Indian citizen, the rest were Americans of Indian extraction. This is an important distinction.
- An office bearer of the ruling party had also threatened to "play a role" in U.S. elections in response to criticism from Mr. Sanders. Such reactions should be avoided.
- Addressing the Lok Sabha in 1957, former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru said about the diaspora, "We want to have no vested interests at the expense of the population of those countries...if they adopt the nationality of that country we have no concern with them. There may be sentimental concerns but politically they cease to be Indian nationals."

Conclusion

- Most immigrant Indian communities have been marked by their ability to assimilate into the countries they now live in.
- Much of that comes from a **desire to be treated as equal citizens, not as immigrants**, while a few also have bad memories of anti-immigrant sentiments in the 1960s and 1970s in Europe and the U.S., when they were targeted and accused of “divided loyalties”.
- Laying claim to their kinship and culture and taking pride in their success is one thing. It would be a mistake to lay claim to their politics.

F. Prelims Facts

1. Centre to reimburse tax to exporters

- The central government has approved the **Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP) scheme**, for reimbursement of taxes and duties, to exporters.
- The reimbursement of taxes such as duty on power charges and VAT on fuel in the transportation and farm sector would **make Indian products competitive in global markets** and will help provide a boost to **India’s dwindling exports**.

G. Tidbits

1. Conversion to a different faith is an individual’s choice: HC

- In the light of a petition filed in the Delhi High Court asking for the **stopping or regulating of religious conversions in India**, the High Court bench has observed that **religion is a personal belief** and has held that the **choice to convert to a different faith or not is an individual’s choice**.
 - The petition had claimed that many individuals, NGOs, and institutions are converting downtrodden persons, particularly of the Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe community, by intimidating, threatening and **luring by monetary benefits and by other acts**, including miracle healing and black magic.
- The Bench noted that there are **already safeguards against forced conversions**. Threatening someone or intimidating someone to convert, is an **offence under the Indian Penal Code**.

2. Coronavirus strain isolated says ICMR

- India is only the fifth country in the world besides Japan, Thailand, U.S., and China to have **successfully isolated the COVID-19 virus strain**.
- The isolation of the virus strain is a huge step forward for India as it will help India take the first step towards **expediting the development of drugs, vaccines and rapid diagnostic kits** in the country.
- ICMR has also announced the expansion of its network of labs equipped to test COVID-19 and the secondary tests for reconfirmation of the virus. These steps will enable India to expedite the detection of the virus and will help in the more effective management of the crisis.

3. Trump set to declare a national emergency

- U.S. President is **expected to declare a national emergency**, a move that would give the U.S. president the authority to use \$40 billion of funds allocated by Congress for disaster relief, towards **the coronavirus crisis**.
- The president is expected to **invoke the Stafford Act**, a law that **empowers the Federal Emergency Management Agency to assist State and local governments** during natural catastrophes and coordinate the nation’s response.

4. Exports post the first rise in seven months

- The **data released by the commerce ministry** has stated that **India's exports have risen for the first time in seven months** in February 2020, growing by 2.91%. Imports have also increased by 2.48%.
- However, **considering the overall fiscal, exports have dipped** by 1.5%. **Imports** during the period between April 2019 and February 2020 **have declined** by 7.3%. **India has a trade deficit** of around \$143.12 billion.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct?

1. The circuit breaker mechanism is triggered only when the prices decline beyond a threshold value stipulated by the stock exchange and is not applicable to price rise.
2. The circuit breakers when triggered bring about trading halt only in the Stock exchange which has breached the threshold.

Options:

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

Answer: Option d

Explanation:

- Circuit Breaker is the mechanism which is triggered when the price fluctuation moves beyond a threshold value stipulated by the stock exchange. There are both lower and upper circuit thresholds.
- It is an automatic mechanism to stop a free-fall or massive surge in a security or an index during trading hours. It is used to check the volatile swings in the market.
- The index-based market-wide circuit breaker system applies at three stages of the index movement, either way at 10 per cent, 15 per cent and 20 per cent.
- These circuit breakers when triggered bring about a coordinated trading halt in all equity and equity derivative markets nationwide. The market-wide circuit breakers are triggered by movement of either the BSE Sensex or the Nifty 50, whichever is breached earlier.
- The market shall re-open, after an index-based market-wide circuit filter breach, with a pre-open call auction session.

Q2. The India VIX index is computed by:

Options:

- a. Bombay Stock Exchange
- b. National Stock Exchange
- c. Securities and Exchange Board of India
- d. Ministry of Finance

Answer: Option b

Explanation:

- India VIX index is meant to indicate investors' perception of the annual market volatility over the next 30 calendar days. The higher the value, the higher is the expected volatility and vice versa.
- India VIX, a measure of investors' perception about the risk of sharp swings based on options prices, rose to its highest level since the 2008 global financial crisis as fear gripped markets worldwide after COVID-19 was declared a 'pandemic'.
- The volatility index is computed by the National Stock Exchange (NSE) based on the order book in Nifty options.

Q3. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct?

1. The National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) envisages a target of 20%–30% reduction of PM₅ and PM₁₀ concentration by 2024.
2. The National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) focuses on the 25 most polluted cities of India.

Options:

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

Answer: Option a

Explanation:

- Goal of the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) is to meet the prescribed annual average ambient air quality standards at all locations in the country in a stipulated timeframe.
- The tentative national level target of 20%–30% reduction of PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀ concentration by 2024 is proposed under the NCAP taking 2017 as the base year for the comparison of concentration.
- The NCAP will be a mid-term, five-year action plan with 2019 as the first year.
- The list of 102 cities chosen for this intervention is from the list of Non-Attainment cities with respect to Ambient Air Quality India (2011-2015) and WHO reports of 2014/2018.

Q4. Which of the following statement/s is/are incorrect?

1. The Essential Commodities Act, 1955 empowers the States and the Central government to regulate only the sale of essential items.
2. The Essential Commodities Act, 1955 empowers the central government to add to the schedule the commodities it considers essential.

Options:

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

Answer: Option a

Explanation:

- The Essential Commodities Act is an act of Parliament of India which was established to ensure the delivery of certain commodities or products, the supply of which if obstructed owing to hoarding or black marketing would affect the normal life of the people.
- The Essential Commodities Act, 1955 empowers the States and the Central government to regulate the production, quality, distribution, and sale of these items,
- The Centre can include new commodities as and when the need arises, and take them off the list once the situation improves.
- An offender under the Essential Commodities Act can be punished with imprisonment up to seven years, or a fine, or both.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Despite India improving its ranking in multiple surveys concerning the higher education sector, it still lacks clear investment and policy focus. Discuss how India can transform its educational sector. (15 marks, 250 words)
2. Given the fact that SAARC has become dysfunctional due to India-Pakistan tensions, India has shifted focus to other regional groupings to ensure co-operation among the neighbours. Comment. What is the significance of such an outreach? (10 marks, 150 words)