

06/04/2024

## TOPICS COVERED

1. Supreme Court stays High Court order striking down law regulating U.P. madrasas (GS Paper II: Secularism)
2. RBI keeps repo rate on hold as food prices remain high (GS Paper III: Banking System)
3. India abstains from UNHRC vote that called upon Israel for immediate ceasefire in Gaza (GS Paper II: IR)
4. Parliaments past, a mirror to changing dynamics (GS Paper II: Parliament)
5. There will be no independent, sovereign Palestine (GS Paper II: IR)

## Supreme Court stays High Court order striking down law regulating U.P. madrasas (GS Paper II: Secularism)

- The Supreme Court has put a temporary stop to the enforcement of a ruling by the Allahabad High Court.
- The High Court's ruling invalidated a 20-year-old law in Uttar Pradesh that regulated madrasas and directed the relocation of their students to regular schools.
- The Supreme Court's decision to freeze the High Court's judgment is an interim measure.
- The Chief Justice of India, D.Y. Chandrachud, led the three-judge Bench that made this decision.
- Despite the Uttar Pradesh government initially opposing the High Court's ruling, it has now accepted the verdict.
- The state government previously defended the Uttar Pradesh Board of Madrasa Education Act, 2004, vigorously in the High Court.
- However, it has since come to terms with the High Court's opinion that the Act posed a threat to secularism and violated the Basic Structure of the Constitution.
- Additional Solicitor General K.M. Nataraj, representing Uttar Pradesh, argued that madrasas focus on religious education rather than broader subjects like math, science, and social studies.

- The court challenged this argument, questioning how striking down the law regulating madrasas would ensure students receive a well-rounded education.
- Chief Justice Chandrachud suggested that rather than scrapping the Madrasa Board Act, the court should issue directions to ensure students in madrasas have access to quality education available in other institutions.
- The court emphasized the importance of all students, including those in madrasas, receiving education of adequate quality to lead dignified lives.
- Notice was issued to the State of Uttar Pradesh, and the court scheduled detailed arguments for the second week of July to determine whether the entire statute needed to be discarded.

## India abstains from UNHRC vote that called upon Israel for immediate ceasefire in Gaza (GS Paper II: IR)

### UNHRC

- **Principal UN Body on Human Rights:** The UNHRC is an inter-governmental body within the United Nations system, responsible for promoting and protecting human rights around the world.
- **Established:** 15 March 2006 by the United Nations General Assembly, replacing the former UN Commission on Human Rights.
- **Headquarters:** Geneva, Switzerland.

### Key Functions of the UNHRC

- **Addressing Human Rights Issues:**
  - Discusses all thematic human rights issues and situations that require its attention throughout the year.
  - Investigates allegations of human rights abuses and makes recommendations to address them.
- **Universal Periodic Review (UPR):** A unique mechanism through which the UNHRC reviews the human rights records of all UN Member States on a regular basis.
- **Special Procedures:** Appoints independent experts (Special Rapporteurs, Working Groups) to monitor and report on specific human rights situations or thematic issues.
- **Capacity Building:** Provides technical assistance and helps states build their capacity to uphold human rights obligations.

### Structure

- **Membership:** 47 Member States elected by the UN General Assembly on a rotational basis, serving three-year terms. Seats are allocated based on regional groups.
- **Sessions:** The UNHRC holds three regular sessions per year (March, June, September) and can hold special sessions if needed.

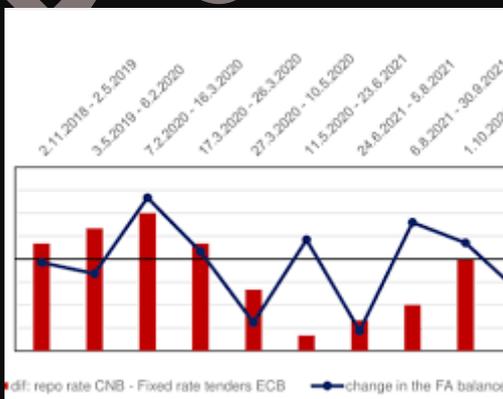
- India abstained from voting on a resolution at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) regarding the conflict in Gaza.
- The resolution called for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and for member states to implement an arms embargo.

- India's abstention is believed to be consistent with its past votes on HRC resolutions that call for "accountability."
- However, India did vote in favor of three other resolutions criticizing Israel for human rights violations against Palestinians and Israel's occupation of Syrian Golan.
- These resolutions also called for the Palestinian right to self-determination.
- **The resolutions were introduced by Pakistan on behalf of the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation.**
- India's Ministry of External Affairs did not provide an explanation for the vote, but it aligns with previous abstentions on similar resolutions.
- The decision is also in line with India's vote at the UNGA in October 2023, as the HRC resolution did not condemn Hamas but criticized Israel's actions in Gaza.
- **The United States, Germany, and four other countries voted against a resolution titled "Human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the obligation to ensure accountability and justice."**
- India, along with France and Japan, abstained from voting on this resolution.
- However, **28 members**, including Bangladesh, China, Maldives, the UAE, and Indonesia, voted in favor of the resolution.
- India voted in favor of three other resolutions:
  1. "Right of the Palestinian people to self-determination"
  2. "Human rights in the occupied Syrian Golan"
  3. "Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in the occupied Syrian Golan"

## RBI keeps repo rate on hold as food prices remain high (GS Paper III: Banking System)

### Repo Rate

- The **repo rate** is the interest rate at which the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) lends money to commercial banks for short-term needs. When banks need liquidity, they can borrow from the RBI by selling government securities, with an agreement to repurchase them later at a slightly higher price.



- **Policy Tool:** The repo rate is a primary tool used by the RBI's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) to manage inflation, economic growth, and liquidity in the banking system.

### How the Repo Rate Works

- **Increase in Repo Rate:**
  - Makes borrowing more expensive for commercial banks.
  - Discourages banks from taking loans from the RBI.
  - Can lead to higher interest rates on loans for consumers and businesses.
  - Helps control inflation by reducing the money supply in the economy.
- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is concerned about the rise in food prices despite a moderation in overall inflation.
- The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) decided to **keep the policy repo rate unchanged at 6.50%**, marking the **seventh consecutive time rates have been held steady**.
- RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das stated that while progress has been made in reducing inflation, the task is not yet complete.
- The MPC aims to withdraw accommodation gradually to bring inflation in line with the target while supporting economic growth.
- Food price uncertainties continue to impact inflation, but record rabi wheat production and early signs of a normal monsoon are expected to help alleviate price pressures.
- Despite challenges, overall inflation has been somewhat controlled, and the growth-inflation dynamics have been favorable since the last policy meeting.

## Rakhigarhi Findings in NCERT books; Narmada Dam references dropped

### Location

- Rakhigarhi is an archaeological site located in the **Hisar district of Haryana**.
- It belongs to the mature phase of the Indus Valley Civilization (also known as the Harappan Civilization), dating back to around 2600-1900 BCE.

### Size and Significance

- **One of the largest Harappan sites:** Rakhigarhi spans over 550 hectares, making it one of the largest known settlements of the Indus Valley Civilization.
- **Challenging Traditional Views:** The site's sheer size suggests a more complex and urbanized society than previously assumed for the Harappan Civilization.
- **Potential Capital:** Researchers hypothesize that Rakhigarhi may have been a major regional center or even a capital city of the Indus Valley people.

### Archaeological Findings

- **Planned City:** Excavations reveal evidence of a well-planned city with streets, drainage systems, and residential structures.
- **Advanced Craftsmanship:** Artifacts like pottery, jewelry, and tools demonstrate sophisticated craftsmanship and technological skills.
- **Trade Networks:** The presence of materials from distant regions suggests extensive trade links.
- **Burials and Skeletons:** Discovered burials and human skeletal remains offer insights into the biological makeup and funerary practices of the Harappan people.

### Ongoing Research

- **Excavations Continue:** Archaeological work at Rakhigarhi is ongoing, with the potential to uncover more about its layout, economy, society, and decline.

- **DNA Studies:** Analysis of ancient DNA from the skeletal remains has shed light on the genetic ancestry of the Harappan people and potential population migrations.
- The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) proposed revisions to school textbooks.
- In the Class 12 history textbook, the NCERT suggests adding findings from DNA analysis of skeletal remains from the Rakhigarhi archaeological site in Haryana.
- They propose dropping references to the adverse effects of the Narmada Dam project on tribal people from the sociology textbook.
- In the sociology textbook, the NCERT **removes a sentence regarding Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes being marked by poverty, powerlessness, and social stigma.**
- A significant addition to the history textbook is a chapter on the Harappan Civilization, stating that **DNA analysis from Rakhigarhi suggests genetic roots dating back to 10,000 BC.**
- The text indicates that Harappan DNA continues in the South Asian population today, indicating no large-scale immigration by Aryans due to genetic and cultural continuity.
- The revised text suggests that research indicates people from bordering areas and distant regions were absorbed into Indian society over time.
- DNA extracted from skeletal remains at Rakhigarhi was analyzed by Deccan College Deemed University, Pune, in collaboration with the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, Hyderabad, and Harvard Medical College.
- Some interpretations suggest that **the Harappans were indigenous to the region, with unbroken continuity for 5,000 years.**
- **Facial reconstruction of Harappan people shows remarkable similarity to the modern population of Haryana.**
- **Archaeologist Mudit Trivedi argues that the DNA mixture from Rakhigarhi indicates ancient ancestry shared with Iranian populations and Andamanese or South-East Asians.**
- Media coverage emphasizes the "indigeneity" of the DNA, prompting reconsideration of the social geographies associated with the data.
- NCERT proposed revisions in Class 12 sociology textbook, altering references to projects like Sardar Sarovar and Polavaram dams.
- Sentence mentioning displacement of adivasis due to these projects was changed to reflect past tense and specify the number displaced.
- Other mentions about the Narmada project were also removed from the textbook.
- The revised text emphasizes the adverse impact of private property on tribals without specific reference to the Narmada dams.
- **NCERT also dropped references to the Babri Masjid demolition from political science textbooks and emphasized the Ram Janmabhoomi Temple movement instead.**

## Parliaments past, a mirror to changing dynamics (GS Paper II: Parliament)

The conduct of business in both Houses so far only points to the need for a revitalisation of legislative engagement and more constructive debate

- The 17th Lok Sabha, which operated from 2019 to 2024, departed from its typical five-day working schedule by concluding its proceedings on a Saturday.
- This departure marked the end of a journey characterized by unexpected twists and turns.
- Interestingly, the previous Lok Sabha also concluded with an extended parliamentary session, drawing a historical parallel.
- With the nation gearing up for the general election, there is speculation about whether history will repeat itself or if a new precedent will be set.
- As citizens of India, it prompts us to reflect on the performance of our Parliament in recent years as we await the arrival of the 18th Lok Sabha.

## How Ministries fared

- The legislative activity in recent times indicates that the nation's political landscape is undergoing significant changes.
- The Office of the Prime Minister faced a surge in queries from Members of Parliament (MPs) in the Rajya Sabha, with 1,146 questions, but only 28 were addressed.
- Interestingly, there was a decline in the number of notices directed at the Prime Minister's Office in both the Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha, indicating reduced interest in seeking answers from the top executive office.
- There has been a noticeable shift in parliamentary focus, with the Ministries of Health and Family and Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare taking center stage.
- These two portfolios have seen a rise in attention, becoming the top two Ministries with the highest number of questions, suggesting increased scrutiny by elected representatives.
- The scrutiny of the country's healthcare system preceded the COVID-19 pandemic, indicating consistent monitoring by MPs.
- Despite being the most questioned ministries, there has been a slight decline in the number of queries in the Lok Sabha, suggesting a marginal decrease in parliamentary engagement on these issues.
- There is a declining interest in matters of national security and internal affairs, particularly reflected in the reduced attention given to the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- The Ministry of Finance, responsible for steering the nation's fiscal destiny, has also experienced a gradual decline in parliamentary interest, despite being crucial for economic resurgence.
- However, there is a positive trend in the increasing rate of questions being admitted for deliberation within the Ministry of Finance, indicating a renewed commitment to transparency and accountability in financial matters.
- Despite the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, education remains a significant topic in parliamentary discourse, with the Ministry of Education consistently among the top five Ministries subject to rigorous questioning.
- However, there has been a rise in the number of disallowed questions in the education sector, raising concerns about oversight effectiveness in this vital area.
- In the Lok Sabha, there has been a downward trajectory in the percentage of disallowed questions across successive sessions.

**"Disallowed questions" refer to questions that are not permitted to be asked or discussed in parliamentary sessions. In the context of education, these could be queries or concerns raised by Members of Parliament (MPs) regarding various aspects of the education system, policies, or issues related to the Ministry of Education.**

- Conversely, the Upper House has seen a consistent increase in the percentage of disallowed questions, indicating systemic challenges in parliamentary oversight.
- Ministries such as Health and Family Welfare, Home Affairs, Defence, Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, and Finance accounted for a significant portion of all disallowed questions, highlighting the need to address these challenges in parliamentary oversight.

## The use of interventions

- The utilization of various parliamentary interventions in Indian parliamentary proceedings is undergoing a transformation.
- Among these interventions, the usage of **Zero Hour** stands out prominently, showing a **significant increase over the past 15 years.**

### Zero Hour

- It is an informal session in both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, roughly between 12 noon and 1 pm.
- Called "Zero Hour" because it doesn't fall within the official agenda of parliamentary business.
- Members can raise matters of urgent public importance without prior notice, highlighting pressing issues.

### Inherent Limitations

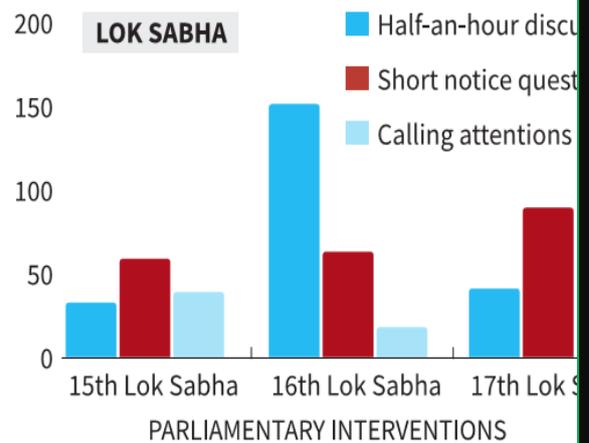
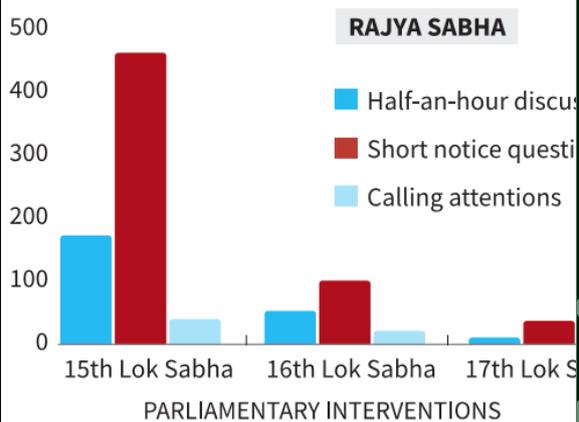
1. **Lack of Structure and Order:**
  - As Zero Hour isn't formally scheduled, there can be disruptions leading to chaotic scenes.
  - The Speaker or Chairperson has discretion over who speaks and for how long, potentially leading to imbalances and some members not being heard.
2. **Limited Time:**
  - Since Zero Hour is about an hour in length, the number of issues that can be thoroughly addressed is limited.
  - Many issues raised might only receive brief attention or may not be taken up at all.
3. **No Binding on the Government:**
  - Ministers are not obligated to respond in detail during Zero Hour. While they might provide short clarifications, the government is not bound to take immediate action.
4. **Potential for Misuse:**
  - Some argue that Zero Hour can be used for political purposes or to raise issues just for publicity, rather than genuinely focusing on critical matters of public importance.

- **In the Rajya Sabha, there has been a remarkable 62% increase in Zero Hour usage, while the Lok Sabha has seen a significant rise of 34%.**
- **This surge in Zero Hour reflects a positive trend, indicating increased attention to addressing pressing issues, grievances, and seeking clarifications from the government.**

- However, other parliamentary interventions such as 'Half-an-Hour Discussions', 'Short Notice Questions', 'Calling Attention', 'Short Duration Discussions', and 'Special Mentions' have witnessed a decline in usage.

## Trends of parliamentary interventions filed in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha

The Lok Sabha has seen a decrease in the filing of Calling Attention motions, while the Rajya Sabha has seen a decreased filing of all parliamentary interventions



SOURCE: LOK SABHA AND RAJYA SABHA STATISTICAL STATEMENTS

### 1. Half-an-Hour Discussions

- **What it is:** A discussion on a matter of urgent public importance that has been the subject of recent questions in Parliament.
- **How it works:** A member of Parliament can raise this discussion after a question has been answered. There's further discussion (lasting about 30 minutes), and the concerned Minister is expected to clarify and provide details on the matter.
- **Why it's important:** Allows for in-depth focus on specific issues even after the Question Hour.

### 2. Short Notice Questions

- **What it is:** A question related to a matter of urgent public importance that can be asked with short notice.
- **How it works:** A member has to give a notice to the Speaker before 10 am, and the question is answered orally by the concerned Minister.
- **Why it's important:** Allows Parliament to address a pressing matter even when not listed in the regular agenda.

### 3. Calling Attention

- **What it is:** A method by which a member can call the attention of a Minister to a specific, urgent matter of public importance.
- **How it works:** The member selects the issue, and the Speaker decides if it can be raised. Then, the Minister makes a brief statement on the matter.
- **Why it's important:** Brings critical matters to the immediate notice of the government.

### 4. Short Duration Discussions

- **What it is:** A discussion for which the House sets aside no more than two hours on a matter of significant public interest.

- **How it works:** A member requests the Speaker for this discussion, and with approval, the date and time for the discussion are fixed.
- **Why it's important:** Allows for deeper debate on issues than what Question Hour or Calling Attention permit.

#### 5. Special Mentions

- **What it is:** A procedure for members of the Rajya Sabha (Upper House) to raise matters of public importance but of insufficient urgency for the other discussions.
- **How it works:** A member obtains the permission of the Chairman to raise the issue, and then makes a brief statement.
- **Why it's important:** Creates a platform to raise crucial issues that might not otherwise receive attention.

Procedure	Lok Sabha	Rajya Sabha	Both Houses
Half-an-Hour Discussions	✓	✓	✓
Short Notice Questions	✓	✓	✓
Calling Attention	✓	✓	✓
Short Duration Discussions	✓	X	
Special Mentions	X	✓	

- While Zero Hour is popular for addressing key issues, it has inherent limitations, and there is a need to leverage other interventions to ensure a balanced parliamentary discourse.
- The 16th Lok Sabha demonstrated a relatively higher level of proactivity compared to other sessions, showing notable performance in the admission of questions and discussions on various interventions.
- However, there were instances of oversight, such as **the failure to raise privilege motions against misleading remarks and missed opportunities to discuss crucial issues like 'Suicides among students due to competitive exams'**.
- The changing parliamentary dynamics highlight the need to **revitalize legislative engagement, emphasizing accountability, constructive debate, and prioritizing the welfare of the nation and its citizens.**

#### MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION: GS PAPER II: PARLIAMENT

**Question:** To what extent, in your view, the Parliament is able to ensure accountability of the executive in India? (150 words/10 Marks) (UPSC 2021)

#### ANSWER APPROACH

- Introduce with the basic principle of the Parliamentary system of Government in India with executive accountability towards the Parliament.
- Then bring the tools for Parliamentary control over executives with associated examples.

- Then discuss the practical situation of these parliamentary control and the reasons for the same.
- Conclude accordingly.

#### ANSWER

The founding fathers of the Indian constitution provided for the Parliamentary form of Government which is based on the executive responsibility to the Parliament for its acts and policies. The Council of Ministers is collectively responsible to the Parliament in general and Lok Sabha in particular. This council of ministers is chosen from the legislature itself.

#### Provisions for the Parliamentary Control over the Executives

- The Council of Ministers can continue to be in office as long as they enjoy the **confidence of the majority** of members in the **Lok Sabha**.
- The Parliament exercises control over the executive through **question hours, zero hours, short-duration discussions, and tools such as calling attention motions, adjournment motions, no-confidence motions, censure motions, etc.**
- Any **legislation enactment requires approval** from a majority of members of both houses of the Parliament.
- The rules and regulations coming out of **delegated/executive legislation need to be tabled before the Parliament** for their examination.
- The Parliament exercises **budgetary control and post-budgetary control** over the executive in financial matters.
- **No tax can be levied or collected and no expenditure can be incurred** by the Executive **without the approval of the Parliament**.
- Government spending and the financial performance of the executive are **scrutinized by the Parliament** with the help of its **committees and constitutional bodies** such as the **Public Accounts Committee (PAC) and the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG)**.
- The Parliament supervises the activities of the executive through its committees such as **Committee on Government Assurance, Committee on Subordinate Legislation, etc.**

However, in reality, parliamentary control over the executive is more theoretical than practical.

The following factors are responsible for this:

- The **lack of strong, steady, and principled opposition** has reduced the effectiveness of legislative control over the administration.
- The **administration has grown in volume** and the Parliament has neither the time nor the expertise to control it.
- Parliamentarians are usually laymen who face **difficulty in understanding the demands for the grants which is technical in nature**.
- The **executive enjoys legislative leadership owing to majority support**. Consequently, it plays a significant role in formulating policies and minimizing the possibility of effective criticism.
- The **public expenditure is examined by the committees after it has been incurred** not before it.
- The scope of financial control has also been reduced due **to increased recourse to the guillotine**.
- The expansion of **delegated legislation** has increased the powers of the bureaucracy and reduced the law-making powers of the Parliament.

Thus, the parliament has failed to live as per the envisioned role by the founding father. Parliamentary control is general, and political in nature, thus it can be inferred that legislative control over the government and administration in India is more theoretical than practical and the control is neither effective nor efficient.

# The big fight: On battleground Uttar Pradesh

## U.P. is critical as a battleground at the national level

- Uttar Pradesh holds immense significance in Indian politics with 80 Lok Sabha seats.
- The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has historically performed well in Uttar Pradesh, winning 71 seats in 2014 and 62 seats in 2019.
- The BJP and the Samajwadi Party (SP) are the major contenders in the elections, leading prominent fronts.
- The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), led by Mayawati, is contesting independently despite facing a decline in recent years.
- The All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) is seeking to establish its presence, forming alliances with regional parties.
- Several sub-regional parties, representing single caste groups in specific areas, are aiming for political space and forming alliances with larger parties.
- The BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) gained support from the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD), which has influence among the agrarian Jat community in western Uttar Pradesh, particularly due to concerns over farm laws.
- Other parties like Apna Dal (Sonelal), Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party (SBSP), and Nirbal Indian Shoshit Hamara Aam Dal (NISHAD) provide avenues for the BJP to connect with specific subaltern communities.
- The Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Congress are part of the INDIA bloc and have allied with the Mahan Dal led by Keshav Dev Maurya.
- The Mahan Dal draws support from OBCs like Mauryas, Shakyas, and Kushwahas in central and eastern Uttar Pradesh.
- **The SP's coalition in the 2022 Assembly polls is missing this time, and former allies like the Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party (SBSP) and the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) have joined the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA).**
- A faction of the Apna Dal is aligned with the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM).
- Both the SP-Congress alliance and the AIMIM-Apna Dal faction are focusing on a coalition of backward classes, Dalits, and Muslims to counter the BJP's Hindutva consolidation.
- Despite efforts, past attempts to counter BJP's consolidation have been largely ineffective.
- **The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) is facing challenges with leaders joining other parties and its social base shrinking.**
- **Uttar Pradesh (U.P.) politics remains fragmented along caste, religious, and regional lines despite BJP's consolidation efforts.**
- The BJP expects to gain from the opening of the Ram temple in Ayodhya and aims to win more seats in U.P. than it did in 2019.
- The Opposition needs to secure a significant number of seats in U.P. to pose a viable national alternative.

# Escalation ladder: On Israel's offensive, and the danger ahead

## The U.S. must rein in Israel, and Iran must show restraint

- On April 1, an attack occurred on an annex of the Iranian embassy in Damascus, escalating the ongoing conflict in West Asia.
- Iran accused Israel of the strike, which resulted in the death of 13 Iranians, including a top commander.
- Israel is known for targeting Iranian military and nuclear figures across the region, although it neither confirms nor denies involvement in specific attacks.
- This attack differed from previous strikes as it targeted an embassy complex, which is protected under international law.
- Even during wartime, diplomatic premises are typically spared from attacks by hostile powers.
- The precision strike aimed at killing IRGC figures is viewed by many in Iran as an act of war.
- Prior to the April 1 attack, there was a shadow war between Israel and Iran in West Asia.
- Israel launched a two-pronged offensive after an October 7 Hamas attack, including an invasion of Gaza and airstrikes in Syria and Lebanon targeting Iran and its allies.
- Israel perceives Iran as the linchpin of non-state militias in the region and seeks to limit its influence.
- The war on Gaza has resulted in a high death toll, with many casualties being women and children.
- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, facing pressure at home and abroad, appears inclined to escalate the regional crisis.
- An open war between Israel and Iran could involve the U.S. and have severe security and economic consequences for the region and the world.
- Iran is urged to show strategic patience and restraint, while the U.S. should restrain Israel from acting recklessly.

## There will be no independent, sovereign Palestine (GS Paper II: IR)

Governments across the world may be backing the two-state formula, but it is as good as dead

- In the current Middle East landscape, it is certain that there will be no independent, sovereign Palestinian state coexisting with Israel.
- The common phrase "living side by side with Israel" to describe the desired Palestinian state is now regarded as a cliché.

- Prior to October 7, 2023, there was some possibility of a Palestinian state emerging, albeit with certain conditions and uncertainties.
- Previous negotiations between Israel and Palestine aimed to outline a detailed roadmap for the two-state solution.
- In January 2001, during talks in Taba, there was significant progress made towards reaching an agreement on the two-state solution.

## Hamas versus the Palestinian Authority

- After October 7, 2023, the prospect of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel became highly unlikely.
- Negotiations for a two-state solution had been ongoing, but the possibility diminished significantly post-October 7.
- Hamas gained popularity in the West Bank, making the idea of Palestinian elections daunting for Israelis.
- The Palestinian Authority in Ramallah is seen as corrupt and ineffective by both Israelis and Palestinians.
- In a fair election, Hamas is likely to win, further diminishing hopes for a two-state solution.
- Israelis are unwilling to consider a Palestinian state unless Hamas is eliminated, which is improbable.
- The conflict is expected to continue, with Israeli forces targeting Hamas strongholds like Rafah.
- There's a divide among Israelis regarding the priority: some prioritize freeing Israeli hostages held by Hamas, while others prioritize eradicating Hamas.
- Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu aims to achieve both objectives despite warnings from U.S. President Joe Biden.

## The danger of wider conflict

- Gaza war may escalate into a wider, regional conflict, causing concern for the Biden administration.
- Secretary of State Blinken is trying to prevent escalation and secure a ceasefire.
- A UN Security Council resolution for an immediate ceasefire was adopted, but it's limited to the end of Ramadan.
- Hamas seems indifferent to loss of lives and destruction, hoping for international support for a quick ceasefire.
- Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu is determined to achieve his objectives before halting the war.
- Israel and Hezbollah have been engaging in conflicts, raising the risk of Hezbollah supporting Hamas against Israel.
- Tensions could escalate further, involving Syria, Iran, and potentially Egypt, putting pressure on the US to support Israel.
- If the situation worsens, Russia might also become involved.
- This scenario, though frightening, shouldn't be disregarded as improbable.

Question 1: Rakhigarhi, an important archaeological site, is associated with which of the following ancient civilizations?

- (A) Mauryan Civilization
- (B) Gupta Civilization
- (C) Indus Valley Civilization
- (D) Vedic Civilization

Question 2: Rakhigarhi is located in which of the following Indian states?

- (A) Gujarat
- (B) Rajasthan
- (C) Haryana
- (D) Uttar Pradesh

Question 3: An increase in the repo rate by the RBI would most likely lead to which of the following?

- (A) Increase in money supply in the economy
- (B) Decrease in the cost of borrowing for businesses
- (C) Increased lending by commercial banks
- (D) Decrease in inflation

Question 4: The repo rate is best described as:

- (A) The interest rate at which banks deposit money with the RBI.
- (B) The interest rate at which government borrows money from the market.
- (C) The interest rate at which RBI lends to commercial banks.
- (D) The interest rate at which banks lend money to the general public.

Question 5: The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) replaced which earlier UN body?

- (A) The Commission on Human Rights
- (B) The Security Council
- (C) The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)
- (D) The International Court of Justice (ICJ)

Question 6: Which of the following is a key mechanism used by the UNHRC to assess the human rights records of all UN Member States?

- (A) Special Procedures
- (B) Universal Periodic Review (UPR)
- (C) The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
- (D) Treaty Body System

Question 7: The headquarters of the UNHRC is located in:

- (A) New York, USA
- (B) The Hague, Netherlands
- (C) Vienna, Austria
- (D) Geneva, Switzerland

Question 8: Consider the following statements about the UNHRC:

1. It is composed of 47 Member States elected by the UN General Assembly.
2. Member States are elected on the basis of equitable geographic distribution

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- (A) 1 only
- (B) 2 only
- (C) Both 1 and 2
- (D) Neither 1 nor 2

Question 9: Zero Hour in the Indian Parliament takes place immediately after:

- (A) Introduction of Bills
- (B) Question Hour
- (C) Adjournment Motion
- (D) Budget Presentation

Question 10: The decision to allow a matter to be raised during Zero Hour rests solely with the:

- (A) Prime Minister
- (B) Leader of the Opposition
- (C) Speaker of the Lok Sabha or Chairperson of the Rajya Sabha
- (D) Secretary-General of the Parliament

PatrioticIAS