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UPSC 360°

The Hindu Unwrapped - Daily Current Affairs Mastery for UPSC CSE (Clear that it's based on The Hindu editorials / news analyses - very aspirant-friendly)

Significance

The rise of Balendra Shah signals a shift towards reform-oriented politics in Nepal. It highlights challenges of balancing ties with India and China, managing economic reforms, and navigating global geopolitics, making Nepal's foreign policy and governance crucial for regional stability.

Path Ahead for Nepal's New Leadership

Why in News?

- ❖ Nepal's political landscape witnessed a historic shift after the parliamentary elections held on **5 March 2026**, with **Balendra Shah**, leader of the **Rashtriya Swatantra Party (RSP)**, emerging as the **Prime Minister-designate**. Shah, a former rapper-engineer-turned-mayor of Kathmandu, secured a strong mandate by capitalising on widespread disillusionment with traditional political parties.
- ❖ His victory has been described as a "monastic anomaly" in Nepali politics – a young, independent-minded leader who bypassed the old-guard establishment. The development assumes added significance amid the ongoing **US-Israel-Iran war** in West Asia, which has severely impacted Nepal due to the large number of Nepalese migrant workers in the Gulf region.

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- ❖ Balendra Shah now faces the complex task of navigating Nepal's delicate balancing act between India, China, and the United States while addressing domestic governance reforms.

Key Details of the Political Shift

- **Balendra Shah & RSP**
 - Shah positioned himself as an “outsider” and “clean reformer”.
 - His campaign was marked by minimal media interviews, symbolic “Greater Nepal” mapping in his office, and a deliberate rejection of traditional political rhetoric.
 - RSP's rise reflects “post-Gen Z” fatigue with dynastic and ideological politics.
- **Foreign Policy Challenges**
 - **India:** Nepal's largest trading partner and most consequential neighbour; historical sensitivities over border issues and water resources.
 - **China:** Major infrastructure investor (Belt and Road Initiative projects); Shah has signalled caution by dropping a China-backed industrial park from his manifesto.
 - **United States:** Growing strategic engagement; Nepal's large migrant workforce in the Gulf makes the West Asia conflict a direct livelihood issue.
 - **West Asia Crisis:** Millions of Nepalese migrants' lives and remittances are tied to the Persian Gulf; the ongoing war has created an immediate contingency planning challenge for Kathmandu.
- **Domestic Mandate**
 - Shah's victory is seen as a rejection of old-guard politics.
 - His “monastic silence” and reformist image resonated with youth and urban voters.

Background: Nepal's Political & Geopolitical Context

- **Internal Politics**

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- Long history of coalition instability and ideological polarisation (Congress, CPN-UML, Maoists).
- Rise of new-generation parties like RSP signals demand for clean governance and anti-corruption.

• Geostrategic Location

- Landlocked between India and China → classic buffer state dilemma.
- “Roti-Beti” social bonds with India; deep economic dependence on Indian market and ports.
- China’s growing footprint through infrastructure financing (Pokhara Airport, BRI projects).

• West Asia Link

- Nepal is heavily dependent on remittances from the Gulf (Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE, Kuwait).
- The 2026 US-Israel-Iran war has already affected migrant safety and employment, making foreign policy management a domestic political necessity.

Implications

• For Nepal

- Shah’s leadership will be tested on balancing economic dependence on India with infrastructure ties to China.
- Immediate priority: Ensuring safety and evacuation support for Nepalese workers in the Gulf.
- Domestic reforms: Anti-corruption, governance efficiency, and youth employment.

• For India

- Opportunity to recalibrate ties with a new, non-traditional leadership in Kathmandu.

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- India must move beyond the “coercive shadow” of the 2015 blockade perception and engage on equal terms.
- Key areas: Trade, connectivity, water resources, and security cooperation.
- **Regional & Global**
 - Highlights the interplay of domestic politics and foreign policy in small Himalayan states.
 - China’s infrastructure push vs. India’s cultural and economic influence.
 - US strategic interest in Nepal as part of Indo-Pacific strategy.

UPSC CSE & State PCS PCSRelevance

Prelims

- Key terms: Rashtriya Swatantra Party (RSP), Balendra Shah, Act East Policy (India), Belt and Road Initiative (China), West Asia Conflict (2026)
- Data: Nepal’s parliamentary election (5 March 2026), India-Nepal trade dependence
- Related: India-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship (1950), Gorkha recruitment

GS-2 (IR)

- India’s Neighbourhood First Policy & Act East Policy
- Nepal’s foreign policy balancing between India and China

GS-2 (Polity & Governance)

- Emerging trends in South Asian democratic politics (rise of new parties)

GS-3 (Security)

- Migration, remittances, and human security linkages with West Asia conflict

Essay / Interview

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- “Nepal’s New Leadership: Navigating the Tightrope Between India, China, and Domestic Renewal”
- “Geopolitics of the Himalayas: How Domestic Political Shifts in Nepal Affect India’s Strategic Interests”

MCQs

1. With reference to Nepal’s recent political developments (March 2026), consider the following statements:
2. Balendra Shah of the Rashtriya Swatantra Party (RSP) has emerged as the Prime Minister-designate.
3. The West Asia conflict has significant implications for Nepal due to its large migrant workforce in the Gulf.
4. Shah’s campaign was marked by extensive media interviews and traditional political rhetoric.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (b)

2. The 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship governs relations between:
 - (a) India and Bhutan
 - (b) India and Nepal
 - (c) India and Bangladesh

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(d) India and Myanmar

Answer: (b)

3. Which of the following is NOT a major challenge for Nepal's new leadership?

- (a) Managing remittances from the Gulf amid West Asia conflict
- (b) Balancing relations with India and China
- (c) Resolving the Doklam border dispute
- (d) Addressing domestic governance and anti-corruption demands

Answer: (c)

4. Balendra Shah's political rise is described as a rejection of:

- (a) Monarchical rule
- (b) Old-guard traditional politics
- (c) Federalism
- (d) Republicanism

Answer: (b)

Mains Questions

1. "Balendra Shah's victory in Nepal represents a generational shift in South Asian politics." Discuss the factors behind his mandate and the foreign policy challenges his government is likely to face. (15 marks / 250 words)
2. Analyse the complex interplay of domestic politics and foreign policy in Nepal, with special reference to its relations with India and China. How should India recalibrate its approach? (10 marks / 150 words)

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3. "The West Asia conflict has direct livelihood implications for Nepal's migrant workers."
Examine the human security dimension of the 2026 crisis and its impact on Nepal-India relations. (15 marks / 250 words)
4. **Essay (250 marks)** "Nepal's New Leadership: Navigating the Geopolitical Tightrope Between Delhi, Beijing, and Domestic Renewal."



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