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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

INDIA'S IMMEDIATE NEIGHBORHOOD AND MIDDLE EAST

Bangladesh's Political Crisis

News Excerpt:

The recent political upheaval in Bangladesh, leading to the **ouster of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina,** has significant implications for **India-Bangladesh relations** and **regional geopolitics.**

Background and Immediate Crisis:

- The recent events in Bangladesh have been marked by widespread protests, defying a national curfew, and storming the Prime Minister's palace in Dhaka.
- The catalyst for these demonstrations was the **anti-quota protests,** which have been simmering despite a Supreme Court ruling.
- The opposition parties, led by the **Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)** and the **banned Jamaat-e-Islami,** have capitalized on the discontent, organizing a **"long march"** that has further destabilized the situation.

Why are there protests over the quota?

- The quota system for freedom fighters in Bangladesh became controversial as the number of original freedom fighters decreased, leading to underutilization and potential misuse of the quota.
- In June this year, the high court nullified the decision of PM Hasina to abolish the quotas and reinstated the quotas after petitions were filed by relatives of 1971 veterans.

- This triggered the recent protests, with students asking why the third generation of freedom fighters was being provided benefits, besides demanding a total merit-based recruitment.

Since the **1971 Liberation War,** Bangladesh has granted **quotas in civil service and public sector jobs** to the descendants of those who **participated in the movement to free the country from Pakistan.**

The quota system was introduced by the then **Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the father of Hasina** in 1972.

Fig: Quota System in Bangladesh

India - Bangladesh relations:

HISTORICAL
- India was the first nation to recognise and establish ties with Bangladesh.

ECONOMIC
- Bilateral Trade grew at almost 44% from $10.78 bn in FY 2020-21 to $18.14 bn IN FY 2021-22.
- Multiple rail links connect the two countries such as Haldibari- Chilahati, Petrapole-Benapole, Gede- Darshana, Singhabad - Rohanpur and Radhikapur – Birol.

DEFENCE
- Both jointly commemorated the 50th anniversary of the 1971 War.
- Joint exercises between the two countries include SAMPRITI (Army) and BONGO-SAGAR (Navy).

MEDICAL
- India gifted two mobile Oxygen Plants and 3.3 million COVISHIELD vaccines.
- India operated "Oxygen Express" trains to transport Liquid Medical Oxygen.

CULTURE
- The two nations enjoy civilizational ties and are closely connected by a shared cultural heritage, and a love of the arts, music, & literature.

Sheikh Hasina's relationship with India:

- Given the strong historical ties and India's support during the 1971 independence war, Hasina has maintained close relations with India.
- Despite criticisms from opposition parties in Bangladesh, India benefited from strategic ties under

her leadership, including **significant infrastructure projects** and **development grants.**

- India has been a **crucial supporter of Sheikh Hasina over the years,** fostering a mutually beneficial relationship.
- Her government had been instrumental in **addressing militant challenges** in **northeastern India** by cracking down on **anti-India militant groups** within Bangladesh.
- She also facilitated **transit rights for India, enhancing connectivity and trade between the two countries.**
- Her departure puts India in a delicate position, having to balance its historical support for Hasina while navigating the new political landscape in Bangladesh.

Implications for India:

- The current political turmoil in Bangladesh has **significant implications for India.** As a **neighbouring country,** India has a vested interest in the **stability and security of Bangladesh.**
- The **rise of radical elements,** the **influx of refugees,** and **potential cross-border tensions** are all concerns that India must navigate carefully.

Strategic and Economic Implications of the Bangladesh Crisis

The collapse of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government carries significant strategic and economic implications for India.

Strategic Implications

- **Diplomatic Challenges**:
  - **Loss of a Close Ally**: Sheikh Hasina was considered a close friend of India. Her ouster disrupts the strong ties that had been established between the two countries, potentially opening the door for other nations, such as China, to increase their influence in Bangladesh.
  - **Handling Illegal Immigration**: Increased political instability in Bangladesh could lead to a surge in illegal immigrants seeking refuge in India, presenting a diplomatic and logistical challenge for New Delhi.
- **Security Concerns**:
  - **Refugee Influx**: The instability might lead to a significant influx of refugees escaping violence, particularly affecting India's northeastern states.
  - **External Influence**: Countries inimical to India's interests, such as China, may exploit the situation to gain a strategic foothold in Bangladesh, posing a security threat to India.

Economic Implications

- **Trade Disruptions**:
  - **Bilateral Trade**: Bangladesh is **India's largest trade partner in South Asia,** with bilateral trade reaching **$13 billion in FY 2023-24.**

  - **Potential FTA**: Discussions on a **Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** aimed at boosting trade and investments could be jeopardized.
- **Infrastructure Projects**:
  - **Stalled Projects**: Ongoing infrastructure projects initiated during Hasina's tenure may face delays or cancellations. This includes projects funded by India's lines of credit aimed at improving connectivity and infrastructure in Bangladesh.
  - **Economic Downturn**: The political crisis can lead to an economic downturn in Bangladesh, affecting its growth prospects and, consequently, the bilateral trade dynamics.
  - **Infrastructure Investments**: India has extended **$8 billion in lines of credit** for infrastructure development in Bangladesh. Key projects like the **Akhaura-Agartala rail link** are vital for connectivity.

About the project:

- The 12.24 km Agartala-Akhaura railway line is divided into 5.46 km on the Indian side in **Tripura** and 6.78 km in the **Bangladesh Akhaura upa-zilla** in the Brahmanbaria district.
- The journey duration between Agartala and Kolkata will be reduced from **31 hours to 10 hours** by the Agartala-Akhaura project.
- **The Ministry for Development of North East Region (DoNER) funded the work on the Indian side, and the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) funded the expense for the Bangladesh side as 'Aid to Bangladesh'.**
- The project will eventually cover **Dhaka and Kolkata.**
- Two other projects inaugurated simultaneously were the **Khulna - Mongla Port Rail Line** and **Unit - II of the Maitree Super Thermal Power Plant in Rampal, Bangladesh**.
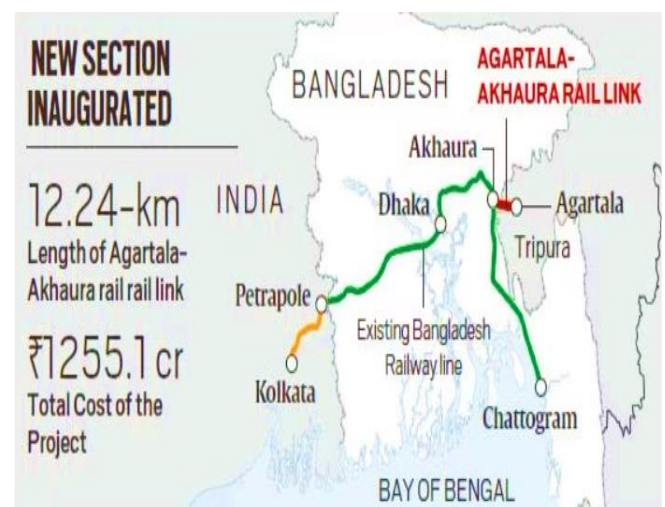
Long-term Impact

- **Market Dynamics**:
  - **Shrinking Market**: With the political crisis, Bangladesh's market growth may stagnate, reducing its potential as a growing export market for India.
  - **Economic Policies**: The new government may adopt different economic policies, possibly less favorable to India, affecting bilateral trade and investments.
- **Regional Stability**:
  - **Geopolitical Balance**: The power vacuum in Bangladesh could shift the regional balance of power. India must navigate this delicately to maintain its influence while managing relations with any new government.
- **Humanitarian Concerns**:
  - **Refugee Crisis**: An increase in refugees due to violence in Bangladesh can lead to humanitarian crises along the border, requiring robust response strategies from India.

Interim Government of Bangladesh:

- Muhammad Yunus, a Nobel laureate, has been appointed as the head of a new interim government in Bangladesh.
- Yunus took oath as the chief advisor (equivalent to prime minister) on August 8, 2024, at the age of 84.
- The interim government consisted of 17 advisors, many of whom were critics of Hasina's administration.
- The appointments were made in consultation with student leaders and military and civil society representatives.

After the formation of the new Interim Government, the Prime Minister of India held a telephonic conversation with Mohammad Yunus, the Chief Adviser of the Interim Government of Bangladesh.

During this interaction, the PM:

- Reaffirmed India's support for a **democratic, stable, peaceful,** and **progressive Bangladesh.**
- Emphasized India's commitment to s**upporting Bangladesh's development initiatives.**
- Underlined the importance of ensuring **safety and protection for Hindus** and all **minority communities** in Bangladesh.

Prof. Yunus's response:

- Assured that the Interim Government would prioritize **the protection, safety,** and **security of Hindus and all minority groups in Bangladesh.**

Way Forward:

- The recent events necessitate a **re-evaluation of India's strategy.** Ensuring a stable and friendly government in Dhaka is crucial for India's regional security and economic interests.

- India must expect that **Pakistan and China will try to exploit the current churn in Dhaka** and nudge the new government away from India in the days ahead.
- India will need to work with its friends and partners like the US, UK and Europe to **limit the violence at the current juncture** and work with the Bangladesh Army to ensure a peaceful transition to a new order within Bangladesh.
- India will need enormous strategic patience, faith in the logic of geography, belief in the centrality of commerce, and a strong political commitment to transcend the Partition pathologies in building relations with a changing Bangladesh.

India-Nepal border issue

News Excerpt:

India has strongly reacted to the Nepal Government's decision to create a map depicting areas in India as part of its territory on a new currency note.

The disputed territory:

- The territorial dispute is about a 372-sq-km area that includes **Limpiadhura, Lipulekh, and Kalapani** at the **India-Nepal-China trijunction** in Uttarakhand's Pithoragarh district.
- Nepal has claimed for long that these areas belong to it both historically and evidently.

Background of the current issue:

- The disputed map claiming Indian territories as Nepalese was adopted by **consensus in Nepal's Parliament four years ago in 2020.**
- But four years after **Nepal included the areas of Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura in its new map,** the government in Kathmandu has decided to come out with a **100 Rupees Nepalese currency** note that depicts the **country's map with the areas under Indian control.**

Origin of the dispute:

- The India-Nepal territory dispute has roots in the **Sugauli Treaty of 1815,** which followed the **Anglo-Nepalese War (1814-1816).**
- The Treaty of Sugauli resulted in **Nepal losing a chunk of territory to the East India Company.**

- ○ **Article 5** of the treaty took away the **jurisdiction of Nepal's rulers** over the land to the east of the **Kali River.**
- In January 2020, Nepal's parliament voted to change its map to include **Lipulekh, Kalapani, and Limpiyadhura** as part of its territory, whereas India didn't agree with this change.
  - ○ The move was described by the Ministry of External Affairs as "**artificial", "unilateral"** and **"unacceptable".** India had also asked Nepal to return to dialogue.
  - ○ In May 2020, tensions rose when India opened a new **80 km road** in **Uttarakhand through the Lipulekh pass**, a route for the Kailash Mansarovar pilgrimage.

Impact of current dispute on India-Nepal ties:

- Despite the boundary dispute, both Nepal and India share a **unique relationship of friendship and cooperation**, characterized by **open borders and deep-rooted religious, cultural** and **people-to-people ties.**
- India is also Nepal's **largest trading partner** and is investing billions of dollars in infrastructure, including hydropower plants.
- However, the border dispute **threatens to derail the ties between the two countries.**

Way Forward:

- India and Nepal must chalk out their borders in a **formal and friendly manner** to avoid other disputes, such as the one over the Kalapani area.
- Both India and Nepal must invest in **negotiating new border management agreements** to take into consideration recent events.
- India should **resolve its border conflict with Nepal** through discussion as soon as possible, given that it already has an **unresolved border dispute with China in the Ladakh region.**

India-Maldives Relations

News Excerpt:

Newly elected Maldivian President **Mohamed Muizzu** has decided to send Indian "troops" out of the country while pledging to safeguard the Maldives' independence and sovereignty.

Background:

- India and the Maldives enjoy close, friendly, and multifaceted relations and share ancient ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious, and commercial ties.
- India was among the **first nations to acknowledge the Maldives** following its independence in 1965 and forge diplomatic ties with it.
- **Maldives' proximity to the west coast of India** (barely 70 nautical miles away from Minicoy and 300 nautical miles away from India's West coast) and its situation at the **hub of commercial sea lanes running through the Indian Ocean** led to significant strategic importance for India.
- **India's prompt assistance during the 1988 coup attempt** led to the development of trust and long-term and friendly bilateral relations with the Maldives.
- India was the **first to assist Maldives during the 2004 tsunami** as well as during the **water crisis in Malé in 2014**.
- **India's swift dispatch of 30,000 doses of measles vaccine in Jan 2020** to prevent an outbreak in the Maldives and India's rapid and comprehensive assistance to the Maldives since the **COVID-19 pandemic** began has further reinforced India's credentials of being the "**first responder**".

Evolution of India-Maldives relations:

- **Political relations:**
  - ○ Since the establishment of diplomatic relations, almost all the Prime Ministers of India visited the Maldives.
  - ○ On international issues, **Maldives has consistently supported India in multilateral fora**, such as the **UN, the Commonwealth, the NAM, and the SAARC.**
  - ○ Maldives also **co-sponsored the G-4 draft resolutions on UN reforms**.
  - ○ **India extended support to Maldives** candidature for a **non-permanent seat in the UN Security Council for the term 2019-20**.
- **Security & Defence Cooperation:**
  - ○ Since 1988, defence and security have been a major area of cooperation between India and the Maldives.
  - ○ A **comprehensive Action Plan for Defence** was also signed in 2016 to consolidate defence partnerships.
  - ○ **Capacity Building/Training:**
    - ■ India provides the largest number of **training opportunities** for the **Maldivian National Defence Force (MNDF)**, meeting around 70% of their defence training requirements.

- The Indian Navy has also provided MNDF with air assets for air surveillance, MEDEVAC, SAR, and Helo-borne vertical insertion capability.
  - Indian defence cooperation also extends to the areas of **Joint Exercises, Maritime Domain Awareness, gifting of hardware, infrastructure development,** etc.
- **Development Cooperation:**
  - The major completed and ongoing **development assistance projects** executed by India are:
    - **Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital:** The hospital was built with Indian Grant Assistance in 1995.
    - **Maldives Institute of Technical Education (now called the Maldives Polytechnic):** It was completed for INR 12 Cr and handed over to GoM in Sept 1996.
    - **India-Maldives Faculty of Hospitality & Tourism Studies:** The foundation stone for the Faculty was jointly laid by Late PM Vajpayee and President Gayoom in 2002.
    - **Technology Adoption Programme in the Education Sector in Maldives:** The US$ 5.3 million project fully funded by GoI was launched in 2011 to provide ICT training to Maldivian teachers and youth and for vocational training.
    - **National College for Police and Law Enforcement (NCPLE):** With GoI grant funding of INR 222.98 Crore, NCPLE is the single-largest grant project executed by India in the Maldives.
- **Infrastructure and connectivity Projects**:
  - **Water and Sanitation in 34 Islands:** The project seeks to improve water supply and sewerage facilities in 34 identified islands by installing a proper water supply distribution network.
  - **Addu Development Project (Roads and Land Reclamation):** It includes roads, street lighting, stormwater drainage, shore protection, and land reclamation for the development of tourism infrastructure.
  - **Greater Male Connectivity Project:** The project aims to connect Male to Villingili, Gulhifalhu, and Thilafushi islands through a series of bridges, causeways, and roads.
- **Economy and Trade:**
  - India and Maldives signed a **trade agreement in 1981** that provides for the export of essential commodities.
  - India-Maldives **bilateral trade** stood at the **USD 300 million mark for the first time in 2021**, reaching an impressive USD 323.9 million. Trade registered a growth of over 31% over the previous year.
    - This is a direct result of the launch of the cargo vessel service between the two countries in

September 2020 and the commencement of work on three of our Line of Credit (LoC) projects since February 2021.
    - The implementation of visa-free entry in Feb 2022 for Indians arriving in the Maldives for business purposes is a further recognition of the growing commercial partnership.
  - India emerged as **Maldives' 3rd largest trade partner** in 2021.
    - **Indian imports from the Maldives** primarily comprise **scrap metals.**
    - **Indian exports to the Maldives** include various **engineering and industrial products** like drugs and pharmaceuticals, radar apparatus, rock boulders, aggregates, cement, and agricultural produce like rice, spices, fruits, vegetables, and poultry.
  - In 2022, the RBI signed a **Currency Swap Agreement** with the Maldives Monetary Authority (MMA) under the SAARC Currency Swap Framework.
    - This is to provide swap support as a backstop line of funding for short-term foreign exchange liquidity requirements.
- **Tourism:**
  - Tourism directly accounts for about a quarter of Maldives' Gross Domestic Product (GDP).
  - In a **pandemic-hit 2020, India was the largest source market** for the Maldives, with nearly 63,000 Indians visiting the Maldives.
  - In 2021 & 2022, India continued as the top market with **over** 2.91 lakh and 2.41 lakh Indian tourist arrivals, respectively.
  - In March 2022, India & Maldives agreed to an **open skies arrangement,** which will further improve connectivity between the two countries.
- **Education & Capacity Building:**
  - For decades, India has been a traditional partner for the Maldives in human resource development across sectors.
  - Several Maldivian youths acquire their higher education in India Universities every year.
  - India has traditionally offered a substantial number of ICCR scholarships to Maldivian youth.
  - India also offers 10 seats every year to the Maldives under the Department of Science and Technology (DST), Govt. of India "India Science and Research Fellowship (ISRF) Programme".
  - Maldives has been a partner of **the ITEC (Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme)** for several years. In 2019-20, the in-person ITEC slots were increased to 200.

Concerns regarding Maldives for India:

- **Geopolitical Strategic Location:** The Maldives, an archipelago of 1,200 coral islands, is strategically positioned in the Indian Ocean, close to important shipping lanes that guarantee steady energy supplies to nations like China, Japan, and India.
- **China's Growing Influence:** The Maldives' importance has risen significantly since China began sending military ships to the Indian Ocean some ten years ago, even up to the Gulf of Aden, in the name of counterpiracy operations. **Today, the Maldives is estimated to owe 70% of its foreign aid to China.**
- **Countering China in the Indian Ocean:** China's entry is solely to advance its interests. It has done so through debt financing, leading to debt traps that further lead to interference in internal politics, support to fundamental groups, and the consequent hegemony of China, which is a hindrance to democracy.
- **Radicalization:** The Maldives saw a sharp increase in radicalization, and India cannot afford a neighbour who does not prevent the radicalization on its soil.
- **Indian Security Interests:** For India, Maldives is a first line of defence against terrorism, piracy on the high seas, drug trafficking, narcotics, and other maritime crimes.

Way Forward:

- Both countries should focus on **capacity building and working together** to address their shared challenges and priorities.
- As neighbours, both countries need to collaborate closely to address challenges like **transnational crimes** and **Humanitarian Assistance Disaster Relief.**
- India must work with the Maldives in the security and defence domains as the leading South Asian power and a "net security provider" in the Indian Ocean region.

Related: The Maldives government has decided not to renew **an agreement with India** that allowed India to **conduct hydrographic surveys in Maldivian waters**.

- This is carried out by ships, which **use methods such as sonar** to understand the various features of a water body.
- These surveys help "**map out water depth, the shape of the seafloor and coastline, the location of possible obstructions, and physical features of water bodies**" to ensure the efficiency and safety of maritime transportation.
- Only 25 percent of the coastal countries, including India, have adequate hydrographic capabilities.
- India has also performed **hydrographic surveys** along its coasts as well as for neighbouring countries, including **Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Bangladesh.**

Maldives Vs Lakshadweep

News Excerpt:

The Indian Prime Minister's visit to the Indian archipelago Lakshadweep triggered an unexpected row that has soured ties with the Maldives.

Lakshadweep:

- Lakshadweep, which translates into Sanskrit and Malayalam as **"hundred thousand islands"**, is a group of **36 coral islands with a total area of only 32 sq km — India's smallest Union Territory.**
- The islands, which are at distances between 220 km and 440 km from Kochi, lie to the North of the Maldives.

Both archipelagos are part of the same chain of coralline islands that extend southward beyond the equator to the **Chagos archipelago.**

How did the Maldives become such an attractive destination for tourists?

- The Maldives has long invested in tourism. The Maldives tourism master plan 1996-2005 notes that tourism, which started in 1972 with the development of 60 tourist beds on two islands, has been **"the most important economic activity"** in the country since the 1980s.
- In 2009, local island guesthouses started to pop up on the islands and atolls after a change in the rules allowed tourists to stay among the local population rather than only on privately owned resort islands.
- Often, an entire island in the Maldives is occupied by a single resort, offering great privacy and luxury to wealthy visitors with high standards of hospitality.

- **Currently, the Maldives is an international tourism hotspot.** Tourism directly contributes to **almost 30% of the country's GDP** and generates more than **60% of its foreign currency earnings.**
- According to the Maldives tourism ministry, **the Maldives offers visa-free arrivals to its major source markets,** which include India, Russia, China, and Kazakhstan.

Why is there such a vast gulf between the Maldives and Lakshadweep?

- The Lakshadweep occupies a far smaller area — **only 10 islands are inhabited** — and the scope for tourism is limited.
  - However, India has never invested in its tourism potential, in part **due to concerns over environmental damage and the destruction of local livelihoods.**
- Bangaram, the uninhabited island that the Prime Minister visited, has the largest carrying capacity of 200 cottages. Among the inhabited islands, Kavaratti has a capacity of 243 cottages.

How is Lakshadweep Island better than Maldives?

- **Natural Beauty and Biodiversity:** Lakshadweep Island boasts untouched and pristine natural beauty, with its clear **turquoise waters, coral reefs, and white sandy beaches.** With its strict regulations on tourism and construction, Lakshadweep Island has managed to preserve its natural environment much better than the Maldives.
- **Authentic Local Experience:** Lakshadweep Island offers a unique opportunity to indulge in an authentic local experience. Its warm and friendly inhabitants make visitors feel welcome and provide insights into the island's rich culture and traditions.
- **Serenity and Privacy:** Compared to the Maldives, which has a higher number of tourists and more commercialized resorts, Lakshadweep Island offers a serene and peaceful atmosphere.
- **Environmental Conservation:** Lakshadweep Island takes its commitment to environmental conservation seriously. It has implemented various eco-friendly initiatives to preserve its fragile ecosystem.
- **Cultural Diversity:** Lakshadweep is home to a diverse mix of cultures influenced by Arab, Indian, and African traditions, resulting in a unique and rich cultural tapestry. From the distinct architecture of its mosques to the vibrant dance forms like Lava and Kolkali, Lakshadweep offers a glimpse into a different world.

Way Forward:

With its distinct beauty, Lakshadweep has the potential to be a major contributor to India's development in terms of tourism and local well-being. In this sense, the development projects are essential steps towards the growth of Lakshadweep offers social empowerment, sustainable solutions, and better regional communication connections.

Raveendran Committee

- In May 2012, the Supreme Court appointed a panel under **Justice R V Raveendran (retd)** to look into the environmental and developmental challenges on the Lakshadweep islands.
- The committee recommended that all infrastructure development proposals should be in accordance with an Integrated Island Management Plan and should be implemented in consultation with elected local self-government bodies.
- The report noted the **"fragile ecology of the islands and the need for conservation of the corals, lagoons and other ecosystems"** and laid down the carrying capacity of each island.

Mauritius and India

News Excerpt:

The Prime Minister of India and his Mauritian counterpart inaugurated India-assisted development projects at Agaléga Island.

Chinese Angle in the Indian Ocean:

- China sees great value in having a powerful presence in the Indian Ocean region.
- **Nine of China's top 10 crude oil suppliers transit the Indian Ocean**, which is also the primary region of transit for China for engagements with Africa, the Middle East, island nations, and littorals across the vast ocean.
- The Indian Ocean is also the main trading route between China and Europe.

STRATEGIC OUTPOSTS IN INDIA'S NEIGHBOURHOOD

India has upgraded the airstrip and jetty at Agaléga Island, a strategically located Mauritian dependency in the Indian Ocean
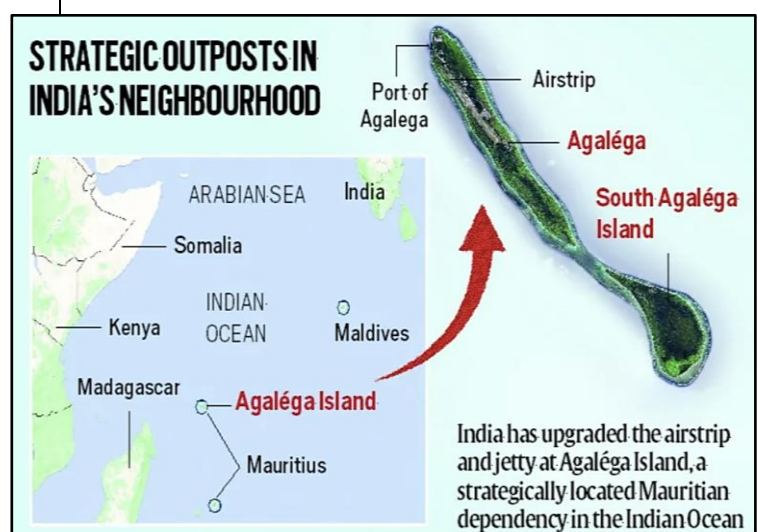
- **China is the only nation with an embassy in each of the six islands** in the Indian Ocean: **Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, Madagascar, and Comoros.**

○ None of the traditional players—the United States, the UK, India, or France—have embassies in all six island countries.

○ China had gone beyond diplomatic and trade partnerships in the region and had begun to **maintain a consistent military presence**.

● In 2017, China opened its **first overseas military facility** in the Indian Ocean in **Djibouti on the Horn of Africa.**

India's stance:

● India understands the importance of working with the governments of all these island nations.

● The domestic politics of these nations often **impact their behaviour and policies abroad**.

Global Power Dynamics:

● The **Indian Ocean region** has emerged as the axis of global power.

○ The **US**, the **UK**, with the **Diego Garcia base**, and **France**, with Reunion Island, are already active in the region.

○ **China**, too, joined them, investing heavily in the region. It has built many assets in the Western Indian Ocean, such as the **bases in Djibouti** and **Gwadar,** and developed **extensive influence** over Africa.

● For **India**, which depends on the Indian Ocean for **almost 90% of its imports** and **exports**, growing **Chinese activities** in the region are a considerable **challenge**.

● India has nurtured the ambition of rising as an influential **blue-water power** and **the Global South**'s voice.

India- Mauritius Relations:
Defence Cooperation:

● India is Mauritius' **preferred defence partner** for acquiring platforms/equipment, capacity building, joint patrolling, hydrological services, etc. Indian defence officers are deputed to the Mauritian Defence Forces.

● In February 2021, India extended a USD 100 mn Line of Credit (**LoC**) to Mauritius for procuring defence products.

India-assisted Projects

● India has extended **7 Lines of Credit** (LOCs) of USD 1.029 billion and **Grant assistance** of USD 406 million to Mauritius (totalling approx. USD 1.4 billion) for various **Defence, Connectivity** and **Infrastructure projects**. In May 2016, India provided a grant of USD 353 million to Mauritius as a Special Economic Package for **five priority projects:** (i) Metro Express Project; (ii) Supreme Court Building; (iii) New ENT Hospital; (iv) Social Housing project; (v) Digital Tablets for school children.

● In **2021,** India approved an LoC of USD 190 mn and a USD 10 mn grant for Phase III of the Metro Project. In **2022**, another LoC worth USD 300 mn and a grant of USD 25 mn were announced for the **Phase IV extension of the Metro** (to be re-tendered by GOM). A MoU on **Community Development Projects** was signed in 2022 to undertake 96 small, people-oriented projects in Mauritius.

● Other completed India-assisted projects include the **Upadhyay Training Centre,** the **Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital,** the **Subramania Bharati Eye Centre,** the

Rajiv Gandhi Science Centre, the **Swami Vivekananda International Conference Centre** and the **World Hindi Secretariat.**

The strategic significance of the project:

- The initiative is **aimed** at fulfilling the larger **geo-strategic objective** of both India and Mauritius.
  - Besides meeting the **development objectives**, the project will also significantly enhance the **capabilities and capacities** of **marine surveillance** and security.
- **Agalega** entered the list of ports in the **western Indian Ocean** that provide strategic access to India — dubbed by some analysts as the **"necklace of diamonds"** — as against the "string of pearls" ports that provide access to the Chinese.
  - India already has a **naval air station** in **North Andaman** called INS Kohassa and another near **Port Blair** called INS Utkrosh, which provide enough depth for the country's military to monitor the **Eastern Indian Ocean** thoroughly.
- With Mauritius's **maritime empowerment** through the Agalega project, India can expect enough cooperation from that country, **"a natural partner,"** to **monitor** important ocean lines in the Western Indian Ocean, too, including the crucial **Mozambique Channel.**
- The project will try to resolve the **traditional and non-traditional challenges** in the Indian Ocean region.
  - It will ensure **security, prosperity** and **stability** in the Indian Ocean Region.
  - It will further **complement** all other areas, such as monitoring the **Exclusive Economic Zone, joint patrolling, hydrography,** and **Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief**.
- Befitting its current stature as a major regional power, **India** wished to convey through the Agalega project that it, too, has arrived, is serious about its critical role as a **net peace provider** in the **Indian Ocean region**, and is willing to brook no interference in managing it as a **"zone of peace."**

Way Forward:

The development projects on Agalega atoll in the Western Indian Ocean are a **significant milestone** in India-Mauritius cooperation. They highlight the **strategic importance** of the **Indian Ocean region** in the evolving geopolitical landscape as well as India's commitment to enhancing maritime infrastructure in the Indian Ocean.

India- Bhutan- China

News Excerpt:

Beijing and Thimphu held the 25th round of **boundary talks**, which have been on hold since 2016. On the other hand, the **King of Bhutan, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuk, was**

on a visit to India. He also made his maiden three-day tour to the state of Assam.

Significance of the 25th China –Bhutan Boundary Talks:

- These talks were held after a gap of 7 years; they were stalled after the Doklam Standoff (2017) between India and China. This was the **first official visit to China by the Bhutanese foreign minister.**
- A "Cooperation Agreement" was signed between both countries outlining the functioning of a Joint Technical Team on the **"Delimitation and Demarcation of the Bhutan China Boundary."**
- The negotiations could mark the beginning of establishing full-fledged diplomatic ties between Bhutan and China.
- Both sides expressed commitment towards **actualizing the "3 Step Roadmap"**.

What is the "3 Step Roadmap"?

- It is a MoU signed between **Bhutan and China in 2021** for clear demarcation of Bhutanese and Chinese territory.
- It includes a **3-stage procedure:**
  - Agreeing to the Proposed border.
  - Site Visitation
  - Formal demarcation of the border.

Indo-Bhutan Relations:

Importance of the King's maiden visit to Assam:

- Assam and Bhutan have traditionally shared peaceful and warm ties.
- The relations were hindered in the 1990s when **insurgent groups from Assam** sought shelter from a crackdown by the Indian military and set up operational camps in the Bhutanese territory.
- On 15 December **2003**, Bhutan undertook a successful military operation, **"Operation All Clear,"** against those militants.
- Bhutan cited a threat to:
  - **Its Sovereignty and National Security:** It was felt that the insurgent groups would supply arms to the **ethnic Nepalese Lhotshampas**, which could fuel an ethnic insurgency in southern Bhutan.
  - **Excellent bilateral relations with India:** India had expressed displeasure with the working of militant groups from Bhutanese soil.

Cultural Relations:

- India and Bhutan's ties have **common roots in Buddhism**. As Lord Buddha's birthplace, India has many significant Buddhist sites like Nalanda, Bodh Gaya, and Rajgir. These are visited frequently by the Bhutanese monks.
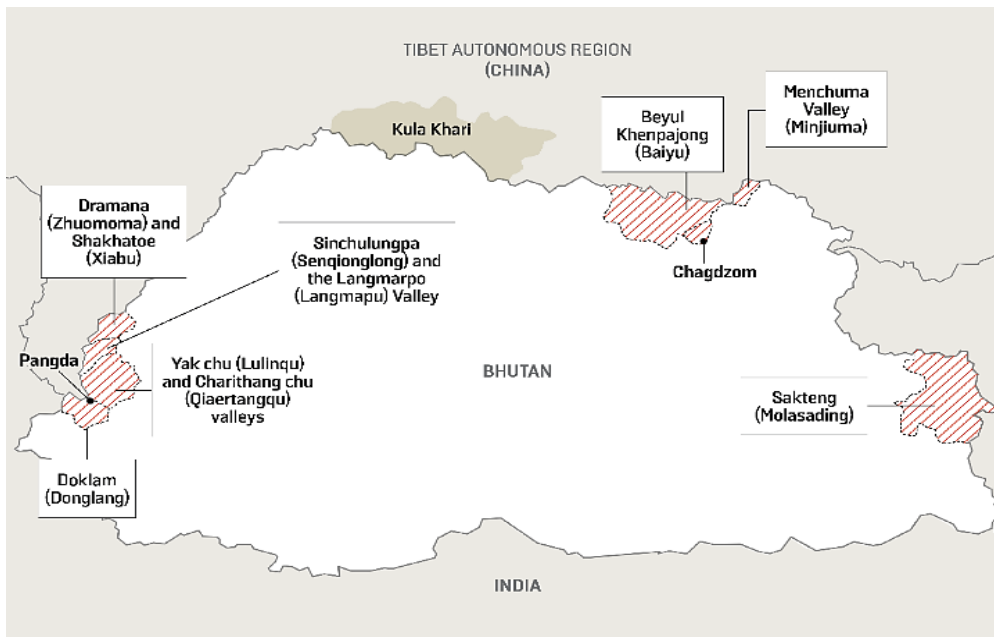
Figure: Disputed Regions of Bhutan

- The two countries share an **open border** with regular exchange of travellers in both directions for work, tourism, shopping, medical care, etc.

Political Relations:

- India and Bhutan officially marked the beginning of their diplomatic relations by signing the **Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in 1949**, revised in **2007**. Both countries have agreed to establish peace and expand economic cooperation.

- In **2017,** during the **Doklam crisis,** Bhutan gave Indian army personnel access to its territory to resist Chinese incursions.

- Bhutan also conferred its **Highest Civilian Award to the Indian PM Narendra Modi in 2021**, recognizing his outstanding contribution to strengthening Indo-Bhutan Friendship.

Economic Relations:

- Since the **1960s**, India has been a front-runner in providing financial assistance to Bhutan. India has also economically supported Bhutan in launching its **5-year plans.**

- Bhutan also receives **economic aid** in agriculture, irrigation, health, industrial development, road transport, energy, and education.

- The two countries signed an **Agreement on Trade and Commerce in 1972**, revised in **2016** to promote and boost a free trade regime.

- **India** is Bhutan's **largest trading partner.** In **2021-22, India's bilateral trade with Bhutan exceeded $1422 million**.

- During the **COVID pandemic**, Bhutan was the first country to receive **Indian-made Covishield Vaccines** under the **Vaccine Maitri initiative**.

- **Hydropower cooperation:** Hydroelectric projects (HEPs) are covered under the 2006 bilateral agreement for cooperation.
  - There are **4 HEPs** operational that are currently supplying electricity to India, namely **Kurrichhu, Tala, Mangdechchu, and Chukha, supplying a total of 2136 MW of electricity.**
  - **2 HEPs, Punatsangchhu-I and Punatsangchhu-II,** are under construction.

Social Relations:

- **Education:** Almost 1000 **Scholarships** are provided annually to Bhutanese students in Indian Universities in various disciplines like Engineering, Medicine, etc.

- **Indian Diaspora**: Approximately 50,000 Indians are **currently working in Bhutan,** contributing significantly in the fields of Education, Arts, Health, etc.

New Areas of Cooperation:

- **Space:** Both collaborated on the joint development of **India- Bhutan SAT** (small satellite). It would help manage natural resources in Bhutan.

- **Fintech:** The launch of **the RuPay Card** will enable full interoperability. Bhutan was the second country to launch **India's BHIM app** to promote cashless payment.

- **E-learning:** Integrate Bhutan's **DrukRen with India's National Knowledge Network** to create easy access to information for universities, research institutions, etc., of both nations.

India's Concern:

Today, Bhutan maintains no official diplomatic relations with any of the P5 countries, i.e. the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Bhutan's increasing proximity to China has created troubles in the Indo-Bhutan relationship. **The concerns include:**

The threat of losing Doklam's strategic significance:

- Doklam is located on the tri-junction of India, Bhutan, and China. Doklam lies next to the Siliguri Corridor, commonly called the "**Chicken's Neck"** a 22km corridor connecting India to the Northeast region. It is a vital link between India, Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh. If lost, it will provide a military advantage to China over any conflict with India.

Threat to India's Northeast:

- The Chinese claim **Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary** lying in the Eastern part of Bhutan **close to Arunachal Pradesh** which China views as a part of its **South Tibet.** This

creates an added pressure point on India and could lead to more aggressive Chinese actions in Arunachal Pradesh.

The threat of losing a friendly ally in India's neighbourhood:

- India is Bhutan's largest trading partner, and India has a trade surplus with Bhutan. China's immense economic aid and pressure to establish diplomatic ties with Bhutan could weaken India's influence in the South Asian region.

Way Forward:

India and Bhutan are a part of several multilateral organizations like the **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), and Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN)**. India can work on improving regional cooperation mechanisms to ensure Bhutan's interests are well represented in regional forums.

China-Central Asia Axis and India's Concerns

News Excerpt

China organised a meeting of trade ministers of the grouping known as **C+C5 — China and the five Central Asian republics,** namely Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan.

Strategic significance of Central Asia

- Central Asia has been called the global chessboard, it sits at the heart of Eurasia and, historically, made up half of the ancient Silk Route.
- The region is strategically vital for many countries like China, Russia, India, the US and Europe, as it served as a pivot for geopolitical transformations within the world island.
- The region is becoming home to the New Great Game- characterised by fierce competition between various states all aiming to increase their influence, hegemony and power over the region. In this 'game', the important players are Russia, the US, European Union (EU), China, Turkey, Iran and India.
- China has perhaps the biggest economic footprint in the Central Asian Republics (CARs) region, principally owing to its massive project, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
- India, for its part, has started reviving its old civilisational links with the region, laying the groundwork for building trust and goodwill by extending assistance through capacity building and human resource development, in the areas of information technology, pharmaceuticals, and healthcare.

Chinese Interest in Central Asia

- China regarded the Central Asian Republics (CARs) as vital for the security of Xinjiang. Xinjiang also became

China's gateway to the markets of Eurasia, Europe, and Russia.

- China intensified its efforts to revive the ancient Silk Route in the region by building pipelines, railway links, and roads.
- With Russia's help, China created the Shanghai Five in 1996 to solve the problem of undefined borders through confidence-building measures. This later transformed into the Shangai Cooperation Organisation.
- The region provides China with a market for cheap exports and overland access to markets in Europe and West Asia.
- Central Asian countries, rich in hydrocarbon resources, were considered vital for diversifying China's domestic energy mix, especially considering its disputes in the South China Sea with Japan, Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines.
- China has been investing heavily in Central Asia through its Belt and Road Initiative, which includes projects in oil and gas, transportation, digital technology, and green energy.

India and Central Asia

- India has a long history of cultural and commercial relations with Central Asia, facilitated by its geographical proximity and the Silk Route.
- India in 2012 launched Connect Central Asia Policy, aimed to enhance India's political, economic, historical and cultural connections with Central Asia.
- Central Asia plays a crucial role in stabilizing the security situation in Afghanistan and reinforcing territorial integrity. The policy is based on pro-active political, economic and people-to-people engagement with Central Asian Countries, both individually and collectively.
- India's Extended Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)," intends to diversify its geopolitical partners and diplomatic goals, and intends to engage its Central Asian partners on a multitude of fronts.

Ways India to increase its footprint constructively in the Central Asian region:

- **Leverage SCO:**
  o India became a full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2017. India becoming a full member of SCO opened avenues for the country to shape its ties with the Central Asian Republics (CARs) countries.
  o The SCO can also serve as a venue for keeping a watch on Pakistan. India could balance the growing Chinese influence and prevent the southern part of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) from becoming the region of China's undivided dominance.

- **International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC):** India has invested in projects such as the International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC). The INSTC made substantial progress after India joined the cargo transported through INSTC has increased to 287,000 tonnes in 2018 from a meagre 27,000 tonnes in 2017, or an increase of 963 percent.
- **Chabahar Port:**
  - India should provide direct access to Central Asian countries through Chabahar port. India can use its soft diplomacy to take the opportunities presented in the resource-rich region.
  - It is in India's interest to expeditiously finalise the much-awaited Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between India and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).
  - If finalised without delay, the FTA with EAEU will give India direct access to the region's huge hydrocarbon resources as well as open doors to the Eurasian markets.
- **Slik Visa:**
  - The CARs are working to strengthen intraregional economic integration by taking steps like the issuance of the Silk Visa, which will allow foreign tourists a single-visa entry to all countries in the region.
  - The regional integration will give more leverage to India because India will also look towards CARs as a geographical unit with socioeconomic homogeneity.
  - For India to be able to use this opportunity, its Connect Central Asia policy should be complemented by closer government-to-government ties and purposeful actions that translate policies into practice.
- **Tax Rebate:**

o India should give tax rebates to investors from India who show willingness in exploring the Central Asian markets and invest in the strategic Chabahar port with some guarantees and sureties.
o Furthermore, the tax rebates can play a catalytic role in reviving the close cultural and economic bonds between India and Central Asia.

Conclusion

India must take into consideration its future energy needs and the market potential of the greater Eurasian region, and seize the opportunity to stretch its economic borders while maintaining its constructive approach.

Death of Ebrahim Raisi and India-Iran ties

News Excerpt:

The **death of the Iranian President** has significant implications for India and the wider region.

More about the news:

- The president of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Ebrahim Raisi, met with an accident in the mountainous protected forest area of **Dizmar near the town of Varzaghan north west Iran.**
- The incident occurred while Raisi was returning from a trip to Iran's border with Azerbaijan.

India-Iran relations

- After the **Cold War ended**, India has tried to maintain cordial relations with most countries in **West Asia**. Iran, which shares borders with **Afghanistan and Pakistan**, is a key player in the region.
- The two countries signed a **friendship treaty in 1950**, marking the beginning of diplomatic relations.
- After the Iranian Revolution in 1979, a "new phase of engagement" began between the two nations, as per the **Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)**.
- India's PM last met the Iranian President in August 2023, ahead of the **BRICS summit in Johannesburg**.
- New Delhi supported Tehran's bid to join BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa). Iran joined the **intergovernmental alliance** in September 2023 during the South Africa BRICS summit.
- India and Iran share common concerns about **Taliban's Sunni extremism** and **Pakistan's role in Afghanistan,** as per Foreign Policy.

"For India, Iran is a stabilizing force in the Persian Gulf, and military and security cooperation between the two countries is on the rise

Who was Ebrahim Raisi?

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| BENGALURU: 7619166663| KOLKATA: 9007709895 | www.ksgindia.com

- Raisi was a hardliner who won **Iran's 2021 presidential polls** that saw the lowest-ever turnout in the **Islamic Republic's history.**
- Raisi was on the US sanctions lists for several charges including his role in the **mass execution of thousands of political prisoners in 1988** at the end of the **Iran-Iraq war.**
- A protégé of **Ayatollah Ali Khamenei,** Raisi was one of several contenders tipped to succeed him.
- Under Raisi, **Iran enriched uranium** to nearly weapons-grade.

What are the implications for India?

- **Oil Imports and Prices:** As India imports a significant portion of its oil requirements, any disruption in **global oil supplies** due to instability in Iran, which is the **third-largest oil producer in OPEC,** could impact **India's import bill**.
- **Safe-haven Asset Demand:** The news of Raisi's death led to an **increase in gold prices**, indicating a shift towards safer assets amid potential regional instability.
- **Chabahar Port Project:** India recently signed a crucial agreement with Iran to operate the Chabahar port, a strategic initiative to boost trade with Central Asia.
  - The progress of this project, which had been hindered by US sanctions on Iran due to its suspected nuclear activities, could be affected by the political developments in Iran.
- **Regional Stability and Trade**: India's External Affairs emphasized the regional benefits of the Chabahar port and urged a broader perspective, noting past US appreciation for its strategic importance.
  - The death of Raisi and the subsequent developments in Iran could impact **regional stability and trade relations,** affecting India's interests in the region.

Impact on Iran's ties with the western countries:

- Iran's ties with the West are rocky over its suspect nuclear programme and its support to groups such as **Hamas and Houthis.**
- If a hardliner replaces the Iranian President, ties with the West are unlikely to improve.
- Talks with the West on removing sanctions over **Iran's nuclear programme s**talled during Raisi's term.
- Tensions with the West also rose after the 2022 death of **Mahsa Amini,** detained for wearing a loose headscarf.

India's stakes in Chabahar

News Excerpt:

India and Iran have signed a **10-year contract** for the operation of a terminal at the strategically important Chabahar port in Iran.

About Chabahar Port:

- Chabahar, situated in **Iran's Sistan-Baluchistan province**, is Iran's closest port to India, just at the

mouth of the Gulf of Oman. Its location in the open sea offers convenient and secure access to large cargo vessels.

- **Emerging in the 1970s**, the modern Chabahar Port gained strategic **significance** for Tehran during the **Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s.**

Importance for India:

- For India, Chabahar presented **crucial strategic and economic opportunities, offering access to Afghanistan**, which had been hindered by Pakistan's hostility. The port is also **part of the proposed International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), a multi-modal transportation project** linking the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea via Iran and onward to northern Europe via St Petersburg in Russia.

About INSTC:

- **Initiated by Russia, India, and Iran, the INSTC is a multi-modal transportation route designed to link the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea via Iran, extending onwards to northern Europe via St. Petersburg in Russia.**
- The INSTC envisages the transportation of goods from **Mumbai to Bandar Abbas** in Iran by **sea**, then from **Bandar Abbas to Bandar-e-Anzali on the Caspian Sea by road**, followed by shipping from **Bandar-e-Anzali to Astrakhan, a Caspian port in the Russian Federation, across the Caspian Sea**. Finally, goods are **transported by rail to various parts of the Russian Federation and Europe.**

- However, India's expanding ties with the United States disrupted the project's ambitious timelines. With the **US labelling Iran as part of the "axis of evil,"** it pressured India to reconsider its strategic ties with Tehran.

Recent developments in the role of the port:

- **India** has provided **six mobile harbour cranes**, including two with a **capacity of 140 tonnes** and four with a capacity of 100 tonnes, along with other **equipment valued at $25 million**. Operating through its wholly-owned subsidiary, **India Ports Global Chabahar Free Zone (IPGCFZ),** IPGL has managed Chabahar port since December 24, 2018.
- Since then, the **port has handled over 90,000 twenty-foot-equivalent units** (TEUs) of container traffic and more than 8.4 million metric tonnes (MMT) of bulk and general cargo. It has also facilitated the transfer of humanitarian aid, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- To date, **2.5 million tonnes of wheat and 2,000 tonnes of pulses have been trans-shipped from India to Afghanistan through Chabahar port**. In 2021, **India delivered 40,000 litres of environmentally friendly pesticide malathion to Iran through the port to combat locust attacks**.

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Chabahar and INSTC:

- The operationalization of long-term investment in Chabahar holds the potential to establish it as a crucial hub connecting **India with the landlocked nations of Central Asia and Afghanistan.**

BEING DIRECT: INDIA TO CHABAHAR

- However, to fully capitalize on its commercial and strategic significance, integrating the port's development with the broader connectivity framework of the **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)** is essential.
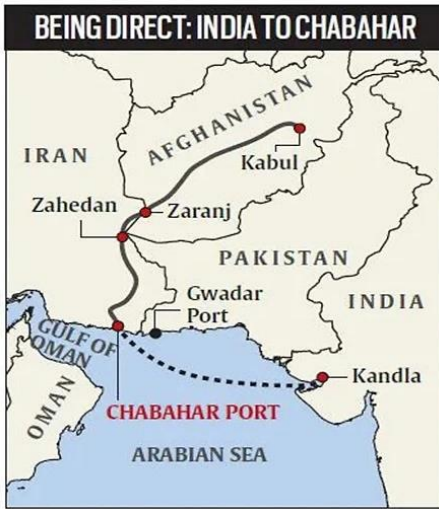
- In 2016, New Delhi and Tehran unequivocally signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to connect the Chabahar port with INSTC by constructing a 628 km-long **Chabahar-Zahedan rail link.**

Why did the US exempt Chabahar from sanctions in 2018?

- In 2018, the US had exempted India from certain sanctions for the **development of the Chabahar port** and the **construction of a railway line connecting it with Afghanistan**.
- The decision to give an exemption by the then **US President Donald Trump**'s administration, which had just imposed tough sanctions on Iran, was reportedly seen as a **recognition** by the US of **India's role** in the development of the Chabahar port, which was

considered to be of **strategic importance** for the development of Afghanistan.

- Ultimately, the **US exit from Afghanistan** could be the reason why it **no longer views the Chabahar port project favourably** and has **warned of sanctions**.

Way Forward:

- The **potential synergy** between the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and Chabahar Port could **enhance Indian connectivity** with Russia and Eurasia.
- However, the conflict in Ukraine and the deterioration of Europe's relationship with Russia have introduced **complexities to the future** of this project, which only greater collaboration could solve.

India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)

News Excerpt:

On the sidelines of the recently concluded G20 summit in New Delhi, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed to establish the **'India-Middle East- Europe Economic Corridor' (IMEC).**

Key provisions:

- An MoU on IMEC was signed by **India, USA, Saudi Arabia, UAE, European Union, Italy, France, and Germany**.
- The proposed IMEC will consist of railroad, ship-to-rail networks (road and sea) and road transport routes (and networks) extending across two corridors, i.e., the east corridor – connecting India to the Arabian Gulf, and the northern corridor – connecting the Arabian Gulf to Europe.
- The corridor would include ports like Haifa in Israel and Piraeus in Greece.
- It is considered as an alternative to the Belt and Road initiative of China and may also serve as a counter to China's economic influence in the Eurasian region.

Significance of the corridor:

- **Boost to export:** It would enable the transportation of goods and services from India to the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel, and Europe, and back.
- **Transformative integration of Asia, Europe, and the Middle East**: The corridor would increase efficiency (relating to transit), reduce costs, enhance economic unity, generate jobs, and lower greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Transportation of energy and fuels:** The MoU states that participants, intend to lay cables for electricity and digital connectivity, as well as pipes for clean hydrogen export along the railway route.

- **Shorter time period of transportation:** The maritime corridor between Asia and Europe currently remains rooted in the saturated Suez Canal and Mediterranean shipping routes despite them being longer and involving additional logistics costs. The IMEC corridor, in contrast, saves three to four days of transit.
- **Linkage of major ports across Asia, Middle-East and Europe:** It links major ports of western India including Jawaharlal Nehru Port (JNPT), Kochi, Kandla and Mundra with major shipping ports of the Gulf including Jebel Ali, Fujairah, Ras Al-Khair, Dammam, Duqm, and Salalah; and European ports like Piraeus, Kavala (Greece), Trieste, La Spezia (Italy), Marseille-Fos (France), Barcelona and Valencia (Spain).
- **Reduction in emissions:** The greening of this project will contribute to the global effort to lower greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Feasibility of the corridor:** IMEC is envisioned as not one, but two corridors- the eastern and northern.
- **Eastern end of IMEC:** India, whose connectivity infrastructure has helped it become the world's fastest-growing major economy, has a massive, well-integrated railroad network, mega ports, and highways on the eastern end of IMEC.
- **Western end of IMEC:** Beyond Haifa, the sea route across the Mediterranean is also a well-charted path to Greece, Italy, France, and Spain, and well served by hinterland connectivity to Europe by rail and roads.

Geopolitical significance of the IMEC corridor:
- It can serve as an "alternative trans-regional commercial transportation route" to the troubled Chabahar-based International North-South Transit Corridor.
- For the U.S., the project could also serve to counter Beijing's influence "at a time when its traditional Arab partners, including the UAE and Saudi Arabia, are deepening ties with China, India, and other Asian powers.

- This corridor may also hint at further normalisation of ties between Israel and the countries in the Gulf.
- With Saudi Arabia being the world's top exporter of oil and UAE being West Asia's dominant finance centre, both are "seeking to project themselves as key logistics and trade hubs between east and west."

Challenges regarding the IMEC:
- **Lack of investment:** A **robust financial framework** needs to be established. Since **none of the corridor signatories have binding financial commitments**, investments will have to be attracted from governments, international organizations, and private sector entities.
- **Security challenges:** The entire trade of the IMEC architecture flows through the Strait of Hormuz, and with **Iran's proximity** and control over the strait, the risk of disruptions remains very high. **Threats from extremist groups and illicit activities** also remain.
- **Geopolitical challenges:** The corridor spans diverse nations with complex geopolitics, and navigating coordination and cooperation among these countries may face regulatory hurdles and bureaucratic delays.
- **Interstate tensions:** Conflicting interests of trade powers may result in power struggles and potential resistance during the project's implementation.
- **Uncertainty:** The Israel-Hamas war has added further complexity to the initiative.

Way Forward:
- A working group of experts from the railway sector, ports and communications needs to develop a plan of action to address physical and non-physical barriers, design, financing, legal and other regulatory requirements.
- A comprehensive IMEC agreement with a clear time frame will help translate the commitments of the MOU into a roadmap for action.

Kuwait fire and the migrant workers

News Excerpt:

The death of 45 Indian workers in a fire in Kuwait is a reminder of the dismal working conditions of a large, and often ignored, section of the Indian Migrants.

Challenges faced by Indian migrants in Gulf countries
- The majority of these **migrants work in the unorganized sector**, such as construction sites and factories, where they often **face dangerous working conditions.**
- The availability of a large number of **unskilled and semi-skilled workers in the Gulf reduces the**

bargaining capacity of migrants, despite the region offering significantly high salaries.

- Many migrants are recruited through the **visa sponsorship or kafala system,** which binds them to their employers and severely limits their capacity to seek better housing or occupational safety improvements.
- Although India has signed **Memoranda of Understanding with West Asian countries, including Kuwait**, to streamline recruitment procedures and provide legal protection, the l**egal redress process is prolonged and court processes are expensive.**
- Migrants, who are already vulnerable, have to contend with the absence of legal assistance and **a shortage of interpreters in an alien country.**
- Migrants in Gulf countries do not have the option of **permanent residency**, are **not adequately protected, and have very few rights.**
  - The lack of citizenship rights can lead to exploitative labor conditions, similar to what was observed in **Qatar** before the **World Cup.**
- **One major challenge** in addressing these issues is the **lack of data on migrants, both at their origin and destination countries.**
- While sources like the **Kerala Migration Survey** (**KMS) provide regular updates** on emigration, return migration, and remittances in Kerala and other states, **India still has a long way to go in systematically studying migration.**
  - The **Kerala Migration Survey (KMS)** 2023 estimates that 2.2 million people from Kerala have migrated, with 80% of them residing in the **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.**

Way Forward:

- There is an urgent need, especially given the large number of migrants from India to various parts of the world, to **systematically study the conditions of their migration and their lives in the destination countries.**
- With a large **Indian diaspora,** especially in the migration corridor with **West Asia**, India **needs well-thought-out and effective policies** to ensure the safety and well-being of its migrants.
- **A national-level migration database is recommended as a necessary step** forward to adequately understand the various sections of migrants from India and the increasing trend of return migration.
- Regulate and monitor the recruitment practices of agencies to prevent exploitation and ensure fair treatment of migrant workers.
- Expedite the process of updating the Emigration Act to provide better legal protection and safeguards for migrant workers. **India's 40-year-old Emigration Act** leaves migrant workers at risk.

India - Oman

News Excerpt:

The Sultan of Oman, Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, was on a 3-day state visit to India.

Oman's significance for India:

- **Geostrategic:**
  - Oman is India's **closest neighbour in the Arabian Gulf** region.
  - With key Omani ports bordering the coastline along the Arabian Sea as well as the **Gulf of Oman leading into the Persian Gulf** and towards the **Gulf of Aden**, Oman's location is of **utmost strategic importance to India.**
- **Diplomatic relations:**
  - The ruling family of Oman has always had a **strong connection** with India. They have had a long history of getting educated here.
  - At **the people-to-people level**, too, India and Oman enjoy close ties. There is a large Indian community of almost seven lakh people, which has contributed to the constantly evolving vibrant relations.
- **Geopolitical support:**
  - During the Cold War era, and even thereafter, when the Arab world was largely ambivalent towards India and was often soft and supportive of Pakistan, it was Oman that kept its doors open to India.
- **Strategic partnership:**
  - The **India-Oman strategic partnership** was signed during Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Oman in **2008** and is **based on twin pillars** of **mutual trust and shared interests.**
  - **Oman** was one of the countries to have been **invited by India to its G-20 presidency as a guest** nation this year.

- **Defence and Security engagement:**
  - Oman is the first Gulf country with which **all three wings of India's defence forces hold joint exercises.**
  - Since 2012-13, an **Indian naval ship** has remained on duty in the **Gulf of Oman for anti-piracy operations.**
  - Oman has **allowed overflights/transit by Indian military aircraft, too**.
  - The **MoU** on **Duqm Port** is a historic landmark in our security cooperation, providing **basing facilities, Operational Turn Round, and other logistics facilities to Indian naval ships** operating in the region.
- **Economic engagement:**
  - **Bilateral trade** during FY 2022-23 reached **$12.388 billion**.
  - There are over **6,000 India-Oman joint ventures in Oman**, with an estimated **investment of over $7.5 billion.**
  - **India** was the **second largest market for Oman's crude oil exports** for the year 2022 after China.
  - In 2022, India and Oman launched the **Rupay debit card in Oman**, a key footprint of India's initiative to promote Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) in the world.
- **Oman's involvement in crucial multilateral forums:**
  - **Oman** is an **integral part** of all important groupings in the region: the **GCC,** the **Organisation of Islamic Cooperation**, and the **Arab League**.
  - Its ability to manage rival ideologies and regional power games makes it **vitally important to India**.

Challenges:
- **Security challenges** in the region have a ripple effect on the bilateral ties.
- Any **instability in the region direct**ly affects the **safety and security of millions of Indians** working there, **India's energy security**, and its steadily growing trade relations.

Way Forward:
- Sectors for **future cooperation** involve Space, Rare Earth Metals as well as infrastructural projects such as the proposed India-Middle-East-Europe Connectivity Corridor (IMEEC) as well as the deep-sea pipeline proposed for the transfer of gas from Oman to India.
- The list of convergences is long and limitless. Both countries are the **ambassadors of peace and enjoy goodwill** across ideologies in the world. **Oman is, therefore, India's gateway to West Asia**.

India-Oman vision document:
- The document is broadly rooted in **Oman's 'Vision 2040'**, its national development blueprint, and **India's development vision of 'Amritkaal'**.
- It focuses on building a partnership in 8 to 10 areas, including - **Maritime cooperation and connectivity, Digital payments, Space, Green energy, Tourism, Agriculture, Food security, and Cricket.**
- The cooperation in clean energy will also focus on **green hydrogen**.

India-UAE Food Security Partnership

News Excerpt
UAE is focussing on the twin objective of food access and readiness to confront the supply chain crisis as its food security has been built on imports from the global market.

About India –UAE food security partnership
- India plays an important role in UAE'S food security strengthening as it is already the world's second-largest food producer.
- Both India and UAE benefit from each other food security partnership and they have various conflicts of interest.

India's Role
- India has always invested in **humanitarian food aid** especially to developing countries or countries in need, standing by its commitment to regional and global food security.
- **Investment in Food Parks and modern supply chain management** shows India's interest in excelling in the global food marketplace through bilateral trade agreements.
- India's huge arable land, agricultural favourable climate, food production and processing sector make it a strong agri-export source.
- India also keeps taking initiatives for food security and nutrition through various schemes.

UAE'S Role
- On the sidelines of the **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)** UAE has signed Food Security Corridor which has enhanced India's position in Global Food Value Chain.
- **During I2U2 Summit 2022**, UAE ensured an investment of USD 2 billion towards constructing Food Parks in India.
- Dubai Multi Commodities Centre has launched an agri-trading and commodity platform **Agriota**. It will enable direct access to Emirati markets and will connect Indian Farmers to the UAE's Food ecosystem.

Significance

- Contributing to Global Developmental Agenda, India can strengthen a sustainable, inclusive, efficient, and resilient future of food with UAE.
- India's presidency at G20 can be seen as an opportunity to establish food security in Global South.
- Establishing good relations with UAE can serve as a food export gateway to West Asia and Africa with UAE's strategic location between Asia and Europe contributing to it.
- Also, private sector projects in UAE can help India in generating non-farm agri-jobs and provide better prices for farmers' products.

Challenges

- As per UN climate change, extreme weather is the major factor which contributes to food insecurity.
- Farming is inversely impacted by events like increased temperatures, weather variability, invasive crops and pests, and frequent extreme weather negatively impacting agricultural yields, nutritional quality and farmer incomes.
- Food security is restricted due to a lack of remunerative prices for end goods, abrupt sales and high cultivation costs.
- Agricultural business has got a boost due to globalisation but it has failed to assure stable market pricing.
- Along with economic reasons, geopolitical tensions and disputes especially related to trade result in embargoes, sanctions, and tariffs effect impacting food prices and availability.
- It can also adversely impact vulnerable populations, as countries which depend heavily on food imports can face food shortages and increased food prices.

Way Forward

- **Prioritizing Climate resilience techniques**, such as water management, soil conservation, and climate-smart technologies can help in climate change and

mitigation in reducing the impact of climate change on food production and security.
- **Investing in climate-resilient crops** to handle temperature variation and precipitation fluctuations can help in better incentivisation of food.
- India should work on **increasing its diplomacy in food and agriculture** to establish itself as a major player in Global South by extending its support to other developing countries like Africa and Asia through technology partnerships, joint research in promoting drought-resistant cropsandclimate-smart agriculture
- **Incentivisation of water and nutrient-efficient crops** such as millet and pulses along with lucrative minimum support prizes and input subsidies for farmers is required. The declaration of 2023 as the International Year of Millets by the UN General Assembly is one such step.

INDIA AND THE WORLD

India-EU Relations

News Excerpt

The 3rd India-EU High-Level Dialogue on Trade and Investment was held recently. Under it, three negotiations are going on – an **India-EU Free Trade Agreement**; an **Investment Protection Agreement** and a **Geographical Indications Agreement**.

Background:

- A **cooperation agreement** signed in 1994 took the bilateral relationship beyond trade and economic cooperation. The **first India-EU Summit**, in 2000, marked a watershed in the evolution of the relationship.
- The **15th India-EU Summit**, in 2020, provided a **common road map** to guide joint action. The road map highlights engagement across **five domains**: foreign policy and security cooperation; trade and economy; sustainable modernisation partnership; global governance; and people-to-people relations.
- India is the **EU's tenth-largest trading partner** and the EU is the **India's third-largest trading partner** after the

| 1962: India and EEC establish ties | → | 1994: Cooperation Agreement between India and the EU | → | 2000: First EU-India Summit in Lisbon, Portugal | → | 2004: Upgrade to a Strategic Partnership during 5th EU-India Summit | → | 2012: 12th EU-IndiaSummit. followed by gap of 4 years |

| 2021: EU-India Leader's Meeting | ← | 2020: 15th EU-India Summit, focusing on AI/5G, maritime security, connectivity and high level trade dialogue | ← | 2018: EU adopts new strategy for India, focusing more on political/security cooperation | ← | 2016: Resumption of regular summits with 13th EU-India Summit |

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US and China. The EU accounts for **16.4%** of India's exports and about **8.3%** of imports.

Timeline of EU- India Relations (1962-2021)

Areas of cooperation:

- **Climate change:** The **India-EU Clean Energy Climate Partnership**, aimed at promoting access to and disseminating clean energy, was launched at the 2016 summit.

- **Defence:** India and the EU regularly conduct joint **military and naval exercises**, which reflect on their commitment to a free, open, inclusive and rules-based order in the **Indo-Pacific**. The first **maritime security dialogue** between the two was held in 2021. The Information Fusion Centre for the Indian Ocean Region in New Delhi **(IFC-IOR)** has been linked up with the Maritime Security Centre for the Horn of Africa **(MSC-HOA)** established by the EU Naval Force **(NAVFOR).**

- **Science and technology:** Recently, the first ministerial meeting of the India-EU Trade and Technology Council **(TTC)** took place. Its key **focus areas** include **AI, 5G** and **cross-border data sharing**. The Science and Technology **Joint Steering Committee** focuses on areas such as healthcare, artificial intelligence, and earth sciences. In 2020, there was an **agreement** for research and development cooperation in the peaceful use of **nuclear energy**.

- **Connectivity:** The EU has a connectivity partnership with India, which builds on the EU's **"Global Gateway Strategy"** and is the EU's **response to China's BRI**. The EU-India connectivity partnership aims at boosting sustainable digital, transport and energy networks and the flow of people, goods, services, data and capital centered on mutual equity and inclusivity.

- **Strategic:** With the EU's growing interest in the **Indo-Pacific region**, particularly since its adoption of the **Indo-Pacific Strategy**, the EU and India have also continued to express their mutual commitment to a shared vision of a peaceful, prosperous, and secure Indo-Pacific through various joint initiatives and **regional security dialogues**.

EU's inclination towards India:

- **Lucrative market:** India's spectacular GDP growth rate of **6.9%** in 2022, almost double that of the **EU's 3.5%**, makes India a lucrative market as well as an attractive investment destination for the EU.

- **Post-COVID recovery:** Reports suggest top French and Italian businesses are **keen on engaging** more with India. India's rapid economic and technological **rise in turbulent times** when most countries are still struggling to come out of their economic woes is a key reason for **EU firms evincing interest**.

- **Diversification:** The EU is looking for an alternative manufacturing location to **China**. **India's neutral stand** in the rapidly emerging multi-polar world makes India a

reliable partner. Also, with its **ease of doing business** regulations and **cheap labour**, India provides a **viable location** for the EU.

EU's significance for India:

- **Atmanirbhar Bharat:** India wants to achieve self-reliance in **manufacturing** and **defence procurement**. Leading European defence equipment manufacturers are willing to partner with Indian companies for defence projects aligned with the **'Make in India' programme**.

- **Trade and investment:** India had a **trade deficit** with the EU in **2018-19** that turned into a **trade surplus** of $13 billion during April-February **2022-23**. The India-EU FTA is likely to be more comprehensive than India's recent deals with Australia and the UAE, as it has an ambitious aim to **liberalise 94%** of the **trade in goods**.

- **People-to-people contacts:** India has a vast **diaspora** residing in the EU. It is **imperative** for India to maintain good ties with the EU so as to **protect the interests** of its diaspora.

- **Strategic:** With the **Chinese aggression** towards India, it needs to maintain and diversify its ties so as to build a **consensus against China** in the international arena.

- **Technology transfer: TTC** is formed to increase cooperation in strategic technologies, digital connectivity, clean energy, trade and investments. India can **gain immensely** from its cooperation with the EU.

Challenges:

- India's reluctance to explicitly condemn **Russia's intervention in Ukraine** and the country's increasing **economic cooperation with Russia** have been areas of disagreement. India has called out the EU's double standards on the same for the EU's purchase of gas from Russia. There is also ambiguity about the **EU's strategy** for tackling the **rise of China**.

- The **FTA** can be approved by the **European Parliament**, but the **investment protection agreements** need to be ratified not only by the EU Parliament but also by the **parliaments** of individual **member countries**. Therefore, **separate negotiations** with each state would be required and **reaching a consensus** might be an issue.

- Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism **(CBAM):** It is a policy aimed at reducing carbon emissions, imposing a **20-35% tax** on **select imports** into the EU starting in **2026**. **Steel exports** from India will fall into this category. It has **raised concern** among the steel manufacturers.

Way forward:

- With **divergent national interests** associated with a group of 27 countries within the EU, India and the EU should not let such divergences of views overwhelm the many **areas of convergence** among them. The EU wants

to be more than just a trading bloc and is seeking alliances with like-minded countries like India.

- As India continues to grow into a major global player and the EU looks for ways to protect its interests in an increasingly **interconnected world**, it is **essential** that these two states **work together** to ensure that their partnership remains a **positive force** for stability and development in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond.

India-France Ties

News Excerpt

Recently, the Prime Minister visited France, as both counties completed 25 years of their strategic partnership. A number of agreements and a slew of defence deals were signed during the Indian Prime Minister's two-day visit to France.

- In January 1998, in a world of change and uncertainty, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and President Jacques Chirac elevated the relationship to a Strategic Partnership – one of the first for India with any country.

Prominent outcomes of the visit

- India-France relation is founded on shared values, belief in sovereignty and strategic autonomy, an unwavering commitment to international law and the UN Charter.
- Indian PM and President of France took stock of the transformation and expansion of the relationship, every area of bilateral cooperation and highlighted its evolution into a partnership of regional responsibilities and global importance.

Major Outcomes

Defence: The defence ministry approved the proposed procurement of 26 Naval variant of Rafale jets from France.

o Setting up of an Indian technical office of the Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO) at the Indian embassy in Paris.

o Expanding cooperation in co-production and co-development of new technologies.

Space:

- Expanding defence manufacturing capabilities and technologies along with strategic cooperation in space.
- Trishna satellite project to boost cooperation in satellite services.

An MoU between our National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT) under the Ministry of Earth Sciences and a French sea research institute IFREMER on collaborative research projects in areas such as the Deep Ocean Mission and exchange of scientific and technical expertise is also being treated as a welcome move and will bolster bilateral scientific cooperation. This is also likely to translate into business opportunities in times to come.

Sustainability: Cornerstone of the India-France partnership:

- A joint commitment to eliminate single-use plastic product pollution and a ban on single-use plastic products.

Digital initiatives

- Covering diverse areas including strengthening of digital public infrastructure, AI, cyber security, 5G/6G telecom and digital skills will strengthen digital cooperation.
- The launch of India's UPI digital payment.

Long-term Initiatives: Visas to Indian students pursuing higher education in France and India's invitation to French universities for opening campuses in India will bolster educational ties and strengthen cultural and people-to-people exchanges.

- The private sector initiatives in facilitating the creation of courses, enhancing capacity, learning and skills and promoting student exchange programmes.

The economic dimension: Sectors like climate action, energy transition, green transport and infrastructure, construction technologies, aeronautics, defence, automotive, life sciences, agriculture, financial services, and information and communication technology present opportunities for further collaboration and deepening engagement between businesses.

- India's conducive and liberal FDI policy regime
- Series of recent interventions in sectors such as infrastructure, digital payments, start-ups, IT and renewable energy provide many investment opportunities to French investors.
- finalization of the Indo-Pacific Triangular Development Cooperation Fund for the creation of disaster resilient infrastructure
- Promoting start-ups in the areas of clean and renewable energy will be critical in securing economic security and a better balance in the region.

Culture:

An Indian Cultural Centre, named Vivekananda Cultural Centre is opened in Paris, On the occasion of The International Day of Yoga which have been organized by the Embassy of India in Paris and other cities of France.

Other areas of Cooperation

French Investments in India:

France has emerged as a major source of FDI for India with more than 1,000 French establishments already present in India.

- France is the 11th largest foreign investor in India with a cumulative investment of USD 10.49 billion.
- The highest FDI equity inflows are in the services sector (18.05%), with cement & gypsum products (9.29%) in the second place, followed by air transport (including air freight) (7.59%).
- Most big French groups have their subsidiaries in India.

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India-France Main Trade Agreements & Memorandum of Understanding:

- Agreement for the Avoidance of Double Taxation in Respect of Taxes on Income.
- MoU on Intellectual Property Rights.
- Agreement on Social Security.
- Agreement on Sustainable Urban Development
- MoU on Civil Aviation
- MoU in the Field of Renewable Energy

Cooperation in the area of the environment

On climate, both countries co-founded **the International Solar Alliance** on the sidelines of COP21.

- France joined the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), launched by India. This structure helps implement investment principles in high-quality G20 infrastructures and contributes to climate change adaptation.

Health cooperation

Solidarity between France and India could be seen at the COVID-19 public health crisis, when India authorized an exemption for the export of many medicines to France. In return, France released assistance of €200 million from the AFD.

Adapting the fight against terrorism to the new threats to better protect our citizens

They will strengthen cooperation on all aspects in order to stay ahead of the evolving threat. This would include operational cooperation, multilateral action, countering online radicalisation and combating financing of terrorism, particularly through the **No Money for Terror (NMFT) initiative** and the **Christchurch Call to Action** to Eliminate Terrorist and Violent Extremism Content Online.

Challenges to India France relation

France is strong enough to have something to offer on the diplomatic, military, space, and nuclear sectors to India, but not strong enough to shape international order, norms, or rules, or to balance China if tensions escalate. For France, India is important, but not the most important partner when it comes to trade and defence cooperation in the context of threats like Russian aggression or terrorism in Africa.

Way-Forward

A shared historical struggle to maintain strategic autonomy in a complex geopolitical landscape has helped both powers develop a degree of trust and a pragmatic partnership.

India–Russia Oil diplomacy

News Excerpt

India is now **importing 25%** of its crude oil requirement from **Russia**. Russia has **surpassed** traditional sellers like Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

How oil is driving India's international relations

- **Requirement**: Around **85%** of India's oil requirement is met through **imports.** India is the third largest importer of energy globally. It directly impacts the **budget deficit** and **foreign exchange spending**.
- **Strategic Petroleum Reserves**: India is currently trying to fill its strategic petroleum reserves. It is hopeful to become a **member** of International Energy Agency **(IEA)**.
- **Exporting petroleum products:** India has a petroleum **refining capacity** of **5 million** barrels per day **(bpd)**, equal to those of the United Kingdom, Italy, Turkey and France combined. India is exporting refined petroleum products to several nations of **Africa**, **Latin America** and **European Union**.
- **Leverage**: **Russia, US** and **West Asia** want to keep India on their side and would not want to risk losing the country as an oil export market. India stands at **bargaining position** in front of them.
- **Engagement: China** and **Turkey** are also importing oil from Russia. India is engaging constructively with both of them, especially Turkey. India had helped Turkey with **Operation Dost**, after Turkey-Syria earthquake.
- **ONGC Videsh**: It is working on **exploration, development**, and **production** of oil and gas in around **15 countries** viz. Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Brazil, Colombia, Mozambique, Myanmar, South Sudan, Venezuela and Vietnam.
- **OPEC:** India holds institutional **dialogue** with Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). **2nd India-OPEC Institutional Dialogue** was held in 2017 in Vienna.
- **West Asia and Middle East**: India holds good relations across **ideological spectrum** in West Asia such as **Saudi Arabia-Iran**, **Israel-Palestine**, etc., mainly because of its demand of crude oil and petroleum products.

TOP SOURCES OF CRUDE OIL FOR INDIA
As a % share of India's total crude oil imports

■ FY22 ■ Q1FY23

	Iraq	Saudi Arab	Russia	UAE	USA
FY22	24.8	18.7	2.02	10.0	9.2
Q1FY23	23.7	17.4	12.9	11.6	5.4

Source: Commerce ministry
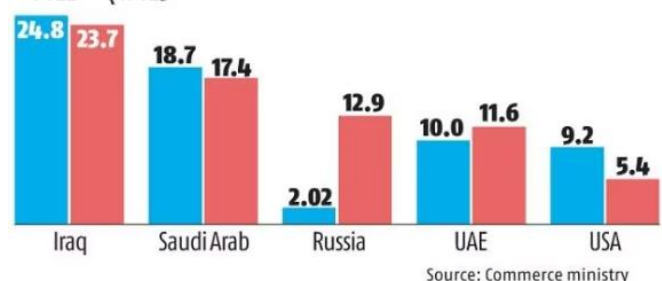
India importing Russian crude

- Though **prior** to **Ukraine conflict**, India was buying crude oil from Russia, but it was very **minimal**.
- **Low cost: India** started **importing more** Russian oil, ever since it started **trading on discount** as the US and

European countries shunned it to punish Russia for its **invasion of Ukraine**.

- **More profit**: **State owned** oil companies and **private refiners** are trying to **maximize** their profits by buying more and more Russian crude oil.

Benefits of India-Russia oil diplomacy

- **Strong Relations:** India buying more oil from Russia will be making their relations strong, especially when west had put **sanctions on Russia**.
- **Growing Trade:** India-Russia trade has reached an all-time high. It will eventually help in **cross sector growth** of both countries.
- **Geostrategic**: **China** and Russia have strong relation; this will help India in **leveraging** its ties with China. A **strong Asia** can effectively bargain with west.
- **Ties with west:** India is meeting the **energy demands of west** supplying refined petroleum to the west, as European countries can't procure crude oil directly from Russia because of sanctions.
- **Internationalisation of Rupee:** India and Russia have found out a **novel way** to keep trade going by trading in domestic currency. A **vostro account** has been opened, which allows both the countries to trade in **rupees and ruble** instead of dollars.
- **No Asian Premium**: West Asian countries use to charge extra monetary amount for exporting crude oil to India in the name of Asian premium. India has found for itself a buyer's market, where Indian buyers can dictate terms.
- **BRICS, SCO:** It will provide an **impetus** to both the blocks, as India and Russia are both members of the blocks. Both can **coordinate** and **collaborate** productively on international fronts leading the **global order**.

Challenges for India

- **Hampering relations:** It can hamper relation of India with **west and their allies**. India's relation with Russia has created a **discomfiture** in the US and the European Union.
- **Pressure from traditional suppliers**: **Iraq** was largest supplier of crude oil to India, earlier. **Saudi Arabia** had already decreased the prices. Both can pressurize India to reduce its import from Russia.
- **Uncertainty:** Once the Russia –Ukraine conflict is over, **Russia can again increase** the prices of its crude oil. Recently happened **Wagner group rebellion** in Russia had led to the speculations of increased prices of oil.
- **Sanctions**: U.S has applied sanctions to Russia and maintained that no country can trade with Russia. Though India is **currently trading** with Russia, there lies an **unpredictability** in the coming future on whether India will **invite sanctions**.
- **Deft Balancing:** India has deft balance among the various international blocks such as **United Nations**, **QUAD**, **I2U2** etc., where India has to face the U.S and European nations on the Russia–Ukraine conflict.
  - **Moral and Ethical**: India has taken a **neutral stand** in ongoing **Russia-Ukraine conflict**. In the long run India has to take an ethical stand against the ongoing **violence**.

Way forward

- **Mediation**: India should try to **minimize** the ongoing **tensions** between Russia and the West by acting as a mediator.
- **Engagement**: India should be holding talks with Russia for **long term procurement** of cheaper crude oil even when the conflict is over.
- **Assurance**: Meanwhile India can engage productively with the **European Union and US**, to assure them of their strategic partnership.

India-Canada Diplomatic Tussle

News Excerpt:

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has recently accused India of violating Canada's sovereignty. He alleged that agents of the Indian government were involved in the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a Canadian citizen. He also asked one senior Indian Diplomat to leave his country.

- Tensions between India and Canada over the Khalistan issue have always run high and are the primary reason why no Indian Prime Minister made a bilateral visit to Canada between 1973 and 2015.
- From the 1970s onwards, the rise of the Khalistani separatist movement in Punjab was accompanied by an increase in support for the movement from a part of the Sikh diaspora in Canada, the U.S., and the U.K.

India-Canada relationship:

- **Historical:**
  - India established diplomatic relations with Canada in 1947 based on strong democratic values, pluralism, culture, and people-to-people contact.
  - The bilateral relations witnessed a positive push during Nehru's visit in 1949 and Canada's assistance in nuclear technology, i.e., CIRUS (Canadian-Indian Reactor, US) in 1954.
- **Economy:**
  - India imported merchandise worth approximately U.S.$4.05 billion in FY 2022-23 from Canada and exported about U.S.$4.11 billion worth of goods — indicating a broadly balanced trade.
  - India's **primary import items** include coal, coke and briquettes, fertilizers, iron and steel, and lentils.
  - India's **major export** items are pharmaceutical products, iron and steel products, organic chemicals, and marine products, along with apparel and textiles of varied forms and variants.
- **Investment:**

- o As per the National Investment Promotion and Facilitation Agency's Invest India, Canada is India's 18th largest foreign investor.
- o Canadian Pension Fund (CPP) has invested in the Indian markets to about $15 billion in areas such as real estate, renewables, and the financial sector.
- o More than 600 Canadian companies, including Bombardier and SNC Lavalin, have a strong presence in India. In comparison, more than 30 Indian companies, such as infotech majors TCS, Infosys, and Wipro, have invested billions of dollars in Canada, creating thousands of jobs.
- **Education:**
  - o Canada has about 1.08 lakh students from India at present. This accounts for more than 37% of its overall international student pool.
  - o Under the **Global Initiative of Academic Works (GIAN) Programme**, around 69 Canadian faculty members visited India for teaching assignments in Indian institutions and worked on 19 projects under **Scheme for promoting Academic and Research Collaboration (SPARC)** to improve research ecosystems in India's higher education institutions.
  - o A perfect example of academic exchange is the greatest contribution of Michael Becher, a Professor of Political Science and International Relations, with the creation of the **Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute in 1966**, with joint headquarters in Calgary and New Delhi. The Institute was named after India's former Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri following his untimely death in 1966.
- **Science and Technology:**
  - o Both countries are working continuously to develop a **low-cost solution to support healthy communities**. One such example is the **India-Canada Centre for Innovative Multidisciplinary Partnership to Accelerate Community Transformation and Sustainability (IC-IMPACTS)** and **Mitacs**, which work in integrated water management, safe and sustainable infrastructure, and public health sectors.
  - o Under the **"Mission Innovation"** programme, India has collaborated with Canada on **Sustainable Biofuels (IC4)**.
- **Tourism:**
  - o To further promote tourism and economic activities, Air India has started its **direct flight Amritsar-Delhi-Toronto** and Air Canada operates a non-stop **direct flight between Mumbai-Toronto, Delhi-Toronto, and Delhi-Vancouver.**
- **Indian diaspora in Canada:**
  - o People who identified Punjabi as their ethnic or cultural origin during the 2021 Canadian census formed the largest share of Indians in Canada, followed by Tamilians, Gujaratis, and Bengalis.
  - o More importantly, 30% of Punjabis in Canada belong to the second or third generation (persons not born outside Canada).
  - o In the field of politics, in the present House of Commons, out of a total of 338, 22 Members of Parliament are of Indian origin.

Speed bumps in bilateral relations between India – Canada:

- **The first time**, the ties saw some grey clouds in 1948 when Canada supported a plebiscite in the Indian state of Kashmir.
- In 1974, India carried out its first nuclear test, and Canadians believed that these tests were carried out with the help of the CIRUS reactor, which was against their ideology of peaceful use of nuclear energy.
- During the 1980s, when Punjab was going through a militancy phase, India expressed its reservations regarding the activities of Khalistan in Canada.
- In 1998, during India's Pokhran Nuclear test. Western nations put economic sanctions on India, including Canada.
- Air India Flight 182 (Kanishka Plane) passenger jet explosion, which killed all 329 passengers on board by the Khalistani terrorists, further deteriorated India-Canada relations.
- Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau's remarks on the Indian farmers' protest in December 2020 further deteriorated the bilateral ties.

Opportunities for Canada and India to push their economies upwards:

- **First**, Canada can assist India in energy security, renewable energy, clean technology, bio-energy, solar, wind and sewerage treatment technology/plants which can benefit India in its Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) targets and Swachh Bharat Mission.
- **Second**, trade complementarities between India and Canada can further strengthen our commercial bond through agricultural products, Chemicals, Automobiles, Energy, Electronics, Textiles, Minerals, and Information Technology cooperation.
- **Third**, in a recent ministerial meeting, Canada agreed to examine the request for Conformity Verification Body (CVB) status to APEDA (Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority) for hassle-free export of Indian organic products.
- **Fourth**, in recent times, we have witnessed a significant movement of professionals, skilled workers, students, and business travellers between the two countries, which can immensely contribute to enhancing the bilateral economic partnership of both countries.

- **Fifth**, the public health sector is another domain where India can act and support Canada as a reliable partner in supplying generic medicines and affordable pharmaceutical products.
- **Sixth**, even after the economic crash due to the Covid-19 pandemic, our bilateral economic trade in 2021 in goods was around US$ 6.29 billion with a positive growth rate of 12 percent compared to 2020.
- **Finally**, Canada and India have taken various initiatives to make our business environment more investor-friendly and thus, in the last six years, there has been an increase from US$ 5 billion to more than US$ 55 billion in portfolio investments from Canada to India.

Way forward:

India and Canada can be great partners for future cooperation and growth. India is a budding economic powerhouse in Asia with immense opportunities in the coming times. The bilateral trade with the joint efforts of both Indian and Canadian governments has reached around C$ 8 billion, which is a win-win situation for both democratic nations. With the alignment of strategic interests, both countries can benefit greatly in the future.

India - Australia Relations

News Excerpt:

The Defence Minister and the External Affairs Minister of India met their Australian counterparts as part of the second India-Australia 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue in New Delhi, and the **6th edition** of the Australia-India leadership dialogue was held in **Melbourne, Australia**.

Key Points:

- India and Australia held a 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue to **step up defence cooperation and deepen the strategic relationship** in critical minerals and trade and investment sectors.
- India and Australia are finalizing agreements for **cooperation in hydrography and air-to-air refuelling.**
- They agreed that a **robust defensive alliance** between Australia and India would benefit both nations and the Indo-Pacific's general security.

Key engagements:

- The year saw significant progress in various areas, such as the **First Annual Leaders Summit**, the Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement **(ECTA)**, and record-high **bilateral trade**.
- Additionally, establishing a **Little India** in Sydney and the **new Consulates General** in Bengaluru and Brisbane have further strengthened the bond between the two countries.

- **Australian university campuses** in India, recognition of educational qualifications, and mobility agreements are also positive developments.

Opportunities identified for India-Australia:

Renewable Energy and Decarbonization:

- Australia and India can lead a **clean tech revolution** and become renewable energy superpowers by collaborating on **solar, green hydrogen**, and other renewable energy forms.
- They need **critical minerals** and **rare earths** for advanced electronics, energy storage systems, electric vehicles, and aerospace technologies.
- Leaders can maximize the potential of the **Critical Minerals Investment Partnership**, eliminate **supply chain bottlenecks**, finance renewable energy projects, and foster a **circular economy** for innovation, job creation, and economic growth.

Employment and skills:

- **India** aims to create **new jobs** for its growing population, while **Australia** faces **workforce shortages**. Initiatives like **Jobs and Skills Australia** and **Skill India** can activate untapped potential and bridge workforce needs.

Geopolitical and geostrategic:

- Australia and India, located in the **Indo-Pacific region**, are focusing on leveraging their technological capabilities to **build trust** and enhance **cooperation**
- Assess global security standards, explore public-private partnerships, and understand how both countries can enhance their security and economic prosperity in a future shaped by technology-driven geopolitics.

People-to-people:

- People-to-people connections are a crucial asset in **India's economic strategy for 2035**.
- Technology can be an **enabler** to foster cross-cultural understanding between the two countries.

- **The Australia-India Leadership Dialogue (AILD)** is the premier forum for **informal diplomacy** between Australia and India.
- The AILD has established itself as a key track **1.5 engagement** between both countries.
- **Theme for 2023:** "Skill for Success"

The theme chosen this year is contemporary, relevant, and outcome-oriented in the following manner:

- **The Clean Energy Transition**: Decarbonising Towards Net Zero.
- **Skills for Success:** Revolutionizing the Job Market in the Digital Age.
- **"Bridges of "Bharosa":** Security Cooperation in a Contested World.
- **The tryst between Identities:** The Convergence of Technology and Culture.

- **Cultural centres** should be developed as **hubs** where technology combines **entertainment** and **culture**, offering interactive experiences.

Challenges in the relations:

- The two countries need more strategic trust despite significant strategic and defence engagement.
- India-Australia relations are facing challenges such as **visa restrictions** for **Indian students** and **professionals** and concerns over **Khalistan supporters' attacks** on the Indian diaspora and temples.
- There are differing concerns about **China's growing presence** in the Pacific and Indian Oceans.
- Australia is India's **eighth-largest** trading partner, and India is Australia's **fifth-largest**. Trade between India and Australia is limited, with **around 70%** of exports of **coal** and **gold** to India.
- Australia's **Temporary foreign worker program** reforms have caused concern in India, impacting **labour mobility** and the future movement of **skilled workers** between the two countries.
- Despite a civil nuclear cooperation agreement, some reservations about exporting uranium to India remain.

Way Forward:

As strong democracies and **dynamic economies** of the **Indo-Pacific**, both countries can make a difference through **cooperation** on a **practical**, **progressive** and **sustainable** agenda. Together, both countries should make a force for **global good.**

India- Norway Relations

News Excerpt:

Norwegian businesses are showing a lot of interest in India and the cooperation between the two countries is expected to increase manifold in the next 10 years.

Historical Background:

- Ties between **Norway and India** have deep historical roots.
- As early as the 1600s, a **Danish-Norwegian trading station** was established in **Tranquebar (Tharangambadi), which today lies in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu.**
- Norway's **first Consulates** in India opened in Kolkata and Mumbai in 1845 and 1857, respectively.

- In 1952, the **"India Fund"** was established to provide development assistance with a focus on fisheries. The same year, Norway opened its Embassy in New Delhi.

Recent development in India-Norway Relations:

- Norwegian businesses are showing a lot of interest in India because **India is the fifth-largest and fastest-growing economy in the world.**
- The recently signed **trade pact between India and the four-nation European Free Trade Association (EFTA) bloc**, which includes Norway, has immense importance as it provides a **secure framework for Western businesses to operate within**.

Energy Sector

- Norway: 3rd largest gas producer, 7th largest oil exporter.
- Indian companies ONGC and Reliance have tie-ups with Norwegian firms.
- India benefits from Norwegian drilling and exploration technologies.

Investment and Funds

- Norway's $1 trillion government pension fund invested $12 billion in India; India seeks more investments.
- Norway's climate investment fund plans $1 billion investment globally in five years, with substantial investment expected in India.

Renewable Energy

- Norway interested in India's solar energy infrastructure.
- Exploring offshore wind energy opportunities with the National Institute of Wind Energy.
- Viable wind energy projects mainly in Tamil Nadu and Gujarat.

Maritime and Fisheries

- India interested in Norway's deep-sea fishing technology, port development, and shipbuilding.
- 30 vessels being built in Indian shipyards for Norwegian owners.
- Joint efforts on ship recycling, focusing on India's accession to the Hong Kong Convention.

Trade and Investment

- Bilateral trade doubled to $2 billion in the last two years.
- 100 Norwegian companies engaged in India, with steady growth in trade.

Academic and Cultural Cooperation

- Academic relations between Tamil Nadu institutions (IIT-Madras, Institute of Wind Energy) and Norwegian institutions.
- Norwegian company Piql creating digital archives for Indian monuments like the Taj Mahal, Dholavira, and Bhimbetka Caves.

Geopolitics and Conflict Resolution

- Norway supports India's bid for a permanent UN Security Council seat.
- Former Norwegian PM involved in 2002 Sri Lankan ceasefire, heads the Oslo Centre for Peace and Human Rights.

- Norway will contribute significantly to promoting investments in India, as the **EFTA-India trade pact** is the **first trade treaty with an investment chapter.**
  - EFTA countries **(Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland)** have committed to creating a million jobs, and Norway will contribute a considerable part of that.
- Norway aims to strengthen relations between **the governments, including with State governments in India, as well as business-to-business and people-to-people ties.**
- Norway is keen on three sectors for cooperation with India: **renewable energy, maritime, and circular economy.**
- Norway is set to host the **Third India-Nordic Summit** by the end of this year in Oslo, continuing the framework of the **India-Nordic Summits previously held in Stockholm and Copenhagen.**

India - Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) ties

News Excerpt:

The **External Affairs Minister, in the recent past,** visited **Guyana**, **Colombia**, the **Dominican Republic,** and **Panama**, signalling an intensification of ties.

What is Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)?

LAC refers to the region south of the United States, i.e., **Mexico, the Caribbean Islands, and South America.**

- The name is given since the dominant languages spoken in the region (Spanish and Portuguese) are derived from Latin.
- The Caribbean region refers to countries belonging to or relating to the Caribbean Sea. It consists of many sovereign island nations and territories that belong to other nations as well.

India & Latin America ties:
ECONOMIC:

- According to the **IBEF** (India Brand Equity Foundation), the **trade** between the two regions was nearly **US$ 50 billion in 2022-23, with much more unexplored potential.**
- India's trade interests in the **LAC region** include raw materials like **edible oil**, **crude oil**, **gold** and critical minerals like **lithium** and **copper.**
- The region's capabilities in producing and supplying the resources that India needs give us a special trade edge.
  - **EDIBLE OIL:** India imports **edible oil** for cooking, with Latin America being its main source of **soybean oil. Argentina** and **Brazil** are the largest producers of soybean oil in the world.
  - **CRUDE OIL:** Venezuela, Mexico, and Brazil have seen a **rise in crude oil** production from **2006-2020**. Venezuela — home to the world's largest crude oil reserves — **presents an opportunity for Indian refiners**, who can refine heavy crude from the Latin American country. It can also help India **further diversify its crude import basket**, given that it has stopped importing crude from another sanctioned country, Iran, since 2019.
  - **GOLD & COPPER:** Chile was the leading supplier of **copper, and** India has also looked towards South America for **gold**, with imports exceeding **$6.5 billion** in the region's **last fiscal year.**
  - **CRITICAL MINERALS: Chile,** part of the **"Lithium Triangle,"** has the **world's largest lithium reserves**, making it a key source of electric **batteries** and **green energy.** Peru is a major lead, zinc, gold, copper, and silver producer.

  - A trade agreement with the Andean countries of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela would be beneficial as they **hold major reserves of the world's critical minerals.**

STRATEGIC:

- **Mexico** was the **first nation** in this region with which independent India established relations.
- **Brazil** is a key partner for India, enjoying multilateral cooperation with India in **BRICS, IBSA, and as a partner in Global South.**
- India has also expanded its diplomatic presence to Central American and South American countries like **Panama** and **Mexico,** which are key to **shipping routes** in the region.
- The Indian **diaspora** and India's **soft power** have leveraged the relationship.
- About **one million Indian diaspora** in the LAC region (mainly in Suriname, Guyana, Trinidad, and Tobago) adds a special dimension to the relationship. It has helped create a **living bridge** between India and the LAC.

Impediments to Greater Cooperation:

- **Chinese Growing Sphere of Influence:** China's growing role in expanding regional industries may also impede Indian prospects. Countries such as Peru count China as one of its closest allies and are also a part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China's state firms are major investors in the region's energy, infrastructure, and space industries.
- **Economic challenges:** The relationship suffers due to few bilateral trade agreements, trade barriers, limited market access, and inefficient logistics routes.
- **Geographical Distance**: The region is relegated to the far end of India's foreign policy with no guiding policy, with Latin America being located far away from India.
- **Linguistic Unfamiliarity:** The lack of Spanish and Portuguese speakers in Indian companies is a disadvantage.
- **Mixed Past Experiences:** Indian companies that ventured to Latin America have had mixed experiences, with challenges such as:
  - **Uruguay**'s revoked mining licenses for Zamin Resources,
  - Unsuccessful Iron ore projects in **Bolivia** and Sugar ventures in **Brazil.**

Way Forward:

- The two blocs have **complementary economies** and hold a series of strategic resources that could leverage the trade and investment ties for **mutual benefit.**
- Areas of great potential could be **energy transition, climate agenda, health, and industrialization.**
- India should encourage greater **cooperation** by **actively engaging** with the **three** Latin American members of the **G20 (Argentina, Brazil & Mexico)** to deepen its engagement.

- For this, the Indian **External Affairs Minister** proposed **four pillars for intensified engagement:**
  - Addressing Global Challenges
  - Resource Partnerships
  - Sharing of Development-Related Experiences
  - Supply Chain Diversification

India-Tanzania relation

News Excerpt:

Recently, India and Tanzania signed **six MoUs** in various fields, including **digital domain, culture and sports,** and agreed on a **five-year roadmap** to boost and expand defence cooperation.

Key points:
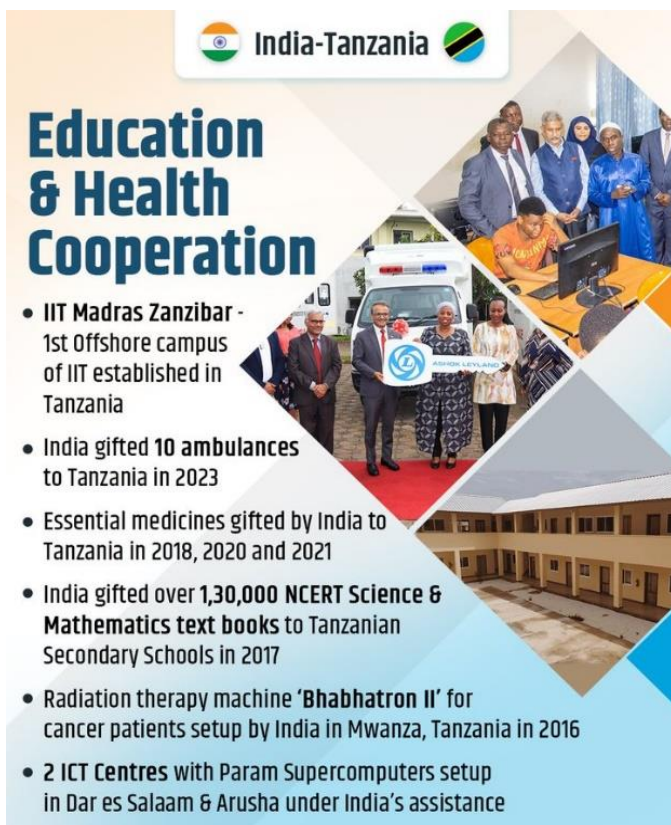
The two countries inked **six agreements** providing for cooperation in the **digital domain, culture, sports, maritime industries and white shipping information sharing.**

- Both sides were also working on an agreement to increase **trade in local currencies**.
- Both countries have agreed on a five-year roadmap in the field of defence. It will add **new dimensions to cooperation in areas like military training, the maritime sphere and defence industries.**
- India and Tanzania were **"unanimous" that terrorism is the "most serious security threat to humanity".** "They have decided to increase cooperation in the field of counter-terrorism."

Relations between both countries

- India and Tanzania have a strong, time-tested relationship based on solidarity and camaraderie that comes from a shared struggle for independence during colonial times.
- From the beginning of India's independence, both countries always had a good understanding. Today that is reflected in a very robust economic engagement. **Both have a trade of almost six and a half billion dollars annually.**
  - India and Tanzania share vibrant economic, commercial and business ties. India is Tanzania's third largest trading partner with bilateral trade of **USD 4.58 billion in 2021-22 and USD 6.4 billion in 2022-23.**
  - India is also among the top five investment sources in Tanzania, and as per the Tanzania Investment Centre, Indian investments in Tanzania add up to **USD 3.68 billion.**
- India has significant Indian investment in Tanzania, which is the country's key trade partner in Africa.
  - **Bank of India, Bank of Baroda, and Canara Bank have operations in Tanzania.**

- Both nations have a Water Partnership which involves soft loans of almost a billion dollars, which when the projects are completed, will bring safe drinking water to 8 million Tanzanians and will cover 28 towns in this country. **India has so far contributed USD 1 billion in assistance for water projects in Tanzania.**
- India and Tanzania have started trade settlements in local currencies, and this new initiative will help in promoting commerce between the two countries.
- The decision by **IIT-Madras to open a campus in Zanzibar** is an important milestone in our relations. It will become a hub of high-quality education for Tanzania and students from regional countries.

India-Vietnam Relations

News Excerpt:

India and Vietnam enhanced their strategic relationship by signing an action plan to boost cooperation in multiple areas, such as maritime security, agriculture, and customs.

Strategic Agreements and MoUs:

- **Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (2024-2028):** An MoU was exchanged by Vietnam's Foreign Minister and India's External Affairs Minister to advance the partnership between the two countries.
- **Customs Capacity Building:** An agreement between the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) of India and the General Department of Vietnam Customs was signed, aiming to enhance cooperation in customs.
- **Agricultural Collaboration:** The Central Agricultural University in Imphal, Manipur, and the Vietnam Academy of Agricultural Sciences in Hanoi inked an MoU to collaborate on agriculture, research, and education.
- **Legal Cooperation:** An MoU between the Ministry of Law and Justice of India and Vietnam's Ministry of Justice was signed to foster cooperation in the legal field.
- **Media Cooperation:** Prasar Bharati and the Voice of Vietnam signed an agreement to collaborate on radio and television content.
- **Credit Line Agreements:** Two credit line agreements, each worth USD 120 million, were exchanged between the Vietnamese Ministry of Finance and the Export-Import Bank of India, supporting various projects in Vietnam.
- **Cultural Conservation:** A letter of intent was exchanged for the restoration and conservation of the My Son UNESCO World Heritage site, highlighting the cultural ties between the two nations.

Relation Between India and Vietnam:

- In the last 10 years, India and Vietnam have transformed their relations into a **comprehensive strategic partnership.**
- **Buddhism** is a shared heritage, which has connected the people of both countries at a spiritual level. India invites people from Vietnam to the Buddhist circuit and wants the youth of Vietnam to take advantage of Nalanda University.

Indian Diaspora in Tanzania

- Tanzania is home to about 40,000 people of Indian origin which are concentrated in the major urban centres of Dar es Salaam, Arusha, Mwanza, Dodoma, Morogoro, Zanzibar, and Mbeya.
- The vast majority are from Gujarat, mainly from Kutch and Kathiawad regions whose ancestors came to this region [Zanzibar and Tanganyika] in several phases starting from early 19th century as merchants, sailors and workers.
- The Indian origin community is active in the field of trade and industry in Tanzania. There are about 15,000 Indian nationals [expatriates] mostly professionals, who live and work in Tanzania, mainly in industry and services.

- In the defence sector, India and Vietnam have a history of cooperation, with India providing training and capacity-building support to the Vietnamese military.
  - The two countries are looking to deepen this cooperation further, with discussions on **joint**

exercises, **equipment procurement, and technology transfers.**

○ This partnership is essential for **maintaining regional peace and security, particularly in the context of rising tensions in the South China Sea.**

Trade Relations:

- Bilateral trade between India and Vietnam has seen substantial growth, with trade volumes increasing **by 27 percent in 2022, reaching USD 14.14 billion.**
- India's exports to Vietnam include **iron and steel, cotton, cereals, meat and fishery products, electrical machinery, automobile parts, cement, chemicals, and pharmaceuticals.**
- Meanwhile, Vietnam's exports to India primarily consist of **electrical and electronic equipment, inorganic chemicals, machinery, copper, rubber, coffee, tea, spices, iron, and steel.**
- India's investments in Vietnam are estimated at around **USD 1.9 billion, spanning energy, mineral exploration, agriculture, and information technology.**
- In contrast, Vietnam has **invested over USD 28.55 million in India,** focusing on **pharmaceuticals, information technology, chemicals, and building materials.**

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

18TH G20 Summit in India

News Excerpt

The G20 Leaders' Summit in 2023 under India's presidency resulted in a major success with the unanimous adoption of the **New Delhi Declaration**.

G20:

- The G20 originated in 1999 in response to the **Asian Financial Crisis** of 1997-98, initially serving as an informal platform for finance ministers and central bank governors from both developed and developing economies.
- In 2008, following the **Global Financial Crisis**, the G20 expanded to include the heads of state of member countries.
- The G20 Presidency rotates annually under a **Troika System** involving the current, previous, and next host countries.

Key Highlights of G20 Summit, 2023:

1. **African Union (AU) as a permanent member of G20:**
   - After the EU, the African Union is the second regional bloc to join the G20. This will strengthen the G-20 and also the voice of the Global South.
   - The AU now has an opportunity to use its G20 permanent seat to craft a pathway for the entire world with a demand to redesign the global trade, finance, and investment architecture.

2. **Adoption of "New Delhi Leaders' Declaration": Major highlights**
   - **Ukraine war:** All states must act in a manner consistent with the UN charter in its entirety. They must refrain from the threat or use of force to seek territorial acquisition against the territorial integrity and sovereignty or political independence of any state; also, the use or threat of nuclear weapons is inadmissible.
   - **Food and Energy Security:** It calls on Russia and Ukraine to ensure food and energy security through immediate and unimpeded deliveries of grain, foodstuffs, and fertilisers/inputs.
- **Economies and Financial markets:**
   o To renew the G20's commitment to ensure a level playing field and fair competition by discouraging protectionism and market-distorting practices;
   o To endorse the Financial Stability Board's high-level recommendations for regulation, supervision and oversight of crypto-assets, and activities;
   o To reaffirm the 2021 exchange rate commitment made by G20 finance ministers and central bank governors;
   o To protect the vulnerable, through equitable growth and enhancing macroeconomic and financial stability.
- **Climate Change:**
   o Accelerate efforts to phase down unabated coal power.
   o Work towards facilitating low-cost financing for developing countries to support their transition to low carbon.
   o Pursue and encourage efforts to triple renewable energy capacity globally by 2030.
   o Reiterated the use of carbon pricing and non-pricing mechanisms and incentives toward carbon neutrality and net zero.
   o Noted the need for $5.8-5.9 trillion in the pre-2030 period required for developing countries, in particular for their needs to implement their emission targets.
   o Called on parties to set an ambitious, transparent, and trackable New Collective Quantified Goal of climate finance in 2024, from a floor of $100 billion a year.

G20 TURNS G21

The African Union, the 55-member bloc of African nations, is now a permanent member of the G20. The group now comprises 19 countries and two regional organisations.

- **Global Debt Vulnerabilities:** Commit to promoting resilient growth by urgently and effectively addressing debt vulnerabilities in developing countries.
- **Health:** The leaders committed to strengthening global health architecture. This will enhance resilience of health systems and development of climate-resilient and low-carbon health systems in collaboration with multilateral banks.
3. **Global Biofuels Alliance:** On the sidelines of G20, prominent countries agreed to create a Global Biofuel Alliance.
   - Its focus is on accelerated adoption of biofuels, creating new biofuels, setting globally recognized standards, identifying global best practices, and ensuring industry participation.
   - **Current members:** India, Brazil, USA, Argentina, Canada, Italy, South Africa, Bangladesh, Singapore, Mauritius, UAE.
4. **Climate action:** Leaders at the G20 Summit did not reach a consensus on the phase-out of fossil fuels, despite a UN report categorising this phase-out as "indispensable" for achieving net-zero emissions.
   - The G20 nations collectively contribute to approximately 80% of global emissions. The inability to agree on this crucial issue casts a shadow over upcoming climate discussions in November in the oil-rich UAE.

> **G20, 2023 in India**
> - India hosted G20 summit for the first time in New Delhi since its inception.
> - **Theme:** "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (The world is one family).
> - G20 member countries account for 80% global GDP, 75% of worldwide trade and about two-thirds of the world population.
> - **Troika of the summit:** Indonesia-India-Brazil.
> - **Invited countries:** Egypt, UAE, Singapore, Netherland, Oman, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Spain, Mauritius.

INITIATIVES BY INDIA AT THE G20

- G20 Generic Framework for Mapping Global Value Chains (GVC) to help members identify risks and build resilience.
- Resource Efficiency and Circular Economy Industry Coalition (RECEIC).
- Green Hydrogen Innovation Centre steered by the International Solar Alliance (ISA).
- Voluntary High-Level Principles for Collaboration on Critical Minerals for Energy Transitions.
- One Future Alliance (OFA), a voluntary initiative aimed to build capacity, and provide technical assistance and adequate funding support for implementing Digital Public Infrastructure in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

Significance of G20:

For India:
- **Soft Power:** Through "One Earth, One Family, and One Future", India stressed the notion of unity and a shared destiny to convey the gravity of the multiple challenges facing humankind today.
- **Voice to environmental concerns of Global South:** India worked on harmonising development with the environment, stating that "no country should have to choose between fighting poverty and fighting for our planet."
- **Middle-path resolution:** A fine balance was struck between the Russian red line and the insistence by G7 on ensuring respect for "territorial integrity and sovereignty or political independence."
- **India's urge for multilateralism:** India's policy 'mantras' of multilateralism, multipolarity and the "middle way" drove the concessions made in order to achieve consensus regarding "New Delhi Leaders' Declaration" at the G-20.
- **India's balance between technology and culture:** The Summit provided an occasion for a demonstration of India's contemporary technological advancement as well as of our heritage, culture, and traditions.
- **Economic growth and food security:** The summit would help India in the expansion of its tourism sector, increase global workplace opportunities for its youths, boost stronger food security through its millet production and consumption and deepen its commitment to biofuels.

Across world:
- **Existential crisis for G20:** It was feared that if India failed to find a consensus, the G-20 itself would fragment, possibly into the G-7 western bloc, and the BRICS bloc.
- **Power to regional organizations:** After the inclusion of regional organisations like the EU and AU in multilateral for a, it will be the turn of ASEAN and the Community of Latin American & Caribbean States (CELAC) to seek G-20 membership.
- **Boost to multilateralism:** It emphasized that UN institutions be "more responsive" to the entire membership. The need to make global governance "more representative, effective, transparent and accountable" was stated clearly.
- **Inclusive growth:** The conclusion of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor Agreement and the Global Biofuels Alliance during the Summit were significant developments.
- **Diverse and Global Development:** The main focus was on realizing SDGs, reforming international financial

institutions, establishing digital public infrastructure, promoting a green development pact and encouraging women-led development.

Conclusion:

The global community has till now, successfully steered through earlier global crises, due to their collective actions. **The New Delhi Declaration 2023** reiterates G20's determination to steer the world out of its current challenges and build a safer, stronger, more resilient, inclusive and healthier future for our people and the planet.

India's G20 Presidency And Disaster Management

News Excerpt

India under its Presidency of the G20, hosted the inaugural meeting of the G20 Disaster Risk Reduction Working Group (DRR WG).

Key Highlights of the meeting

- **Call for Social Protection System:** The G20 Disaster Risk Resilience Working Group has urged governments to establish a social protection system as an effective and preferred instrument for disaster risk financing.
- **Emphasis on New-Age Social Protection Systems:** The working group emphasized the importance of modern Social Protection Systems that focus on investing in local risk resilience to mitigate, prepare for, and recover from disasters.
- **Five Priorities Outlined:**
  o Global coverage of Early Warning Systems: The group prioritized achieving global coverage of Early Warning Systems to enhance preparedness and response to disasters.
  o Increased commitment to infrastructure resilience: There was a strong emphasis on increasing commitment to making infrastructure systems more resilient against disasters.
  o Strengthened national financial frameworks for DRR: The group highlighted the need for robust national financial frameworks that support Disaster Risk Reduction efforts.
  o Enhanced national and global disaster response system: The working group called for strengthening both national and global disaster response systems to effectively address emergencies.
  o Promoting ecosystems-based approaches to DRR: The group advocated for the wider application of ecosystems-based approaches to Disaster Risk Reduction.
- **Objectives and Impact:** The G20 DRR WG aimed to consider the mid-term review of the Sendai Framework, foster multilateral cooperation at all levels, and provide insights for future global policies and initiatives concerning Disaster Risk Reduction.

Need for Creating a Collective G20 Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction

- The G20 nations, with a population of 4.7 billion, face significant exposure, risk from asset concentration, and vulnerability to natural disasters. In the current World Risk Index, four G20 nations are among the top 10 most vulnerable countries.
- The G20 countries collectively experience an estimated annual average loss of USD 218 billion, which amounts to 9% of their average annual investment in infrastructure. These losses highlight the need for effective disaster risk reduction measures.
- Implementing disaster risk reduction measures can play a crucial role in mitigating and preventing such substantial losses. By proactively addressing vulnerabilities and strengthening resilience, the G20 nations can reduce the impact of natural disasters and safeguard their populations and assets.

Strategies for Reducing Disaster Risk

- **Better Economic and Urban Development for Risk Reduction:**
  o The primary approach to reducing risk involves diminishing vulnerability and exposure by implementing improved economic and urban development choices and practices, safeguarding the environment, reducing poverty and inequality, among other measures.
  o An example of this is the effective implementation of flood risk management strategies in India, which can aid in mitigating and managing extreme weather conditions.
- **Reimagining Financing for Disaster Risk Reduction:**
  o There is a need to reconsider the financing methods for disaster risk reduction. Reliance solely on government budgets may be limited due to a country's fiscal position.
  o Exploring innovative financing tools, such as establishing reserve funds, dedicated lines of credit, and leveraging global resources, should be considered.
- **Resilient Infrastructure and Additional Financing:**
  o Infrastructure projects funded by public revenues, such as roads, railways, airports, and electricity lines, should be designed to withstand disasters and may require additional funding.
  o Financing mechanisms that account for the social benefits of resilient infrastructure should be explored to meet this additional funding requirement.
- **Addressing Extensive and Intensive Risk:**
  o Differential strategies need to be developed to address extensive risk (frequent but moderate

impacts) and intensive risk (low frequency and high impact events).

o Extensive events, including heatwaves, lightning, local floods, and landslides, cumulatively result in substantial losses. Implementing targeted approaches to reducing losses from extensive risk events can yield positive outcomes in the short to medium term.

WHAT IS THE PRESENT ISSUE OVER ARTICLE 2(4) OF UN CHARTER?

- **Article 2 (4)** from Chapter I of UN Charter prohibits the threat or use of force and calls on all Members to respect other States' sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence.
- A confluence of forces - *resurgent nationalism, protectionism, multilateralism,* and the *resurgence of interstate wars* challenge the post-World War II order.
- The two wars (*Ukraine and Gaza conflict*) have led many to pronounce the death of international law, especially the rule prohibiting the use of force in international relations as shown below:
  - The international law suffers from several structural deficiencies.
  - Unlike municipal law, international law lacks a global police force to enforce it successfully, notwithstanding the growth of several international courts and tribunals.

- **Multi-tiered and Multi-sectoral Approach:**
  - o Disaster risk reduction should be viewed as a multi-tiered and multi-sectoral effort.
  - o By integrating efforts vertically from the local to sub-national to national to global levels and horizontally across sectors, readiness to manage unforeseen risks can be enhanced.
  - o The G20 can play a role in developing such strategies, recognizing the interconnectedness and interdependence of the world.

Way-Forward

- The G20 should encourage collaboration and coordination among its members and other stakeholders concerning early warning systems, disaster-resilient infrastructure, financial frameworks, and response systems for disaster risk reduction.
- Efforts should be made to promote innovation and research in disaster risk reduction, with a particular focus on leveraging technology, data, and ecosystems-based approaches.
- It is essential to align disaster risk reduction endeavours with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and the New Urban Agenda. Ensuring that no one is left behind should be a priority in these efforts.
- The G20 Working Group on Disaster Risk Reduction provides an opportunity for the G20 to assume a leadership role in implementing the Sendai framework over the next seven years.

Powerful but paralyzed: United Nation

News Excerpt:

According to the UN General Assembly (UNGA) President, the UN Security Council (UNSC) does not reflect today's realities and is unable to discharge its basic function of maintaining international peace and security.

Background:

- **The P-5 (UNSC Permanent Members)** have been guilty of playing out their **inter-political rivalries** inside the UNSC, thereby paralyzing the Council and compromising international peace and security.
  - o The P-5 standoff has given space for the countries in conflict, especially developing countries in **Africa and Asia**, to push the P-5 to not treat their **issues uni-dimensionally** through a colonial or Western lens but respect their **sovereignty** and viewpoints.
  - o However, such geopolitical paralysis inside the Council caused by P-5 affects its decision-making ability and credibility. This is where the UNSC stands.
- For the first time, the West is meeting some serious challenges to a **Western worldview** being imposed on **geopolitical issues of the Global South**.

The latest manifestation of UNSC paralysis:

- On 7th October 2023, the Hamas terror attack on Israel took place. The **UNGA** voted for a ceasefire, with **153 out of 193 member** states supporting it, but the UNSC did not follow through with it.
- The **loss of credibility of the UN** on recent issues can be attributed to the double-speak and inaction of both **P-5** and the **Arab World**.
- The **UN Secretary-General** and other **UN organs** have pointed out potential violations of international law. Thus, in international conflict situations, the solution is to strengthen the UN.
- However, the Ukraine conflict saw a P-5 country going to war. **Russia** vetoed every resolution **against the UNSC** while the P-5 was split on the **Ukraine conflict**; the abstention of many developing countries on the UN votes conveyed a very different message.

UN and Global South Scenario:

- The Global South used **UNSC** and **UNGA** as platforms to send a message to P-5 and the West that while they are on the side of the **UN Charter** and for Ukraine's

sovereignty and territorial integrity, the fight in Europe has to be resolved politically and not militarily.

- All sides are recklessly fuelling the war, and the **unilateral sanctions imposed on Russia are only hurting the Global South** inter alia food, energy, finance, and humanitarian assistance.

Way Forward:

- There is a need to push P-5 to make more informed and responsible decisions on developing country-related issues by reflecting the views of the Global South, and thus, countries like India have called for comprehensive UNSC reforms.
- **India** is already the most populous country and the fifth-largest economy in the world and can contribute more towards taking a **stand for the Global South**. For instance, India brought the African Union into the G-20 during its Presidency last year.
- **Robust reforms** are needed to make the UNSC more representative, credible, and reflective of the reality outside the UNSC's chambers.

UNSC –Meeting on Artificial Intelligence (AI)

News Excerpt

The United Nations Security Council **(UNSC)** held its **first meeting** on the **threats AI poses** to international peace and stability.

Background:

- In India, **NITI Aayog** circulated a **note** to establish a cloud computing platform **AIRAWAT** (Artificial Intelligence Research, Analytics and Knowledge Assimilation Platform).
- NITI Aayog in its document National Strategy on AI has mentioned **"Principles of responsible AI"** - Protection and Reinforcement of Positive Human Values, Accountability, Transparency, Privacy, Inclusivity, Equality and Reliability.
- **USA** published a blueprint of **AI Bill of Rights**; it outlined principles for an effective use of AI.
- Similarly, **UK** released a **whitepaper** regarding responsible use of AI, specifically mentioning the principles to be followed by the private sector in usage of AI.
- Last year, **China** enacted a law to regulate the **algorithms**, based on AI.

Why need for regulations?

- **Industrial Revolution 4.0** is built on the **foundation of Artificial Intelligence**, the AI has weakened the difference between the **human intelligence** and **machine learning.**
- AI is being used in various sectors like **healthcare**, **education**, **judiciary**, etc. It is being used to **diagnose**

diseases, assisting in **analysis** and helping judges with **legal research** (SUPACE and SUVAS portal).

- It is still an **evolving concept**, which creates a lot of **skepticism** regarding its future uses. Hence, a **sense of urgency** and caution is seen in regulating AI. For eg threat of losing jobs, career switches, etc.
- Role AI played during the **pandemic** in research of **vaccine** and scaling up its **manufacturing**. E.g US company **Moderna** was among the first to release an effective COVID-19 vaccine. **AI algorithms** and robotic automation helped them move from manually producing around 30 mRNAs each month, to being able to produce around 1,000 a month.
- AI can also help accelerate **achieving SDG** faster.

India's initiatives with AI:

- MeitY, NASSCOM, and DRDO created the **roadmap for AI** in India.
- Centre for Artificial Intelligence and Robotics **(CAIR).**
- Biometric identification, Facial recognition, Criminal investigation, Crowd and Traffic Management, Digital agriculture.
- US-India Artificial Intelligence Initiative.
- **National Artificial Intelligence (AI) Mission** will include creating **Centers of Excellence (CoE)** - National Centre for Transformation AI
- **MCA 21, version 3.0.** use of the latest technologies like data analytics, AI, and ML.
- **NRF** formed under National Education Policy **(NEP) 2020**, to boost research across segments, including AI
- **NCERT** in pursuance of The National Education Policy 2020, introducing **curriculum of artificial intelligence** course at a secondary level.
- **Supreme court** is using **AI tools SUPACE** (Supreme Court Portal for Assistance in Court's Efficiency) and **SUVAS** (Supreme Court Vidhik Anuvaad Software).

Key concerns regarding AI:

Political concerns:

- AI can be used to **negate freedom and democracy** by censoring, constraining, repressing or disempowering people; posing a threat to peace and stability of the nation. For e.g.

Political action	Possible impact
China is racially profiling ethnic minorities through facial recognition techniques **(FRT)** and creating separate habitations for them.	**Socio-economic parameters** of the community will degrade and at times they can possibly **retaliate**, affecting the harmony and **creating rifts** in societies.
Europe is using AI in identification of migrants and denying them entry into the European borders.	It will further lead to **migrant crises**, disregard of **Geneva convention** and create **ethical concern**s.

Ethical and Moral concerns:

- AI poses moral questions of **accountability** in several cases. For e.g
- If a **self-driving car** hits someone, who will be held responsible? the owner of the car or the programmer who made a code for the car.
- If a **disease is not diagnosed** through AI algorithms, who will be held responsible? The **examiner** or the **coder** of the algorithm.
- Firstly, AI can be **used in battlefield** against humans. Secondly, who will be held responsible for the **lethal decisions** on battlefield?
- **Deepfakes** of women and children used in pornography.

  - **National Strategy on AI**: It proposes to develop an **ecosystem** for the **research and adoption** of Artificial Intelligence i.e., **#AI FOR ALL**.
  - NITI Aayog has identified **five sectors** viz. **healthcare**, **agriculture**, **education**, **smart cities and infrastructure** and **transportation**, to focus its efforts on implementation of AI.

Technological concerns:

- **Technological hegemony** can be created by **developed nations** using AI at the cost of developing nations. By the time technology reaches developing nations, various **barriers** can be cropped up for developing nations to limit AI's use.
- **For e.g** Developed nations reaped the **benefits** of industrial revolution at the cost of **climate change**. By the time technological advancement began in developing nations, various **limitations** on the name of **sustainable development** have been put on developing nations.
- Another key concern is **mass layoffs** and **job displacement** by companies, raising the issue of **unemployment**.
- AI gives rise to various **cybercrimes**. A recent example is of scamming money from people by creating deepfake videos of their close ones asking for money.

Security concerns:

- AI could aid **reckless quest** for **proliferation** of weapons of mass destruction by **state and non-state actors** alike. Various **treaties** signed and agreed upon till now could become **redundant** if this happens. E.g **statute of IAEA**, **outer space treaty**, **NPT,** etc.
- **Infiltration** across the borders is a concern, furthermore the Fake Currency Notes **(FCN)** designed through AI can break a nation's economy.

Way forward:

- As suggested in the meeting, an **independent body** to **oversee, regulate** and **enforce AI regulations** can be created. This body should consist of **experts**, who are well versed with the concept of AI.
- UNSC Secretary General has said, the UNSC will come up with a **legally binding agreement** regarding AI by **2026** which will **ban AI in weapons of war**. Meanwhile, a globally agreed set of **international rules** can be created.
- AI should be **tied to principles** of upholding **freedom and democracy**, respect for **human rights, rule of law** and security, protection of **intellectual property rights, privacy** and **trustworthiness**.

Multilateral Development Banks

News Excerpt

The finance minister of India said that in **G20 presidency**, the **primary focus** of India is **strengthening** Multilateral development banks **(MDBs).**

Global MDB's

- Worldwide membership with countries from various geographic regions as its member. E.g IMF and World bank group.
- Broader mandate. E.g infra, healthcare, education, poverty reduction, etc.
- Significant funding sources due to global membership.
- Complex governance structure, representation based on shareholding.

Regional MDB's

- Limited members, that too from a particular geographic region. E.g ADB, AfDB, NDB.
- Specialized mandate. e.g regional challenges.
- Limited funding sources as compared to global MDB's.
- Decision making is influenced by the priorities and interests of regional member countries.

Multilateral development Finance

MDBs are **international financial institutions** formed with the **objective** of encouraging **economic development** in developing economies. The **two types of MDBs** are –
first, which are largest and best-known institutions, **global MDB's** (e.g., world bank group).

Multilateral Development Bank

Funding from Member Companies + Contribution from Shareholder → Multilateral Development Bank → Development Projects Funding → Economic Growth and Development
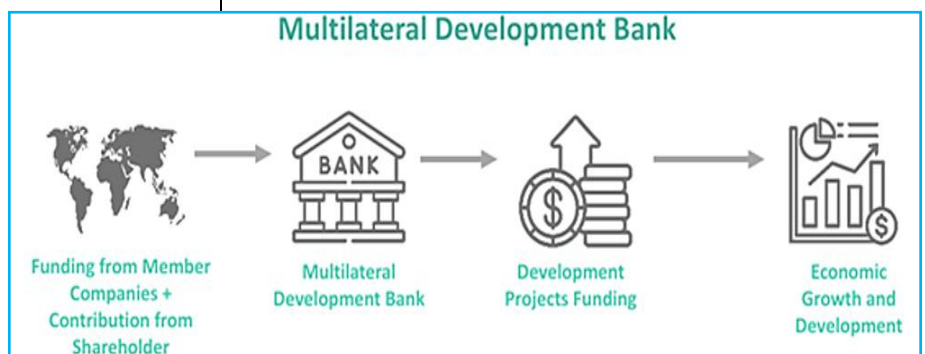
Second, the banks which are formed by developing and low-income countries together to provide credit to their members and other countries, **regional MDB's** (e.g., Asian Development bank, AIIB, New Development bank, Caribbean Development Bank).

- Some important MDBs where **India is a member** – Asian Development Bank (ADB), World Bank Group, African Development Bank (AfDB), New Development Bank (NDB), International Monetary Fund (IMF), etc.
- Recently under G20 Finance Track Discussions, talks on escalation of debt issues in vulnerable economies and the importance of managing global debt vulnerabilities were held.
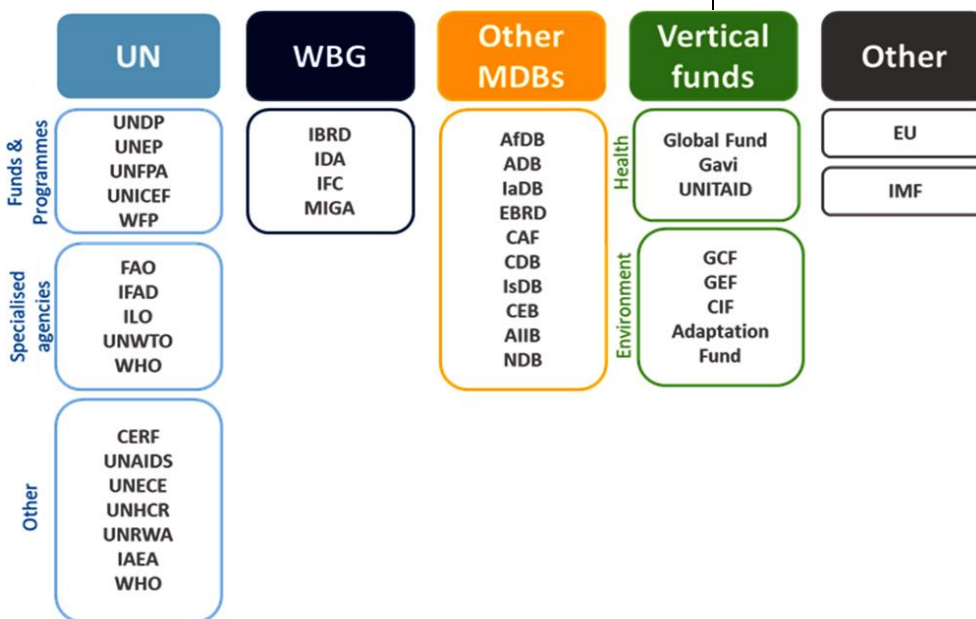
Need for MDBs:

- **Development projects:** Funding to development projects such as infrastructure, transportation, energy, water, healthcare, education, etc is necessary for the growth of the country. Countries are not able to gather resources from themselves, hence need of MDBs.
- **Stability and Resilience**: Countries are struggling to maintain reserves and going through balance of payments crises, recent example can be cited of **Sri Lanka**. MDBs could provide a helping hand to them and navigate them through their worst of their times.
- **Poverty alleviation**: It requires financing of several projects such as education, healthcare, and sanitation. By extending the credit facilities to the underdeveloped economies and the economies in transition, living standards of the people could be raised.
- **Sustainable development**: There is a need to maintain a balance between economic development and environment protection. Arrangements of finances for the projects that supports clean and renewable energy, water treatment and biodiversity conservation is the need of the hour.

- **Capacity Building**: Building the capacities of nations by not only providing them with financial support but also with technical expertise is required. MDBs can help governments with formulation of policies and regulations, and their implementation.

G20 meet and the MDBs:

G20 finance track discussed various challenges faced by MDBs.

- MDBs face increasing demand from the donor and borrower countries to **expand** their **lending operations**. MDBs are currently not adequately equipped in meeting the rising demands.
- Member countries have different development goals, priorities and agendas. **Consensus building** and **rationalizing priorities** among them is a tedious task.
- **Some countries** are unable to manage their debt and get involved in a **debt crisis**. MDBs are not having proper tools to **analyse** the **debt vulnerabilities** of the nation's going through debt crises.
- MDBs are also prone to **political stability** and **conflict** in the nations, as these lead to stalled projects and **ensuring continuity** of the project is a challenge for MDBs.
- MDBs are not effectively utilizing their **links with private channels** such NGOs, developmental aid agencies and businesses. The coordination mechanism is fragmented which results in **non-flow of funds**.

Advantages of MDBs

- MDBs have played a key role in contributing to **infrastructure development** of several **African** and **Asian countries**. Infrastructure development does not only lead to better infrastructure but also **accelerates** the **economic development** of the nation.
- MDBs are **tool of cooperation** and **collaboration** among countries, enabling them to collectively address the issues affecting them.
- MDBs support projects that **streamline** trade processes, **logistics and supply chains** and provide financial assistance to help countries to expand their **export capacities**. Thus, helping in **trade facilitation**.
- They collect financial resources and **pool** them, which enables the countries to get access to **larger volume of funds**. In absence of MDBs, **countries** would not be able to gather such large pool of finances.
- **Private sector participation**: MDBs **encourage** private sector participation by providing guarantees and risk mitigation.

- MDBs prioritize gender equality and social inclusion in their projects, thus helping in bridging gaps and creating equal opportunities for marginalized sections of society.

MDBs and the New Tech:

- **Unified Payments Interface (UPI):** UPI's easy to use interface through mobile devices can help MDBs penetrate in the **underserved regions**. MDBs can use digital payments of UPI to **disburse payments** of the projects to increase **transparency** and **accountability**. The funds can be efficiently disbursed to the beneficiaries through UPI, also the **lower transactions cost** of UPI is lower as compared to traditional payments methods.

- **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI):** DPI's can **provide digital platforms** to MDBs to check the **progress** of the project, **monitor** its implementation and **track** its outcomes. DPI enables real time **sharing of data**, best practices, and **research findings**. The large amount of data generated from DPI can help in **informed decision-making** process. DPI allows citizens to engage in planning, assessment, and feedback process, which further helps ensuring that project meets the **local needs**.

- **Virtual Digital Assets (VDAs):** VDA's operate on **blockchain technology**, which can be used to create and enforce **smart contracts**. MDB's could explore decentralized finance **(De-Fi) applications** powered by VDA's such as decentralized lending, borrowing and other financial services to complement traditional funding sources.

Way forward

- Indian G-20 Presidency has set up an **Independent Expert Group on Strengthening MDBs**. The Expert Group, in the **Volume-I of their Report** has proposed a **triple agenda** for the MDBs –

- **firstly**, Efforts to tackle global challenges, alongside MDB's core mission of poverty reduction and shared prosperity.

- **Secondly**, to triple their sustainable lending level by 2030.

- **Thirdly**, to enhance their financial strength to capital adequacy improvements and general capital increases.

- Indian presidency of G20 should try to foster **recommitment to multilateralism**.

Adoption of UPI, DPI and VDA's in the framework of MDB's could lead to enhancement of their functioning, efficient use of the resources and strengthening of their vulnerabilities.

Reforms in the Bretton Woods system

News Excerpt

Recently, the UN Secretary-General emphasized the need for reforms in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and Bretton Woods Institutions. The comment is significant as the global community was grappling with economic shocks resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic and the ongoing Russia-Ukraine Conflict.

Bretton Woods system

- The Bretton Woods system was established in 1944 during the Bretton Woods Conference in New Hampshire, USA.

- Its purpose was to promote stability and cooperation in international monetary affairs following World War II.

- The system resulted in the creation of two significant organizations: the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

- Although the Bretton Woods System was dissolved in the 1970s, the IMF and World Bank, known as the Bretton Woods institutions, have continued to play vital roles in facilitating international currency exchange.

Reforming the UNSC

- It is crucial to achieve equitable representation for all regions, including Africa, and to decentralize power and authority. This would enable nations from diverse regions to express their concerns regarding peace and democracy within their countries, resulting in more representative and democratic decision-making.

- The emphasis should be on addressing global challenges rather than upholding the privileges of the P5 nations.

- Immediate action is necessary to rebalance power dynamics between the P5 and the rest of the world, ensuring a more democratic and legitimate governance structure for the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) concerning international peace and security.

- The Intergovernmental Negotiation (IGN) process, responsible for discussing UNSC reform, should undergo revision and revitalization, with the aim of avoiding procedural tactics that impede progress.

Need for Reforms

- While the IMF and World Bank initially experienced success during their first 50 years, they have faced challenges in recent times due to the re-emergence of issues such as rising inequality, financial instability, and protectionism.

- The current global landscape, characterized by the threat of climate change, ecological stress, increased disasters, and a more interconnected world with new challenges like cyber-security and pandemics, necessitates the establishment of a new international financial architecture.

Key reform areas

Scale of impact	Efficiency	Accountability

Building blocks

Transparency	Systemic coherence	Co-ordination	Financial capacity	Selectivity	Capacity of adaptation
- Identify key blind spots in multilateral development finance - Improve the availability of comprehensive and comparable data on multilateral inflows and outflows - Enhance multilateral organisations' communication on results and impact	- Clarify the division of labour among multilateral entities - Identify and leverage potential synergies among multilateral organisations - Sunset or merge multilateral entities with overlapping or obsolete mandates	- Improve co-ordination among donors based on a common set of evidence - Promote increased co-ordination and collaboration among multilateral organisations	- Ensure that multilateral organisations are adequately capitalised and funded (quantitatively and qualitatively) to address new global challenges - Increase the financial leverage of multilateral organisations and their capacity to mobilise private finance	- Improve the prioritisation of multilateral activities to optimise the use of scarce resources	- Ensure that the constitution and funding of multilateral organisations provides them with sufficient flexibility to adapt to the rapidly evolving global environment

- Concerns have been raised regarding biases in fund allocation and the lack of regulation for Special Drawing Rights (SDRs). Notably, the IMF allocated a substantial amount of USD 650 billion in SDRs during the pandemic.
- The G7 countries, with a population of 772 million people, received a significant share of USD 280 billion, whereas the African continent, with a population of 1.3 billion people, received only USD 34 billion.

Measures to address the Issue

- The need for reshaping and revitalizing three global institutions, namely the IMF, WBG, and WTO, has become evident.
- The IMF will undergo changes, focusing on macroeconomic policy and financial stability. This includes implementing stricter surveillance of advanced economies and their impact on global crises.
- The restructured WBG will prioritize sustainability, shared prosperity, and effective utilization of private capital. It will also collaborate with other entities to tackle global challenges and serve as a wholesaler of finance.
- There is a necessity for a stronger WTO to ensure fair trade, expedite dispute resolution, and swiftly respond to emergencies.

- The global system should incorporate more automatic and rule-based financing mechanisms to minimize delays and prevent political influences.
- Regular calibrated issuance of Special Drawing Rights (SDRs), implementation of global pollution taxes, and financial transaction taxes are needed.
- Establishing a well-structured G-20 could offer comprehensive guidance to the Bretton Woods system and its interactions with other institutions.

WTO Panel Rules Against India

News Excerpt:

The dispute panel of the World Trade Organization (WTO) ruled that India has violated global trade agreements by imposing duties on certain communications and information technology products, and called for India to rectify the situation.

About WTO

- It is the successor to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), established in the wake of the Second World War in 1995.
- It has 164 members, and it accounts for 98% of world trade and works to help trade flow smoothly, freely and predictably.

- The rules and agreements of WTO are the result of negotiations between the members. The current set of rules and regulations are the result of 1986-1994 negotiations (revision of GATT).

The **General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)** was signed in 1947 by 23 countries. It is a treaty minimizing barriers to international trade by eliminating or reducing quotas, tariffs, and subsidies. It was intended to boost economic recovery after World War II.

- The WTO Secretariat is situated in Geneva (Switzerland)
- WTO'S Ministerial Conference is a top decision-making body, it meets every 2 years.
- All members of WTO can decide on all matters under multilateral trade agreements.

Challenges for WTO

- Due to opposition to Judge Appointments, the top officials of WTO are no longer actively functioning.
- WTO has to resolve lots of trade disputes which has come as a major challenge for WTO, where countries are increasingly adopting protectionist measures against the international trading system.`

About the decision

- India's approach to promoting domestic IT manufacturing and reducing its dependence on imports has been challenged by the EU and other countries.
- India's approach has been argued as protectionist and violative of Global Trade Rules.
- The introduction of import duties by India between 7.5% and 20% for IT products such as mobile phones (and its component), and integrated circuits were challenged by the EU (along with Japan and Taiwan) in 2019.
- It was found by WTO Panel that India's tariffs on certain IT products were inconsistent with the terms of the Information Technology Agreement (ITA) and violated global trading rules
- India has been a signatory to the 1996 ITA, which aims to eliminate tariffs on a wide range of IT products.
- The decision has shown that India should align its trade policies with global norms and obligations.
- The decision also highlights the challenges India as a developing Nation is encountering to balance its domestic policy with international trade standards.

Impacts of decision

- At present India has argued that products such as smartphones were non-existent during the time of signing the agreement and it is not bound to eliminate tariffs on such items.
- The ruling will have serious implications between India and EU trade relations and similarly with Japan and Taiwan as the EU is India's third-largest trading partner, accounting for 10.8% of total Indian trade in 2021.

- India's domestic manufacturing sector protected by tariffs will also be impacted.
- India might have to eliminate or minimize import duties challenged by the EU and other countries.

Conclusion

Currently, India can appeal against the ruling over IT tariffs. After appeal the case will be held in Legal Purgatory because of inactive WTO'S top appeals bench. The situation can be challenging if India is seeking to resolve the problem in a transparent and rule-based manner, as Legal Purgatory undermines the effectiveness of the WTO'S dispute settlement mechanism.

India, Brazil, South Africa (IBSA) and Global South

News Excerpt:

The 11th IBSA Trilateral Ministerial Commission Meeting was held on 22 September 2023, in New York. This trilateral alliance brings together India, Brazil, and South Africa—three diverse and democratic nations with shared objectives of promoting South-South cooperation.

About IBSA:

The grouping was formalized and named the IBSA Dialogue Forum when the three countries' Foreign Ministers met in Brasilia on 6 June 2003 and issued the Brasilia Declaration.

- Brazil assumed on March 2, 2023, the rotating presidency of the India, Brazil, South Africa Dialogue Forum - IBSA.
- However, as the grouping completes 20 years in 2023 there have been only 5 summits held till date.
- **Idea Behind IBSA:** These three developing nations shared a common belief that harnessing their collective potential could promote mutual development and champion a just and fair international order.

Summits:

- Five IBSA Leadership Summits have been held so far.
  - The 5th IBSA Summit was held in Pretoria on 18 October 2011.
  - The inaugural IBSA Summit in Brasilia in 2006 marked a pivotal moment, followed by subsequent summits in South Africa, New Delhi, and Brazil.

History of Global South:

- The idea of the Global South was first proposed by Carl Ogelsby, an American writer, in the 70s, which comprises countries primarily located in Asia, Africa, and South America, among others.
- Before that, the terminology used was "First World," "Second World," and "Third World" in the Cold War era.
  - "First World" referred to the Western capitalist democracies,
  - "Second World" to the communist states, and

o "Third World" to the less developed, non-aligned nations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

- However, the main emphasis was based on the division of the economy and economically developed nations, and the same was reflected in the term "Global South".
- The term "Global South" is geographical, reflecting that many of the world's least developed and economically disadvantaged countries are located in the Southern Hemisphere and later it pushed for a new economic order.
- The Brandt Report, led by former West German Chancellor Willy Brandt, published in 1980, was instrumental in popularizing the "Global South."
  o It emphasized the distinction between countries with higher GDP per capita (primarily located in the Northern Hemisphere) and those with lower GDP per capita (predominantly in the Southern Hemisphere).
  o It highlighted the economic disparities between these regions and proposed measures for addressing them.

How India and IBSA are fighting the cause of Global South?

- A central objective of IBSA is to **reform key international institutions** like the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). These reforms aim to ensure a more significant role for developing countries and strengthen the Global South's voices on the global stage.
- Moreover, IBSA actively promotes economic ties among its member states.
- The trilateral partnership seeks to deepen economic integration through initiatives such as the MERCOSUR-SACU-India Trilateral Free Trade Agreement (T-FTA).
- IBSA's impact also extends to regional security and cooperation. The forum has consistently supported the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) as a pivotal African Union socio-economic program, reinforcing their commitment to advancing regional development.

Furthermore, the IBSA Fellowship Programme, launched to facilitate the exchange of scholars for joint research, has contributed to policy inputs that advance the IBSA process.

Challenges:

- All three forum countries face severe challenges and competition from other countries of their respective regions for the leadership role. For instance, India faces challenges from Pakistan, Indonesia and Malaysia; South Africa from Nigeria and Egypt; and Brazil from Argentina and Mexico.
- The forum can grow effectively only if it functions without any hindrances. Several internal issues haunt the three member countries – corruption, increasing crime rates, political violence, economic inequality, etc., which need to be addressed properly by the individual countries for the forum to be successful.

- In addition to the modesty of its joint initiatives, IBSA faces a more fundamental problem of legitimacy. While its members hold themselves out as regional democratic leaders with some capacity to speak on behalf of the Global South, their regional roles are, in fact highly contested.
- Some other challenges are-
  o Producing a Coordinated Plan of Action and a Greater Strategic Focus
  o Achieving a Comprehensive Economic Partnership
    ▪ Trade Facilitation
    ▪ Agriculture Cooperation
    ▪ Other Potential Areas for Future Cooperation: Energy, Manufacturing and Services, R&D, Commodities
  o Expanding the Development Fund
  o Integrating Social Development Strategies

Way forward:

- The grouping should move in due course from being a forum for dialogue to become a vehicle for concrete socio-economic cooperation so that its benefits are shared by the common man as well.
- IBSA should focus on a comprehensive economic and investment agreement free of trade barriers.
- Globalization should be factored into the IBSA equation - all three countries have global companies, and it might be prudent to think of IBSA as a global company and to build cultural diversity within it.

BRICS Expansion

News Excerpt

In the 2023 summit at Johannesburg, South Africa, the five-member BRICS invited six more countries **Iran, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Argentina, Egypt, and Ethiopia** to join the alliance as **permanent members**. Their membership will begin in January 2024.

Background:

- **1st BRIC summit** was held in Yekaterinburg, Russia, on 16 June **2009**. BRIC group was renamed as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) after South Africa was accepted as a full member in 2010.
- BRICS comprise almost 41% of the world population, 25% of the world GDP and 18% share in the world trade.

Significance of the expansion:

- **Voice of Global South:** Adding these new members strengthens the group's heft as a spokesperson for the developing world.
- **Economic significance:**

Metric	Old BRICS	New BRICS
Global exports	18.28%	20.58%
GDP	25.77%	29%
Population	40.9%	46%
Oil production	20.4%	43.1%

- o With the additions, it will represent almost half (~46%) of the world's population and will include three of the **world's biggest oil producers, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Iran.**
- o BRICS share in global exports will increase from 18 % to 21 %.
- **Political significance:** The induction of 4 major Middle East players- Egypt, Iran, UAE, and Saudi Arabia will give BRICS a major boost – as these countries have been at odds with each other.
- **Strategic significance:** The addition of Third World countries furthers India's agenda of developing a multipolar world.

BRICS expansion

- BRICS
- New joiners (as of Jan 2024)

Impulses to join BRICS:

- **Anti-US sentiment-** all these countries are looking for a grouping that is an alternative to West-led institutions.
- **Multipolarity-** BRICS provides a platform where countries of the Global South can express their solidarity.
- The invitation to Iran, whose ties with the West are strained, has a strong China-Russia imprint.
- Saudi Arabia, traditionally a US ally, has been increasingly charting out its own course recently, and the BRICS membership is in line with that.
- Argentina, facing a trying economic crisis, will hope for financial aid from BRICS.

Challenges after expansion in BRICS' functioning:

- Tensions between Middle Eastern countries may make it difficult to develop a consensus on geo-economic and geo-political issues, especially if Saudi-Iran or Saudi-UAE fault lines grow.
- This rapid expansion could dilute the original purpose of the BRICS grouping, especially if China is seen as taking a dominant position in the grouping.
- The sanctions Iran faces might make intra-BRICS trade even more difficult to grow- both Russia and Iran are now off the SWIFT system.

India's concerns regarding expansion:

- India is uncomfortable with BRICS becoming an anti-western grouping, given its close ties with the US and other Western countries, particularly in the strategic sphere.
- The group could become more pro-China and sideline New Delhi's voice and interests.
- As the BRICS, an economic grouping, becomes more strategic and political, India may find its balancing act with the Quad, SCO and IPEF more difficult.

Conclusion:

The growth of BRICS from a grouping of rag-tag as opposed to the more elite and exclusive G7 club is a welcome development that aims to democratise global governance institutions. For India, which still aims to keep its feet in both boats, it is important to ensure that BRICS does not lose its intrinsic value as a forum for emerging economies, into a platform for anti-western statements, as the NAM once did.

Global Biofuels Alliance

News Excerpt

Brazil, India and the United States, as the leading biofuel producers and consumers, will work together towards the development of a Global Biofuels Alliance along with other interested countries.

About:

- The Global Biofuel Alliance (GBA) is an **initiative by India** as the G20 Chair.
- GBA Members constitute major producers and consumers of biofuels, such as the USA (52 per cent), Brazil (30 per cent) and India (3 per cent), contributing about 85 per cent share in production and about 81 per cent in consumption of ethanol.
- The Alliance intends to accelerate the global uptake of biofuels by facilitating technology advancements, and intensifying utilization of sustainable biofuels.
- The alliance will also act as a central repository of knowledge. GBA aims to serve as a catalytic platform, fostering global collaboration for the advancement and widespread adoption of biofuels.

Objectives of the alliance:

Its focus is on accelerated adoption of biofuels, creating new biofuels, setting globally recognized standards, identifying global best practices and ensuring industry participation. The GBA has emphasised that its focus would be to develop 2G ethanol. Nineteen countries and 12 international organisations have already agreed to join the GBA.

Biofuels v/s Sustainable Biofuels:

- Experts have reiterated that biofuels are derived from crops grown specifically to produce biofuels such as sugarcane, corn or soybean and the sustainable biofuels are from agricultural waste, used cooking oil and processed animal residues like fats.
- First one is informally referred to as 1G or first-generation biofuel and the sustainable biofuel as 2G, that is second-generation biofuel.
- This distinction has now come into sharp focus as climate change accelerates, with fears of threat to food security and increased loss of forests and biodiversity due to greater land required for farming.

Factors behind renewed focus on biofuels:

- With severe disruptions to global crude oil supplies following the Ukraine conflict, several countries have been scrambling to find alternatives to the import dependence on petrol and diesel. India, for instance, imports 87% of its crude oil and it is the main reserve currency expenditure for the country.
- With transport accounting for about one-quarter of global carbon emissions, there have been renewed attempts to accelerate the decarbonising of this sector, with several countries announcing battery production and electric vehicle (EV) policies and legacy automakers entering the now thriving EV sector.
- Most biofuels today are blended with petrol or diesel at varying degrees. For instance, India blends about 10% of biofuel and the government has advanced its target to achieve 20% ethanol blending in petrol by 2025-26 from an earlier target of 2030.

Benefits of the initiative:

- It would soften the disruptions, if any to the global crude oil supply market in the future.
- It would also allow countries to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions even while stretching the life of current internal combustion engines, giving time for automakers to develop robust alternatives.
- This will help India become the voice of the global south by getting countries which are still to start their biofuels programme.
- It will provide additional opportunities to Indian industries by exporting technology and equipment.
- It will help accelerate India's existing biofuel programmes such as – PM-JIVANYojna, SATAT and GOBARdhan scheme, thereby contributing to increased farmers' income, creating jobs and overall development of the Indian biofuel eco-system.

Biofuels

The International Energy Agency (IEA) **defines** biofuels as "liquid fuels derived from biomass and used as an alternative to fossil fuel-based fuels such as gasoline, diesel and aviation fuels."

Conclusion:

India, Brazil as well as the United States have already expanded biofuel production and use by designing long-term strategies, implementing the right investment signals, supporting innovation, ensuring supplies are secure and affordable, addressing sustainability concerns early and collaborating with the international community. **Identifying and helping develop markets with high potential for sustainable biofuel production and consumption would be the next right step towards the global energy transition.**

G7 Summit, 2024

News Excerpt:

The Prime Minister of India highlighted India's perspective on the world stage at the G7 Summit in Italy.

India's Participation and Role at the G7 Summit:

- India was one of 12 countries invited to the resort town of **Fasano in Italy's Apulia region.**
- It is part of **Italy's push to involve the Global South with the G7** and India has always brought the issues of the **Global South to the forefront.**
- This is the **11th G7 summit attended by India;** PM Modi attended for the **fifth time in a row.**
- India's regular participation at the G7 summit points to the **increasing recognition of India's efforts** in resolving global challenges, including peace, security, development, and environment preservation.
- India's participation provided an opportunity to follow up on the outcomes of the **G20 summit** held under India's presidency last year and deliberate on issues significant for the **Global South.**

Group of 7 (G7):

- The G7 is an informal grouping of **advanced democracies** that meets annually to coordinate **global economic policy and address other transnational issues.**
- It **was founded in 1975 in response**

to the oil crisis and includes **Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States.**

- **Russia joined in 1998**, forming the G8, but **was excluded in 2014** (following the annexation of Crimea) returning the group to the G7 format.
- Initially focused on **global economic development**, the G7's agenda now encompasses a wide range of global issues, including foreign and security policy, trade, climate, and development.
- The G7 operates **as an informal forum** without a permanent secretariat or formal procedures, with the **presidency rotating annually** among member states.
- The type and topics of these meetings are also determined by the presidency, reflecting the group's flexible and adaptive approach to addressing global challenges.
- **Though the European Union is not a member of the G7, it attends the annual summit.**

New Agreements and Collaborations between India and Italy:

- **Naval Visits:** Later this year, Italy's aircraft carrier ITS Cavour and training ship ITS Vespucci will visit India, strengthening maritime cooperation.
- **Cultural Exchange:** India has committed to upgrading the Yashwant Ghadge Memorial in Montone, Italy, showcasing enhanced cultural ties.
- **Academic Partnership:** The establishment of the **first Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)** chair on India studies at the University of Milan is planned, fostering academic exchanges and deeper understanding between the two nations.

Confederation of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES)

News Excerpt:

Three military-led West African countries **Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger** have finalized plans to form a confederation after turning their backs on **former colonial ruler France to seek closer ties with Russia.**

More about the news:

- The Foreign Ministers of three countries met in **Niger's capital Niamey** to agree on a text to establish the alliance named **L'Alliance des États du Sahel (AES).**
- The three countries in late January decided to quit the **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)**, to create their own regional grouping.

About AES:

- It was established by signing the **Liptako-Gourma Charter**, named after the place where **all three countries' borders intersect.**
- It was established on September 16, 2023, as a **collaborative defence pact** among the three countries

focused on **fostering economic development and political autonomy.**

- It pledges its members to **support one another militarily** should any of them come under attack and also obligates the three nations to **cooperate to end or prevent armed uprisings.**
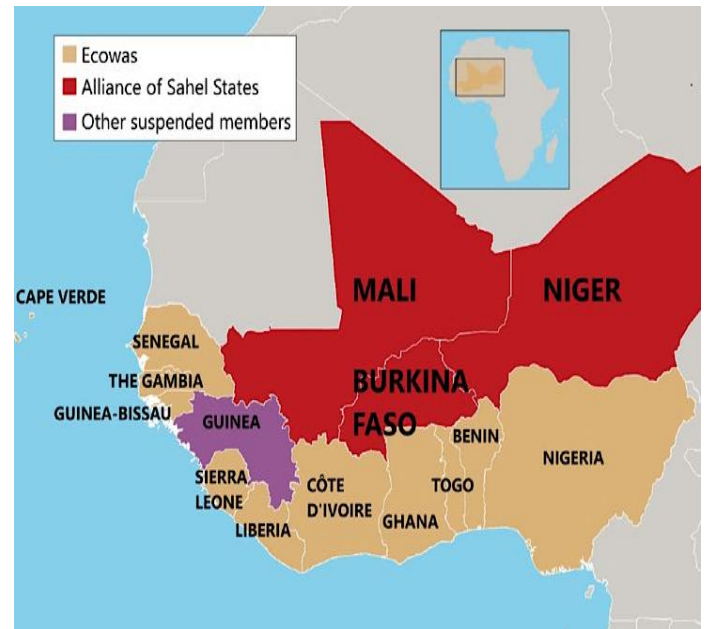
Background of the formation of Alliance:

Series of Political Instability:

- All three countries faced a series of political upheavals with all of them experiencing coups.
- A primary catalyst for the series of coups is the **government's failure to quell rebel insurgencies effectively.** Inadequate equipment and training render military personnel vulnerable to insurgent attacks, leading to significant casualties.
- Persistent issues such as **poverty, inequality, and corruption** contribute to societal unrest, fueling discontentment in the nation.

Impact on Franco-African Relations:

- France's role in the region has been met with **accusations of neo-colonialism,** with critics asserting that France exploits African nations' natural resources without providing commensurate benefits.
- The strained relations **led to France withdrawing its troops** from Burkina Faso and Mali. By December 2023, **French military operations in West Africa ceased entirely,** with the final troop withdrawal from Niger, leading to a diminished French influence.

Conclusion of International Peacekeeping Efforts:

- The cessation of MINUSMA operations and the withdrawal of French troops underscore the precarious state of regional stability in West Africa.
- The **absence of international intervention mechanisms may worsen existing security**

challenges, posing long-term ramifications for the affected countries and the broader region.

> **United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)**
> - **The MINUSMA** was established by the **Security Council in 2013** to support political processes in that country and carry out several **security-related tasks.**
> - The Mission was asked to **support the transitional authorities of Mali** in the stabilization of the country.
> **ECOWAS:**
> - The governments of **fifteen West African Countries** established the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on the **28th of May 1975** in Lagos, Nigeria.
> - The **only Arabic-speaking Member Mauritania withdrew** in December 2000.
> The Community aims to promote cooperation and integration, **leading to the establishment of an economic union in West Africa** to raise the living standards of its people and maintain and enhance economic stability.

Way forward:

The **three landlocked countries** are among the poorest nations in the world. Despite the announcements, **without finance and technical capacity**, it won't be easy for them to build new institution

22nd India-Russia Annual Summit

News Excerpt:

The **Prime Minister of India** visited the **Russian Federation** on **July 8-9, 2024**, for the **22nd India-Russia Annual Summit**.

More about the News:

- During the visit, the Russian President awarded the Indian Prime Minister **Russia's highest civilian honour**, the "**Order of Saint Andrew the Apostle**," for his significant contributions to fostering the **Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership** between India and Russia.
- It was **announced in 2019** (2 years after the Chinese President), but the ceremony occurred in 2024.

Political Relations

- The leaders acknowledged the continuous strengthening

of the **Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership** based on trust, mutual understanding, and strategic alignment.
- **Bilateral engagements**, including during **India's SCO** and **G20 Chairmanships in 2023** and **Russia's BRICS Chairmanship** in 2024, have deepened the partnership across various sectors.

Cooperation at the Level of Foreign Ministries

- They welcomed the **Protocol on Foreign Office Consultations (2024-28)** and regular consultations on **bilateral**, **UN-related**, **counter-terrorism**, consular, and global issues.

Parliamentary Cooperation

- Both sides highlighted the importance of **inter-parliamentary interactions**, emphasizing regular meetings of **Inter-Parliamentary Commissions** and Parliamentary Friendship Groups.
- They valued the visit of the **Speaker of the Russian Federation Council** to New Delhi for the 9th G20 Parliamentary Speakers' Summit in October 2023.

Cooperation Between National Security Councils

- The leaders emphasized **security dialogues** at the **National Security Advisors level**, enhancing strategic understanding and coordination on bilateral, regional, and global issues.

Trade and Economic Partnership

- They noted significant growth in **bilateral trade in 2023**, nearly **doubling the target of USD 30 billion** set for **2025**.
- The new target is to reach **USD 100 billion by 2030**.

INDIA AND RUSSIA'S GROWING TRADE RELATIONSHIP

INDIA-RUSSIA TRADE ROUTES
- SUEZ CANAL ROUTE (existing)
- CHENNAI-VLADIVOSTOK ROUTE (proposed)
- NEW MARITIME ROUTE
- EXISTING ROADS
- RAILROAD NETWORK

Transport and Connectivity

- They agreed to develop stable transport corridors, focusing on projects like the **Chennai-Vladivostok Eastern Maritime Corridor** and the **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC).**
- Cooperation will also promote **connectivity across Eurasia** and enhance shipping via the **Northern Sea Route**.

Civil Nuclear & Space Cooperation

- Highlighting **civil nuclear cooperation**, both sides noted progress at **Kudankulam** and discussed future projects.
- In **space cooperation**, they welcomed collaboration between **ISRO and ROSCOSMOS** in **satellite navigation**, **human spaceflight programs**, and **planetary exploration**.
- They plan to explore cooperation in **rocket engine development**.

Military Cooperation

- Military cooperation remains a cornerstone of the partnership, focusing on **joint research**, **development**, and **production of advanced defence technology**.
- They agreed to promote **joint manufacturing in India** under the **Make-in-India initiative**, including spare parts and components for Russian-origin defence equipment.

Name of MoUs/ Agreement	Objectives
Program of India-Russia cooperation in trade, economic, and investment spheres in the Russian Far East from 2024 to 2029 as well as of cooperation principles in the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation.	To facilitate further increase in **trade and joint investment projects** between the Far East Region of Russia and India.
MoU between the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, India and the Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation on the issues of Climate change and low-carbon development	Establish a Joint Working Group on the issues of climate change and low-carbon development. **Exchange of information / best practices** and co-hosting research to develop low-cost technologies.
MoU between Survey of India and the Federal Service for State Registration, Cadastre and Cartography, Russian Federation	**Exchange of knowledge and experience** in geodesy, cartography, and spatial data infrastructure; professional training and capacity building; cooperation between scientific and educational institutes.
MoU between the National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research, Ministry of Earth Sciences, Government of India, and the Arctic and Antarctic Research Institute on Cooperation in Research and Logistics in polar regions.	**Cooperation in the study of polar environments and their variability** by sharing resources and data; logistics in polar regions; joint research; exchanges of personnel; and participation in international programs and projects in the polar region.
MoU on Cooperation and Collaboration on Broadcasting between Prasar Bharati, India, and ANO "TV-Novosti" (Russia Today TV Channel), Russia.	**Cooperation in the field of broadcasting,** including exchange of programs, personnel, and training.
MoU between the Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of the Republic of India, and Federal State Budgetary Institution "Scientific Centre for Expert Evaluation of Medicinal Products" of the Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation.	To ensure **the availability of high-quality medicines** for human use through the exchange of information and capacity building.
Cooperation Agreement between the Indian International Arbitration Centre and International Commercial Arbitration Court at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Russian Federation	Facilitation of **settlement of civil law disputes of a commercial nature.**
Joint Investment Promotion Framework Agreement between Invest India and JSC "Management Company of Russian Direct Investment Fund"	**Facilitate investment** by Russian companies in the Indian market by promoting and fostering investment cooperation.
MoU between Trade Promotion Council of India and All Russia Public Organization "Business Russia"	**Promotion of bilateral trade and investment**, organizing B2B meetings, business promotion events; and exchange of business delegations.

Way Forward:

- Maintain the momentum of the "**Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership**" by reinforcing institutional links and mechanisms for dialogue.
- Regularly **convene high-level summits** and meetings to review progress and set new goals, with the next **annual summit scheduled in India in 2025.**
- Achieve the $**100 billion bilateral trade** target by 2030 through focused efforts and concrete action plans.
- Execute the **'Programme-2030' action plan** to identify and develop new sectors of economic collaboration.

- Improve **transport connectivity** via projects like the Chennai-Vladivostok Corridor, International North-South Corridor, and Northern Sea Route.
- **Deepen collaboration in energy**, including oil, gas, and renewable energy sectors.
- Increase **cultural cooperation** through festivals, exhibitions, and academic exchanges to promote mutual understanding.
- Continue **working together in the UN** and other multilateral organizations to address global challenges and promote a multipolar world order.

Colombo Security Conclave

News Excerpt:

The Colombo Security Conclave (CSC) officially welcomed **Bangladesh as its fifth member state**.

Colombo Security Conclave (CSC):

- **It is a regional security cooperation framework that originated in 2011 from trilateral meetings** between the National Security Advisors (NSAs) and Deputy NSAs of **India, Maldives, and Sri Lanka.**
- The meetings were briefly **suspended between 2014 and 2020 due to tensions between India and Maldives.**
- **In 2020, the framework was revived, rebranded, and renamed from the "NSA-level Trilateral Meeting" to the "Colombo Security Conclave."**
- A **secretariat** for the group was established in **Colombo** in 2021.
- The CSC **aims to address security concerns in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) with a focus on maritime security, marine pollution response, and search and rescue (SAR) operations.**
- **Members: India, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Mauritius (2022) and Bangladesh (2024)**
- **Observer state: Seychelles**
- The **inclusion of Bangladesh** as a full member highlights the growing importance of regional security collaboration within the CSC framework.

Key Areas of Cooperation

Maritime Safety and Security:

- Access to **India's Long-Range Identification and Tracking (LRIT) Data Centre.**
- Use of the **Merchant Ship Information System (MSIS)** to exchange unclassified information on white shipping.
- **Enhanced Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)** through training and cooperation in SAR operations.
- Strengthening of **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) surveillance** and communication **channels to address illegal maritime activities.**
- **Exercises like 'DOSTI' and tsunami warning coordination.**

Countering Terrorism and Radicalization:

Intelligence sharing against terrorism, radicalization, extremism, illegal drugs, weapons, and human trafficking.

- **Combating Trafficking and Transnational Organized Crime:**

Collaboration on issues such as contraband smuggling, illegal unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing, and irregular human migration (IHM).

- **Cyber Security and Protection of Critical Infrastructure:**
  - Workshops and training programs to develop regional cybersecurity capabilities, including deep/dark web handling, digital forensics, and defensive operations.
- **Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR):**
  - Coordinated efforts to provide humanitarian aid and manage disaster relief operations in the region.

Significance of CSC:

- **Addressing Regional Security Challenges:** By focusing on maritime security, the CSC helps maintain stability in the IOR, which is vital for international trade and shipping.
- **Non-Traditional Security Threats:** The CSC addresses various non-traditional security threats, including piracy, contraband smuggling, IUU fishing, IHM, marine pollution, and climate change impacts.
- **Operational and Policy-Level Cooperation:** The CSC fosters cooperation at both the operational and policy-making levels, involving various government agencies and military coordination.
- **Enhanced Regional Collaboration:** The CSC's small grouping allows for easier agreement on security issues and provides a platform for island and littoral nations to tackle their maritime challenges effectively.
- The CSC's initiatives, such as **virtual workshops, tabletop exercises, and conferences, contribute significantly to building regional capacity and enhancing maritime security**.
  - For example, the CSC's tabletop exercises, like the one organized by the **Indian Coast Guard in Kolkata in March 2023,** are vital for maintaining coordination between the member states' militaries during joint operations.

Way Forward:

- **Institutional Strengthening**: Strengthening the institutional framework of the CSC to enhance coordination and decision-making.
- **Regular Dialogues**: Holding regular high-level dialogues and meetings to discuss emerging security challenges and devise joint strategies.

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- **Research and Innovation**: Promoting joint research and innovation projects in maritime security and other relevant areas.
- **Engagement with External Partners:** Engaging with external partners and organizations to gain additional support and resources for CSC initiatives.

Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Summit Meet 2024

News Excerpt:

The Indian External Affairs Minister attended the meeting of the SCO Council of Heads of State held in **Kazakhstan's capital, Astana**.

More about the News:

- Indian External Affairs Minister held talks with **his counterparts from SCO members Tajikistan, Russia, China, and the newest member Belarus**, on the sidelines of the two-day summit.
- India also **welcomed Belarus** to the SCO as its newest member.

Key outcomes of Summit:

- The key outcome was the signing of the **Astana Declaration**, which underscores the commitment to non-interference in internal affairs and the importance of reforms to strengthen the United Nations (UN).
- According to the **Astana Declaration,** member states underscored the SCO's role in bolstering global peace, security, and stability and shaping a new democratic,

equitable international political and economic order, inviting the global community to join the initiative.

The following decisions have been signed by the Heads of State:

- The declaration also introduced the initiative "**On World Unity for Just Peace, Harmony, and Development**," inviting the global community to join in this effort.
- The **SCO Development Strategy** until 2035, outlining collective contributions in light of Belarus gaining membership status.
  - The cooperation programs to combat terrorism, separatism, and extremism for 2025-2027.
  - The **Anti-Drug Strategy** for the next five years and its corresponding Action Program.
  - Strategies for energy cooperation until 2030.
  - **Economic Development Strategy's Action Plan** until 2030.
  - Resolutions encompassed the Association of Investors, programs for developing cooperation in protected areas and eco-tourism, and mechanisms for financing SCO project activities.
  - **Qingdao City in China** was declared the SCO Tourism and Cultural Capital for 2024-2025.

About Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO):

- Its origins lie in the "**Shanghai Five**", formed in 1996 and consisting of **China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.**
- Building on this, SCO was established on **June 15, 2001,** in Shanghai as an international organization, and Uzbekistan was also included as a sixth member.

SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANISATION (SCO)

- **India and Pakistan joined in 2017,** and **Iran** was admitted as a full member in 2021.
- Before the inclusion of Belarus (Admitted in 2024), it had nine members: **India, Iran, Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan**.
- Afghanistan and Mongolia hold **Observer Status**.
- The **headquarters** of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is located in **Beijing, China.**

Conflict among SCO member

- India and China have locked horns over the border issue.
- State sponsored terrorism and frequent ceasefire violation along with persistent demand by Pakistan of reverting to Article 370 has become a bone of contention between India and Pakistan.
- Several conflicts between Taliban-led Afghanistan and Pakistan which makes the border area of the two countries unstable.
- Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have seen an escalation of conflict between the two countries, as witnessed in September and then again in November 2022, which has been a troubling development for the region.

Significance of SCO for India

- **Nature of SCO**: SCO ensures political stability in Central Asia and enhances intra-regional cooperation. It doesn't use democracy as an instrument to encourage regime change and promote its geopolitical agenda. Despite being a democracy, India is also sceptical about the merits of democracy promotion by Western countries which have proved disastrous, contributing merely to chaos and instability in the region.
- **Neutrality and Strategic Autonomy**: SCO is not a military alliance rather its military exercises are essentially counter-terror drills. This allows India to follow a policy of neutrality and strategic autonomy and keep away from any formal military alliance.
- **No Anti-Americanism**: The SCO does not perceive itself as an anti-American formation. Neither does it intend to create an alternative world order. It endorses the UN Charter and remains committed to the existing institutions and demands reforms of multilateral institutions.
- **Part of Multi-Alignment Strategy**: SCO is a part of India's multi-alignment strategy. It has paved the way for the policy of strategic engagement with pre-eminent powers in the world. It fits completely within the doctrine of plurilateralism, in which India's objective is to engage with all the major players based on its national interest.
- **Pragmatic De-coupling:** The Covid-19 pandemic, made the world realize its dependence on Chinese supply chains. This also prompted India to go for the Atamanirbhar Bharat Campaign. However, India understands that complete decoupling would be utopian and hence it wants to keep engaging with China

and SCO to provide that forum in which diplomacy and dialogue can help resolve India-China differences.

- **Beyond South Asia**: SCO will help India in projecting its global power aspirations in Central Asia. This will push India's status as a significant pan-Asian player, which was earlier restricted to South Asia. It helps India surpasses the physical and psychological barrier created by Pakistan.
- **Connectivity:** SCO allows India to pursue its connectivity and developmental projects in Eurasia. One example is the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) which will become operational soon.
- **Afghanistan Factor**: SCO will allow India to play an active role in Afghanistan. The SCO-CSTO Outreach Summit on Afghanistan is an important initiative for India to increase its presence once again in Afghanistan. It can be used as a regional platform to contribute to peace in Afghanistan.
- **Scope for India-Pakistan engagement:** SCO provides India and Pakistan with a platform for talks. There is an opportunity to discuss a two-way Pakistan-Central Asia connectivity project. If the project gets materialized, the improvement in Indo-Pak relations will emerge as a subset of the rise of Eurasia.

Challenges For India

- **China Challenge**: China is the biggest player in the region, its investment reached $40 billion at the end of 2020. Compared to it, India's trade was estimated to be about $2 billion with Central Asia. With the Ukraine war on, there is growing strategic proximity between Russia and China, it is unlikely that the problems that are confronting India-Russia relations are going to disappear anytime soon.
- **The Pakistan Factor**: The presence of the Pakistan-China alliance in SCO limits India's capability in pushing the issue of terrorism in the SCO. China shields Pakistan so that there is no extra pressure on Pakistan to act on the question of terrorism and this serves its own interests as well.
- The SCO includes member states with different political systems, economic models, and strategic priorities such as CPEC, border infrastructure projects etc., which can lead to internal conflicts and disagreements on issues such as economic cooperation and security.

Way Forward:

- India must use the SCO as a platform for **multilateral diplomacy** to help India in advancing its regional and global interests.
- We must **ensure active participation** in all SCO meetings and initiatives.
- India must take a **leadership role** in areas where it has expertise, such as **IT, pharmaceuticals, and space** technology.

- Partnering with SCO members on **scientific research and innovation projects** will enhance ties.
- Investing in **regional infrastructure projects** that enhance connectivity and trade will be important in the future.

TREATY, CONVENTIONS AND AGREEMENTS

Washington Declaration

News Excerpt:

Recently, the South Korean President visited the U.S. to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the U.S.-South Korea multidimensional 'Iron-clad' alliance. A highlight of the visit was the signing of the "Washington Declaration" as a nuclear deterrence strategy.

Understanding the Washington Declaration:

- The Washington Declaration is a comprehensive approach to nuclear deterrence, emphasizing both offensive and defensive capabilities, along with arms control measures.
- It aims to deter potential adversaries from initiating nuclear aggression by clearly communicating the United States' intent and resolve to respond with overwhelming force, if necessary.
- The strategy is centered on four core pillars: extended deterrence, Strategic Dialogue, Non-proliferation and arms control and Peaceful Resolution.
- **Extended Deterrence:**
  o The Washington Declaration reinforces the United States' commitment to providing extended deterrence to South Korea.
  o It assures Seoul that it will benefit from the full range of U.S. capabilities, including conventional and nuclear forces, in deterring any potential threat to its security.
  o This commitment enhances the credibility of the alliance and sends a clear message to adversaries that aggression will be met with a strong response.
- **Strategic Dialogue:**
  o The declaration emphasizes the importance of maintaining regular strategic dialogue between the United States and South Korea.
  o This facilitates a deeper understanding of the evolving security environment, enhances intelligence sharing, and enables both countries to align their defence policies effectively.
  o Regular consultations and joint exercises contribute to building interoperability and coordination between their armed forces, fostering a robust defence posture.
- **Non-proliferation and Arms Control**:

o The Washington Declaration highlights the shared commitment of both nations to promoting non-proliferation and arms control efforts in the region.
o It underscores the need to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and strengthen the international norms and agreements governing disarmament.
o This mutual commitment helps maintain stability in Northeast Asia and reduces the risk of nuclear proliferation.
- **Peaceful Resolution:**
  o The Washington Declaration reiterates the commitment of the United States and South Korea to pursuing a peaceful resolution of the Korean Peninsula's issues.
  o It supports diplomatic engagement with North Korea to achieve the complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization of the peninsula.
  o This commitment to dialogue and diplomacy is essential in reducing tensions and fostering a more secure and prosperous region.

Relevance in the Current Global Scenario:

The Washington Declaration holds immense relevance in the current global scenario, characterized by emerging security challenges and evolving nuclear dynamics. The strategy addresses the following key factors:

- **Evolving Threat Landscape:**
  o The global security landscape has witnessed the emergence of new threats, such as nuclear proliferation, state-sponsored terrorism, and cyber warfare.
  o The Washington Declaration, with its emphasis on modernization and adaptation, ensures that the U.S. nuclear deterrent remains effective against these evolving threats, safeguarding national and global security interests.
- **Regional Security Concerns:**
  o Many regions around the world face unique security challenges. By extending its nuclear umbrella to allies and partners, the United States reassures them of its commitment to their security.
  o This bolsters stability in regions where tensions might otherwise escalate, promoting peace through deterrence.
  o The US has been intensifying its efforts to restrict such undesirable geo-strategic situations through alliance strengthening and hard military power reinforcement in the region.
  o Initiatives like QUAD, AUKUS and nuclear consultation with Japan and South Korea can be seen in this background.
- **Arms Control and Non-Proliferation:**
  o The Washington Declaration's emphasis on arms control and non-proliferation aligns with global

efforts to reduce nuclear risks and prevent the further spread of nuclear weapons.
- o By engaging in negotiations and dialogue with other nuclear-armed states, the United States plays a crucial role in fostering a cooperative and secure international environment.

Way forward
- **Bilateral Cooperation and Regional Stability:**
  - o The Washington Declaration also paved the way for increased military cooperation and joint exercises between the United States and South Korea.
  - o These joint exercises not only enhance the military readiness and interoperability of the two nations but also serve as a visible demonstration of the alliance's commitment to regional stability and security.
- **Impact on Bilateral Relations:**
  - o The Washington Declaration has had a profound impact on the U.S.-South Korea bilateral relations.
  - o It has solidified the alliance by fostering a shared vision and mutual understanding of security challenges.
  - o The declaration serves as a testament to the enduring partnership between the two nations, leading to increased diplomatic, economic, and cultural ties.

Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF)

News Excerpt
The second Ministerial Meeting of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) was recently held in the United States, highlighting the substantial progress achieved in promoting economic collaboration among partner nations in the Indo-Pacific region.

About IPEF
The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) is a US-led initiative aimed at strengthening economic partnerships among participating countries in the Indo-Pacific region. Its goal is to promote resilience, sustainability, inclusiveness, economic growth, fairness, and competitiveness.

Launch and Members: IPEF was jointly launched by the USA and other partner countries in the Indo-Pacific region on May 23, 2022, in Tokyo. **The participating countries include Australia, Brunei, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, United States, and Vietnam.**

Pillars of IPEF:
Fair and resilient trade (Pillar I):
- Focuses on enhancing trade engagement among IPEF partner countries.
- Aims to promote economic growth, peace, and prosperity in the region.
- India has joined Pillars II to IV of IPEF while having an observer status in Pillar I.

Supply-chain resilience (Pillar II):
- Seeks to make supply chains more resilient, robust, and well-integrated.
- Emphasizes crisis response measures and cooperation to mitigate disruptions.
- Focuses on improving logistics, connectivity, and investments in critical sectors.
- Aims to enhance worker roles through upskilling and reskilling initiatives.

Clean energy, decarbonization and infrastructure (Pillar III):
- Aims to advance cooperation on clean energy and climate-friendly technologies.
- Focuses on research, development, commercialization, and deployment of clean energy.
- Encourages investment in climate-related projects in the Indo-Pacific region.

Taxation and Anti-corruption (Pillar IV):
- Focuses on implementing effective anti-corruption and tax measures.
- Highlights India's strong steps in improving legislative and administrative frameworks to combat corruption.

Outer Space Treaty

News Excerpt
The United Nations (UN) has issued a policy brief titled "For All Humanity — The Future of Outer Space Governance," proposing the creation of a fresh treaty that would guarantee peace, security, and the prevention of an arms race in outer space.

Understanding Outer Space
- Outer space, also known as space or celestial space, encompasses the expansive region beyond Earth's atmosphere and between celestial bodies.
- It is a vacuum that exists beyond the Earth's atmospheric boundaries and extends boundlessly throughout the universe.
- Outer space is distinguished by its remarkably low density and pressure, devoid of air and other atmospheric components.

Key Highlights
- **Increasing Satellite Launches:**
  - o Over the past decade, there has been a remarkable surge in satellite launches, fuelled by participation from both the government and private sectors. The number of new launches increased from 210 in 2013 to 600 in 2019, further rising to 1,200 in 2020 and 2,470 in 2022.
  - o Leading countries such as the United States, China, India, and Japan are at the forefront of space activities, encompassing manned missions, lunar exploration, and resource exploitation.
    - NASA, through its Artemis mission, aims to accomplish the historic feat of landing the first woman and the next man on the Moon.

Out Space Treaty, 1967	Treaties and Principles guiding Outer Space

Out Space Treaty, 1967

- The Outer Space Treaty provides the basic framework on international space law, including the following principles:
- Outer Space is for benefit of all mankind.
- It is free for exploration and use and is not subject to any claim of sovereignty.
- No state can place any from of weapon of mass destruction in orbit or on a celestial bodies.
- All celestial bodies shall be used for peaceful purposes. • Astronauts are envoys of Mankind
- State held ultimate responsibility for its national space activities done by any sector. State are liable for damage caused by their space objects and should avoid harmful
- contamination of space and celestial bodies.
- Treaty act as a foundation of four other treaties which are
    - The "Rescue Agreement" 1968
    - The "Liability Convention" 1972
    - The "Registration Convention 1976
    - The "Moon Agreement" 1984

Treaties and Principles guiding Outer Space

Principles of Space Exploration

- The **"Declaration of Legal Principles"**- Governing
- the Activities of States in the Exploration and Uses of Outer Space
- The **"Broadcasting Principles"**. Governing the Use by States of Artificial Earth Satellites for International Direct Television Broadcasting
- The "Remote Sensing Principles". Relating to Remote Sensing of the Earth from Outer Space
- The **"Nuclear Power Sources Principles"**. Relevant to the Use of Nuclear Power Sources in Outer Space
- The **"Benefits Declaration"**- International Cooperation in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space for the Benefit and in the Interest of All States, Taking into Particular Account the Needs of Developing Countries

Rescue Agreement 1968	Liability Convention 1972	Registration Convention 1976	Moon Agreement 1984

• Based on **Article 5 and 8** of the Outer Space Treaty
 	
• States have to take all possible steps to rescue and assist astronauts in distress and promptly return them to the launching State
 	
• Other State upon request should also provide assistance to launching Bates in recovering space objects that return to Earth outside the territory of the Launching State.
	• Based on the Article 7 of the Outer Space Treaty
	
	• It mandates that State shall be liable to pay for compensation if its space objects cause.
	  • Damage on earth surface
	  • Damage an Aircraft
	  • Damages due to it a faults.
	• It also provides for procedures for the settlement of claims for damages
		• Address the desire of the States for a mechanism that assist in the identification of space objects
		
		• It addresses issues relating to States Parties responsibilities concerning their space object
			• It reaffirms Outer Space Treaty that the Moon and other celestial bodies, should be used exclusively for
			
			• peaceful purposes. It mandates that the UN should be informed of the location and purpose of any station established on Moon
			
			• Moon and its natural resources are the common heritage of mankind and hence its exploitation should be governed by international law.

- **Lack of International Framework:**
  - There is currently an absence of an internationally agreed framework pertaining to space resource exploration, exploitation, and utilization.
  - The policy brief emphasizes the need to establish mechanisms that facilitate the implementation of space resource activities while addressing jurisdiction, control, liability, and responsibility for environmental pollution.
- **Coordination and Space Traffic Management:**
  - The coordination of space traffic is fragmented, with varying standards and practices employed by different national and regional entities.
  - This lack of coordination poses challenges, particularly for countries with limited space capabilities.
- **Space Debris and Environmental Concerns:**
  - The proliferation of space debris is a significant concern, as thousands of objects pose threats to operational spacecraft.
  - The UN highlights the importance of addressing legal considerations related to jurisdiction, control, liability, and responsibility for environmental pollution caused by space debris. Although technology for space debris removal is being developed, the legal aspects require attention.

Way Forward

- **New Treaty for Peace and Security:**
  - The UN recommends negotiating and developing a new treaty to ensure peace, security, and prevent an arms race in outer space.
  - This treaty would establish international norms, rules, and principles to address emerging threats and promote responsible space activities.
- **Coordinated Space Situational Awareness:**
  - Member states are urged to establish an effective framework for coordinating space situational awareness, space object manoeuvres, and space events.
  - Such coordination will enhance the safety and security of space operations.
- **Space Debris Removal Framework:**
  - The UN calls for the development of norms and principles for the removal of space debris, taking into account both legal and scientific aspects.
- **Framework for Sustainable Space Resource Utilization:**
  - An effective framework is recommended for the sustainable exploration, exploitation, and utilization of space resources, particularly on the Moon and other celestial bodies.

Colombo Security Conclave

News Excerpt

A joint expedition of ocean scientists from India, Bangladesh and Mauritius was organised by the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS), Ministry of Earth Sciences under the regional framework of Colombo Security Conclave (CSC).

Agenda of CSC:

In March 2022, the group adopted an agenda of five pillars.

- Maritime safety and security
- Countering terrorism and radicalisation
- Combating trafficking and transnational organised crime
- Cybersecurity and protection of critical infrastructure and technology
- Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

Significance:

- CSC comprises Indian Ocean islands and littoral nations, thereby it has potential to counter China's growing presence and influence in the region.
- The small group provides an opportunity for India to address its own strategic concerns in the Indian Ocean while providing an opportunity for the island and littoral nations to address their own challenges.
- Since July 2021, the CSC's exercises have included on maritime search and rescue; cybersecurity; coastal security; and investigation of terrorism cases.

Challenges:

- If the CSC does expand its membership, it should not duplicate the work of the other Indian Ocean region multilateral groups like IORA, IONS, otherwise it might impact the effectiveness of the limited membership group.
- The group is vulnerable to domestic political changes unless it can better institutionalise itself within the participant's systems.
- With the CSC subsuming the former India-Sri Lanka-Maldives maritime security dialogue, India does not currently hold a regular and dedicated bilateral maritime security dialogue with any of the other five CSC countries.
- CSC lacks 'concrete roadmap', with a 'defined charter of objectives' to institutionalise cooperation.
- India's dominant role in the grouping, which creates sensitivities among some members who do not want the group to be viewed as anti-China, limiting the willingness of the group's smaller nations to cooperate on sensitive security issues.

Conclusion:

Mini-lateral forums like CSC are significant in accentuating India's image as the 'Preferred Security Partner' (PSP) to its maritime neighbours. From an Indian perspective, the growing subregional framework through the CSC is a further example of the importance of the six countries in India's strategic vision for the Indian Ocean.

Teesta River Water Treaty

News Excerpt:

The **Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF)** from **Lhonak Lake** in North Sikkim washed away the 60-meter-high concrete dam of the 1200MW **Teesta-III hydel project** near Chungthang village.

India-Bangladesh Teesta Water Treaty:

The sharing of water of River Teesta has been a subject of contention between the two nations for the last 35 years. Several dialogues and bilateral agreements have taken place but have made limited progress in resolving the issue.

About Teesta River:
- It is a **tributary of Brahmaputra** (known as Jamuna in Bangladesh)
- **Origin:** Glacier Teesta Khangtse (it originates from **Tso Lhamo Lake at the Sikkim Himalayas**)
- **It flows through the States of** Sikkim, and West Bengal and enters Bangladesh.
- **Drains into:** Bay of Bengal
- **Tributaries: Right bank:** Zemu chhu, Rangyong Chhu, Rangit River
- **Left Bank:** Lachung Chhu, Ranikhola, Rangpo Chhu, Chakkung Chhu, Dik Chhu.
- **Length:** It is ~ 414 km long- (~ 150km lie in Sikkim, 123Km lie in West Bengal and 140Km in Bangladesh)
- **India's Catchment Area:** 12,540 square km.
- **Bangladesh's Catchment Area:** 2,750 square Km. It supports roughly 10 million people and 14% of crop production.

Historical Background

1947: Boundary Commission (BC) was set up by **Sir Cyril Radcliff.** The commission allotted a major part of Teesta's catchment area to India.

1971: No significant dialogues took place before the formation of Bangladesh

1972: India- Bangladesh Joint River Commission was set up to discuss sharing the Teesta river water.

1983: An ad hoc agreement was concluded between India and Bangladesh on the amount of water to be shared.

2011: Bangladesh expressed disapproval over the old numbers and demanded a fair and equitable share on the basis of the **Ganga Water Treaty of 1996.** The negotiations went on till 2011. A new deal with renewed allocation was agreed upon that would last for the next 15 years. But, it was opposed by West Bengal. Therefore, the deal remained unsigned.

Importance of Teesta to India and Bangladesh

Importance for Bangladesh:

- According to the 2013 assessment by **the Asian Foundation**, Bangladesh's flood plains cover **14%** of the country's total cultivated area and support the livelihood of **73%** of the country's population.

- Bangladesh has over 230 rivers, out of which 57 are Transboundary and **54 flow through India**, making Bangladesh heavily dependent on India's water supply.

- **According to the Food and Agriculture Organization** of the United Nations (FAO), the ratio of Bangladesh's external dependency for water is over 90 percent.

- **Rangpur Region**, known as the **"Rice Bowl of Bangladesh"**, is a major paddy-growing region that requires a large amount of water for its cultivation.

International Rules on equitable sharing of water:

Helsinki Water Rules, 1966
- **Article IV** states the issue of equitable utilization of the waters of an international drainage basin.
- "Each Basin State in its territory has a reasonable and equitable share in the beneficial uses of the waters of an international drainage basin".
- The Helsinki Rules were limited to international drainage basins and connected groundwater sources.

Berlin Water Rules, 2004
- Superseded the Helsinki Rules
- Importance to appropriate management of 'all freshwater sources' within the nations; climate-related issues; minimization of environmental harm.
- Aimed to meet vital human needs, and the individual's right of access to adequate safe drinking water, among others.

Importance for India (West Bengal):

- Teesta, the second largest river in West Bengal, is its lifeline. It is an important source for agriculture and hydropower generation in the region. It supports the water demands of over 6 districts. It supports the livelihood of thousands of farmers and fishermen and has a presence of rich flora and fauna.

Current Status of the dispute:

As an upper riparian state, India has the advantage of releasing water as per its needs. Therefore, it releases water during surplus. There is a drastic reduction of water in the dry season, which remains a contention between the two nations.

India's Stand

- West Bengal claims that due to climate change the water volume of Teesta has receded below 100 cumec which is highly inadequate for the irrigation and the water requirements for the people of Bengal.

- The agreement will dry up the Northern part of Bengal, which will hurt the farmers and the state's economy as West Bengal is a largely agrarian state.

- West Bengal's seeks to irrigate 9,22,000 hectares replacing the earlier 58,000 hectares. This will be hampered if any water is shared from Teesta.
- **Alternate solution:** West Bengal proposed sharing the water of **River Torso** which is also closer to Bangladesh.

Bangladesh's Stand:

- Teesta River has a catchment area of **~2700 square km** and supports the livelihood of **~10 million people.**
- Therefore, Bangladesh has demanded a **50-50% basis** of water sharing. Bangladesh, being a lower riparian state, has argued for a just and equitable framework.

Associated Concerns on The Teesta Water Sharing:
Political:
Increasing Closeness of Bangladesh and China: Bangladesh and China entered into **a $1 billion project** to restore and manage river Teesta. This project is designed to effectively manage the water crisis during the dry months.

- **Irritant in the bilateral relation:** The opposing stands by both nations have led to a deadlock in resolving the issue, which may hamper achieving India's objective of **Neighbourhood First Policy, Act East Policy.**

Economic:

- **Impact on Agriculture and livelihood:** Drastic water reduction during the lean seasons and water diversion by **Gajoldoba Barrage** threaten food security and rural livelihood.
- **Cultivation of water-intensive crops:** Paddy cultivation or Boro has significantly increased on both sides of North Bengal and Northwest Bangladesh. It is highly water-intensive and demands more water.

Environmental:

- **Floods:** Severe fluctuations in river flow cause massive floods at unexpected times, destroying life and property. For instance, Opening the vents of the Gajolbonda barrage.
- **Destabilization of Bangladesh's rivers:** Bangladesh's rivers are becoming shallower and wider due to the drastic reduction of water in the dry season. Excessively high volumes in the monsoon season are leading to destabilization of the rivers.

Disaster Related:

- **Flash floods:** Occurred in **north Sikkim** after the **South Lhonak Lake** burst due to continuous rains. The high storage volume in the **Teesta-III dam's reservoir** and the failure to open its spillways are two key factors to be the probable triggers that exacerbated the **GLOF's impact**.
- **Seismically active zone:** it lies in the **seismically active zone V,** Hydroelectricity projects across the river makes it environmentally hazardous.

Way forward:

With climate change and changing variables, both nations must ensure scientific assessment based on data and seasonal precipitation, to determine a fair and equitable water-sharing formula. Moreover, all the stakeholders must be involved to arrive at an acceptable domestic solution and cross-border peace.

India-Peru Trade Agreement

News Excerpt:

Recently, A **Special Round of negotiations** for the India - Peru Trade Agreement was held virtually on 10-11th October 2023.

Key points:

- Discussions were focused on various chapters, including **Initial Provisions and General Definitions, Rules of Origin, Trade in Goods, Customs Procedures and Trade Facilitation, Technical Barriers to Trade, Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, General and Security Exceptions, Cooperation and Legal and Institutional Issues/Dispute Settlement** during this special round.
- Discussions on **Services, Movement of Natural Persons, Trade Remedies and Investment chapter** will be held later in the month based on mutual convenience of the negotiators.
- Negotiations for the India-Peru Trade Agreement commenced in **2017**, and the fifth round was concluded in **August 2019.** On account of Covid, the negotiations came to a pause. The Trade Agreement is anticipated to significantly boost trade and investment and enhance cooperation in various sectors. **The sixth round is slated to be held in December, 2023 at Lima in Peru.**

India-Peru trade Relationship:

- Trade between India and Peru is growing, with trade crossing the **US $1 billion mark in 2011-12 and the US$3 billion mark in 2017-18.**

INDIA- PERU RELATIONS	- India established diplomatic relations with Peru in March 1963. - Since early 2000s, the relationship has acquired more economic and business content leading to a Joint Study on Feasibility of a Trade Agreement. - Many bilateral agreements have been signed by the two sides over the years, covering a wide range of areas. Some of the more recent ones include Customs Cooperation Agreement, Cooperation in New and Renewable Energy, Defence Cooperation Agreement, Establishment of a Joint Commission, Educational Exchange Programme, and MoU on Cooperation in Geology and Mineral Resources. - The size of the Indian community in Peru is small, numbering around 450, including PIOs, mainly engaged in business and trade.

o The total trade between two countries in the Financial Year 2020-21 was **US$2,285.57 million, of which India's exports were worth US$764.69 million and imports from Peru were US$1,520.88 million.**

• India and Peru have been experiencing steady growth in their trade relationship. During **FY 2022-23, the bilateral trade volume reached $3.12 billion.**

• India exported **goods worth $ 865.91 million** to Peru and imported **goods valued at $ 2.25 billion from Peru.**

• Key Indian exports to Peru include **motor vehicles/cars, cotton yarn and pharmaceuticals**, while Peru primarily exports **gold, copper ores and concentrates.**

India-Italy Defence Cooperation Agreement

News Excerpt:

Recently, India and Italy **signed an agreement on cooperation** to promote engagement in various **defence domains**. This was concluded after the bilateral talks between the Defence Minister of India and his Italian counterpart in Rome.

Key points:

• During the meeting, both sides discussed **various defence cooperation issues,** including **training, sharing of information, maritime exercises and maritime security.**

• Both Ministers discussed the **complementary capacities of India and Italy in defence and the possibilities of joint development.**

• The Defence Minister of India suggested fostering the interaction of the **Indian start-ups with the Italian defence companies.**

India – Italy Relations

Political relations between India and Italy were established in 1947. The two countries enjoy cordial relationship.

Italy is among India's top 5 trading partners in the EU. The balance of trade has been in India's favour since the early eighties.

The bilateral trade between India and Italy registered at Euro 14.88 billion in 2022. The exports from India to Italy reached Euro 10.06 billion, an increase of 60.50% compared to the previous year 2021.

The Indian community in Italy (estimated at 2.5 lakhs including PIOs) is the third largest community of Indians in Europe after UK and the Netherlands.

The agreement for cultural cooperation was signed in 1976. It was replaced by a new Agreement in July 2004. An Executive Programme for Cultural Cooperation/Cultural Exchange Programme (EPCC/CEP) is signed periodically, under the bilateral cultural agreement.

• The relationship between India and Italy was elevated to a Strategic Partnership in March 2023 during the visit of the Italian Prime Minister to India.

India-USA '2+2' Ministerial dialogue

News Excerpt:

Recently, the Indian Defence Minister and External Affairs Minister met their counterparts from the US government, Defence Secretary and Secretary of State, respectively, for the fifth 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue held in New Delhi.

Key points of Dialogue:

• India and the US are exploring **new educational exchanges, steps to facilitate travel between the two countries and ways to reduce visa wait times.**

○ In addition, the two are fostering **innovation through collaboration in semiconductors, advanced biotechnology, sustainable energy, and space.**

• The 2+2 Dialogue undertook a comprehensive review of **bilateral relations and discussed multiple partnerships in trade and investment, technology, and critical and emerging technologies.**

• Value and supply chain securitisation of various products and services, partnership in **space, engagement in mineral securities, and joint efforts in combating terrorism** were included in the principals' earlier 2+2 dialogue overview of bilateral relationships.

• Both countries discussed a **tie-up in the semiconductors field** as this area is very important for the future and has made strong achievements in the last 4-5 months.

About '2+2' Ministerial dialogue:

• The 2+2 meetings signify the participation of two high-level representatives, Ministers holding Foreign and Defence portfolios, from each of the two countries who aim to enhance the scope of dialogue between them.

• This mechanism enables the partners to understand and appreciate each other's strategic concerns and sensitivities, taking into account political factors on both sides, to build a stronger, more integrated strategic relationship in a rapidly changing global environment.

India's 2+2 Dialogue Partners:

• The **US is India's oldest and most important 2+2 dialogue partner**.

○ The **first 2+2 dialogue** between the two countries was held during the Trump Administration in New Delhi in **September 2018.**

○ It was also seen as a replacement for the Strategic and Commercial Dialogue held

between the foreign and commerce ministers of the two countries during the **previous Obama administration.**

○ The launch of the dialogue was seen as a **"reflection of the shared commitment"** by India and the US to provide **"a positive, forward-looking vision for the India-US strategic partnership and to promote synergy in their diplomatic and security efforts".**

● Additionally, India has held 2+2 meetings with ministers from **Australia, Japan, the United Kingdom and Russia.**

● The talks with **Japan** via this platform began **in 2019, aiming to "further enhance the strategic depth of bilateral security and defence cooperation".**

● The inaugural edition of the India-Russia 2+2 dialogue was held in 2021.

● The same year, **2+2 dialogue with Australia also began. In October 2023, the first such meeting with the UK took place.**

Defence and strategic agreements under 2+2:

● Over the years, the strategic bilateral relationship with its partners, including the dialogues held in the 2+2 format, has produced tangible and far-reaching results for India.

● India and the US have signed a troika of **"foundational pacts"** for **deep military cooperation**, beginning with the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement **(LEMOA) in 2016,** followed by the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement **(COMCASA)** after the **first 2+2 dialogue in 2018,** and then the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement **(BECA) in 2020.**

Significance of 2+2 Dialogue:

● The strengthening of cooperation mechanisms between the two militaries is important in the context of an increasingly aggressive China, which threatens many countries in its neighbourhood and beyond and has challenged several established norms and aspects of international relations.

● Another example is establishing the mechanism with **Japan,** which is also cautious of China's role.

● However, India also talks to Russia through 2+2 dialogues, **considering its security and energy interests and the countries' historical depth of relations.**

Way Forward:

The 2+2 dialogue has strategic and economic importance. At present, when the world system is changing, and new issues are emerging in various fields, such dialogues become even more important.

India and Brazil '2+2'

News Excerpt:

India and Brazil explored ways to expand cooperation in **energy, critical minerals, technology, and counter-terrorism** at their first '2+2' Defence and Foreign ministerial dialogue.

About 2+2 Dialogue:

● The 2+2 meetings involve the attendance of two prominent ministers or secretaries from the Defence and Foreign Affairs sectors of both nations, intending to enhance dialogue between them.

● This framework enables partners to gain deeper insights into each other's strategic priorities, fostering a stronger and more cohesive strategic partnership.

India-Brazil Relations:

● **Bilateral Relations & Partnership:** India and Brazil both belong to various plurilateral forums, such as **BRICS, BASIC, G-20, G-4, IBSA, and the International Solar Alliance.** They also frequently collaborate within larger multilateral bodies like the UN, WTO, UNESCO, and WIPO.

● **Historical Roots:** Between the 16th and 18th centuries**, Brazil and Goa,** both outposts of the Portuguese imperialist empire, had bilateral exchanges that are reflected in food and dressing as well as local traditions. Another remarkable but relatively unknown facet of India-Brazil bilateral relations is that the bulk of Brazilian cattle are of Indian origin. More recently, the popularity of a Brazilian telenovella called 'Caminho das Indias' (Paths of India) has had a great impact on enhancing awareness of India in the minds of the Brazilian public.

● **Diplomatic Relations:** Diplomatic relations were established in 1948, with both countries opening embassies in the same year. India has a Consulate General in Sao Paulo, while Brazil has one in Mumbai. India opened its embassy in Rio de Janeiro in 1948, later moving it to Brasilia in 1971.

Why Brazil is Important to us?

Strategically significant for India: Due to its **abundant natural resources and expanding markets,** Brazil offers substantial opportunities for collaboration across diverse sectors.

Critical supplier of minerals and hydrocarbons:
Brazil, particularly in crude petroleum oil, plays a vital role in supporting India's economic growth trajectory.

Largest economy in Latin America:
Brazil is an attractive destination for Indian investors and businesses, fostering bilateral economic engagement.

Both influential players in the Global South,
India and Brazil collaborate closely on various global issues within multilateral forums, advocating for the interests of developing nations and promoting multilateralism.

Areas of Cooperation between India and Brazil:

- **Institutional Mechanisms:** As strategic partners, India and Brazil maintain several institutional mechanisms to facilitate coordination across different facets of their bilateral relationship, including strategic dialogue, trade monitoring, defence cooperation, and joint committees on science and technology.

- **Trade and Investment:** The bilateral trade between India and Brazil has witnessed substantial growth, with India emerging as Brazil's fifth-largest trading partner in 2021. Major exports from India include agrochemicals, synthetic yarns, and auto components, while Brazil exports crude oil, gold, and vegetable oil to India. Investments between the two countries span various sectors, such as automobiles, IT, mining, energy, biofuels, and footwear, reflecting the diversification and depth of their economic collaboration.

- **Defence and Security Cooperation:** India and Brazil signed a defence cooperation agreement in 2003, institutionalizing mechanisms like the Joint Defence Committee to enhance collaboration in defence and security. The two nations also engage in strategic dialogue, addressing regional and global challenges of mutual concern, with recent agreements focusing on cybersecurity cooperation.

- **Cooperation in Biofuels, Oil & Gas:** With Brazil boasting significant crude oil reserves, the collaboration between India and Brazil extends to the energy sector, particularly in biofuels and oil & gas. Efforts to increase the blending percentage of biofuels with petrol and diesel align with the shared objectives of both countries' national policies, facilitating cooperation in this critical area.

- **Science and Technology:** Cooperation between India and Brazil in science and technology spans space exploration, satellite monitoring, and agricultural research, facilitating knowledge exchange and capacity-building initiatives.

- **Cultural Relations:** Cultural exchanges between India and Brazil, supported by initiatives like the Cultural

- Exchange Programme, foster mutual understanding and appreciation for each other's heritage, with yoga and Ayurveda gaining popularity in Brazil.

- **Challenges in the Bilateral Relationship between India and Brazil:** Despite the growing partnership, challenges persist, including trade competition in agricultural products, concerns over sugarcane subsidies, limited people-to-people contacts, and the influence of China in the region.

Way Forward:

The diplomatic relationship between India and Brazil, reaching its 75th year in 2023, has undergone significant evolution.

> India currently holds the 2+2 dialogue with the **USA, UK, Russia, Japan, and Australia.**

Nevertheless, like any relationship, challenges persist, serving as opportunities for strengthening bonds. To bolster their partnership, India and Brazil must explore new avenues for collaboration, tackle trade obstacles, foster cultural exchanges and interpersonal connections, improve energy cooperation, and increase involvement in multilateral platforms.

India signs a trade agreement with EFTA

News Excerpt:

India and the European Free Trade Association, comprising **Norway, Switzerland, Iceland, and Liechtenstein**, signed a free trade agreement in March 2024.
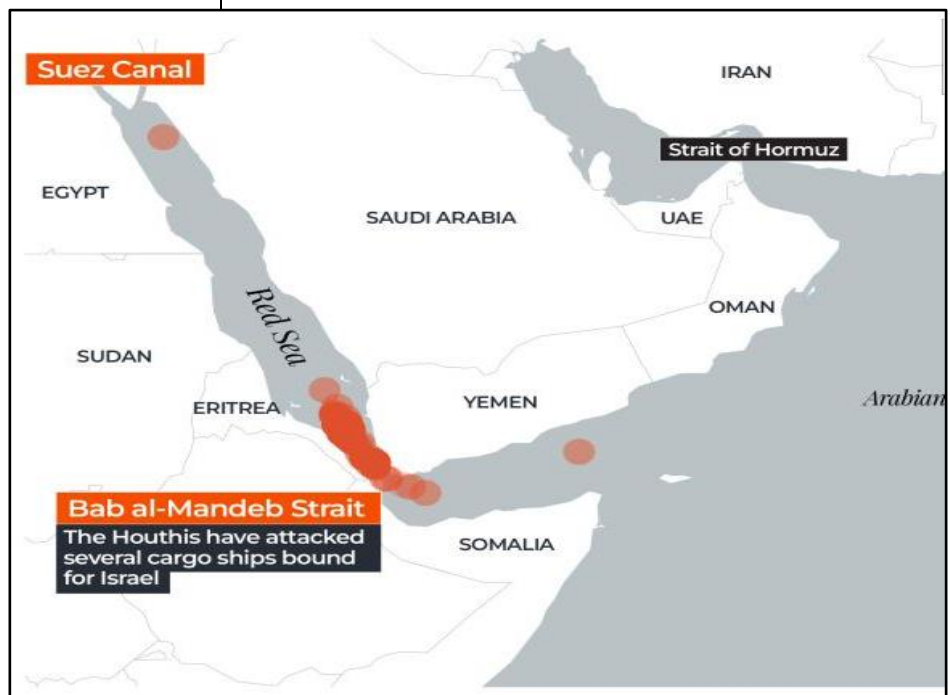
Key Highlights of the Agreement:

The agreement, officially called the **Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA)**, aims to encourage investments and enhance trade in goods and services between India and the EFTA nations.

- The **agreement consists of 14 chapters** covering various aspects such as trade in goods, rules of origin, trade in services, investment promotion, intellectual property rights (IPRs), and more.

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- This is **India's fourth such agreement since 2014**, with previous agreements signed with Mauritius, the UAE, and Australia.
- EFTA countries have committed to **investing $100 billion in India** over the next 15 years, reflecting the potential for economic growth and job creation.
- Negotiations for the agreement began in 2008, with 13 rounds of talks held until 2013. After a hiatus, negotiations resumed in October 2023 and concluded swiftly.
- The two-way trade between India and EFTA countries was $18.65 billion in 2022-23, **with Switzerland being India's largest trading partner in the EFTA bloc, followed by Norway.**

The European Free Trade Association (EFTA)

- The European Free Trade Association (EFTA) is an intergovernmental organization set up for the promotion of **free trade and economic integration to the benefit of its four Member States – Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland** – and the benefit of their trading partners around the globe.
- EFTA was founded by the **Stockholm Convention in 1960.**
- Since the beginning of the 1990s, EFTA has actively pursued trade relations with third countries in and beyond Europe.
- In 2021, EFTA was the **tenth-largest trader in the world in merchandise trade and the eighth-largest in trade in services.** EFTA is also among the most important trading partners in goods and services for the EU. **EFTA's budget is prepared in two currencies: Swiss francs (CHF) and euros (EUR).**
- In 2022, the combined EFTA-India merchandise trade surpassed USD 6.1 billion. **The primary imports to the EFTA States consisted of organic chemicals (27.5%), while machinery (17.5%) and pharmaceutical products (11.4%), excluding gold, constituted the main exports to India.** Furthermore, services trade and foreign direct investment have also reached substantial levels.

The timing of India signing the trade agreement with the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) is crucial for several reasons:

- **Election Year Concerns:** Over 64 countries, including India, are heading into elections this year. This could lead to a pause in free trade agreements (FTAs) as political priorities shift during election periods.
- **Global Supply Chain Shift:** There's a significant shift in global investment away from China, presenting an opportunity for countries like India to attract investment. The signing of the agreement allows India to capitalize on this shift.
- **Competition from Other Nations:** Vietnam-led Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) nations and North American countries like Mexico are also emerging as favourable investment destinations. India needs to act swiftly to compete with these countries for investment.
- **Geo-political Opportunity:** Delaying integration into global supply chains could result in missed opportunities for India to establish itself as a key player in the global economy.

India pushed for investment commitment in the EFTA deal due to several reasons:

- **Trade Deficit Concerns:** India runs trade deficits with most of its major trading partners. Past FTAs, especially with ASEAN nations, have widened India's trade gap. India sought investment commitments to balance this trade deficit.
- **Tariff Disparities:** India's average tariffs are higher compared to developed nations, making it easier for FTA partners to access the Indian market. The investment commitment could help offset some of these disparities.
- **Services Sector Potential:** India stands to gain in the services sector, which is a significant contributor to its economy. The deal could further boost this sector.
- **Beneficiary Sectors:** Sectors in India that could benefit from EFTA investment include pharma, chemicals, food processing, and engineering. Investments from EFTA, particularly Norway's sovereign wealth fund, could help India diversify its imports away from China.

Accessing the EFTA market might pose challenges for India:

- **Tariff Elimination:** Switzerland, India's biggest trade partner in the EFTA, has eliminated import duties on all industrial goods. This could lead to stiffer competition for Indian goods in the Swiss market.
- **Agricultural Trade Barriers:** EFTA has not shown a willingness to eliminate tariffs on basic agricultural produce, making it challenging for India to export agricultural products to EFTA countries. Complex tariffs, quality standards, and approval requirements further complicate agricultural exports to Switzerland.
- **Non-Tariff Barriers:** Besides tariffs, non-tariff barriers such as complex regulations, standards, and certification requirements can hinder trade. India needs to engage in dialogue with EFTA countries to streamline regulations and ensure compliance with international standards.
- **Competitive Market:** EFTA countries have well-developed industries and strong competition. Indian businesses may face challenges in penetrating these markets. To overcome this, India could focus on niche markets where it has a competitive advantage, such as technology services, pharmaceuticals, and specialized manufacturing.
- **Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) Protection:** One of the key issues in IPR was data exclusivity, which could impact the generic medicine sector. Hence, India needs

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to strengthen its legal framework and enforcement mechanisms to provide adequate protection to intellectual property rights holders.

India's G20 Task Force on Digital Public Infrastructure

News Excerpt:

The final 'Report of India's G20 Task Force on Digital Public Infrastructure' by 'India's G20 Task Force on Digital Public Infrastructure for Economic Transformation, Financial Inclusion and Development' was released in New Delhi.

> **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI):**
>
> It refers to a set of digital technologies, platforms, and systems that are developed and deployed to provide essential services to the public.
>
> - DPI consists of **shared digital systems**, usually created through public-private partnerships, that form the underlying foundation for delivering services efficiently and at scale.
> - **Key components:** Typically include **digital identity systems**, payment interfaces, data exchange platforms, and other foundational digital systems.
> - **India's Outcomes From DPI:**
>   - India has achieved **remarkable digital progress over the last decade by implementing DPI** - a unique approach to digital projects tailored to India's context.
>   - This progress was made possible by India's world class digital public infrastructure for financial inclusion, including: UPI, AADHAAR, e-KYC etc.

About the Task Force:

- The task force is named **'India's G20 Task Force on Digital Public Infrastructure for Economic Transformation, Financial Inclusion and Development'.**
- The task force was established in **January 2023** to oversee and facilitate achieving **India's G20 Presidency** agenda and priorities on **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) and Financial Inclusion.**
- The Task Force looked at ways G20 member countries can boost productivity by adopting digital technology and DPI across sectors, as well as helping the government with digital economy policies and regulations.
- **Co-Chairs of the Task Force are:**
  - **Amitabh Kant** (G20 Sherpa of India)
  - **Nandan Nilekani** (Co-founder and Chairman of Infosys and Founding Chairman of UIDAI (Aadhaar))

Report of India's G20 Task Force on DPI:
The report is divided into three main parts:

- **Part 1:** Introduces the DPI Approach as a **transformative paradigm** for addressing global challenges through innovative technological solutions.
- **Part 2:** Examine India's DPI agenda during its 2023 G20 Presidency, **focusing on initiatives** within the Global Partnership for Financial Inclusion (GPFI) and Digital Economy Working Group (DEWG).
- **Part 3:** Presents a forward-looking strategy outlining a **strategic blueprint** for elevating DPI across various sectors, as well as on a global scale, through a range of its policy recommendations.

Key Highlights of the Report:

- The report emphasizes the **need to identify an existing global body** with a multinational **presence** to foster **DPI ecosystems,** particularly in **Global South** countries.
- It recognizes that **many countries are exploring ways** to develop national digital infrastructure to:
  - Accelerate economic progress
  - Drastically improve public services
  - Build trust between people and institutions
  - Enhance transparency
  - Reduce distance between citizens and services
- The report aims to **guide the future development and implementation of DPI approaches worldwide, with a particular focus on the Global South.**

Global Responsibility of India in DPI:

- India needs to identify an existing body to **harness the DPI ecosystem** across various regions and countries, especially in the Global South.
- This body should be **of global standard with multinational presence**, capable of working on policy dimensions, formulation, and implementation of strategies with appropriate technical and academic expertise.

Globalization of UPI:

- The **Reserve Bank of India is actively engaging** with various Indian Missions abroad to globalize UPI payment rails.
- The **National Payment Corporation of India's** (NPCI) international arm has reached out to over 80 countries for "UPI globalization" and has executed agreements with more than 20 payment partners covering over 30 countries.

AI Integration with DPI:

- The report suggests **integrating artificial intelligence (AI) with DPIs to amplify** their capabilities. However, it cautions that such integration should be done with guardrails of **ethical use of AI and data privacy**. The report proposes a DPI approach to AI growth, including:
  - Publication of open datasets via open API to train AI/ML models
  - Creation of reusable AI toolkits
  - Publication of open models to drive market innovation in AI

Innovation and Scalability:

- The report emphasizes that **open-source software**, AI models, standards, or content that are publicly available **can be replicated**, modified, and shared freely.

- This approach encourages **innovation and scalability** in DPI by promoting the entry of private players in the technology industry.

Way Forward:

- To maximize the effectiveness of DPI outreach efforts, a **comprehensive and phased approach** could be encouraged.
- **Identification of the countries** with interest and need in adopting the DPI, outlining a **customized sovereign DPI design** and architecture, arranging for funds and engaging systems integrators are necessary steps to address any country specific DPI requirements.
- India must participate **actively in global standards setting bodies** to shape global standards.

CONFLICTS AROUND THE WORLD

India and UN Peacekeeping Forces

News Excerpt

Recently, Indian Army observed the 75th International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers. On the occasion, India announced plans to conduct two initiatives in 2023 aimed at training women personnel from South East Asia, as part of their collaboration with ASEAN in the defence sector.

About UN Peacekeeping

- UN Peacekeeping is a vital tool utilized by the United Nations to facilitate the transition from conflict to peace in countries.
- It involves deploying military, police, and civilian personnel to regions affected by conflicts or political instability.
- The primary objective is to foster peace and security, protect civilians, and assist in restoring stable governance structures.
- UN Peacekeeping brings together various entities, including the UN General Assembly, UN Security Council, Secretariat, troop and police contributors, and host governments, to collectively work towards international peace and security.

Mandates:

- UN Peacekeeping mandates vary from operation to operation, but typically encompass the following elements:
- Monitoring ceasefires, peace agreements, and security arrangements.
- Protecting civilians, particularly those at risk of harm.
- Facilitating political dialogue, reconciliation, and supporting elections.
- Establishing rule of law, security institutions, and promoting human rights.
- Delivering humanitarian aid, supporting refugee reintegration, and promoting environmental sustainability.

Principles:

- **Consent of the Parties:** Peacekeeping operations require the consent of the main parties involved in the conflict. Without consent, a peacekeeping operation risks becoming involved in the conflict and deviating from its peacekeeping role.
- **Impartiality:** Peacekeepers must maintain impartiality in their interactions with the conflict parties. Impartiality does not imply neutrality; peacekeepers actively carry out their mandate and uphold international norms.
- **Non-use of Force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate:** Peacekeeping operations should refrain from using force, except when necessary for self-defence and protection of their mandate. "Robust" peacekeeping allows the use of force with Security Council authorization and consent from the host nation and involved parties.

India's Contributions in UN Peacekeeping

Troop Contribution:

- India has a notable history of contributing to UN Peacekeeping operations as one of the largest troop-contributing countries.
- They have deployed soldiers, medical personnel, and engineers to various peacekeeping missions worldwide.
- India has contributed around 275,000 troops to peacekeeping missions thus far.

Casualties: Indian Army soldiers have made significant sacrifices while serving in UN Peacekeeping Missions, with 179 soldiers losing their lives in the line of duty.

Training and Infrastructure:

- The Indian Army has established the Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping (CUNPK) in New Delhi.
- This center provides specialized training for over 12,000 troops annually in peacekeeping operations.
- CUNPK hosts national and international courses for potential peacekeepers and trainers, playing a vital role in sharing best practices and enhancing the capacity of peacekeepers.

Women in Peacekeeping:

- India has taken proactive measures to promote gender equality in peacekeeping operations.
- They have deployed Female Engagement Teams in the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei, which constitutes the second-largest women contingent after Liberia.
- India has also deployed Women Military Police in the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force, as well as women staff officers and military observers in various missions.

Conflicts in West Asia

News Excerpt:

The military confrontation which started between Israel and Hamas has **snowballed into a regional security crisis. Hezbollah, Kataib Hezbollah, Hashad al-Shabi, Houthis, Iran, Pakistan and the United States** are all now part of an **expanding conflict theatre.**

How has the Israel-Hamas war spilled over?

- When Israel launched its war on Gaza, **Hezbollah (the Lebanese Shia group)** that Iran backs fired rockets at Israeli forces in the Shebaa Farms, an Israeli-controlled territory that Lebanon claims as its own, **in solidarity with the Palestinians.**
- **Arab countries,** too, were **upset with Israel's indiscriminate bombing** and stuck to the path of diplomacy **to put pressure on the Jewish state.**
  - **Iran-backed militias** also opened new fronts against Israel.
- **Houthis, the Shia militias of Yemen,** started **attacking commercial vessels** in the **Red Sea** in mid-November 2023 in **"solidarity with the Palestinians."**
  - Houthis, who control much of Yemen, including its Red Sea coast, have **used sea denial tactics to target dozens of ships ever since.**
  - They **forced several shipping giants to suspend operations in the Red Sea**, which connects the Mediterranean Sea with the Arabian Sea (and the Indian Ocean) through the Suez Canal and the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait.
- When Houthi attacks imperilled the Red Sea traffic, the **U.S.,** which continues to support Israel's war on Gaza, **started carrying out airstrikes in Yemen, targeting Houthi positions.**
- **Hashad al-Shabi, the Shia Mobilisation Forces of Iraq and Syria**, which Iran also backs, launched more than 100 **attacks against U.S. troops** deployed in the two countries.

- In retaliation, the **U.S. carried out attacks in Syria and killed a commander of Hashad al-Shabi in a hit in Baghdad,** which led to protests in Iraq.
- **Israel** has carried out **multiple strikes inside Syria and Lebanon,** killing Hamas, Hezbollah and Iranian commanders.
- **Iran** carried out **strikes** on January 16 in **Iraq's Kurdistan, Syria and Pakistan, claiming to have hit a Mossad operational centre and Sunni Islamist militants.**
- In retaliation, Pakistan carried out air strikes on Iran on January 18.

Key players of the West Asia conflict:

- There are **three major operational centres** - **Israel, Iran and the U.S.**
- **Israel says** it has the right to **attack Gaza until** it meets its **objectives - dismantling Hamas and releasing hostages.**
- **Iran** is the **main backer of all anti-Israel non-state actors in West Asia**, be it Hamas, the Islamic Jihad, Hezbollah, Houthis or the Shia militias of Iraq and Syria.
- The **U.S.**, which has a **widespread military presence in the region**, has three objectives -
  - To **ensure** the **security of Israel**,
  - The **security** of **America's troops and assets deployed in the region,**
  - The **perseverance of the U.S.-led order in the region.**

Changing regional order in West Asia:

- **In the past, the U.S. had retained a dominating presence in West Asia**, shaping its geopolitical outcomes, and **America's rivals were wary of breaching certain red lines.**
  - This was the backbone of the U.S.-led order in West Asia.
- **Iran had stayed out of it since 1979**; it never risked a direct war with the U.S. or Israel.
  - **The current crisis suggests that the old order is in tatters -**
    - **Iran-backed proxies are directly attacking both Israeli and American positions**, while Iran is flexing its military muscle through cross-border attacks.
    - The **Houthis have challenged the U.S.'s ability to provide security** to one of the world's busiest **shipping routes.**
    - **Arab countries remain America's allies** but **are increasingly frustrated with the USA's unconditional support for Israel's war on Gaza.**

Houthis carried out multiple attacks on commercial vessels in the Red Sea. In retaliation, the U.S. launched airstrikes against the Houthis

○ The U.S., despite its support for Israel, seems unable to push Israel to end its disastrous war and bring back some stability.

Way Forward:

The old order, anchored by America's domineering regional presence, is in tatters. What West Asia needs is a **new security equilibrium.** There has to be an **immediate ceasefire** in Gaza, and **peace between Israel and Palestinians** could be used as a springboard for further talks aimed at regional security between the main stakeholders - **Israel, Arab nations, Iran, the U.S.** and their respective allies and proxies.

Israel – Palestine Conflict

News Excerpt:

The Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas recently launched its most significant assault on Israel, firing a barrage of rockets from Gaza and sending fighters across the border under **Operation 'Al-Aqsa Flood'.**

Historical Background:

- The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has its roots in the late 19th century when Jews fleeing anti-Semitism in Russia and central Europe began emigrating to Palestine.
- In 1917, during World War I, the British captured Palestine from the Ottomans and, in the **Balfour Declaration** of November 2, promised the Jews a "national home" there.
- **Palestine split:**
  o Palestine was partitioned into Jewish and Arab states under United Nations Resolution 181, approved in November 1947. Jerusalem is put under international control.
  o In the split, the West Bank, including east Jerusalem, went to Jordan and the Gaza Strip to Egypt.

o Israel was finally created on May 14, 1948, provoking an eight-month war with Arab states.
o The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was created in 1964.

- **Occupation and war:**
  o In the Six-Day War in June 1967, Israel defeated Egypt, Jordan and Syria and occupied the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights from the countries respectively.
  o Arab states attacked Israel on October 6, 1973, the **Jewish holy day of Yom Kippur**. Israel repelled the attack.
  o Israel invaded civil war-wracked Lebanon on June 6, 1982, to attack Palestinian militants after initially sending in its forces in 1978.
  o The **first intifada, or Palestinian uprising** against Israeli rule, raged from 1987 to 1993.

- **Peace process:**
  o In 1993, Israel and the PLO signed a declaration on principles for Palestinian autonomy after six months of secret negotiations in Oslo, launching a peace process.
    ▪ **PLO leader Yasser Arafat** returned to Gaza in July 1994 to create the Palestinian Authority. Self-rule was established for the first time in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho.
  o In September 2000, right-wing Israeli opposition leader and future prime minister Ariel Sharon visited the **Al-Aqsa mosque** compound in east Jerusalem, a site holy to Muslims and Jews, who referred to it as the **Temple Mount**, sparking the first clashes of the **second intifada.**

Palestinian Loss of Land 1947 to Present
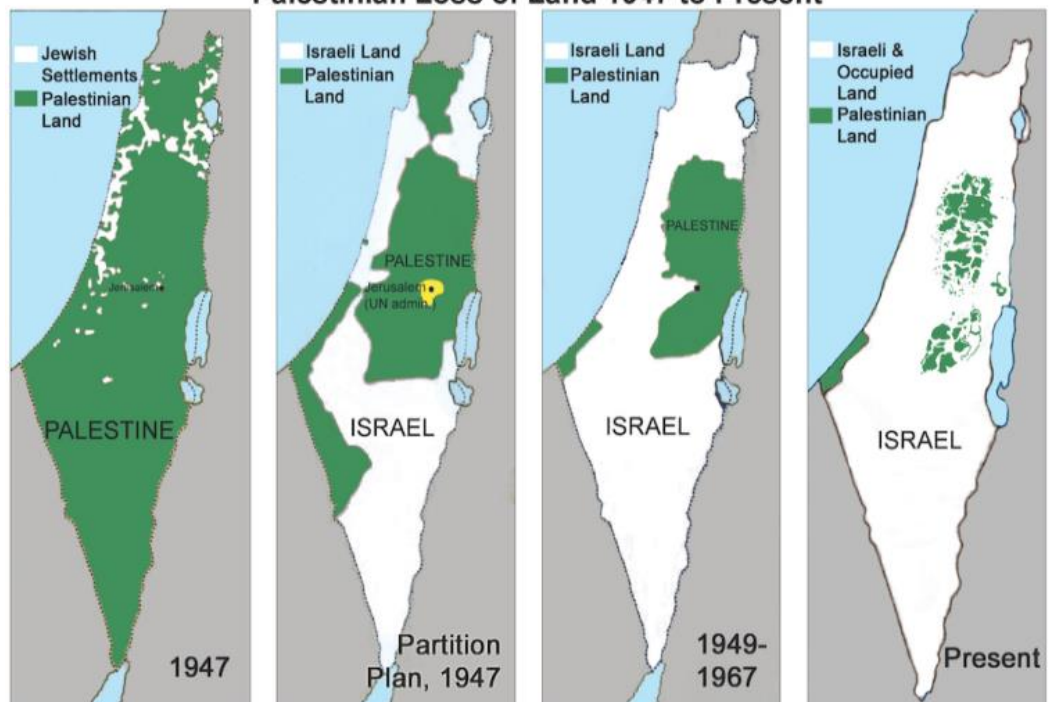
- Responding to a wave of suicide bombings, Israel 2002 invaded the West Bank in its largest operation since the 1967 war.
- **Moderate Mahmud Abbas** took over the leadership of the Palestinian Authority in January 2005 after the death of Arafat.
- The last Israeli forces left Gaza after a 38-year occupation in September 2005.

Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyyah (the Islamic Resistance Movement) - in short, Hamas:

- The roots of Hamas go back to the Muslim Brotherhood. The Brotherhood, established by Egyptian Islamist Hasan al-Banna in 1928, made a presence in British-ruled Palestine in the 1930s.
- Hamas was established after the **first intifada** broke out in **1987.** They are anti-semitic and do not recognize Israel. Sheikh Ahmed Yassin is a Palestinian cleric who bec**ame an activist in local branches of the Muslim Brotherhood after dedicating his early life to Islamic scholarship in Cairo**.
- According to the charter issued by Hamas in 1987, Palestine is "an Islamic Waqf land consecrated for Moslem generations until Judgement Day"; "there is no solution to the Palestine problem except jihad" and all peace initiatives are a "waste of time and acts of absurdity".
- When the PLO moved to join peace efforts seeking a solution to the Palestinian issue, Hamas hardened its position. It opposed the **Oslo Agreement**, which allowed the formation of the Palestinian Authority with limited powers within the occupied territories. When the PLO recognized Israel, Hamas rejected the two-state solution.
- **In the 2006 legislative elections in the Palestinian territory -**
  o Hamas won 74 out of the 132 seats, while the Fatah party, the PLO's backbone, got only 45 seats.
  o In its election manifesto, Hamas showed signs of moderation for the first time. It dropped the call for the destruction of Israel, which was mentioned in the 1988 charter.
  o Hamas formed the government but faced opposition from Israel and most international powers. Like Israel, the U.S. and several European countries have designated Hamas as a terrorist organization.
  o As tensions rose between Fatah and Hamas in the West Bank, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas dissolved the Hamas government and declared a state of emergency.
  o This led to violent clashes between Fatah and Hamas. Fatah ousted Hamas from the West Bank, and Hamas ousted the former from Gaza in 2007. Since then, Hamas has been the government in Gaza.
  o Following Hamas's capture of Gaza, Israel imposed a blockade on the strip, practically turning the territory into an open prison.

India's stance on the Israel – Palestine conflict:

- India's policy has gone from being unequivocally pro-Palestine for the first four decades to a policy of de-hyphenation.
- **Before 1990:**
  o In 1948, India was the only non-Arab-state among 13 countries that **voted against the UN partition plan of Palestine in the General Assembly**, which led to the creation of Israel.
  o The relationship with Palestine was almost an article of faith in Indian foreign policy for over four decades. In the 1967 and 1973 wars, India called out Israel as the aggressor.
  o In 1975, India became the first non-Arab country to recognize the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people. It invited it to open an office in Delhi, which was accorded diplomatic status five years later.
  o In 1988, when the PLO declared an independent state of Palestine with its capital in East Jerusalem, India granted recognition immediately.
  o India opened a Representative Office in Gaza, which later moved to Ramallah as the Palestinian movement split between Hamas (which gained control of Gaza) and the PLO.
- **From 1992 to 2014:**
  o The balancing began with India's decision to normalize ties with Israel in 1992, which came against the backdrop of the break-up of the Soviet Union and massive shifts in the geopolitics of West Asia on account of the first Gulf War in 1990. That year, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) lost much of its clout in the Arab world by siding with Iraq and Saddam Hussein in the occupation of Kuwait.
  o For two-and-a-half decades from 1992, the India-Israel relationship continued to grow, primarily through defence deals and in sectors such as science and technology and agriculture. But India only acknowledged the relationship partially.
  o India voted in favour of the UN General Assembly resolution in October 2003 against Israel's construction of a separation wall. It voted for Palestine to become a full member of UNESCO in 2011, and, a year later, co-sponsored the UN General Assembly resolution that enabled Palestine to become a "non-member" observer state at the UN without voting rights.
- **After 2014:**
  o The Indian government decided to take full ownership of the relationship with Israel. The first

indication of the new phase came with an abstention by India at the UN Human Rights Council on a resolution welcoming a report by the HRC High Commissioner. The report said it had evidence of alleged war crimes committed by Israeli forces and Hamas during the 2014 airstrikes against Gaza that killed over 2000.

o In 2016, India abstained again on a UNHRC resolution against Israel. But the big change was the status of the historic city that both Israel and Palestine claim.

o PM Narendra Modi visited Israel in 2017 and became the **first sitting Indian Prime Minister** to visit the country in the last 70 years.

o India and Israel then signed seven agreements in key areas like space, water management, energy and agriculture.

Way forward:

● If Israel and other regional and international players want lasting peace and stability, their focus must turn to finding a solution to the question of Palestine. The military operations without addressing the core issue would only be cosmetic interventions. Hamas's indiscriminate violence against Israeli civilians is disgusting and will not help the Palestinian cause. On the contrary, it will put more Palestinian lives at risk.

Israel & the ICJ hearing

News Excerpt:

South Africa recently filed an **application with the International Court of Justice (ICJ) instituting proceedings against Israel**, alleging that Israel is committing a "Genocide."

What is a Genocide?

● The definition of genocide was coined in 1944 by a Jewish lawyer, Raphael Lemkin, who was a key figure in the establishment of the **United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide** of 1948.

● Often seen as the "crime of crimes", genocide is defined by the **special intent to "destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group".**

● According to ICJ, the use of force, even on a significant scale, "cannot in itself constitute an act of genocide".

About Ratification of the Genocide Convention:

● The **Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide** (Genocide Convention) is an instrument of international law that codified for the first time the crime of genocide.

● The Genocide Convention was the **First Human Rights Treaty** adopted by the **General Assembly of the United Nations (UNGA)** on **December 9, 1948** (effective from **Jan 1951**) and signified the international community's commitment to 'never again' after the atrocities committed during **World War II**.

o **India** signed with it on 29 Nov 1949 and **ratified** it on **27 Aug 1959**.

o Its adoption marked a crucial step towards developing **International Human Rights** and **International Criminal Law**.

● **Definition:** According to the Genocide Convention, genocide is a crime that can take place both in times of war as well as in times of peace. The definition of the crime of genocide, as set out in the Convention, has been widely **adopted at both national and international levels**, including in the 1998 Rome Statute of the **International Criminal Court (ICC)**.

o According to **Art. 94(1) of the UN Charter and Art. 60 of the Statute of the ICJ,** the decisions of the ICJ are **binding and final on the States** Parties to the case and are **not subject to appeal**.

o According to **Art. 94(2) of the UN Charter**, the UNSC has the power, at the request of the injured State, to take special measures to enforce a judgment rendered by the ICJ.

Background of the recent Israel-Palestine conflict:

● In early October 2023, war broke out between Israel and Hamas (Hamas has controlled Gaza since 2006).

● Hamas fighters fired rockets into Israel and stormed southern Israeli cities and towns across the border of the Gaza Strip on 7 October 2023, killing more than 1,300 Israelis, injuring 3,300, and taking hundreds of hostages.

● One day after the October attack, the **Israeli Cabinet formally declared war against Hamas.**

Main Israeli-Palestinian Issues: The Israeli-Palestinian conflict revolves around the following key issues such as:

● **The two-state solution**: It proposes creating a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza alongside Israel, but Hamas rejects it.

● **Settlements**: Settlements built on land occupied by Israel in 1967 are considered illegal by most countries, causing perpetual tension.

● **Jerusalem:** Jerusalem is a contentious point, with Palestinians wanting East Jerusalem as their capital, while Israel insists on its sovereignty over the entire city.

● **The refugee issue:** It involves millions of Palestinians, descendants of those who fled in 1948; Palestinians have long demanded that refugees should be allowed to return, along with millions of their descendants. Israel says any resettlement of Palestinian refugees must occur outside of its borders.

South Africa's Claim:

● On December 29, 2023, South Africa filed the application with ICJ, basing its case on two claims:

o The first is the **scale of civilian death and destruction in Gaza.**

- ■ There is no doubt that the war in Gaza has been devastating for the civilian population, but this does not indicate the occurrence of genocide.
  - o The second one is about various **statements issued by Israeli officials or former officials**, which they claim **prove the necessary special intent of committing genocide.**
    - ■ But they do not reflect Israel's actions in practice and could be a very selective collection of statements.
- South Africa's filing has been **welcomed by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation,** whose 57 members include many African and Muslim-majority countries such as Turkey and Malaysia, which have also made separate statements of support.
- **Israel's Response:** Israel rejects South Africa's claim, stating that it lacks both a factual and a legal basis and constitutes a despicable and contemptuous exploitation of the court.

About ICJ (International Court of Justice):

- The ICJ was established in **June 1945** by the Charter of the UN, following decades of international conflicts.
  - o **Location:** Hague (Netherlands).
- ICJ has a total strength of **15 judges** appointed for **9 years** through separate, simultaneous elections at the **UN General Assembly** and the **UN Security Council**.
- **The multilateral forum has dual jurisdictional powers**:
  - o **Advisory Jurisdiction:** This relates to the jurisdiction of the court in providing legal opinions on matters referred to it by the organs and specialized agencies of the UN,
  - o **Contentious Jurisdiction**: It involves settling disputes between countries and determining "state responsibility" for crimes committed in violation of international law.

Significance:

- **An adverse ruling would be detrimental to Israel's reputation and set a legal precedent.**
- Although the decisions of the **International Court of Justice**, which is currently hearing a case instituted by **South Africa** accusing **Israel**, are legally binding and cannot be appealed against, they are often defied in the absence of an enforcement mechanism.

Way Forward:

- The key to resolving the conflict lies in both sides' **willingness to accept each other and make compromises for peace** in the region.
- South Africa wants it to implement a provisional measure that would **oblige Israel "not to engage in genocide, and to prevent and to punish genocide"**. Such temporary measures are meant to prevent a situation from worsening while the case is decided.

Myanmar's Civil War

News Excerpt:

The **Arakan Army captured Paletwa** in the **Chin State**, which lies on Myanmar's western borders with Bangladesh and India.

About the news:

- The town of **Paletwa** has sparked a **conflict** between the **Chin and Arakan ethnic groups**.
  - o Paletwa is a **commercial town** on the **Kaladan River**, and therefore, any armed group with a significant presence in the town would **benefit** from the **economic activity** in the region.
  - o Paletwa's strategic location on the **western border** makes it a good **launchpad** for **Arakan Army operations**.
- The **majority** of Paletwa's residents are **Chin**, who view the town as part of their homeland. However, some in
- the Rakhine State, argue that the town was historically part of the **Arakan Hill Tracts** during colonial rule and should have been part of their province.

Background:

In **2021**, the **Myanmar military leaders ousted the elected government**. Now 3 years later, the **opposition to military rule** has gained strength. Ethnic Armed Organisations **(EAOs)** and the **People's Defence Forces** control many towns in different parts of the country. The **Chin armed groups** and the **Arakan army** have been fighting the Myanmar military.

Concerns for India:

- **Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project (KMTTP):**
  - o The developments in Paletwa will impact the Indian government's Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project **(KMTTP)** in Myanmar, which has already faced significant delays.
- **China's tacit support to armed groups:**
  - o There are reports which suggest that the **Arakan Army** receives considerable **funding** and **military equipment** from China.
  - o The Arakan Army, along with the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army, is part of the **Three Brotherhood alliance**. The alliance has pledged to protect Chinese investments in Myanmar.
- **China's investments in the region:**
  - o China has operationalized **oil and natural gas pipelines** from the **Shwe gas fields** near Kyaukpyu in the **Rakhine State** to **Yunan province** in China.
  - o Recently, China signed supplementary agreements with the Myanmar military to operationalize the **deep sea port** and a **special economic zone** near **Kyaukpyu.**

- ○ There were renewed efforts to construct a **railway line** from China's **Yunnan to Kyaukpyu via Mandalay** as part of the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor **(CMEC).**
- **Perception of Chinese influence:**
  - ○ Unlike India, **China** is a **permanent member** of the **United Nations Security Council,** which prompts many state and non-state actors in **need of international support** to be relatively more accommodating of China's concerns.

Major reasons behind the delay:

- The operationalization was **delayed** due to **rugged terrain**, **inadequate** inter-departmental **coordination**, **political instability**, and **security challenges** in Myanmar.
- The Kaladan project has been delayed for multiple reasons, including the **Rohingya crisis that erupted in 2017.**
  - ○ The Rohingya crisis is rooted in religious and ethnic differences between the junta in Naypyidaw and Muslim Rohingyas.
- Due to COVID-19, most of the daily wagers have returned to their hometowns. Owing to the pandemic, contractors who were brought from other states in the country had been facing hardships in assembling daily wagers for the project.
- **Both Chin and Rakhine states,** through which the KMTTP runs, are **insurgency-wracked** and work on projects has been impacted by the poor security situation in the region.
  - ○ **The rebel Arakan Army (AA) captured the Paletwa township near the Mizoram border in January.**
  - ○ **The conflict between the AA and the Myanmar military junta** is not based on religious differences but fuelled by a nationalist aspiration of the Buddhist Arakanese population of the region, which has been demanding a confederated or independent status.
- The fight between the AA and the junta's forces took a crucial turn on January 15 when **the rebel forces captured Paletwa.**

- ○ This move has also roused concern about **a tripartite conflict** involving the junta's forces, the AA, and rebels of the Chin State, **as Paletwa has traditionally been a Chin-majority township.**

Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project (KMTTP):

- **The Kaladan project** (estimated to cost around $500 million) **is aimed at connecting the port of Kolkata with the port of Sittwe in Rakhine or Arakan State,** which would then be connected to Mizoram by road and the Kaladan River, which flows by Paletwa.
- **India** and **Myanmar** signed a **framework agreement** in **2008** to address the **geo-economic** and **geo-political** challenges of northeast India.
  - ○ Transporting goods to and from northeast India via the **Siliguri corridor** is a **logistical challenge,** and in a **worst-case scenario** with **China**, there is a possibility of movement along the corridor being adversely affected.
- It aimed to provide an **alternative route to the sea** for **northeast India**.
  - ○ **Kolkata to Sittwe port** (Myanmar) - Shipping - 539 km
  - ○ **Sittwe to Paletwa** (River Kaladan) - Inland Water Transport (IWT) - 158 km
  - ○ **Paletwa to Indo-Myanmar Border** (in Myanmar) - Road - 110 km
  - ○ **Border to NH-54** (Lawngtlai) (in India) - Road - 100 km.
- Although the **Sittwe port** and inland water terminal at **Paletwa** have been **completed**, road construction faces challenges due to the prevailing security situation in Myanmar.
  - ○ It provides a strategic link to the North-East, thereby reducing pressure on the Siliguri Corridor.

Present Status of the project:

- The Kaladan project has two major components: **the Waterways component and the Road component.**
- The **waterways component has been completed to date.**
- However, the road component, which includes the construction of a 109-km double-lane highway between Paletwa and Zorinpuri (Mizoram-Myanmar border), is still a work in progress.
- Until this highway is ready, northeast India's access to the Bay of Bengal through Sittwe will remain incomplete.

Significance of the Kaladan Project:

- Through this project, India hopes to **reduce its dependency on chicken's neck** that lies between Nepal and Bangladesh thereby reducing the cost of transportation and time.
- The biggest potential of the project lies in developing the NE, where goods from North-East India can be directly transported by sea instead of being transported through roadways from other ports in India.
- **Trade between Myanmar and India will get a boost.** Exports from India to Myanmar through this new shipping route may include construction materials such as cement, steel and bricks, among others, whereas India's imports from Myanmar would be rice, timber, fish and seafood.
- The trade-in rupees may help facilitate not only trade between Myanmar and India but also the procurement and shipment of project goods that are needed for the implementation of Indian projects in Myanmar.

Way Forward:

- The Chin and Arakan groups must agree on an **inclusive governance framework** for Paletwa and surrounding areas to maintain peace. **Inter-ethnic solidarity** must be improved by accommodating each other's perspectives on ethnic boundaries. Scaling up **humanitarian and development assistance** with a broader spectrum of ethnic organisations and local people is crucial.
- This **project** necessitates competent **technical personnel and experts** to monitor Chin-Arakan ethnic relations, military-EAO contestation, sectarian violence in Rakhine state, and the growing Chinese presence in Myanmar. The Kaladan experience suggests **bringing these experts together** to expedite connectivity and development assistance projects in India's immediate neighbourhood.

Sudan Crisis and India's Response

News Excerpt

A crisis erupted in Sudan resulting in a trail of violence. India responded by launching Operation Kaveri to evacuate its nationals. There are near about 4000 Indians stuck in various parts of Sudan, including the capital Khartoum and in distant provinces like Darfur.

Genesis of the Crisis in Sudan

- The root cause of violence in Sudan lies in the overthrowing of long-serving President Omar al-Bashir by military generals in 2019.
- A power-sharing agreement was signed between the military and protesters through which a Sovereignty Council was established. Council was to conduct elections at the end of 2023.
- In 2021, however military overthrew the transitional government led by Abdalla Hamdok.

Tussle between Army and RSF

- Soon after the coup, a power struggle arose between the military (SAF) and paramilitary (RSF) generals. This created roadblocks in the transition to elections.
- Negotiations between SAF and RSF broke down due to disagreements over the timetable and security sector reforms.
- Another bone of contention arose over the control of resources and RSF integration into the army. RSF general wants to delay the integration for 10 years but the army said it would take place in the next two years.

Impact of the Present Crisis

- The battle between the army and RSF will impact the democratic transition in Sudan. It might lead to the country's collapse.
- The ouster of the Hamdok government will freeze international economic support to Sudan which is battling with hyperinflation and crippled by massive foreign debt.
- Tensions in Sudan will destabilize neighbouring countries as well especially South Sudan and Chad. Refugees from Sudan's contested areas have already arrived in Chad.

India-Sudan Relations

Economic Relations	Strategic Relations	India as Peace-Maker-Juba Peace Agreement
• The bilateral trade between India and Sudan has grown from USD 327.27 million in 2005-06 to USD 1663.7 million in 2018-19. • India's investments in Sudan and South Sudan were roughly USD 3 billion, out of which USD 2.4 billion was invested in the petroleum sector from ONGC Videsh. • India has implemented 49 bilateral projects through concessional lines of credit worth USD 612 million in areas such as energy, transport, and agribusiness industry in Sudan in 2021.	• Sudan is located in Northeast Africa and is the third largest African Nation. • It is strategically located on the Red Sea, near the vast swath of gold reserves and agriculture potential. • Sudan is been coveted by the outside powers, including its neighbors, the Gulf countries, Russia and the Western nations.	• India supported Sudan's efforts to form a transitional government and also supported the Juba Peace Agreement signed by the government in October 2020. • Juba agreement covered various areas such as governance, security, and justice and was important for future constitutional negotiations.

India's response- Operation Kaveri

▪ India began **'Operation Kaveri'** to evacuate around 4,000 nationals currently stranded in Khartoum and other parts of Sudan.

▪ It involves the deployment of the **Indian Navy's INS Sumedha, a stealth offshore patrol vessel, and two Indian Air Force C-130J special** operations aircraft on standby in Jeddah.

▪ India has been adept at using its diplomatic skill and leveraging goodwill to ensure that Indians overseas can return to the country when they are faced with a crisis at their destinations.

Kosovo-Serbia Conflict

News Excerpt

Recently, there was a confrontation between Serbian demonstrators and NATO peacekeepers in Kosovo, resulting in over 60 people being injured. This incident marks the gravest outbreak of violence witnessed in the area in more than ten years.

Ethnic Background

• Kosovo is a region with a long history of Serbs and Albanians coexisting, representing distinct ethnicities and religious backgrounds.

• The population of Kosovo consists of approximately 1.8 million people, with Albanians comprising 92% and Serbs constituting only 6%. The remaining residents include Bosniaks, Gorans, Turks, and Roma.

• Serbs residing in Kosovo primarily identify as Eastern Orthodox Christians, whereas the majority of Albanians in the region adhere to the Muslim faith.

• Alongside Serbs and Albanians, other minority groups in Kosovo include Bosnians and Turks.

• In terms of demographics, Serbs make up the majority population in Serbia, while Albanians constitute the majority in Kosovo.

Battle of Kosovo

➢ Serbian nationalists consider the 1389 Battle of Kosovo, fought between Serbian Prince Lazar Hrebeljanovic and Ottoman Sultan Murad Hudavendigar, as a significant event in their national struggle.

➢ Kosovo's ethnic Albanian majority perceives Kosovo as their rightful territory and accuses Serbia of occupying and repressing them.

Disintegration of Yugoslavia

• From 1945 to 1992, the Balkan region comprised a country known as the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), with Belgrade as its capital. It consisted of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia. Serbia included the autonomous provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina.

• After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia disintegrated, and each republic became an independent country.

• Slovenia was the first to secede from Yugoslavia in 1991.

• The late 1980s and early 1990s witnessed a decline in the central government's power in Yugoslavia, accompanied by a resurgence of nationalism.

• Political leaders exploited nationalist sentiments, which led to the erosion of the shared Yugoslav identity and the rise of fear and mistrust among ethnic groups.

• In 1998, ethnic Albanian rebels established the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) to challenge Serbian rule.

Majority ethnic Serb areas of Kosovo

NATO Intervention

- In 1999, NATO intervened in response to Serbia's brutal actions in Kosovo, initiating a 78-day air campaign against Kosovo and Serbia.
- As a result, Serbia agreed to withdraw its forces from Kosovo.
- The intervention allowed for the return of Albanian refugees to Kosovo but also led to the displacement of many Serbs who feared retaliation.
- In June 1999, Kosovo came under international administration, with its ultimate status remaining unresolved.
- The United Nations' tribunal indicted several Serbian leaders, including President Milošević, for war crimes.

Current Status of Kosovo

- Despite Kosovo declaring independence in 2008, Serbia maintains that it is an inseparable part of its own territory.
- Nations like India, China, and Russia do not acknowledge Kosovo as an independent country, whereas the United States, most European Union countries, Japan, and Australia recognize its independence.
- Presently, 99 out of the 193 United Nations (UN) member countries have officially recognized Kosovo as an independent nation.

India's Stand on Kosovo

- India asserts that Kosovo does not meet the three principles necessary for recognition: a clearly defined territory, a duly constituted government accepted by the people, and effective control over a governed area.
- India has objected to Kosovo's participation in international organizations like UNESCO, the Apostille Convention, the Convention for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes, and the Egmont Group of Financial Intelligence Units.
- India's refusal to recognize Kosovo stems from its commitment to uphold the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Serbia, with whom it maintains a longstanding relationship.

Niger Political Crisis

News Excerpt

The President, Mr. Bazoum, and his family were detained by elite troops in Niger, whom declared that they now held power.

Recent crisis in Niger:

- Niger was a French colony until 1960. It faced a long period of instability post-independence and was rocked by four military coups between 1974 and 2010.

- Mahamadou Issoufou came to power in 2011, winning legislative election.
- In 2021, Mr. Bazoum was elected President, in the first democratic transfer of power since the country's independence.

About Niger:
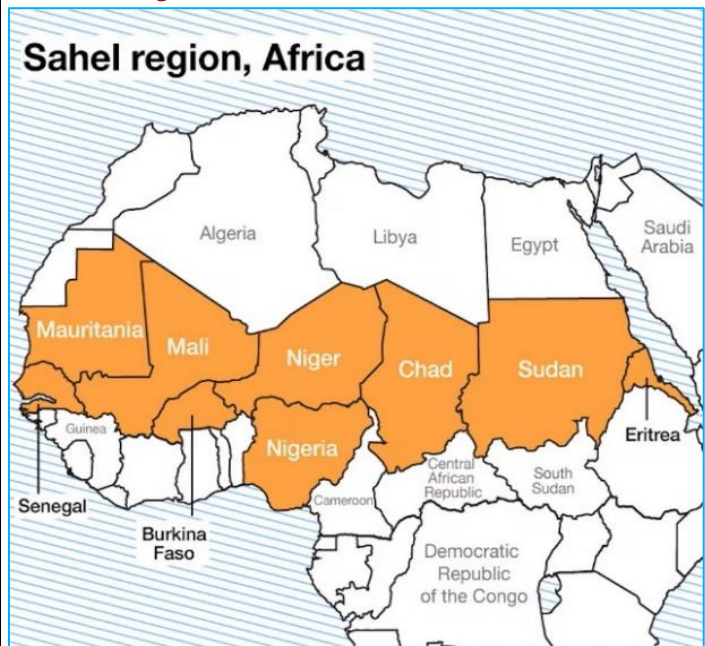
- It is a landlocked country in West Africa.
- It is a unitary state bordered by Libya to the northeast, Chad to the east, Nigeria to the south, Benin, and Burkina Faso to the southwest, Mali to the west, and Algeria to the northwest.
- Over 80% of its land area lies in the Sahara.
- The hotter and drier climate with desert area causes more frequent fires in some regions.

International relations

- It is a member of the African Union and the West African Monetary Union.
- It also belongs to the Niger Basin Authority and Lake Chad Basin Commission, the Economic Community of West African States, the Non-Aligned Movement, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, and the Organization for the Harmonization of Business Law in Africa (OHADA).

Regional impacts of Niger Crisis:
- Pose threat to the stability of other Western African countries.
- Spread of terrorism in the region.
- Niger was last stronghold of democracy in Sahel.
- Promote more military coups and authoritarianism.

Military Junta's rationale behind the military takeover

- There were continued deterioration of the security situation in the country.
- Poor economic and social governance.

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Factors that led to military takeovers of elected regimes in the Sahel region

> **Recent African coups**
> (i) Mali – 2020, 2021 (ii) Chad – 2021
> (iii) Guinea – 2021 (iv) Sudan – 2021
> (v) Burkina Faso– 2022 (vi) Niger-2023

- **Political instability:** High unemployment, political unrest, Weak governments (often composed of elites of certain ethnic communities) and threats from radical Islamist groups all contribute to political instability.
- **Economic strife:** As of 2021, over 41.8 percent of Niger's population is living in extreme poverty. There is prevalent social discontent due to deteriorating socio-economic conditions, including high living costs - in a country where poverty and hunger are widespread, as well as growing insecurity.
- **Ethnic clash:** Across the Sahel, ethnic tensions are on the rise; as some communities have increased their promotion of hate speech, others have gone as far as to establish armed groups specifically focused on ethnic protection.
- **Natural Resources:** Throughout the Sahelian strip, conflicts over access to natural resources between nomadic and sedentary communities continue to multiply on transhumance routes.
- **Climate change:** In parallel with rising temperatures and erratic rainfall, incidences of violence have recently been increasing in the Sahel. In fact, there is strong evidence that climate change, which is drying up sources of livelihoods, also fuels conflict.
- **Governance issues:** Political leaders' engagement in frequent corruption; Government's inabilities to register economic and social progress.

Niger central to Sahel security

West African nations have imposed sanctions and threatened force if Niger's coup leaders do not reinstate ousted President Mohamed Bazoum following the latest coup in the jihadist-plagued Sahel

Have military takeovers lessened the violence in Sahel region:

There is no concrete evidence that military takeovers restore stability and bring down violence.

- The crisis monitoring group, **Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)**, points out that successive military coups in the recent past have caused regional instability and the weakening of state institutions.
- It recorded that in 2022, the number of reported deaths from political violence increased by 77% in Burkina Faso and 150% in Mali from 2021.
- **Africa Centre for Strategic Studies (ACSS)** points out that some coups have become a means of grabbing power by politicised security elites on the pretext of restoring security and order.
- This trend is evident in the fact that even though Niger was seen as managing insurgencies and extremism better than its neighbours Mali and Burkina Faso, the Nigerien putschists also cited the worsening security situation as a reason for their uprising.

Why is the West concerned about Niger's coup

- **Anti-French sentiment:** France's relations with the military rulers grew hostile in Mali and Burkina Faso.
  o Mali last year expelled the French ambassador when he disagreed with the junta's decision to remain in power until 2025.
  o Burkina Faso's military government also announced its decision to end its military agreement with France.
- **America's Africa strategy:** Niger was key partner for Washington's fight against Islamist insurgents, who have killed thousands of people. U.S. military personnel have been training local forces to fight militant groups.
- **Western countries** poured resources into Niger to bolster its security forces in the face of a growing insurgency linked to al-Qaeda and Islamic State.
- **European Union** also decided last year to set up a three-year military training mission in Niger, to which Germany contributes troops. Italy also has about 300 soldiers in the country.

Role of Russia in the crisis

- Multiple pro-coup protestors in Niger were seen waving **Russian flags in the protests** outside the National Assembly.
- Notably, the **anti-French sentiment in the Sahel** has been seen as a reason for Russia making inroads into the region.
- Mercenaries from **Russia's private military Group Wagner** are already active in Mali, from where the French have withdrawn troops after a decade.
- **Burkina Faso** is reportedly involved with the Wagner group to deal with surging jihadist violence. After officially announcing the end of the French operation in November 2022, Burkina Faso turned towards Moscow taking steps like Mali.

Way Forward

Encourage all parties involved in the crisis to engage in meaningful dialogue. Mediation by neutral parties, such as respected leaders, international organizations, or diplomatic envoys, can help facilitate communication and negotiations.

Engage with regional and international partners to seek their support and expertise in resolving the crisis. Diplomatic pressure and collaboration can often provide valuable insights and resources.

Somalia crisis

News Excerpt:

Al-Shabaab, an affiliate of **al-Qaeda,** has been waging a war against the Somali government for the past 17 years. In a nation fraught with **authoritarianism, clan war, famine, piracy, and corruption**, it adds another chapter — **terror.**
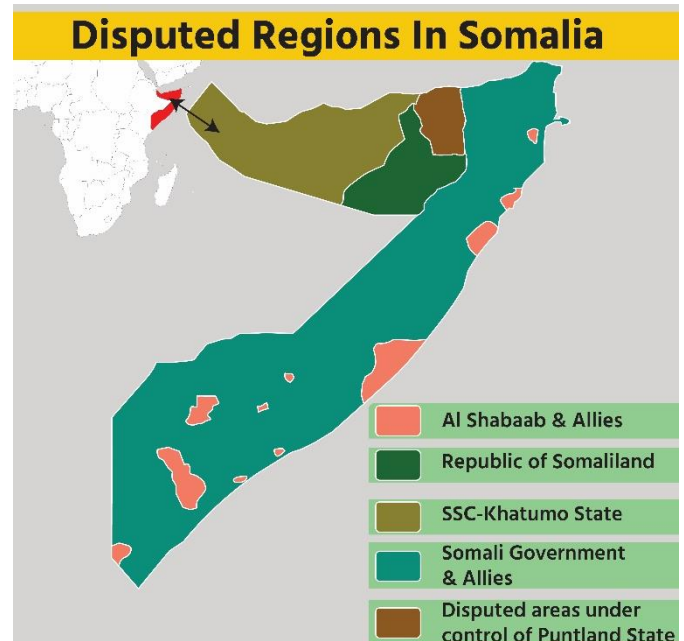
Al-Shabaab:

- Al-Shabaab is a **Sunni Islamic terrorist group** advocating a **strict version of Sharia law**
- Al-Shabaab was formed as the **military wing of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU),** which briefly gained control of central and southern Somalia in mid-2006.
- The group publicly pledged loyalty to **al-Qaeda i**n 2012.
- It **works to overthrow the Somali Federal Government**, expel foreign forces from Somalia, and establish a **fundamentalist Islamic state.**
- After the ICU was removed from power by **UN-backed Ethiopian forces** in December 2006 and disbanded, al-Shabaab remained active and used foreign intervention to gain support for its struggle against occupying forces.
- It took control of Mogadishu and grew in power by positioning itself as an alternative to the corrupt government.
- Despite being driven out of major cities by Somali and African Union forces, al-Shabaab continues to operate from rural areas.
- With the southern city of **Jilib as its de facto capital**, al-Shabaab relocated to the **south** and has now focused its activities in **rural areas of Somalia** where it offers **protection services** and plays **mediator to disputes.**
- The terror group also obtains **revenue from illicit charcoal trade.**

Somalia's Troubled History:

- Somalia's history has been marked by authoritarianism, clan wars, famine, piracy, and corruption.
- The country was even labelled a "**failed state" by The Fund for Peace for several years.**
- However, the **UN stated in 2021 that Somalia is on a fragile path to progress.**

From Sultanates to Modern Somalia:

Disputed Regions In Somalia

Legend:
- Al Shabaab & Allies
- Republic of Somaliland
- SSC-Khatumo State
- Somali Government & Allies
- Disputed areas under control of Puntland State

- From the 7th to the 19th century, Somalia was ruled by various **Sultanates, with Sunni Islam** being the **dominant religion.**
- In the 19th century, colonial powers divided the region, with the **British and Italians** controlling most of the area.
- When they **withdrew in 1960, northern and southern Somalia united to form the modern nation.**
- However, **democracy was short-lived**. In **1969, Siad Barre** took power through a **military coup** and implemented **"scientific socialism," nationalizing banks, promoting literacy,** and **allying with the Soviet Union.**
- Despite Somalis being a largely **homogenous group,** different **clans** had ruled the roost. However, Barre saw to it that loyalty to major clans such as **Isaaq, Darood, Dir** and **Hawiye remained outlawed.**
- The first signs of the authoritarian leader's downfall emerged with the **Ogaden war** that Somalia fought **with its neighboring Ethiopia in 1977.**

The Ogaden War:

- In the summer of 1977, Somalia, a poverty-stricken country in the Horn of Africa, invaded its equally poor neighbour, Ethiopia, in hopes of **conquering the Ogaden Desert region,** which was populated by **ethnic Somalis.**
- During the **conflict, Ethiopia acted as a U.S. ally, and Somalia was backed by the USSR.**
- Despite the initial gains, the war proved costly for Somalia as it had to retreat from the Ogaden region and grapple with the influx of **Ogaden Somali refugees.**
- This **loss weakened Barre's regime** and led to **increased clan tensions.** By 1991, Barre was ousted, leading to further instability and the proclamation of independence by the northern region of Somaliland.

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Hezbollah

- Hezbollah is a **Shiite Muslim political party** and **militant group based** in **Lebanon.**
- Its extensive security apparatus in Lebanon have fostered its reputation as "**a state within a state**."
- Founded in the chaos of the fifteen-year Lebanese Civil War, the **Iran-backed** group is driven by its opposition to Israel and its resistance to Western influence in the Middle East.
- Due to its history of carrying out **terrorist attacks internationally, Hezbollah has been designated a terrorist organization by the United States and many other countries.**

International Intervention in Somalia:

- International efforts to stabilize Somalia were largely ineffective. In **1993, U.S. Marines attempted to arrest a clan leader,** leading to the infamous **"Black Hawk Down"** incident, which cost 18 American and 300 Somali lives.
- Despite numerous attempts to establish a central government, Somalia remained in turmoil.
- Somalia follows a **federal system of governance, which** makes the **loyalty of clan leaders crucial.** The hostility between the clans made it impossible to govern the country.
- The **role of Ethiopia** too has not gone unnoticed. It has been accused of **meddling in Somalia's** affairs trying to protect its interests.

Israel-Hezbollah conflict

News Excerpt:

Concerns about all-out regional war are once again rising after a projectile fell on a football in the **Israeli-occupied Golan Heights**, killing **12** children and young people and injuring 30 others.

Potential for escalation of conflict:

- Both sides indicate readiness for full-scale war while stating they want to avoid it.
- **Hezbollah has previously signalled that it is not seeking to widen the conflict** while also saying it is **ready to fight any war** imposed on it and warning that it has used only a small part of its capabilities so far.
- Past wars have inflicted heavy damage. In **2006**, Israeli strikes levelled large areas of **Beirut's Hezbollah-controlled southern suburbs,** knocked out Beirut airport, and hit roads, bridges and other infrastructure.
- Hezbollah claimed that it had a **larger arsenal than in 2006,** including more advanced weapons.

Impact on the Gaza ceasefire talks:

- The war on Gaza remains the root cause of the expanding conflict across the region, and members of the Iran-backed **"axis of resistance",** including

Hezbollah, have said they will stop attacking Israel if it stops killing Palestinians in the enclave and allows humanitarian aid in.

- It is **still unclear** if the latest escalation between Israel and Hezbollah could have a direct impact on the
- **mediated negotiations**, but no breakthrough appeared imminent even before the strike.

Hezbollah began attacking Israel on Oct. 8, a day after Hamas' Oct. 7 assault on Israel

Hezbollah claims its attacks are in **support of Palestinians in Gaza**

Background of Israel-Hezbollah conflict

The conflict is linked to the **Gaza war** but has its **own dynamics**

Israel and Hezbollah have a **history of conflicts**, with the last major war in 2006.

Druze Community:

- The Druze are an **Arab sect of roughly one million** people who primarily live in **Syria, Lebanon and Israel.**
- **Originating in Egypt in the 11th century**, the group practices an **offshoot of Islam** which **permits no converts** – either to or from the religion – and **no intermarriage.**
- More than **20,000 Druze live in the Golan Heights**. Most of them **identify as Syrian** and rejected an offer of Israeli citizenship when Israel seized the region in 1967.

Golan Heights:

- The Golan Heights is a **strategic plateau that Israel seized from Syria** during the **Six-Day War in 1967,** before formally **annexing it in 1981.**
- The hilly landscape, which spans some **500 square miles**, also **shares a border with Jordan and Lebanon.**
- The Golan Heights is considered to be **occupied territory under international law and UN Security Council resolutions,** and Syria continues to demand it be returned.
- Israel sees the Golan Heights as key to its **national security interests and says** it needs to control the region to fend off threats from **Syria and Iranian** proxy groups there.

MISCELLANEOUS

Geopolitics of Rare Earth Elements and Semiconductor Rivalry

News Excerpt

China has put **curbs** on the **exports of germanium and gallium** metals. Earlier **USA** had asked **Netherlands** to impose similar curbs towards China. **Japan** has also announced restrictions on semiconductor exports to China.

Impact on India

- **Short-term impact**: Disruption in immediate **supply chains**. Increased prices resulting from the export control order would affect the **cost** and **availability** of chips.
- **Long-term consequences**: Depend on several factors, including alternative supply **sources**, domestic semiconductor **production** capabilities, and strategic **partnerships** like the India-U.S. Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology **(iCET).**

Opportunities for India

- **In India**, which is totally **import-dependent** for Germanium and Gallium (by-products in the processing of zinc and alumina), efforts should be made to **focus on waste recovery** from zinc and alumina production.
- Moving attention towards the available **substitutes** such as **Indium** and **Silicon** could also be considered.
- There is some good quality of silica feedstock available in India, but that has to be converted to **metallurgical-grade silicon.**

India-USA iCET

- Collaboration on resilient **supply chains**, development of a semiconductor **design**, **manufacturing**, and **fabrication** ecosystem in India, and promoting development of a **skilled workforce** for the industry.
- A joint **task force** for Semiconductor Mission to make an **assessment** identify **opportunities** and facilitate development of semiconductor ecosystems. The task force would also flag opportunities and challenges for India's role in the global semiconductor value chain.
- **MoU** on Semiconductor Supply Chain and Innovation Partnership to promote commercial opportunities, research, talent, and skill development.
- Proposal to **train 60,000 Indian engineers** and a proposed **investment of $400 million** to establish a collaborative **engineering centre** in India.

Other initiatives

- Beijing's "**Made in China 2025**" plan launched in 2019 is geared towards achieving self-sufficiency in semiconductors.
- Japan, South Korea and Taiwan are part of the USA-led "**Chip 4 Alliance**".

Challenges regarding REE

- **Monopoly:** Unlike other raw materials, such as oil, which are mainly concentrated among the OPEC countries, REEs are found in mineral deposits such as Bastnaesite and Monazite, which are relatively more geographically dispersed. Yet, REE supply chains are highly **geographically concentrated**, mainly in **China**. From mine to metal, China dominates the REE supply chain

- **RE extraction**, **refinement** into oxides, and **separation** into metals also require vast amounts of **seed capital** and very high turnover **time** for new mines and accompany severe **environmental hazards** during mining and processing.
- Three things are essential for chip making: uninterrupted and uninterruptible **power**; unlimited pure **water supply**; and **chip making infrastructure** — the "fabs" or fabrication plants that are highly specialized units. At the moment, there is **an issue with reference to this in India.**
- Chip manufacturing also requires a highly **skilled workforce**.
- The absence of a **"chip ecosystem"** is why, despite the political will, no big international chip makers have yet shown interest in India. Other than requirements for chip making itself, a huge set of **ancillary industries** have to take shape, including electronics manufacturers who can create a domestic market for chips.
- Absence of **Free trade agreement** and a bilateral investment agreement with **Taiwan.**

Way forward

- **Economic Survey 2022-23** has prescribed a "carefully crafted **multi-dimensional mineral policy**". It also underlined the need to create **"strategic mineral reserves"** along the lines of strategic petroleum reserves to ensure a continuous supply of minerals so that the country is **self-reliant** and successfully effects the clean energy transition.
- India can collectively move forward on this path **along with G20 countries.** A **G20 REE Fund** should be established. Alternatively, the G20 countries should work together to create an **international REE bank** from which countries can draw emergency supplies in case of trade blockades.
- Developing technology for **REE extraction from Monazite ore**: Monazite ores are abundant in India, Australia, and Brazil. Their **HREE** (heavy rare earth element) **content** is also significantly higher than Bastnaesite ores. Yet, the use of **accumulated Thorium** and the **management of radioactive waste** has not allowed for the significant exploitation of Monazite ores for REE production.
- **Strengthen market mechanisms**: India should emphasize a market-based global trade in critical raw materials.
- **Develop technological alternatives for replacement and recycling:** Even today, only 1 per cent of REE is being recycled. India along with other countries should collectivize their efforts to promote the recycling of REEs.

Debt Crises in Developing Countries
News Excerpt

The persistent and damaging debt problems gripping several developing nations were the core topic during the **G20 summit**.

Background:
- Responding to the pandemic shock in **2020**, the **G20** implemented the Debt Service Suspension Initiative **(DSSI)** in support of **low-income countries**. But it did not solve longer-term problems.
- In **2022**, the world's poorest countries had to afford $35 billion in debt-service payments, according to the World Bank. More than 40% was owed to China, now the world's largest bilateral creditor.
- In view of mounting problems, the G20 launched the **Common Framework for Debt Treatment (CF)** to reach beyond the DSSI. It is the only multilateral mechanism for forgiving and restructuring sovereign debt.
- Earlier this year, the **Global Sovereign Debt Roundtable (GSDR)** met and discussed debt sustainability and debt restructuring challenges and ways to address them. It was **co-chaired** by the **IMF**, **World Bank** and **India** (the G20 President).

Status of debt:
- **According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF)**, **21 countries** are in default or seeking restructuring. **15% of low-income countries** are already in debt distress. The number of countries facing high levels of debt has increased sharply, from only 22 to 59 between 2011 and 2022.
- **According to UNCTAD**, **81 developing countries** lost $241 billion in international reserves in 2022. The high-interest rates and soaring debt levels will add to the crushing effect on developing countries.
- According to the report from the "Debt Relief for a Green and Inclusive Recovery" **(DRGR) Project,** the sovereign debt of emerging markets and developing economies **(EDME)** increased by 178%, from $1.4 trillion to $3.9 trillion, between 2008 and 2021. The **Global South** is staring at a **debt crisis**.

Causes of debt crises:
- **Covid-19 pandemic and cost of living crises:** Financing needs soared with countries' efforts to fend off the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis.
- **Financial architecture:** An inequal international financial architecture makes developing countries' access to financing **inadequate** and **expensive**.
- **Interest rates:** Central banks are raising interest rates, leading to **capital flight** and **currency depreciation** in developing economies, as well as increasing **borrowing costs**. These factors have pushed countries such as **Ghana** and **Sri Lanka** into debt distress.
- **Climate change:** When countries' **vulnerability** to climate change goes up, so, too, do their borrowing rates. Without proper **adaptation**, countries' **exposure** to climate change's impacts increases, necessitating even more finance to address risks and damages from **floods**, **droughts**, **wildfires** and more.
- **Russia-Ukraine war:** EDMEs are seeing weakened economic growth due to **high food and energy prices** fuelled by Russia's war in Ukraine.
- **Odious debt:** It is debt that resulted from **loans** to an **illegitimate or dictatorial government** that used the money to oppress the people or for personal purposes. For example - **Cuba**, **South Africa**, **Indonesia, Argentina** and **Nicaragua**.

Implications of debt:
- Public debt can be **vital** for development. Governments use it to finance their expenditures, to protect and invest in their people. However, it can also be a **heavy burden** when public debt grows too much or too fast. This is what is happening today across the developing world.
- The weight of debt **drags down development**. Debt has been translating into a substantial burden for developing countries due to limited access to **financing**, rising **borrowing costs**, **currency devaluations** and **sluggish growth**. These factors **compromise** their ability to react to **emergencies**, tackle climate change and invest in their people and their future.

Concerns:
- **Multi-fold increase:** Global public debt has increased more than fivefold since the year 2000, clearly **outpacing global GDP**, which tripled over the same time. In 2022, global public debt, comprising general government domestic and external debt, reached a record of USD 92 trillion. Developing countries owe almost 30% of the total, of which roughly 70% is attributable to **China**, **India** and **Brazil**.
- **Inequalities in the international financial architecture:** Borrowing from **foreign creditors** increases exposure to external shocks. Relying on **private creditors** makes credit expensive and debt restructuring complex. Delays and uncertainties increase the costs of resolving debt crises. As a result, **developing countries pay much more** for their debt than developed ones.
- **Facing impossible choices - servicing debt or serving their people**: High borrowing costs make it difficult for developing countries to fund important investments, which in turn further undermines debt sustainability and progress towards sustainable development. For example - In **Africa**, the amount spent on interest payments is higher than spending on either education or health.

Way forward:
- The **United Nations** has a road map that focuses on **three areas of action**: tackling the high **cost of debt** and rising risks of debt distress, massively scaling up
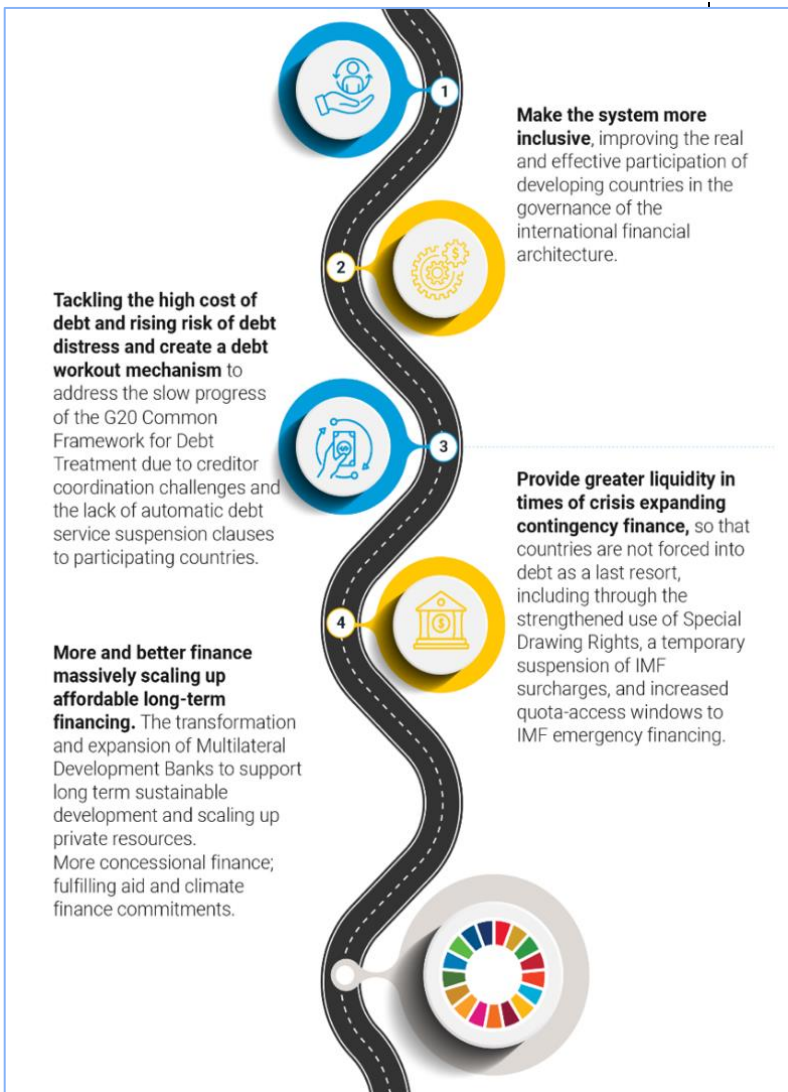
affordable **long-term financing** for development, and **expanding contingency financing** to countries in need. The implementation of these actions is crucial for a more sustainable world.

- The creation of a **new special purpose fund**—the recovery and sustainability fund **(RSF)**—to be capitalized by international financial institutions **(IFIs)** and **bilateral donors**. The funds will be used to secure collateral against **new tradable bonds**—recovery and sustainability bonds (RSBs)—issued by participating indebted countries. The guarantees attached to the RSBs will provide **credit enhancement** and allow countries to issue the new bonds on terms that are more favourable than those of the current stock of private external debt.

- An independent **sovereign debt authority** that engages with creditor and debtor interests, both institutional and private, is urgently needed. At a minimum, such an authority should provide **coherent guidelines** for suspending debt payments in disaster situations, ensuring SDGs are considered in debt sustainability assessments, and providing **expert advice** to governments in need.

- Furthermore, a **public debt registry** for developing countries would allow both lenders and borrowers to **access debt data**. This would go a long way in boosting **debt transparency**, strengthening **debt management**, reducing the risk of **debt distress** and improving **access to financing.**

Shipping choke points

News Excerpt:
The ease of moving goods via the Suez Canal and the Panama Canal is threatened, potentially disrupting over a third of global trade.

What do the ongoing Red Sea and Panama Canal crises mean for world trade?

- A disruption in maritime transport is a crucial concern for the world economy, as over 80% of the global goods trade is carried by sea.
  o The share of trade via sea is much higher for developing countries such as India.
- Currently, two important shipping routes are facing blockages. While the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait that leads to the Suez Canal in the Red Sea region connects Asia to Europe, the 100-year-old Panama Canal connects the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.
- Both these routes are among the busiest in the world, and a blockage results in forcing global shipping lines to take longer alternate routes, pushing up freight rates.

What is the impact on Indian Trade flowing through the Red Sea?

- **Longer Route and Increase in Freight's Time and Cost:** After the attacks, almost **90% of western hemisphere cargo**, both inbound or shipped from India, that used to go through the Red Sea is now getting re-routed through the **Cape of Good Hope (Africa).** This potentially adds one to two weeks to voyages, disrupting shipping schedules and subsequently elevating fuel and insurance costs.
- **The impact of this move varies on the type of buyer-seller contract.**
  o If it is **FOB (free on board)**, the freight burden is on the buyer (they expect the Indian exporter to hold back consignment), and in **CIF (cost, insurance and freight)** or **C&F (cost and freight**) contracts, the freight has to be borne by the exporter.
  o Similarly, exporters who have to bear the freight are requesting their buyers to allow them to hold the consignment given the increase in freight costs, which includes peak season surcharge and contingency surcharge.
  o However, if there is zero inventory, the buyer will insist on the shipment of the goods. According to the **Container Corporation of India,** about **25% of its containers are being held back by Indian exporters**.

- **Sectors affected:** The European Union is **India's second-largest export destination**. Slowing demand from the region has impacted India's labour-intensive sectors, such as **textiles, gems and jewellery exports**.
  - **Particular sector impacted:** Commodities that are worst affected are **chemicals, plastic, and petrochemicals** due to the unavailability of margins to absorb the hike in freight.
  - Airlifting is possible for high-value, low-volume commodities, but goods that are moved are generally large volumes.
- **Agricultural Sector:** Disruption in the Red Sea route has turned to increase Indian **agricultural product** prices by **10-20%** as shipments reroute through the Cape of Good Hope.

How does the Red Sea crisis impact India's Imports?

- **Costlier Imports**: Recent developments have made imports costlier and called for better inventory management. While the impacts on some critical imports are being assessed, both import and export cycles have elongated.
- **Final products turning dearer:**
  - **Crude oil and petroleum products**: The Red Sea crisis could come in the way of any plans to reduce petrol and diesel pump prices. Gross imports of crude oil and petroleum products as a share of India's gross imports in value terms were 25.8% in 2022-23 and 22.6% in the first half of the current fiscal year.
  - **India's Higher Dependence**: India's import dependence (based on consumption) in the April-September 2023 period was **87.6%,** according to the **government's Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell**. Citing the turbulent situation, there was no plan to slash fuel prices.
- **Freight rates increased**: Additional war risk premiums in the Red Sea have been partially contributing to the freight rate increases for the relevant routes, but this surcharge is significantly lower than the costs linked to re-routing via the Cape of Good Hope.

Why is trade via the Panama Canal slowing?

- Shipping via the Panama Canal has dropped by over 50% due to **drought conditions** at the 51-mile stretch.
- Due to the shortage of water, ships moving from Asia to the US are being forced to use the Suez Canal, which takes six more days compared to the Panama Canal.

- Moreover, in decades, Panama is facing its driest rainy season, raising fears of prolonged canal bottlenecks.

What is being done to address this?

- To counter the attacks and protect the free flow of commerce in the Red Sea, the U.S. Secretary of Defence announced the establishment of **Operation Prosperity Guardian (OPS)**, which focuses on security in the Red Sea.
- From the Indian side, both the Navy and Coast Guard have increased their presence and surveillance in the region.
- **The Indian Navy's Information Fusion Centre for the Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR)** actively monitors the region and coordinates in the back end to facilitate communication where required.

Way Forward:

New challenges in the Maritime security domain expect a newer outlook for security. States need to undertake a developmental approach while adopting integrated operations to set domestic regulations with international laws and frameworks parallelly.

SECURITY
STATE AND NON-STATE ACTORS

Dima Hasao Insurgent Group

News Excerpt

Recently, Assam based insurgent group the **Dimasa National Liberation Army (DNLA) signed** a Peace Agreement with the state and Union government.

About the Dima Hasao Insurgent Group (DNLA)

- The group was established in 2019 with the aim to seek sovereign territory for the Dimasa tribals.
- Working of this group is looked after by **North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council and the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council.**
- It is an operating insurgent group in Dima Hasao and Karbi Anglong districts in Assam.
- It works to develop a sense of brotherhood among Dimasas by rebuilding trust and faith among fellow Dimasas to regain Dimasa Kingdom.
- It works on extortion and taxation and gets support from the NSCN (IM) of Nagaland.

About Dimasas or Dimasa-Kacharis

- These are inhabitants of Dima Hasao, KarbiAnglong, Cachar, Hojai and Nagaon districts covering majority of Assam and Nagaland and known as earliest rulers and settlers of Assam.
- These are also known as earliest inhabitants of the Brahmaputra Valley.
- These are believed to be descendants of the rulers of powerful Kamarupa Kingdom prior to Ahom Rule who ruled large parts of Assam along the south bank of Brahmaputra between 13th and 16th centuries.
- Dimapur now called Nagaland and later Maibang in North Cachar Hills was their capital.

Meitei Extremist Organizations

News Excerpt:

The **Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)** has extended the ban **under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA)** against **several "Meitei extremist organizations".**

Key Points:

- It declared the outfits as an **"unlawful association"** for pushing Manipur's indigenous people to secede.
- They are referred to together as **"Meitei Extremist Organizations"** and are now an illegal association for ten years, beginning November 13, 2023.
- After much deliberation over their activities over the last five years, some were given an additional 5-year ban, whereas some were added to the list for the first time.

- This step comes after their **involvement in the recent ethnic violence in Manipur was discovered.**

About the Organizations:

The banned organizations include:

- the Peoples' Liberation Army, generally known as **PLA**, and its political wing, the Revolutionary Peoples' Front **(RPF)**,
- the United National Liberation Front **(UNLF)** and its armed wing, the Manipur Peoples' Army **(MPA),**
- the Peoples' Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak **(PREPAK)** and its armed wing, the **'Red Army'**,
- the Kangleipak Communist Party **(KCP)** and its armed wing, also called the 'Red Army', the Kanglei Yaol Kanba Lup **(KYKL),**
- the Coordination Committee **(CorCom)** and the Alliance for Socialist Unity Kangleipak **(ASUK).**

Reason for the Extension of Ban:

The Central Government believes that the outfits have been engaging in activities that are:

- Harmful to the sovereignty and integrity of India.
- **Employing and engaging** in armed means to achieve their objectives.
- **Attacking and killing** the security forces, police and civilians in Manipur.
- Indulging in acts of **intimidation**, **extortion and looting** of the civilian population for collection of funds.
- Making contacts with sources abroad to influence public opinion and **procure arms and ammunition.**
- **Providing training** to achieve their secessionist objectives and using camps in neighbouring countries for sanctuaries.

Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA)

- It was enacted in **1967** to prohibit illegal activity associations in India effectively.
  - **Unlawful activity** is defined as any action committed by an individual or group to undermine India's territorial **integrity and sovereignty.**
- The Act provides the central government with **absolute jurisdiction**, and if the Centre considers an activity to be illegal, it may declare it such in an official gazette.
- Both **Indian and international nationals can be charged under UAPA.**
  - It will apply to offenders in the same way, even if the offence is committed in a foreign country outside of India.
- **The investigative agency has 180 days after the arrests to file a charge sheet** under the UAPA, which can be extended further by alerting the court.
- Parliament approved the **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Bill, 2019, to designate**

persons as terrorists under the Act on specific circumstances.
  - The Act empowers the Director General of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) to approve the seizure or attachment of property when the NIA is investigating the matter.

Way Forward:

India's National Security laws, such as the UAPA, must remain stringent to safeguard the sovereignty and the integrity of the nation from offences such as secession, subversion, organization and perpetration of terrorist activities, and collusion with a foreign country.

Violent Extremist Organization Under Investigation

News Excerpt:

The **Financial Action Task Force (FATF)**, in its report **'Crowdfunding for Terrorism Financing'** has highlighted that a "violent extremist organization under investigation" in India collected funds through "well-structured networks" including offline and online fundraising mechanisms such as circulating QR codes and account details.

Key points:

- The FATF report referred to the **Popular Front of India (PFI)** as having resorted to a solicitation for funds at mosques and public places, which were ultimately used to procure arms and ammunition and for training the cadres. **But FATF refrains from mentioning its name directly.**
- According to FATF, the **group's fundraising tactics included offline and online mechanisms**, such as circulating QR codes and account details through which donors were asked to send money.
- Over 3,000 bank accounts and informal value transfer systems were used. **The accounts involved domestic and foreign transactions,** making this case extremely difficult to investigate.
- A portion of the funds raised through crowdfunding was also **invested and parked in businesses** and real estate projects to generate regular income for terrorism activities.
- In September 2022, The Ministry of Home Affairs declared the PFI, along with its associates or affiliates or fronts, as an **"unlawful association"** under Section 3 of the **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967.**

About Violent Extremism:

- **Violent extremism** is multifaceted and influenced by several political, social, economic, and ideological elements.
- Violent Extremist organizations **use violence to take advantage of current discontent** to present their ideology as the answer to the issues that communities confront.

- **Grievances and actual or perceived injustice** are major reasons for the emergence of these organizations.
- For example, terrorist groups such as the **Islamic State** in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), **Al-Qaida, Boko Haram,** etc. are violent extremists working as violent extremist organizations.

Impact of the emergence of such organizations:

- It undermines peace and security, human rights, and sustainable development.
- The spread of violent extremism has further aggravated an unprecedented humanitarian crisis that surpasses the boundaries of any one region.
- Millions of people have fled the territory controlled by terrorist and violent extremist groups, thus leading to massive displacements.
- Migratory flows have increased both away, from, and towards the conflict zones - involving those seeking safety and those lured into the conflict as foreign terrorist fighters, further destabilizing the regions concerned.

Steps taken by India to stop extremism:

- A **Fake Indian Currency Notes (FICN)** Coordination Centre Cell is functioning under the **Ministry of Home Affairs** to share intelligence among the security agencies of the Centre/States to counter the problem of circulation of fake currency notes.
- A **Terror Funding and Fake Currency (TFFC)** Cell is functioning under the **National Investigation Agency (NIA)** to conduct a focused investigation of terror funding and fake currency cases.
- **Security Related Expenditure (SRE) Scheme:** This Scheme is being implemented as a sub-scheme of the Umbrella Scheme 'Modernization of Police Forces'. The SRE Scheme aims to strengthen the capacity of the **Left-Wing Extremist** (LWE) affected states to fight effectively.
- **Special Central Assistance (SCA) for most LWE-affected districts:** This Scheme was approved in 2017, and the main objective of the Scheme is to fill the critical gaps in Public Infrastructure and Services, which are emergent.
- **Special Infrastructure Scheme (SIS):** Under the scheme, funds are provided to States for strengthening the security-related infrastructure.
- **Scheme of Fortified Police Stations:** Under the scheme, 400 Fortified Police Stations have been constructed in 10 LWE-affected States.
- **Civic Action Programme (CAP):** This Scheme is being implemented to bridge the gaps between Security Forces and local people through personal interaction and bring the human face of the forces before the local population.

- **Aspirational District Programme (ADP):** The Ministry of Home Affairs has been tasked with monitoring the ADP in 35 LWE-affected districts.

Way Forward:

- Particular focus should be put on the **role of women, youth, local stakeholders and civil society**, including religious and community leaders.
- Initiatives aimed at **integrating individuals willing to leave violent extremism behind** and return to their communities should also be enhanced and encouraged.
- Sustainable peace can be built through **safeguarding human rights, building inclusive societies and strengthening the resilience against recruitment to violent extremist groups and ideologies in local communities.**

Peace Agreement with the United National Liberation Front (UNLF)

News Excerpt:

The Union Government of India and the State Government of Manipur signed a Peace Agreement with the United National Liberation Front (UNLF), Manipur's oldest valley-based **armed group.**

About the news:

- The Union Home Ministry has recently signed agreements with several armed groups in the northeast to end militancy and promote regional development.
- It is the first time a valley-based Manipuri armed group has agreed to return to the mainstream. It is a **banned organization under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act** (**UAPA)**, and this ban has been extended for **five** years recently.
- There has been a significant reduction in insurgency incidents in the last ten years. Also, in this period, Security Forces casualties and civilian deaths have decreased significantly.
- A **Peace Monitoring Committee (PMC)** will oversee the enforcement of the agreed ground rules.

Significance of the agreement:

- **End of hostilities:** The agreement will not only bring an end to hostilities between UNLF and security forces, which have claimed precious lives on both sides over the last more than **half a century** but also provide an opportunity to address the longstanding concerns of the community.
- **Set a precedent for others:** The return of UNLF to the **mainstream** will encourage other valley-based armed groups to participate in the peace process in due course.

- **Ensure development:** The development is likely to be a significant step in **restoring peace and normalcy** in the State.

Limitations of Agreement:

- The biggest hurdle in the road to peace remains the **floating looted arms** numbering around 4,500 in various hands — militants, self-styled activist groups, and private militias.
- The **terms of the agreement are not known**. The involvement of militants in the latest ethnic conflict may complicate the issue further.
- If criminal cases are withdrawn, then **similar concessions** have to be given on the other side to the Kuki militants. More problematic would be the withdrawal of cases on serious crimes.

Challenges in implementing the Agreement:

- The primary issue is the **multiplicity of stakeholders and the divergent interests** of different groups. Diverse demands from various ethnic and/or tribal communities in regions like Manipur and Nagaland are difficult to reconcile.
  - Each group has distinct historical grievances, aspirations, and demands, making it hard to arrive at a resolution that satisfies all parties.
- The fragility of peace agreements also lies in their **vulnerability to disruptions** caused by extremist factions or splinter groups within these communities.
- Moreover, the implementation of peace agreements also faces challenges due to **historical distrust** between the communities and the government.
- **External influences and geopolitical factors** may also play a role.

o The reluctance of neighbouring countries to support peace processes or interference by external actors can destabilize the region and make implementing peace agreements a daunting task.

About the United National Liberation Front (UNLF):

Formation: The UNLF was formed in November **1964.** It set up its armed wing, the "Manipur Peoples' Army (MPA)" in February **1990.**

Objective:

The UNLF favoured a long-term programme to secede from India, form an alliance mainly with China, and gradually capture political power with the help of an indoctrinated young population and the intelligentsia. It aimed to reclaim the **Kabaw Valley** in **Myanmar.**

Personnel and Weapons: The UNLF split into factions due to internal differences. Jointly, the two factions are estimated to have 400-500 personnel with over 500 weapons of mixed types.

Organizational Structure: The organizational structure of the UNLF comprises a chairman, a central committee (five members), a military affairs committee (three members), and a standing committee (four members). All of the **UNLF camps** were in Myanmar.

Linkages and Front Organizations: The UNLF, the **oldest valley-based armed group**, had significantly influenced public issues. Most of the impact was through the front organizations that it used to mobilize public protests on key matters.

Return to Mainstream: The senior **leaders** of the UNLF responded favorably to the Centre's offer to join the mainstream for the first time in 2020. More than 400 personnel with an equal number of weapons joined the peace process.

Way Forward:

- Following the recent signing of the Peace Agreement, around 25 leaders/cadres of **National Revolutionary Front Manipur** (NRFM- a Meitei UG outfit), along with 25 weapons, joined UNLF in the peace process.
- The development is likely to encourage other Meitei outfits to join the peace process and democratically pursue their demands, besides giving a boost to fulfill the Government's vision of an "**Insurgency free and prosperous North East."**
- The return of UNLF to the mainstream will also encourage other valley-based armed groups to participate in the peace process.
- The government and other involved stakeholders should work to **build trust for their policies** before implementing them in the conflicting regions.
- **External influences** in such matters should be forbidden so that separatist forces cannot interfere in peace-building activities.

Triumph in ULFA Peace Accord marks a national security milestone

News Excerpt:

The Union Ministry of Home Affairs and the Assam government have **signed a memorandum of settlement with the pro-talks faction of the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA).**

Background:

> **Other peace agreements signed with insurgent groups in North-East:**
> NLFT agreement in 2019
> Bru and Bodo pacts in 2020
> Karbi in 2021
> Adivasi agreement in 2022
> Assam-Meghalaya border agreement
> Assam-Arunachal border agreement
> Agreement with UNLF in 2023

Historical:

- Assamese people have a unique culture, language, and a **strong sense of identity.**
- The **region's growing tea, coal, and oil economy attracted migrants from all over in the 19th century, and the exodus of refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan in the 1970s made the indigenous population insecure.**
- Eventually, the **Assam Accord**, seeking to "find a satisfactory solution to the problem of foreigners in Assam", was **signed in 1985**.

> **Assam Accord, 1985**
> The Assam Accord was signed on 15th August 1985 amongst the Union of India, the Govt. of Assam, All Assam Students of the Union, and All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad.

Emergence of ULFA:

- Amidst all this, a group of more **radical thinkers** led by Bhimakanta Buragohain **formed ULFA on April 7, 1979.**
- The founders of ULFA wanted to **establish a sovereign Assamese nation through an armed struggle against the Indian state.**
- For over 44 years, this 'struggle' has been chequered with **kidnappings and extortion, executions, and bomb blasts**, leading to tragic loss of life in Assam and beyond.
- **International linkages of ULFA:**
  - It had **bases in five neighbouring countries - Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Nepal, and Myanmar** - allowing for a strategic Northeast encirclement.
  - ULFA has **links to other insurgent outfits in the Northeast and Myanmar**, as well as Islamic terror outfits like Harkat-ul-Jihad-e-Islami and Al-Qaeda.

Government of India's response:

- The **Indian state's response has been unsparing.**
  - In 1990, the Centre launched **Operation Bajrang, leading to the arrest of 1,221 ULFA insurgents.**
  - Assam was declared a '**disturbed area**', and **President's rule** was imposed. Eventually, the **Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA)** was invoked.
- Yet, the ULFA has survived, in some part due to help from outside India.

Key achievements of the newly signed Peace Accord:

- It is a **tripartite agreement** between the Central Government, the Assam government, and ULFA.
- The peace accord ensures that **97 out of 126 Assembly seats in Assam will be reserved for indigenous people**, and the future delimitation exercise will follow this principle.
- ₹**1.5 lakh crore investment had been pledged in the peace accord**, and constitutional safeguards would be ensured by protecting land rights and restricting migration from one constituency to another.
- **ULFA agreed to shun violence, disband the organization,** and join the democratic process.
- The **ULFA has also agreed to vacate all camps occupied by its armed cadres**, engage in the peaceful democratic process established by law, and maintain the country's integrity.
- In return, the Central Government has agreed to provide a huge package and several big projects for the all-round development of Assam.

Way Forward:

- **Rehabilitation of the surrendered insurgents** can pave the way for long-term stability and peace, allowing the region to focus on development initiatives.
- An **inclusive growth model, enhancing trust and transparency,** and reaching the grass-roots level is essential to improve regional governance further.
- **Promoting trade-induced industrialization** can create new employment opportunities, stimulate growth, and strengthen regional integration.
- There is a **need to focus on excellent education levels**, taking more people in the national mainstream.
- There is a **need to ensure greater transparency in AFSPA.**

Suspension of Operations pact with Kuki-Zo insurgent groups

News Excerpt:

Two months after the Manipur government refused to send a representative to a meeting called by the Centre to extend the **Suspension of Operations (SoO)** pact with **Kuki-Zo insurgent groups**, there is a **"status quo"** on the agreement on the ground.

Suspension of Operations (SoO) pact:

- The Suspension of Operations (SoO) pact is a **tripartite agreement** signed between **the United Peoples' Front (UPF)** and the **Kuki National Organization (KNO)**, an umbrella of 25 insurgent groups, the **Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)** and the **Manipur government**.

The following major militant groups have been active In the Northeast

Arunachal Pradesh
United Liberation volunteers of Arunachal Pradesh (ULVA)
United People's Volunteers of Arunachal Pradesh (UPVA)
United Liberation Movement of Arunachal Pradesh (ULMA)

Assam
United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA)
Bodo Security Force (BSF)

Nagaland
National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak / Muviah) (NSCN I/M)
National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang) NSCN(K)
Naga National Council (Adinno) / Naga Federal Govt (NFG)
Naga National Council (Khodao)–NNC(K)

Meghalaya
Achick Liberation Matgrik Army (ALMA)

Manipur
National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN I/M)
People's Liberation Army (PLA / Revolutionary People's Front (RPF)
United National Liberation Front (UNLF)
Peoples Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK)

Tripura
All Tripura Tribal Force (ATTF)
Tripura National Volunteer Force (TNVF)

Mizoram
Hmar People's Convention (HPC)

○ Of these insurgent groups, 17 come under the **Kuki National Organization (KNO)**, and 8 belong to the **United People's Front (UPF).**

- The agreement was signed in the wake of the **Kuki-Naga clashes in the 1990s** when hundreds were killed. The insurgent groups demanded an independent land for the **Kuki-Zo.**

What are the terms of the SoO pact?

- The **Suspension of Operation agreement is for one year,** but it is **extendable** according to the progress of its implementation.
- To oversee the effective implementation of the SoO pact, a committee called the **Joint Monitoring Group (JMG),** with representatives from all the signatories, has been formed.
- According to the pact, the Centre and state governments agreed that the **security forces would not launch any operations against these groups.** In return, the **insurgent groups will also not launch any such operation.**
- The pact also requires these groups to **abide by the Indian Constitution,** the **laws of the land,** and the **territorial integrity of Manipur.**
- The SoO pact further bars these groups from committing any activity that amounts to **atrocity or, extortion,** or any other **unlawful operation.**
- The militant cadres are to be confined to **designated camps** identified by the government. **Arms are deposited** in a safe room under a double-locking system. The groups are given arms only to guard their camps and protect their leaders.
- As part of the **rehabilitation package**, the cadres living in the designated camps are given a **monthly stipend of 6000 Rs**. Financial assistance is also being provided to maintain the designated camps.

Demand for suspension of the Pact:

- After **ethnic violence between the Kuki-Zo people** and the **Meitei people** erupted in the State in **May 2023**, there were strong **demands** from the Valley areas to **abrogate the SoO agreement.**
- The **Manipur government** had claimed that **SoO groups violated ground rules** & **instigated violence.**
- **Meitei civil society groups** have also demanded that the MHA not extend the pact.
- The **Manipur Assembly** has also **passed a resolution** to urge the Central government to **abrogate the SoO pact** with Kuki-Zo insurgent groups.

Current Status:

- **Manipur government did not send its representative** to the last meeting held to discuss the extension of SoO.
- Without the participation of the Manipur government, the **SoO pact could not be extended** on paper. As of now, the **status quo exists.**

THREATS TO INTERNAL SECURITY

UAPA & Associated debates

News Excerpt:

Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) has been invoked against the news portal NewsClick.

About the news:

- The police have accused the NewsClick **founder** of holding discussions with an "active member of the Propaganda department of the Communist Party of China" to **distort** the **map of India** by projecting Kashmir and Arunachal Pradesh as disputed territory.
- NewsClick is accused of money laundering by the ED, allegedly receiving ₹77 crore as foreign remittance between 2018-21 with nearly ₹38 crore from entities with alleged links to China.
- The provisions invoked against NewsClick include **Section 13** (unlawful activities), **16** (terrorist act), **17** (raising funds for terrorist acts), **18** (conspiracy), and **22 (C)** (offenses by companies, trusts) of the UAPA, along with **IPC sections 153 A** (promoting enmity between different religious groups) and **120B** (criminal conspiracy).

Foreign funding to Indian media:

- The Indian regulatory framework permits foreign funding in the news media industry. However, the allegations against NewsClick are based on its purported use of foreign funds to spread false narratives against India and favour its geopolitical rival.
- In recent years, India has implemented stricter regulations on foreign funding of domestic entities, particularly NGOs and religious organizations. There is a growing concern that such entities, may indulge in anti-India activities on the counter side of the argument is that it curtails civil liberties as political parties are allowed to receive foreign fundings.

Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA)

- PMLA is a comprehensive penal statute to counter the threat of money laundering, in response to India's international commitment to Vienna convention.
- Critics of the law often refereed it as the government's "hatchet" law, and there is growing concern among the civil society about the powers given to the ED through this law.

Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), 1967:

- The law **aims** to prevent certain **unlawful activities** of individuals and associations effectively and also deals with **terrorist activities**. An "unlawful activity" can include:
  o Any action which is done to bring about the surrender of Indian territory.
  o Any action that supports the withdrawal of a part of Indian territory from the larger Union of India.

- o Actions that question or disrupt the sovereignty and territorial integrity of our country.
  - o Any action that causes (or wants to cause) discontent against India.
- The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) **Amendment Act of 2019** broadened the definition of "terrorist" to include **individuals**.
- It provides for a **Tribunal** under a **High Court judge** to be constituted by the government for its bans to have long-term legal sanctity.
- The **NIA Director-General** can now seize assets obtained through terrorism. The government can **seize** the **properties**, **bank accounts** and **offices** connected to these organizations and individuals.
- In **2022**, the Ministry of Home Affairs declared the Popular Front of India (**PFI)** an "unlawful association" with any of its associates under UAPA.

UAPA vis-a-vis IPC:

- UAPA presents an **alternate criminal law framework** where the general principles of criminal law are reversed. By **relaxing timelines** for the state to file **chargesheets** and its stringent conditions for **bail**, the UAPA gives the state more powers compared with the Indian Penal Code (IPC).
- A **remand order** can be for **30 days** instead of the usual 15, and the maximum period of **judicial custody** before filing a chargesheet is extendable from the usual 90 days to **180 days**.
- Just like other special laws dealing with narcotic drugs and the now-defunct laws on terrorism (TADA and POTA), the UAPA also **modifies** the Code of Criminal Procedure **(CrPC)** to give it more teeth.

Significance of UAPA:

- **Need of the hour:** India faces **formidable** security challenges, especially in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, the Naxalism-affected states, and the North-Eastern region. The UAPA presents the government with authorized means to **scrutinize** and bring to justice persons and groups that participate in terrorist actions.
- **Empowerment:** The law permits the establishment of **dedicated courts** to handle trials and mandates severe punishment for terrorism-related crimes.
  - o Additionally, it grants the government the authority to **classify individuals** or **groups** as terrorist entities and freeze their financial assets.
- **Broader scope:** Its purpose is to combat terrorism and other illegal activities like **organized crime**, **money laundering**, and **trafficking.**

Issues with UAPA:

- **Criminalizing opinion and thoughts:** UAPA criminalizes the holding of particular opinions or even the mere possession of **literature**. Crimes are not just considered as **acts of commission** or **omission** but as thoughts influencing others' thoughts.
- **Violation of rights:** It criminalizes various forms of non-violent political activities, including **political protest**.
  - o It is often viewed as an assault on citizens' rights to **expression**, **assembly,** and **association** under **Article 19** and right to life and liberty under Article 21.
- **Bypassing safeguards**: It has been used to bypass fundamental **legal rights** and **procedures** such as the presumption of innocence, provision of bail or **anticipatory bail**, protection from warrantless **search**, **seizure** and **arrest** of individuals, and time limits on **detention** by the police.
- **Extensive powers:** UAPA confers broad **discretionary powers** on the government and authorizes the **creation of special courts** along with the ability to use **secret witnesses** and hold **closed-door hearings**.
- **No Judicial review:** A **review committee** to de-notify the individual notified as a terrorist is constituted by the central government, thus removing all the chances of any institutional mechanism for judicial review.

SUPREME COURT JUDGEMENTS

01 ARUP BHUYAN V. STATE OF ASSAM (2011)
Mere membership of a banned organisation will not incriminate a person unless he resorts to violence.. A person's association with an unlawful organisation must be an active "membership".

02 K.A. NAJEEB V. UNION OF INDIA (2021)
Despite the UAPA's restrictions on bail, constitutional courts can nevertheless grant bail if the accused's fundamental rights have been violated.

03 ARUP BHUYAN VS STATE OF ASSAM (2023)
Even a mere membership of a banned association is sufficient to constitute an offence. It upheld the constitutional validity of Section 10(a) (i) of the UAPA.

Way Forward:

Despite having significance regarding upholding the nation's sovereignty and integrity and safeguarding the lives and possessions of its people**, UAPA has been the subject of intense debate and scrutiny. Striking balance:** Finding a balance between safeguarding **national security** and protecting **civil liberties** is crucial. The act will be an efficient **tool** if it is executed impartially and justly, and its regulations are not exploited to suppress lawful modes of dissent or activism.

Future of India's Cyber Landscapes

News Excerpt:

Recently, the **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY)** signaled a proactive approach to regulating and shaping the digital future of the nation through the announcement of the **Digital India Act 2023 (DIA).** It is a significant step towards establishing a future-ready legal framework for the country's burgeoning digital ecosystem.

Background:

- The DIA, poised to replace the two-decade-old **Information Technology Act of 2000 (IT Act),** is designed to address the challenges and openings presented by the dramatic growth of the internet and emerging technologies.
- The IT Act of 2000, drafted during a time when the internet was in its immaturity, has struggled to keep pace with the rapid-fire changes in technology and user behaviour. Since its commencement, **India's internet user base has exploded from a bare 5.5 million to a stunning 850 million.**

Key provisions of DIA:

The proposed DIA includes a range of essential aspects aimed at addressing the constantly evolving digital landscape.

- Strong **emphasis on online safety and trust, with a commitment to securing citizen's rights in the digital realm** while remaining adaptable to shifting request dynamics and transnational legal principles.
- Recognizing the **growing significance of new-age technologies similar to artificial intelligence and blockchain,** the DIA provides guidelines for their responsible utilization.
- DIA strikes a balance between fostering invention and securing against implicit damages.
- It promotes **ethical AI practices, data sequestration in blockchain operations, and mechanisms for responsibility in the use of these technologies.**
- It upholds the conception of an open internet, striking a balance between availability and necessary regulations to maintain order and protect users. Also, the DIA

authorizes strict Know Your Client (KYC) conditions for wearable bias, accompanied by criminal law sanctions.

- It contemplates a review of the **"safe harbor" principle,** which presently shields online platforms from liability related to user-generated content, indicating an implicit shift in online responsibility norms.

Safe harbour

- Safe harbour – as prescribed under Section 79 of the IT Act, 2000 – is legal immunity that online intermediaries enjoy against content posted by users on their platforms.
- This is available as long as these platforms abide by certain due diligence requirements, such as censoring content when asked by the government or courts.
- The concept originally came from Section 230 of the United States' Communications Decency Act, which has been termed "one of the foundational laws behind the modern Internet".

Reason for new DIA:

- Intermediaries were synonymous with the safe harbor in the 2000s. Still, they have since evolved into various Internet participants with very varied functional needs that call for multiple guardrails and legal requirements.
- **Among other restrictions, the present IT Act has the following ones:**
  - Lack of comprehensive user rights, trust, and safety protections;
  - Limited recognition of harms and new forms of cybercrimes without any institutional mechanism for awareness creation;
  - Absence of clear regulatory procedures for harmful and illicit content.
  - Lack of adequate principles for data/privacy protection.
  - Lack of a converged, coordinated & harmonized institutional regulatory body; a dedicated & efficacious investigatory/ enforceability and a swift adjudicatory mechanism;
  - Inadequately coordinated incident response processes for cyber security incidents.

Importance of DIA:

- This forward-thinking attitude is advantageous for both businesses and citizens, and it also establishes India as a responsible player in the global technology landscape, prepared to utilize cutting-edge technologies while minimizing associated risks fully.
- The DIA is a critical step in ensuring that India has a secure, responsible, and innovative digital future. In a time of constant change, it represents a forward-thinking approach to regulation and has the potential to

influence the digital landscape of the nation for future generations.

- This act will also **regulate a range of crimes** the government thinks are unique to the online space. The **weaponization of misinformation under the garb of free speech, along with other harms, including cyberbullying, doxxing, and identity theft, will not be entertained and will be regulated under this act.**

Doxxing:

- It is a type of online harassment when someone's real name, address, job, or other identifying information is made public without the victim's permission.
- It is intended to degrade, abuse, harass, or otherwise harm a victim.

- An effective adjudicatory mechanism will also be explored under the Digital India Act.

Challenges associated with DIA:

- The review of the "safe harbor" principle, which shields online platforms from liability for user-generated content, could lead to a more conservative approach among these platforms, conceivably knocking on freedom of expression.
- The DIA's success hinges on effective enforcement, requiring substantial resources, expertise, and infrastructure.
- Balancing the interests of various stakeholders, including tech titans, while ensuring the protection of citizen rights poses a significant challenge.

Government Initiatives for Cyber Security

- National Security Council Secretariat organizes the 2nd Edition of the National Cyber Security Exercise **' Bharat NCX 2023'** for Government associations, Public and Private Sectors to strengthen India's Cyber posture of India's Critical Sector.

Bharat NCX

- The objective of the exercise is to train senior management and technical personnel of the government, critical sector organizations and public and private agencies about contemporary cyber threats and handling cyber incidents and response.
- The program is being conducted by the **National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS), Govt. of India in strategic cooperation with Rashtriya Raksha University (RRU).**

- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) started the **Cyber Surakshit Bharat initiative** to create a robust cybersecurity ecosystem in India. This aligns with the government's vision for a Digital India'. The National e-Government Division (NeGD) patronized this program.

- India's public agency for Cybersecurity, **The Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In)**, has led to a reduction in cyber-attacks on government networks due to its advancements in diving the nation's Cybersecurity. By tutoring cybersecurity mindfulness and anti-phishing to government officers across India, government workers are more set to fight cybercrime.
- As a part of the Indian Government's enterprise on Cybersecurity, to guard critical information applicable to public security, profitable development, and public health, India has established the **National Critical Information Structure Protection Center.**
- **A national cyber collaboration center (NCCC)** has been set up in the government's **Cyber Swachhta initiative** to help with increased situational mindfulness about being and implicit cyber threats.

Digital forensics

- Digital forensics is a branch of forensic science that focuses on identifying, acquiring, recycling, analyzing, and reporting on data stored electronically.
- Electronic substantiation is an element of nearly all felonious conditioning, and digital forensics support is pivotal for law enforcement examinations.
- Electronic substantiation can be collected from various sources, such as computers, smartphones, remote storehouses, unmanned upstanding systems, shipborne outfits, and more.
- The main feature of digital forensics is to prize data from the electronic substantiation, process it into practicable intelligence, and present the findings for execution. All processes use sound forensic ways to ensure the findings are permissible in court.
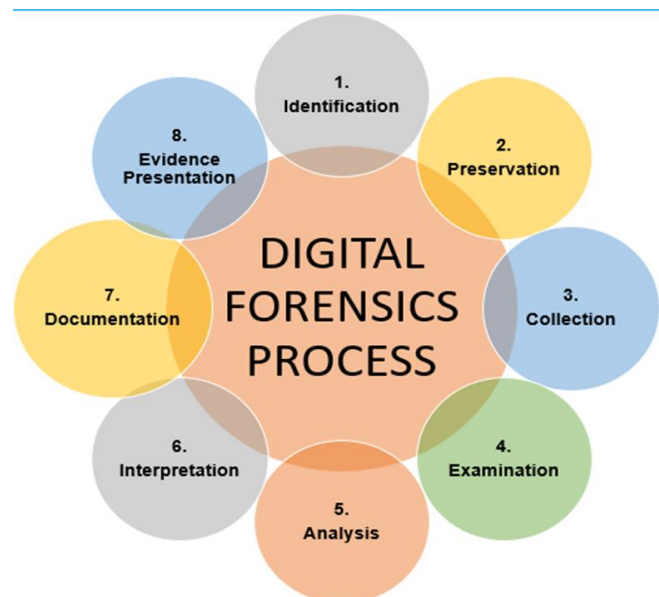
Way Forward

- The nation should improve its digital forensics capabilities so that cyberattacks can be quickly detected and stopped.
- Through digital campaigns, advertisements, or direct instruction, the government should adequately support cyber education in both urban and rural areas of the nation.
- The mechanism should be straightforward, offer prompt recourse to citizens, resolve online conflicts, and create future cyber jurisprudence.
- To enforce strict regulations and penalize businesses that don't increase their investments in Cybersecurity, India needs a lone, central agency.
- At both the state and federal levels, there are numerous government organizations today. Establishing a national cybercrime unit with the resources to combat threats and breaches is essential.
- The responsibility of creating defences against cybercrime must be shared in part by businesses and business organizations. Organizations need to hire cybercrime specialists to create policies and SOPs in the event of a cybersecurity threat.
- As part of the government's national strategy, Cybersecurity must be integrated into important strategic and socioeconomic initiatives.

India and its National Security Strategy

News Excerpt:

India plans to launch its National Security Strategy (NSS).

What is a National Security Strategy (NSS)?

- It is a detailed document **outlining the country's security objectives** and how to achieve them. It **defines traditional and non-traditional threats** as well as **opportunities.**
- It also sets the accountability of **agencies tasked with implementing** such responsibilities.
- It will not just **guide** military and internal security, but also **guide critical defence and security reforms**. It provides a holistic view of overall National Security.
- It guides how military, economic, and diplomatic assets will be allocated to support the national security strategy.
- **It also evaluates potential risks, and challenges** in implementing the strategy, **risk management, and mitigation plans.**

NSS developed by:

- The **National Security Council Secretariat** will develop the strategy under the **National Security Council (NSC)**.

  - The NSC is the apex body of the **three-tiered structure** of **India's National Security Management System.**
  - **The National Security Advisor** chairs it.
  - It exercises its power through the National Security Council Secretariat, which has **four verticals: Strategic Planning, Internal Affairs, Intelligence and Technology, and a Military vertical**.
- The **Cabinet Committee on Security then** accords the final approval.

Countries having NSS:

Most developed countries with an advanced military and security infrastructure have a National Security Strategy in place, which is updated from time to time. For e.g.- U.S., Russia U.K and also China have published their respective National Security Strategies.

India's Need for NSS:

- Currently, there is only one political directive for defence forces in the document called "**Raksha Mantri's Operational Directive of 2009**", which needs to be revised.
- It would help various government **agencies to work cohesively**, avoiding duplication of efforts, and if the need arises, this would prevent **ad hoc decision-making.**
- It would ensure the **public understands the nation's security interests**, fostering a sense of national security consciousness.
- It helps signal the nation's position on international security issues and **fosters confidence among allies** while deterring potential adversaries like China and Pakistan.
- In an uncertain geopolitical world, India can remain **responsive to emerging threats,** both from traditional and non-traditional sources.
- It demonstrates that India is **taking a proactive approach to national security**, aligning with its growing stature as a significant player in global affairs.
- It can facilitate the establishment of integrated theatre commands and step up the **pace of military modernization** by offering clear directives to the forces.

Way Forward:

- The counterargument usually given against NSS is that it places critical defence doctrines and strategies in the public light. **However, the benefits of having a well-structured NSS surely outweigh the challenges**.
- As **India carves its niche on the global stage**, a clear and comprehensive NSS is essential for protecting the nation's interests and communicating them to the world.

Rise in Cyber Attacks in India

News Excerpt:

In a massive data breach, details of over 81.5 crore citizens with the **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)** were on sale. The breach includes sensitive data such as Names, Phone numbers, Addresses, Aadhar numbers, and Passport information.

The surge in Cyber-Attacks in India:

India is seeing a surge in cyber attacks on technological infrastructures, thus impacting sectors like banking, insurance, and healthcare. **India has averaged 1.3 million cyber attacks yearly since 2020, as rapid digital transformation has led to vulnerabilities in new infrastructures.**

- All cyber attacks entail a financial cost. Last year, the Official Cybercrime Report by Cyber-Security Ventures projected this cost globally at $8 trillion for 2023.
- State-sponsored cyber attacks against India increased by **278%** between 2021 and September 2023.
- The targeted cyber attacks on government agencies went up by 460% and those on **startups and small and medium enterprises (SMEs)** by 508%, according to the **2023 India Threat Landscape Report** by Singapore-based cyber security firm Cyfirma.
- In India, **Cyfirma (a cybersecurity firm)** found that service companies, including **IT and BPO**, were receiving 14.3% of cyber attacks between March 2021 and September 2023. This was followed by **manufacturing at 11.6**%, and **healthcare and education** at around 10% each.
- **Retail** agencies, including online platforms, saw **9.8% of attacks**, while government agencies saw **9.6% of attacks**.

What is Cyber Security?

- It **protects computer systems from theft or damage** to their hardware, software, or electronic data, as well as from disruption or misdirection of the services they provide.
- It is the collection of **security concepts and safeguards, training, and best practices** that can be used to protect the organization's cyber environment.
- Cyber security **ensures** the maintenance of the security properties of the organization and user's assets **against security risks in networked environments.**

Challenges to Cyber Security in India:

- **Widespread digital illiteracy** makes Indian citizens highly susceptible to cyber fraud, cyber theft, etc.
- **Lack of adoption of new technology:** For e.g., Banking infrastructure is not robust enough to cope with the rising digital crime as 75% of the total credit and debit cards are based on a magnetic strip, which is easy to clone.

- **Lack of adequate infrastructure and trained staff:** There are currently around 30,000 cyber security job vacancies in India, but demand far outstrips the supply.
- **Anonymity:** Even advanced precision threats hackers carry are difficult to attribute to specific actors, state, or non-state.
- **Underreporting:** More than 90% of cybercrime incidents remain under the sheet due to fear of reputational and credibility loss of an organization.
- **Information Warfare**: Information and communication technologies can be used to manipulate and disrupt the information and perception environment of the country, promoting anti-national elements.
- **Leakage of sensitive information** like defence and security through attacks on communication networks which can destabilize **Critical Infrastructure** like Nuclear power plants, power grids, etc.

Steps taken to prevent Cyber Attacks by India:

- **National Cyber Security Policy 2013 (NCSP):** The policy aims to protect the public and private infrastructure from cyber attacks.
- **National Cyber Security Reference Framework (NCRF) 2023**: The NCRF policy will be aimed at helping critical sectors such as banking, energy, and others with "strategic guidance" to address cyber security concerns.
- **Indian Computer Emergency Response Team, 2004 (CERT-In):** It is crucial in providing alerts, advisories, and continuous monitoring of cyber security threats.

Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In)

- CERT-In is in operation since January 2004.
- It is the **national nodal agency** for responding to computer security incidents as and when they occur under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITy).

Its functions:

- **Collection, analysis and dissemination** of information on cyber incidents.
- **Forecast and alerts** of cyber security incidents
- **Emergency measures** for handling cyber security incidents
- **Issue guidelines**, advisories, vulnerability notes and white papers relating to information security practices.

- **Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000:** The Government has enacted and amended laws to address cyber threats and crimes. The IT Act of 2000 and its amendments empower authorities to take action against cyber offences.
- The **Ministry of Home Affairs** has provided financial assistance to all the States & UTs under the **Cyber Crime Prevention against Women & Children (CCPWC) scheme** to support their efforts for setting up cyber forensic-cum-training laboratories, training, and hiring of junior cyber consultants.

- The Government has established the **Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C)** to provide a framework and eco-system to deal with cyber crimes in a comprehensive and coordinated manner.
- The Government has launched the **National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal (www.cybercrime.gov.in)** to enable the public to report incidents about all types of cyber crimes, with a particular focus on cyber crimes against women and children.
  - A **toll-free number, 1930,** has been operationalized to get assistance in lodging online cyber complaints.

Way Forward:

- **Develop intelligent systems:** To mitigate the increasing number of cyber attacks in India, cyber security experts call for **using AI, large language models, and machine learning** to develop intelligent systems for dynamic defence.
- **Budapest Convention**: India may consider acceding to the Budapest Convention.
- **Mock drills:** Cyber Security mock drills should be regularly conducted to prepare the organizations to detect, mitigate, and prevent cyber incidents.
- **Air gapping**: The concept of air gapping, which isolates critical infrastructures from the internet, should be used.
- **International data protection law**: The Indian Government should promote attempts to create a global data protection law that facilitates quick information-sharing with multinational companies that do not host domestic servers.
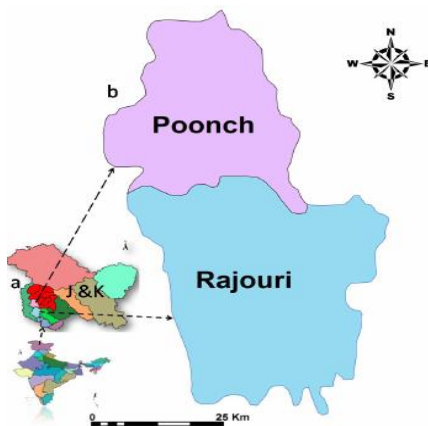
The shift of the terrorist activity from Kashmir to Jammu

News Excerpt:

- The recent shift of terrorist activities from the Kashmir Valley to the Jammu sector is making Poonch-Rajouri a terror hotspot.

About:

- The recent run of encounters in the depth areas of the **Poonch-Rajouri sector** has resulted in more losses for the Army than the terrorists.
- In addition, while the Kashmir zone — the traditionally more volatile area — is relatively quiet, it's the **Pir Panjal (South) in the Jammu sector,** which has, in recent months, witnessed more operational activity and the presence of terrorists.
- The areas of Rajouri and Poonch have seen multiple high-visibility militant attacks this year.

Reasons:

- **Least resistance:** Kashmir's strong, layered **counter-infiltration (CI) and counter-terrorism (CT)** grid makes planning proxy operations difficult. The abrogation of **Article 370** has also made Kashmir less conducive to separatist trends. Thus, Jammu offers less resistance than Kashmir.
- **Reduction in deployment:** From May 2020 onwards, when the Ladakh sector was activated, some troops were lifted from the Jammu sector and redeployed there. There may have been some dilution, but HQ Northern Command has always been watchful and has followed the basic principle of redeploying and creating other reserves.
- **Easier Route:** Rajouri is a transit route to Kashmir. When security forces corner terrorists, terrorists will always have the option to cross the LoC to return to Pakistan.
- **Local Support:** The Poonch-Rajouri sector has had a chequered history of local support, which enabled Pakistan to establish a strong proxy presence in the forested and **rocky tracts of the Pir Panjal (South).**
- **Change of weather:** The Line of Control (LoC) is easier to infiltrate than the Kashmir region because the area gets covered by snow during the winter. Due to dense forest areas, it becomes easier for the terrorists to camouflage and dodge the security forces.

What steps should be taken?

- **Brigade-sized operations** should be conducted with drone support in the lower reaches of the Pir Panjal, as the foliage cover is lowest at this time. This needs to be reinforced by a strong public outreach.
- Political and civil society leaders must be balanced in their utterances, and the media should also not speculate.
- If there are any casualties, then **the transparency of an inquiry and suitable disciplinary action** is expected from the Army.
- An immediate drive to address the **emotions prevailing among the local communities** must be undertaken by direct contact and interaction.

Way Forward:

- The Indian Army is further strengthening its preparedness on the Line of Control and the International Border from where these terrorists have been trying to infiltrate into the Indian side from across.
- Over the last 33 years, such moments have often come and gone. The nation needs to remain reassured of the ability of the Government and Army to see it through.

Personally Identifiable Information

News Excerpt:

The Ministry of Corporate Affairs recently **fixed a critical vulnerability in its online portal** months after a cybersecurity researcher reported it to India's Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In).

- The **vulnerability** reportedly exposed **personal details** — like **Aadhaar, PAN, voter identity, passport, date of birth, contact number and address** — of more than 98 lakh directors of Indian companies.

What is Personally Identifiable Information?

- Personally Identifiable Information (PII) is any **data or information** maintained by an organization or agency that can **potentially be used to identify a specific individual.**
- This could include information such as Aadhaar, PAN, voter identity, passport, date of birth, contact number, communication address, and **biometric information**.
- The constituents of PII vary depending on an individual's home country.
- However, **non-PII** can be used to **identify an individual in tandem with additional information.**
  - **Non-PII information** includes **photographic images** (especially of the face or other identifying characteristics), **place of birth, religion, geographic indicators, employment information, educational qualifications, and medical records.**
- While **access to one set of PII** may be **enough to compromise online security**, access to multiple databases can be used to identify and target individuals.

What is the difference between sensitive and non-sensitive PII?

- **Non-sensitive PII** is **publicly available information** and can be stored and transmitted unencrypted.
  - This includes **zip code, race, gender, and religion**.
  - They cannot be used to **identify an individual accurately.**
- **Sensitive PII,** when exposed, can be used to **identify individuals and potentially cause harm.**
  - **Sensitive PII is stored by employers, government organizations, banks, and other digital accounts used by individuals.**

What are the risks of PII exposure?

- Cyberattacks and **weaknesses in digital infrastructure** can lead to the **exposure of citizens' PII.**
- **Threat actors** can **access exposed PII** and **misuse** it to launch **targeted attacks** on individuals.
- These **attacks** could range from **phishing attacks** with messages curated with PII information to **fraudulently opening bank accounts** and **siphoning funds from accounts allotted to beneficiaries** of **government welfare programmes.**

- Threat actors may also use such information to **obtain cellular connections and credit cards and compromise the security of an individual's digital accounts.**
- Threat actors also **sell exposed PII information on the dark web.**

What are the recent events where PII was compromised?

- In 2023, reports emerged that a **bot on Telegram** was **returning the personal data of Indian citizens** who **registered with the COVID-19 vaccine intelligence network (CoWIN) portal** for vaccination purposes.
- A similar data breach was reported when an **American cybersecurity company** said that the **PII of 815 million Indian citizens**, including **Aadhaar numbers and passport details**, were being **sold on the dark web**.
- A **data breach** was also reported in the **RailYatri platform in January 2023.**

How can one protect PII?

- Individuals may be unable to prevent leaks in government organizations' or service providers' databases.
  - However, they can take steps to ensure that their PII is not readily available to threat actors.
- **Look for HTTPs in URLs** when visiting unknown websites. The **"S" stands for secure** and is **used by legitimate websites** to secure collected information from unsecured connections.
  - Some browsers may use a **lock symbol in the URL bar to signify a secure website.**
- **Use a VPN** when **accessing sensitive information using public networks.**
  - A **VPN helps protect PII** and other vital data by securing your online connection from prying eyes on public networks.
- **Keep a tab on your PII**, such as Aadhaar, passport, PAN, Voter ID, and other important identity proofs.
- **Avoid sharing** or accessing **images or details** of **identity documents** through **unknown devices.**
  - **If you access them** at a photocopy shop or devices owned by others, **make sure to delete the documents**, even from recycle bins, to ensure they are not misused.
- **Avoid sharing personal information** on **social media** platforms.
- **Keep a tab on your bank account transactions**, credit cards, and credit score; a hit in the score could mean your PII has been misused to procure credit cards in your name.

Provisions related to Data security in India:

Digital Personal Data Protection Act 2023 (DPDPA)
○ It aims to **empower citizens** with the **right to know** and **hold authority over their data.**
○ It **limits corporate and government surveillance** and **citizen profiling possibilities** with exceptions built in for national security and interests.

Information Technology (Reasonable Security Practices and Procedures and Sensitive Personal Data or Information) Rules, 2011

- ○ It is a basic framework for **regulating sensitive personal data**.
- ○ These rules are **limited primarily to the collection, possession, storage, handling, retention, transfer, and disclosure of sensitive personal data** by corporations by introducing a consent requirement for all such activities.
- ○ The law prescribes certain **"security practices and procedures"** for handling sensitive data.

Justice B. N. Srikrishna Committee

- ○ In 2017, the central government established a Committee of Experts on Data Protection, which Justice B. N. Srikrishna led.
- ○ The primary **objective** of this committee was to **investigate and analyse matters pertaining to data protection** within the country.

Digital India Act 2023 (DIA)

- ○ It represents a significant step towards **establishing a future-ready legal framework for the country's burgeoning digital ecosystem.**
- ○ This move by the **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY)** signals a **proactive approach to regulating and shaping the nation's digital future.**
- ○ It is poised to **replace** the two-decade-old **Information Technology Act of 2000 (IT Act).**
- ○ It is designed to address the challenges and opportunities presented by the dramatic growth of the internet and emerging technologies.

Way Forward:

Personal Identifiable Information (PII) is frequently a target for identity thieves, especially over the Internet. **Thus, it becomes essential for companies and government agencies to keep their databases secure**. It must be a multifaceted approach; the **common public must also be aware of** how to keep their information safe and report to the authorities when required.

Grey Zone Warfare

News Excerpt:

Grey zone warfare has become the latest in informal warfare.

About Grey Zone Warfare

- ● It generally means **a middle, unclear space between direct conflict and peace** in international relations.
  - ○ **The grey zone describes** a set of activities that occur between peace (or cooperation) and war (or armed conflict).
  - ○ Many activities fall into this murky middle ground—from nefarious economic activities, influence operations, and cyberattacks to mercenary operations, assassinations, and disinformation campaigns.
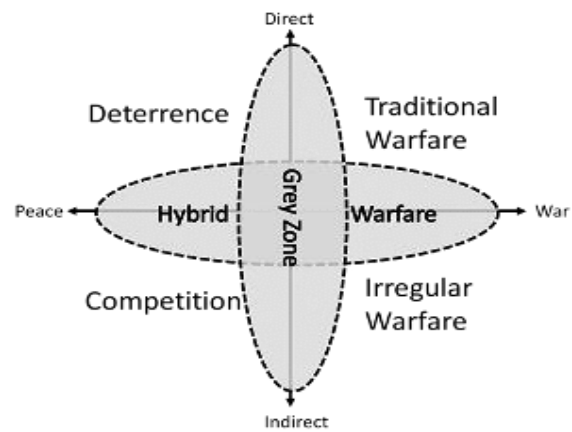
- ● Generally, grey-zone activities are considered **gradualist campaigns by state and non-state actors that combine non-military and quasi-military tools and fall below the threshold of armed conflict.**
  - ○ **They aim** to thwart, destabilize, weaken, or attack an adversary and are often tailored to the vulnerabilities of the target state.
- ● While grey-zone activities are nothing new, the onset of new technologies has provided states with more tools to operate and avoid clear categorization, attribution, and detection—all of which complicate the nation-states' ability to respond.
  - ○ Activities in the grey zone **have always been a feature of great-power competition.**

Grey Zone Tactics against India:

Grey Zone warfare involves the **use of various unconventional tactics and strategies** that fall below the threshold of traditional warfare but still **aim to advance a nation's interests and influence.** Countries such as China use these measures to achieve their sovereignty goals while minimizing the risk of escalation.

Here are some ways Grey Zone warfare is waged:

- ● **Cyber Operations -** This includes system intrusions to deny the availability of information systems, hacking and stealing data, corrupting data, spreading disinformation, and conducting cyber espionage to disrupt or influence a target country's critical infrastructure, political systems, or economy without causing direct physical harm.
- ● **Information Warfare**: Propaganda, rumours, fake news, social media manipulation, and psychological operations are used to shape public opinion, create divisions, and undermine trust in institutions within the target nation.
- ● **Support to Proxy Forces -** Providing support to non-state actors, insurgents, or militias in a way that enables them to advance the supporting nation's agenda without officially engaging in direct conflict. During the 80s and 90s, Chinese support for various insurgent movements in India's northeast was widely known, and it continues to this day.

- **Economic Coercion -** Imposing sanctions, trade restrictions, or manipulating financial markets to undermine the target nation's economy or coerce policy changes without military action. Australia's support of the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong led China to levy a 212 per cent tariff on Australian wines in 2020.
- **Political Subversion** - Using covert **means to influence elections, manipulate political processes, or support political groups** or movements that align with the aggressor's interests.
- **Irregular Warfare -** Deploying unconventional military tactics such as **guerrilla warfare, sabotage, or asymmetric attacks** by leveraging smaller, specialized units or non-traditional military forces forms part of Irregular Warfare.
- **Legal and Diplomatic Maneuvering**—China is careful when exploiting legal or diplomatic loopholes, leveraging international institutions, or manipulating alliances to weaken the target country's position on the global stage while offering a justification for its own actions based on precepts and conventions of law.
- **Military Intimidation -** This involves using military assets to convey the threat of a potential military attack or a risk of military escalation.
  - The massing of PLA troops at the contested borders with India opposite Galwan in Ladakh was part of this military intimidation that went awry, and China suffered many casualties – allegedly much more than those suffered by the Indian side.

Way Forward:

Grey Zone Warfare is an important tactic in international relations that helps make good relations with countries on some fronts with issues on other fronts. Thus, a nation must be prepared on all fronts, be it in conventional war or unconventional of this sort.

Digital arrest

News Excerpt:

Due to the rapid surge in digital arrests, the **Central government collaborated with Microsoft** to block 1,000 Skype IDs involved in online blackmail, extortion, and intimidation.

What is digital arrest?

- In the world of cybercrime, a new crime, '**digital arrest**', is rapidly increasing.
- The fraudsters deceive potential individuals by pretending to be government officials and law enforcement authorities.
- They **accuse their target of malicious involvement** in illegal activities, which could lead to serious legal consequences and prosecution.

- They demand a huge sum of money to resolve the issues and direct the victim to be quarantined unless the issue is resolved**. This is known as digital arrest.**

Modus Operandi of digital arrest:

- The Ministry of Home Affairs has outlined common ways entertained by the criminals to deceive individuals:
  - **Initial Contact:** Fraudsters initiate contact by phone, alleging involvement in illegal activities like trafficking drugs or fake passports.
  - **Threats**: They may claim that a family member has been detained due to criminal activities or an accident, instilling fear in the victim.
  - **Monetary Demands:** To avoid repercussions, victims are coerced into paying the fraudsters a large sum of money.
  - **Digital Arrests:** In some instances, victims are coerced into staying on video calls via platforms such as Skype until they comply with demands. The criminals create fake settings resembling police stations and wear uniforms to appear authentic.

Status of digital arrest:

- A large number of complaints have been made on the **National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal (NCRP)** about intimidation, blackmail, extortion, and digital arrests by cybercriminals posing as police officers, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), Narcotics Department, Reserve Bank of India (RBI), and Enforcement Directorate (ED), etc.
- According to the **Intelligence Agencies,** these incidents are part of an online organized economic crime racket run by cross-border crime syndicates.

Government steps to curb it:

- **Ministry of Home Affairs: The Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Center (I4C)** has blocked more than 1,000 Skype IDs by collaborating with Microsoft.
- **Ministry of Communication:** The **Department of Telecommunications (DoT)** has issued advisories to alert citizens about fake calls threatening disconnection and has implemented various measures to combat suspected fraudulent communications:
  - **CHAKSHU:** As part of the **Sanchar Saathi initiative**, 52 entities sending malicious and phishing SMSs have been blacklisted.
  - **SMS and Handset Blocks:** Nationwide deactivation of 700 SMS templates and blacklisting of 348 mobile handsets have been carried out.
  - **Re-verification and Disconnections:** As of April 30, 2024, 8,272 of the **10,834 flagged mobile** numbers for re-verification **were disconnected** due to failed re-verification.
  - **Handset Blocks:** Nationwide blocking of 8.6 million mobile handsets has been enforced due to cybercrime and financial fraud involvement.

Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Center (I4C):

- The Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) is an initiative of the **Ministry of Home Affairs,** Government of India, established **to address cybercrime** in a coordinated and comprehensive manner.
- It aims to tackle various issues related to cybercrime by improving coordination among different law enforcement agencies and stakeholders.
- The I4C scheme was **approved on October 5, 2018**, and since then, it has been working towards enhancing the nation's capacity to combat cybercrimes.

Objectives of I4C:

- To act as a nodal point to curb Cybercrime in the country.
- To strengthen the fight against Cybercrime committed against women and children.
- Facilitate easy filing of cybercrime-related complaints and identify Cybercrime trends and patterns.
- To act as an early warning system for Law Enforcement Agencies for proactive Cybercrime prevention and detection.
- Awareness creation among the public about preventing Cybercrime.
- Assist States/UTs in capacity building of Police Officers, Public Prosecutors and Judicial Officers in the area of cyber forensics, investigation, cyber hygiene, cyber-criminology, etc.

Way Forward:

- Stay vigilant and report any suspicious calls or threats to the cybercrime **helpline number 1930.**
- **Immediate reporting and awareness** are crucial in combating cybercrimes effectively.
- Given the dynamic nature of cybercriminal tactics, both authorities and the public must adopt a proactive approach**. Collaboration** among government agencies, technology companies, and law enforcement is essential in addressing the cybercrime threat.

India records highest number of Internet shutdowns in 2023

News Excerpt:

For the sixth year in a row, India led the world in internet shutdowns, disrupting the internet at least 116 times.

More about the news:

In 2023, there was a concerning surge in internet shutdowns worldwide, marking it as the most severe year on record for such disruptions, as outlined in the latest **report** titled **"Shrinking democracy, growing violence: internet shutdowns in 2023** published by **Access Now organization**."

What is an Internet shutdown?

- An internet shutdown is a **deliberate interruption of internet or electronic communications**, rendering them inaccessible or effectively unusable for a specific population or within a particular location.
- Typically orchestrated by a government or similar authority, these actions aim to control the flow of information and influence individuals' behaviour.

Global Findings:

- **Unprecedented Levels of Shutdowns:** The year 2023 saw the highest number of internet shutdowns in a single year since monitoring began in 2016, with **283 shutdowns across 39 countries**. This represents a **41% increase from 2022**, signalling a significant escalation in the use of shutdowns to suppress expression and hinder access to information.
- **Conflicts as Primary Driver:** Conflicts emerged as the primary driver of shutdowns for the first time since 2016, with shutdowns intersecting with natural disasters as a new worrying trend. Shutdowns during conflicts exacerbated humanitarian crises, contributing to the most violent year on record.
- **Triggers for Shutdowns:** In 2023, key triggers for shutdowns included **protests, school exams, and elections**. Conflicts became the leading global driver for shutdowns, with more militaries employing them as part of deliberate strategies.
- **International Response:** Despite challenges, significant international support was provided to combat shutdowns in 2023, with stakeholders taking unprecedented action through initiatives like the **#KeepItOn Election Watch** and legal challenges, urging governments to uphold human rights obligations.
- **Continued Concerns:** The fight against shutdowns continues, with elections slated for 2024 raising further concerns about the potential for increased shutdowns and their impact on democratic processes and human rights.

India Specific Findings:

- **Frequency and Scope of Shutdowns:** India led globally in internet shutdowns for the sixth consecutive year, with 116 shutdown orders issued in 2023. These shutdowns increasingly targeted regional areas rather than localized ones, indicating a broader application of this measure.
- **Extensive Impact:** Over the past five years, there have been over 500 shutdowns in India, affecting millions of citizens. Manipur, in particular, experienced a prolonged statewide shutdown for 212 days, severely impeding communication and documentation efforts, especially regarding human rights abuses.

- **Severe Consequences:** Shutdowns in Manipur and Punjab highlighted the widespread suffering caused by these measures. They affected millions of individuals and impeded various aspects of life, including business, education, and access to information.

- **Proliferation and Duration:** Shutdowns occurred at the national level and in 13 states, with some states implementing multiple shutdowns throughout the year. The duration of shutdowns also increased, with over 41% lasting five days or more, indicating a trend towards longer disruptions.

- **Targeting Mobile Networks:** The vast majority of shutdowns exclusively targeted mobile networks, despite the fact that most internet users in India rely on wireless services. This indicates a disproportionate impact on mobile users.

- **Prolonged durations:** The duration of shutdowns in India also increased in 2023, with over 41% lasting five days or more, compared to 15% in 2022. These shutdowns were compounded by the blocking of 14 messaging apps starting in early May, alongside 7,502 URL-blocking orders issued between January and October 2023.

- **Legal Framework and Challenges:** Despite a Supreme Court judgment in Bhasin versus Union of India affirming the right to free speech and online activities, officials have failed to publish shutdown orders, highlighting a lack of transparency and accountability in the process.

- **Economic Losses:** The economic repercussions of shutdowns are profound, with reports indicating losses of $1.9 billion and a decline in foreign investment of $118 million in the first half of 2023 alone.

- **Impact on Marginalized Groups:** Shutdowns disproportionately affect marginalized groups, exacerbating existing inequalities and hindering efforts towards equitable digitization, further widening the digital divide.

Way Forward:

- The prevalence of internet shutdowns in India **contradicts the government's professed commitment to a 'Digital India'** and undermines its credibility as a global leader in digitization.

- With over 500 documented shutdowns in the past five years, the Indian government **must prioritize ensuring an internet shutdown-free environment** if they aim to be recognized as credible advocates for digital access and human rights.

Enemy Agents Ordinance

News Excerpt:

Jammu and Kashmir's Director General of Police (DGP) emphasized the need for stringent measures against those assisting militants in the region, **advocating for the use of the Enemy Agents Ordinance, 2005.**

What is the Enemy Agents Ordinance?

- It was initially **introduced in 1917** by the Dogra Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir.
  - It retained the **title 'ordinance' as per the nomenclature of laws during the Dogra rule**.

- After the 1947 Partition, **this ordinance was incorporated into the legal framework of the then-state of Jammu and Kashmir and subsequently amended.**

- Significant changes occurred in 2019 with the **abrogation of Article 370**, which led to the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization Act.

- **This act restructured the region's legal framework, retaining the Enemy Agents Ordinance and other security laws like the Public Safety Act** while replacing the Ranbir Penal Code with the Indian Penal Code and extending various Indian laws to Jammu and Kashmir.

Key Provisions of the Ordinance:

- **Scope of Punishment:**
- The ordinance mandates severe penalties for those found guilty of aiding the enemy, including death, life imprisonment, or rigorous imprisonment for up to 10 years, plus fines.

- **Trial Process:**
  - Trials under this ordinance are conducted by a special judge appointed by the government in consultation with the High Court.
  - **The accused can only engage a lawyer if permitted by the court.**

- **Appeal and Review:**
  - There is **no provision for appeal against the verdict of the special judge.**
  - However, **the decision can be reviewed by a judge selected by the government from the High Court, whose decision is final.**

- **Confidentiality:**
  - The ordinance **prohibits the disclosure or publication of information related to proceedings under it**.
  - Unauthorized disclosure can result in up to two years of imprisonment, a fine, or both.

Necessity and Rationale:

- The Enemy Agents Ordinance remains crucial for the region's security, especially given the ongoing militancy.

- According to the DGP**, those supporting militants should face stringent legal consequences under this ordinance, reflecting the need for robust measures to maintain law and order.**

Application and Historical Cases:

- The ordinance has been applied to numerous cases involving Kashmiris accused of aiding militants.

- One notable case is that of **Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front founder Maqbool Bhat, who was tried and executed under this ordinance in 1984.**

Way Forward:

- The Enemy Agents Ordinance, with its stringent provisions and severe penalties, serves as a vital tool in Jammu and Kashmir's efforts to **combat militancy and maintain security.**
- Its **historical roots and contemporary application** underscore its importance in the region's legal framework despite the significant legal transformations following the abrogation of Article 370.

Why is militancy on the rise in Jammu?

News Excerpt:

The recent terrorist attacks in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) underscore a **troubling shift in militant focus from the traditionally volatile Kashmir Valley** to the relatively peaceful Jammu region.

Background:

- Jammu and Kashmir have long been a hotspot of militant activity, with the **Kashmir Valley being the epicent**re of insurgency for decades.
- However, in recent years, a noticeable shift has occurred, with militants increasingly **targeting the Jammu** region.
- This shift can be attributed to several factors, including **increased security presence and intelligence operations** in the Valley, which have made it more difficult for militants to operate there.
- Additionally, the strategic importance of Jammu as a **gateway to the rest of India** makes it an attractive target for militants seeking to disrupt normalcy and instil fear.

Is a new pattern emerging?

- The attacks follow a pattern that suggests concerted attempts to revive militancy in the Jammu region over the past three years — **in the Chenab Valley comprising Doda, Kishtwar, Ramban, Kathua, Udhampur, and Reasi districts and south of the Pir Panjal comprising Rajouri and Poonch districts.**
- The resurgence of militant activity in the Jammu belt, which has remained free of such incidents in the past two decades, has sent alarm bells ringing among the security establishment.
  - This region was a hotbed of militancy in the **late 1990s and the early 2000s.**
- These incidents are not isolated; they are part of a **broader pattern** of escalating violence aimed at destabilizing the region and undermining public confidence in the government's ability to maintain security.

What does the data show?

- Since 2021, the Jammu region has witnessed **31 terror incidents** in which we lost 47 security personnel and 19 civilians other than 48 terrorists who were killed in various encounters.
- The Kashmir Valley, meanwhile, **reported 263 terror incidents** in which we lost 68 security personnel and 75 civilians.
  - As many as 417 alleged terrorists have also been killed in the Valley since 2021.
- A plain reading of numbers shows that incidents in Jammu remain far fewer than in the Valley, yet it is the **frequency and the nature of attacks** targeting pilgrims and security forces that is worrying.

What could be the possible reasons?

- After the 2020 Galwan clashes in eastern Ladakh, in which 20 soldiers were martyred, **a large contingent of the Army was pulled out of Jammu and deployed along the China border.**
  - This led to the thinning of the security grid, making the area vulnerable, pointed out security experts.
  - Inimical elements in the neighbourhood want to engage and exhaust India at both fronts — **the western (Pakistan) and northern (China) borders as part of a design.**
- As there is a heightened state of alert in the Kashmir Valley and little legroom for state-sponsored terrorists, it is convenient to launch terror attacks in Jammu, where the guard is relatively down.
- Post-reading of Article 370 in J&K in August 2019, and based on indicators such as zero stone-throwing events, no strikes, and a boom in tourism, the government has claimed huge success in the Kashmir Valley in terms of the overall security scenario.
  - **Reviving terrorism in Jammu upsets this narrative.**
  - Another possibility is that [militants are trying] to stabilize cadres in the Kashmir Valley while they take up insecurities in Jammu.

- The demography of the area is such that the **attacks could flare up communal tensions too,** leading to social unrest.
  - The **diverse and often difficult terrain** of Jammu and Kashmir poses a significant challenge for security forces.
  - The **dense forests, mountainous regions, and porous borders** with Pakistan provide militants with ample hiding spots and routes for infiltration.

Implications of these attacks:

They indicate a need for the government to **adapt its security strategies** to address the changing dynamics of militant activities.

They underscore the **importance of community engagement and cooperation** in countering terrorism.

They highlight the **necessity of addressing the underlying socio-economic issues** that often fuel militancy.

How is the infiltration happening?

- The 192-km **international border (IB)** along Jammu is secured by the **Border Security Force (BSF),** while the 740-km **Line of Control (LoC)**, the effective border in the Kashmir Valley and parts of Jammu, is under the operational control of the **Army.**
- Officials said though measures are in place, **tough terrain and forested areas** along the LoC and **vulnerable patches** along the IB may have been used for fresh infiltration.

Way Forward:

- **Building and maintaining trust between security forces and local communities** is crucial. In many cases, militants exploit local grievances and mistrust of authorities to gain support and cover.
- The role of **external actors**, particularly Pakistan, in supporting and abetting militant activities in J&K cannot be overlooked. **Cross-border terrorism** remains a persistent threat, necessitating robust border security measures and **international diplomatic efforts to hold accountable** those who provide sanctuary to militants.
- **Strengthening intelligence capabilities** is paramount. This includes investing in advanced surveillance technologies, enhancing human intelligence (HUMINT) networks, and fostering greater inter-agency coordination.

- In 2003, the Army launched **Operation Sarp Vinaash** near Hilkaka in the Poonch sector. In the aerial attacks, more than 60 terrorists, who had entrenched themselves in bunkers and trenches in the forest, were killed.

- **Real-time intelligence** sharing between various security agencies can significantly improve response times and operational effectiveness.
  - Given the role of cross-border infiltration in sustaining militancy, enhancing border security is crucial. This includes deploying advanced surveillance systems, increasing border patrols, and fortifying vulnerable points along the Line of Control (LoC) and the International Border (IB).
- **Development programs** that focus on education, employment, and infrastructure can provide alternative pathways for the youth, reducing their susceptibility to militant recruitment.
- Addressing the ideological roots of militancy is essential for long-term peace. **Counter-radicalization programs** that promote moderate religious teachings, interfaith dialogue, and community resilience against extremist ideologies can help prevent the spread of radicalism.
- **Establishing and equipping specialized counter-terrorism units** with advanced training and technology can improve the ability to conduct precise and effective operations against militants. These units should be capable of rapid deployment and equipped to handle a variety of scenarios.
- **Proactive measures,** such as conducting regular security drills, maintaining high alert levels, and conducting thorough searches at checkpoints, can deter militant activities. Pre-emptive measures, such as disrupting militant financing networks and arresting key operatives before they can execute attacks, are equally important.

CrowdStrike: A Digital Storm

News Excerpt:

In July, an update from CrowdStrike caused widespread disruption in IT systems globally due to the global outage of Microsoft impacting various sectors and causing chaos.

CrowdStrike at the Center

- The source of the disruption was traced to CrowdStrike, a U.S.-based cybersecurity company.
- Recently, CrowdStrike launched **Falcon for Defender** to support **Microsoft's Defender deployments,** claiming that its AI-powered detections could **identify threats missed by Microsoft's own solution.**
- **A defect in a Falcon content update for the Windows host led to the outage.** Falcon is CrowdStrike's security platform.

- **CrowdStrike claimed that the defect was identified and quickly fixed,** clarifying that **Mac and Linux hosts were not affected.**
- CrowdStrike clarified that **the incident was not a cyberattack,** although they **warned that adversaries might try to exploit the situation.**

Global impact of the outage:
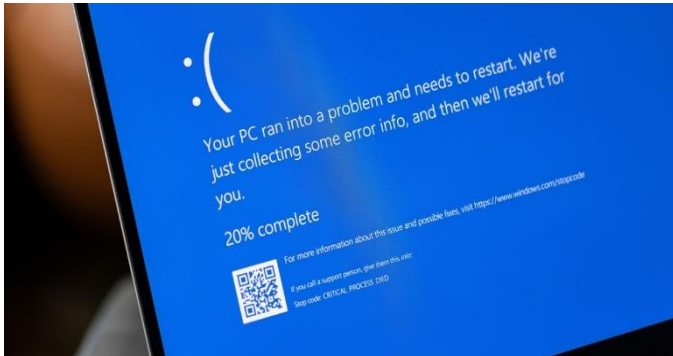
- Every day, users relying on Windows and other Microsoft services encountered the **'Blue Screen of Death' error, scrambling to find alternative devices and platforms.**
- Airports in India **resorted to issuing handwritten boarding passes**, while airlines in the U.S. grounded flights.
- **Shoppers in Australia were unable to make digital payments,** and **hospitals in the U.K. had to cancel patient appointments.**
- **Global Share markets were also impacted due to the outage.**
- However, Indian exchanges and clearing corporations operated smoothly and had minimal impact.
  - o **CrowdStrike's shares itself fell by more than 10%,** though the company remains up by 100% compared to the previous year.
- **Government** officials around the world issued statements regarding the situation. **The Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In)** rated the incident as **Critical.**

CERT-In
- CERT-In is operational since **January 2004.**
- It is the national nodal agency for responding to **computer security incidents** as and when they occur.

Its functions:
- Collection, analysis and dissemination of information on cyber incidents.
- Forecast and alerts of cyber security incidents
- Emergency measures for handling cyber security incidents
- Coordination of cyber incident response activities.
- Issue guidelines, advisories, vulnerability notes and white papers relating to information security practices, procedures, prevention, response and reporting of cyber incidents.
- Such other functions relating to cyber security as may be prescribed.

Concerns Over Digital Dependency
- The CrowdStrike incident underscores the vulnerability of global digital infrastructure.
- As essential services and operations increasingly rely on a few dominant cloud providers, any disruption can have widespread consequences.
- This event serves as a **wake-up call about the risks inherent in concentrating digital dependencies on a handful of tech giants.**
- The **"Superb Six"** Microsoft, Apple, Google parent Alphabet, Amazon, Nvidia, and Meta Platforms dominate the global digital ecosystem.
  - o **Their influence is profound, and their systems' failures can disrupt essential services, eroding public trust**.

Need for Diversification:
- The frequent occurrence of such disruptions highlights the need for diversifying digital dependencies.
- The concentration of power calls for **regulatory oversight to safeguard** against the risks posed by such monopolistic control.
- Policymakers and industry leaders must invest in building resilient infrastructures, encourage competition, and foster innovation among smaller cloud providers.
- **Ensuring robust backup systems and reducing reliance on a few major players is crucial to mitigating the risk of catastrophic failures.**

Way Forward:
- **Enhance International Cooperation:** Build alliances for threat intelligence sharing, coordinated incident response, and global cybersecurity initiatives.
- **Invest in Cyber Infrastructure and Workforce**: Develop advanced technologies and a skilled cybersecurity workforce through education, training, and public-private partnerships.
- **Promote Public Awareness and Cyber Hygiene**: Launch nationwide campaigns to educate citizens on online safety, and implement mandatory cyber hygiene training in critical sectors.
- **Establish Rapid Response Mechanisms**: Strengthen national CERTs and develop crisis management plans to ensure swift and effective responses to cyber incidents.
- **Encourage Ethical Hacking and Continuous Assessment**: Promote bug bounty programs, conduct regular security audits, and engage in red teaming exercises to identify and mitigate vulnerabilities.

SECURITY CHALLENGES AND THEIR MANAGEMENT IN BORDER AREAS

Changing Pattern of Chinese Mobilization

News Excerpt

The People's Republic of China recently established National Defence Mobilisation Offices (NDMO) and made major amendments to its Reserve Personnel Law.

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China's NDMOs

- China started **establishing NDMOs** managed by China's National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) in:
  - Beijing, Shanghai, Shandong, Fujian, Wuhan, Hunan, Sichuan, Tibet, Inner Mongolia, Hubei, Xinjiang, and some other cities and smaller villages
- The **stated functions** of these offices are:
  - Economic mobilisation
  - Civil air defence mobilisation
  - Traffic readiness during mobilisation
  - Equipment mobilisation
  - Technology mobilisation and planning
  - Organising and implementation of mobilisation processes at the local level.
- However, an additional function appears to be the recruitment of militia and reserve force personnel at the local level.

> **Structure and Mandate of Chinese Defence Mobilisation**
> China's **National Defence Mobilisation Commission (NDMC)** is the unified structure responsible for coordinating decisions among relevant state and military agencies, departments, and structures.
> Earlier, military region-level defence mobilisation committees **(MRDMCs)** were responsible for above work.
> MRDMCs' role has been curtailed, and the NDMOs have been empowered with **local-level mobilisation** and mobilisation-related recruitment.
> Along with the mobilisation, these offices will also **recruit and manage** the militia and reserve forces at the local level.
> The theatre commands, however, will still have a major say during wartime.

New Reserve Personnel Law

- China is expanding the reserve force by recruiting more personnel.
- The size of the reserve personnel is estimated is estimated to be more than 7 million by some scholars.
- From March 1, 2023, China began implementing the **new Reserve Personnel Law.**
- Earlier, the reserve forces were under the dual leadership of military organs and local Party committees.
- Since July 2020, they have been put **under the People's Liberation Army (PLA).**
- The latest reform establishes a legal and regulatory system for reserve personnel, and seeks to improve the attractiveness of reserve duty by guaranteeing more benefits for the reservists.
- **This law addresses** reservists' military ranks, training, promotion, management, mobilisation, personnel benefits, and retirement.

Significance of these Reforms

- **Region-Specific Personnel**: Since recruitment and training reserve personnel is at the local level, this would result in more region-specific and contingency-specific militia and reserve personnel.
- **Ensure Fluent Supply**: Since they are trained under the theatre commands, the recruits will also compensate for the shortage of military personnel in their respective regional contingencies.
- **Familiarisation with the Region**: Local recruitment reduces regional and centralised hurdles like familiarisation with the region and lack of acquaintance with local authorities.
- **Strengthens Armed Force**: Expanding the reservist force, making them a more attractive force, and training them with the PLA to keep them combat-ready increases the strength of the armed forces during a contingency.
- **Faster integration**: Training with the PLA would make reservists capable of using equipment and developing skills, which would help integration within the services a relatively smoother process.

> **Chinese Reserve Service Personnel**
> It includes reserve units affiliated with the PLA and personnel **registered for**
> - Reserve services
> - Technical personnel
> - Qualified veterans
> - Local cadres
> - People's armed police
> - Militia cadres
> They are responsible for **combat-readiness** and non-combat military operations during an escalation.
> They can be **directly transferred** to active-duty troops during an escalation.

Criticism of these Reforms

- **Resource Constraints**: The NDMOs under NDRC neither have the experience nor enough resources to recruit cadres for mobilisation.
- **Inconsistent Reforms**: The expansion of the reserve personnel cadre and the adjustment of certain sections within the armed forces appears to run contrary to China's ongoing military reforms, which aim to convert the PLA into a lean and technologically advanced force.
- **Overlapping of Work**: The recently formed PLA Joint Logistics Support Force's function and one of the reservist force's major mandates is helping with logistics and maintaining supply lines.
- **Ambiguity Over Defence Spending**: Like most aspects of PLA spending, there is an ambiguity over how China funds its reserve personnel forces from its defence budget or elsewhere.

Implications for India and the World

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- **Border Tensions**: India shares 3488 Km of border with China and some of them are contested by China also (for example, the **clashes in Galwan valley**) and an increase in the size and strength of the Chinese reserve army could potentially increase the potential for conflicts or border disputes.
- **Global Military Balance**: The other countries may feel compelled to respond by bolstering their own military capabilities, potentially resulting in an arms race and increased military spending in the region. For example, **South Korea** plans to spend around $270 billion over 2023-2027.
- **Diplomatic Relations**: Such steps are likely to strain already depleting diplomatic relations between China and other countries. This may lead to a more assertive foreign policy stance by affected nations and potentially result in a more competitive and challenging geopolitical environment.
- **Further Regional Power Shift**: China's bolstered reserve army could potentially lead to a power shift in the region, potentially impacting the balance of power between China and other countries, including India.
- **Regional Stability**: The increased numbers and strength of the Chinese reserve army may heighten concerns about the potential for military conflicts or escalations, which could have broader implications for peace and stability in the region.

Way Forward

- **Strengthening Defence Capabilities**: India and other countries should continue to strengthen their defence capabilities. Investing in modernization, technological advancements, and strategic partnerships can enhance deterrence and ensure a credible defence posture
- **Diplomatic Engagement**: India and other countries should engage in open and constructive discussions with China to address concerns and potential areas of conflict. For example, India- China **Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination**.
- **Regional Cooperation**: Strengthening regional cooperation mechanisms, such as the **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC),** can provide platforms for dialogue and conflict resolution.
- **Arms Control and Disarmament**: Encouraging transparency in military capabilities, promoting **non-proliferation efforts**, and working towards confidence-building measures can contribute to reducing tensions and preventing an arms race.
- **Economic Cooperation**: Fostering economic cooperation and interdependence among nations can create mutual interests and reduce the likelihood of conflicts.

- o However, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue's push for boosting **supply chain resilience** is aimed at reducing economic dependence on China.
- Encouraging **track two diplomacy**, involving non-governmental actors, think tanks, and academics, can foster constructive dialogue and generate innovative solutions.
- **People-to-people exchanges**, cultural interactions, and educational programs can also contribute to mutual understanding and promote long-term peace and stability.

Border Roads Organisation (BRO)

News Excerpt

The Border Roads Organisation under the Ministry of Defence has built over 60 per cent of roads bordering China in the last three years.

- BRO is a government agency under the control of the Ministry of Defence.
- This body is responsible for the construction, maintenance, and development of roads, bridges, and tunnels in border areas and other strategic regions of the country.
- It was founded in 1960, primarily to improve connectivity in remote and challenging terrains along India's borders.
- The Government of India set up the Border Roads Development Board (BRDB) with the Prime Minister as Chairman of the Board and Defence Minister as Deputy Chairman.

Road's Construction in Border areas

- Roads along Pakistan borders were also constructed in the last three years. For instance, the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir also saw construction of 443.94 km of roads while 311.14 km of border roads were built in Rajasthan.
- According to data provided in parliament Arunachal Pradesh saw the construction of maximum road length at 507.14 km followed by Ladakh at 453.59 km and Uttarakhand at 343.56km. A total of 164.95 km of roads were built in Sikkim and 40.23 km of border roads were built in Himachal Pradesh.
- Overall, 2445.54 km of roads were constructed by BRO in the last three years.
- The data also showed that BRO had spent Rs 846.46 crore of the sanctioned Rs 923 crore in 2022-23 for maintaining border roads—up from Rs 744.52 crore in the previous fiscal year.

Role of BRO in Border Security

- **Infrastructure Development**: BRO is responsible for constructing and maintaining roads, bridges, and tunnels in border regions. These infrastructure projects

improve accessibility to border areas, enabling the swift movement of armed forces personnel, equipment, and supplies. Well-maintained and strategically placed roads contribute to better border patrolling and surveillance.

- **Strategic Connectivity**: By establishing roads and infrastructure in remote and challenging terrains near the borders, BRO ensures that border regions are well-connected. This connectivity is vital for maintaining troop readiness, quick response capabilities, and efficient supply chain management for defence forces.
- **Quick Response**: The infrastructure developed by BRO allows defence forces to respond swiftly to any security threats or emergencies along the borders. It facilitates rapid troop deployment and the movement of specialized equipment, enabling timely action.
- **Surveillance and Patrolling**: The improved road network created by BRO supports border patrolling and surveillance activities. Troops can effectively monitor and secure the border areas, deter intrusions, and respond to any unauthorized crossings.
- **Strategic Deployment**: The BRO's efforts enable the Indian military to position its personnel and resources strategically along the borders. This positioning helps deter potential adversaries and ensures a strong defence posture.

Challenges faced by BRO

- **Geographical and Climatic Challenges**: BRO often operates in high-altitude regions, dense forests, deserts, and mountainous terrains. Extreme weather conditions, including heavy snowfall, avalanches, landslides, and freezing temperatures, can disrupt construction and maintenance activities.
- **Logistical Challenges**: Transporting construction equipment, materials, and personnel to remote sites can be a logistical nightmare. Seasonal road closures and difficult terrain can hinder the movement of resources.
- **Security Concerns**: BRO operates in border regions that may have security risks due to potential cross-border tensions, insurgent activities, and other threats. Ensuring the safety of personnel and equipment is a constant challenge.
- **Technological Challenges**: Constructing roads, tunnels, and bridges in challenging terrains requires specialized engineering solutions. Adapting technology and techniques to these unique environments can be a technical challenge.

Way Forward

To ensure BRO's continued effectiveness and success, the following strategies can be considered-

- o **Technology Integration**: Embrace innovative construction techniques and technology to enhance efficiency and quality. This could include the use of advanced machinery, drones for surveying, and digital project management systems.
- o **Capacity Building**: Invest in training and skill development for BRO personnel to handle the unique challenges of working in difficult terrains. Provide them with the necessary tools and knowledge to adapt to changing circumstances.

CHINA RELEASES NEW EDITION OF STANDARD MAP SHOWING ITS TERRITORIAL CLAIMS

- China has officially released the 2023 edition of its "**standard map**," which shows the state of **Arunachal Pradesh and the Aksai Chin region as part of its territory.**
- The map released in August shows Arunachal Pradesh which China claims as South Tibet and Aksai Chin occupied by it in the 1962 war as part of its territory.
- **Taiwan and the disputed South China Sea** are also included within the Chinese territory in the new map.
- The map also incorporates China's claims over the **nine-dash line** thus laying claim to a large part of the South China Sea. **Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei** have all claims over the South China Sea areas.
- Recently, China and India were at loggerheads after Beijing issued **stapled, instead of stamped, visas to Indian athletes** hailing from Arunachal Pradesh, who were to participate in the wushu (martial art) championship in the mainland.

India's response to Chinese claim

- The Government of India has rejected the Chinese claims in the map **"as they have no basis".**
- India has lodged a strong protest through diplomatic channels with the Chinese side on the 2023 "**standard map"** of China that lays claim to India's territory.

India-China Border Dispute

India shares a total boundary of around **3,488 km** with China (the second largest after Bangladesh). The Sino-Indian border is generally divided into three sectors namely: **the Western sector, the Middle sector, and the Eastern sector**. 4 states (Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh) and 2 Union Territories (Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh) share borders with China.

Western Sector

- In the western sector, India shares about **2152 km** long border between India's Jammu and Kashmir and Xinjiang Province of China. In this sector**, there is a territorial dispute over Aksai Chin**. Both countries went to war in 1962 over the disputed territory of Aksai Chin. India claims it as a part of Kashmir, while **China** claims it is a part of **Xinjiang.**
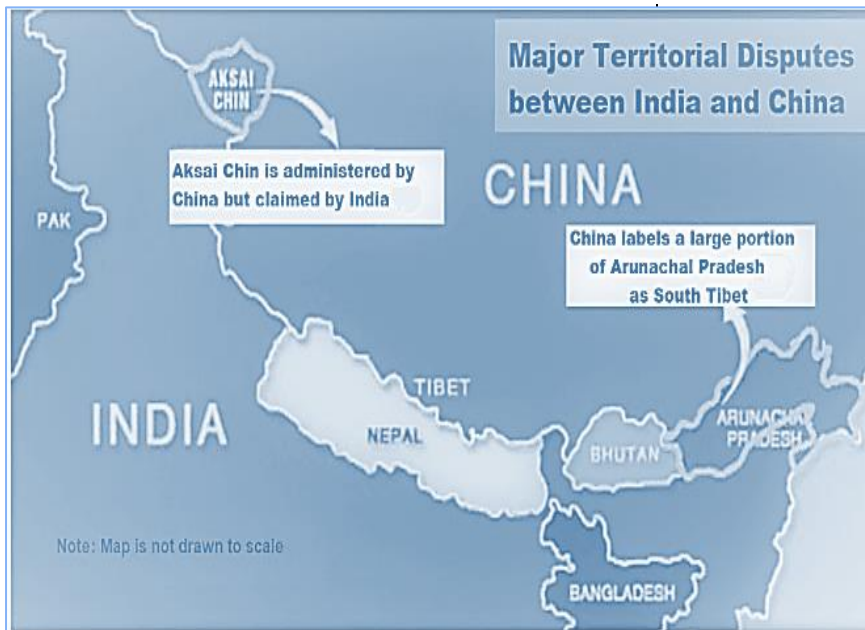
- During the time of British rule in India, two borders between India and China were proposed: **The Johnson's Line and The McDonald Line.**
  - Johnson's line (proposed in 1865) shows Aksai Chin in Jammu and Kashmir, i.e., under India's control, whereas the McDonald Line (proposed in 1893) places it under China's control. India considers the Johnson Line as the correct, and rightful national border with China, whereas China considers the McDonald Line as the correct border with India.
- At present, the **Line of Actual Control (LAC)** is the line separating, the Indian areas of Jammu and Kashmir from Aksai Chin. It is concurrent with the Chinese Aksai Chin claim line.

Middle sector

- In this sector, India shares about 625 km long boundary with China which runs along the watershed from **Ladakh to Nepal**. The states of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand touch this border with Tibet (China) in this sector. Both sides **do not have much disagreement over the border in this area.**

Eastern Sector

- The **McMahon Line** is a demarcation line drawn by British India's colonial administration in 1914, forming the border between India's Arunachal Pradesh and Tibet (now under Chinese control).
- China disputes this boundary and claims Arunachal Pradesh as part of its territory, referring to it as "**South Tibet.**" This dispute has led to occasional border tensions and remains unresolved.

Present mechanism to resolve the border issue

- China and India have employed multiple mechanisms to address border disputes, including **Special Representatives Talks**, regular **military and diplomatic meetings**, Confidence-Building Measures,

and agreements like the Border Peace and **Tranquility Agreements** (1993, 1996) and Political Parameters and Guiding Principles (2005).

- The **Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC)** was established in 2012 to facilitate ongoing discussions.
- The 19th round **of the India-China Corps Commander Level Meeting** was held at the **Chushul-Moldo** border meeting point on the Indian side in August 2023.

Conclusion:

In today's era of growing geopolitical tensions, a map is no longer just a two-dimensional paper with lines, but an indicator of a country's intentions and the imagination of its frontiers. In that sense, Beijing's decision to publish a map, though a routine annual exercise must be read closely with the Chinese moves on the LAC and maritime sphere, including military exercises, transgressions, building of permanent infrastructure and border villages. India too, must realise the importance of its map-making exercises and ensure no surprises for its diplomatic ties with neighbours.

Spike in fighting in Myanmar

News Excerpt:

A recent surge in violence **between Myanmar's military and anti-junta forces** could have ramifications for security in India's strategic northeast region.

Key Points:

- The **Three Brotherhood Alliance,** including the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), Arakan Army, and Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), launched **Operation 1027 (named after the date the offensive began)** in northeastern **Shan State bordering China.**
- The alliance reportedly overran more than **135 military sites** and **seized massive stores of weapons and ammunition.**
- This **was followed by similar offensives** by other rebel groups
- Chin, Kachin States, and the Sagaing Region, border India, causing the Indian administration to worry.
- **The junta has declared martial law in various towns in Shan, Chin, and Karenni states and the Sagaing Region.**

Operation 1027:

- **Operation 1027 - aka October 27**, was launched to **eradicate the oppressive military dictatorship**. and

defend the territory against Myanmar military incursions.

- **It was initiated to protect the lives and property of civilians.**
- The operation was done to reduce the junta's air and artillery strike capabilities, remove the military regime from power, and crack down on criminal activities – including online scam operations – that have increased along the country's northeastern border with China.

Operation 1107:
- It is an ongoing joint operation **launched on November 7, 2023,** by other insurgent groups bordering China and Thailand against the military junta.
- It was launched **in support of the concurrent Operation 1027**.

What does it mean for India?
- **The influx of Refugees:** With the influx of thousands of Myanmar refugees into India, there will be **considerable stresses on natural resources**, leading to both environmental and social impacts on the North Eastern region. Refugee migration also inflicts a significant **economic burden** on the host countries.
- **Spillover of Hostilities:** There is an associated fear of the spillover into border regions of India, which would affect the country's internal security situation.
  - **Myanmar's Chin ethnic group has significant ties with Manipur's Kukis**, and many militant groups from Manipur have a presence in Myanmar's Sagaing Region and are believed to be supported by the junta.
  - According to experts, this could have **ramifications for the situation in Manipur.**
- **Ethnic Problems:** The sudden influx of refugees can aggravate ethnic problems and change the domestic balance of power within communities, thus causing tensions.

Way Forward:
Myanmar's current geopolitical situation **is complex and impacts Indian security.** The Indian authorities need to balance both their geopolitical as well as domestic interests to be able to tide through this crisis.

India's Coastal Security Apparatus: 26/11

News Excerpt:
15 years have passed since the 26/11 sea-borne terror attack on Mumbai (2008-2023), which was caused by a failure in India's coastal security.

India's coastal security:
- India's coasts have always been vulnerable to anti-national activities. The **physical proximity** of India's coasts to Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and the Gulf countries adds to its vulnerability.

- The strategic installations such as the Gas and Oil plants, Nuclear plants as well as the vast population residing in coastal cities are vital for the security, development, and prosperity of the country, but they are also **high-value targets** for terrorists.
- There is a **multi-tier arrangement for the protection and maritime security of the country involving the Indian Navy (IN), Indian Coast Guard (ICG), and Marine Police of the coastal States and Union Territories**.
- The **Indian Navy** patrols the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL), while the **Indian Coast Guard** is mandated to patrol and surveillance up to 200 nautical miles (i.e., Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)).
- Simultaneously, **the State Coastal Police (SCP)** performs boat patrolling in shallow coastal areas.
- The SCP has jurisdiction up to 12 nautical miles from the coast, and the ICG and the IN have jurisdiction over the entire maritime zone (up to 200 nautical miles), including the territorial waters (with the State marine police (SMP)).
- The **Border Security Force (BSF)** is deployed in the creek areas of Gujarat and Sundarbans in West Bengal.

Loopholes that persist in India's Coastal Security:
- **Fragmented Approach to Security Management:** A diffused approach gives rise to overlapping jurisdiction and the need for unity of command. Management of international land and coastal borders falls within the exclusive purview of the **Ministry of Home Affairs**, but the agencies responsible for safeguarding these borders lie under the control of the **Ministry of Defence**.
- **Lack of Infrastructure:** To secure maritime borders and coastlines, technical capability must detect every infringement. This needs an advanced technology infrastructure, especially for tracking the Sub-20 Metre Vessels.
- **Identification of genuine Indian fishermen:** Equipping the boats with satellite-based tracking transponders was considered an option; however, the cost was prohibitive for the smaller fishermen. The identification of genuine Indian fishermen at sea by security agencies remains a challenge, and the threat of an Indian fishing boat seized by Pakistani operatives to undertake a 26/11-type Mumbai attack remains a danger.

Government Initiatives:
- **Integrating management:** Following 26/11, the Central government set up a three-tier security arrangement comprising the Indian Navy (IN), the Indian Coast Guard (ICG), and the State Marine Police, jointly safeguarding India's maritime zone.
- There are joint exercises in the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal. "**Sagar Kavach"** exercises, involving the Navy, ICG, and the State coastal police, are now held.

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- **Updating the security system:** Coastal police stations and surveillance infrastructure under a Coastal Security Scheme (CSS) were set up. Radar stations came up along the coastline. Automatic Identification Systems and Joint Operation Centres (JOCs) were also set up.

> **Related:**
> 2023 marks the 15th anniversary of the tragic terror attacks on Mumbai, and **Israel has officially designated Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) as a terror organization.**
> The action was taken without any request from India's government.

- Coastal radar chains were set up. **The National Command and Control Communications Intelligence Network (N3CIN), the Maritime Domain Awareness Plan, and the Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC)** also came into play.
- The Indian Navy has established **four Joint Operations Centers (JOC) at Mumbai, Visakhapatnam, Kochi, and Port Blair, ensuring an increased deployment of security forces and surveillance equipment.**
- The appointment of the country's first **National Maritime Security Coordinator (NMSC)** reflects the serious intent of the Government of India (GoI) to address maritime security challenges. It is a step in the right direction.

Way Forward:

- After an extensive vulnerability/gap analysis, one of the most significant achievements has been the **integration of all maritime stakeholders,** including several State and Central agencies, into the new coastal security mechanism. As a result, **good coordination, synergy, and understanding** between all agencies now exist.
- **Requirement of Training:** The Coast Guard acknowledges improvements in the security architecture, particularly inter-agency cooperation, but points out that those high-technology initiatives alone will not ensure foolproof security. The States Marine or Coastal police have to play a major role; for this, they must be trained, equipped, and motivated.

Resurgence of Pirates

News Excerpt:

Two separate incidents of piracy have sparked fears of the return of Somali pirates in international waters amid troubling geopolitical uncertainty.
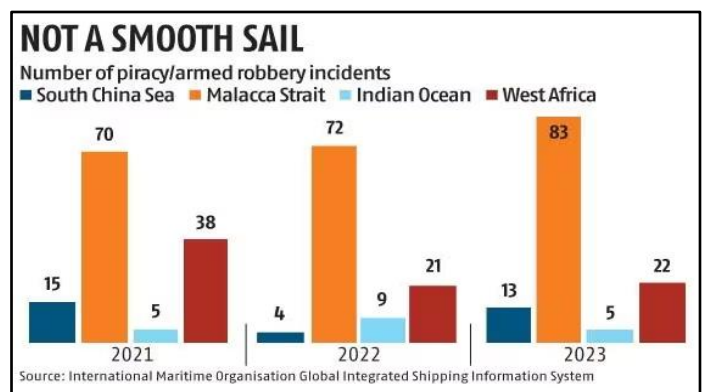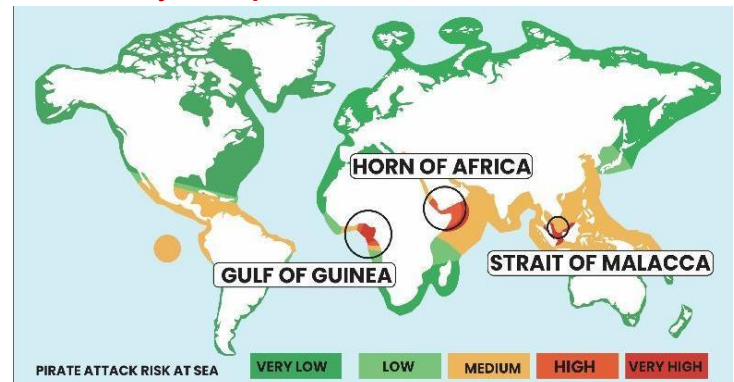
About the news:

- INS Visakhapatnam, a mission deployed in the Gulf of Aden for anti-piracy operations, swiftly responded to a distress call by Marshall Island flagged **MV Genco Picardy** following a drone attack.

- **In a separate incident, MV Ruen, a Malta-flagged merchant ship,** was hijacked by unknown raiders in the Arabian Sea.
- India's shipping regulator, Director General of Shipping (DGS), has advised seafarers to take extra caution as incidents of piracy have seen an uptick after several years of relative normalcy, making international waters riskier for merchant ships.

Challenges in the maritime domain:

- Piracy and armed robbery
- Human and contraband trafficking
- Irregular Human Migration (IHM)
- Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing
- Gun running, poaching, maritime terrorism

NOT A SMOOTH SAIL
Number of piracy/armed robbery incidents
South China Sea ■ Malacca Strait ■ Indian Ocean ■ West Africa

2021: 15, 70, 5, 38
2022: 4, 72, 9, 21
2023: 13, 83, 5, 22

Source: International Maritime Organisation Global Integrated Shipping Information System

Three major hotspots identified in IOR:

HORN OF AFRICA
GULF OF GUINEA
STRAIT OF MALACCA
PIRATE ATTACK RISK AT SEA — VERY LOW | LOW | MEDIUM | HIGH | VERY HIGH

- **South East Asia**
  - A larger pattern of maritime security concerns in the **Straits of Malacca and Singapore** has exhibited a sharp increase in incidents from **45 in 2019 to a peak of 83 in 2023**, as per the International Maritime Organisation's **Global Integrated Shipping Information System (GISIS)**. GISIS is developed, maintained, and headed by the **International Maritime Organisation (IMO).**
- **Gulf of Guinea:** There is a rise in the intensity of piracy incidents in the Gulf of Guinea
- **Horn of Africa:** The rise in conflict-related incidents in the **Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea** involving attacks

using drones and missiles is a growing concern and poses serious risks.

Reasons for the recent maritime threats:

- Connections and intentions of attacks on ships in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean Region remain uncertain, given that vessels owned by multiple countries are being attacked.
- According to the DGS advisory, **Global political instability** continues to escalate, posing significant threats to maritime activities, especially shipping, commerce, and supply chains.
  - This heightened risk stems from various factors, including **conflicts, territorial disagreements, cyber-attacks, the imposition of sanctions, piracy, and potential acts of sabotage.**
- Concurrently, the rising number of sea-borne migrants, drug smuggling using merchant vessels, and a surge in stowaway incidents are creating severe security challenges worldwide.

India's steps for maritime security:

- The Indian Navy is a part of the **Combined Maritime Forces (CMF)**, a 39-nation group of naval forces looking at maritime security.
- Indian Naval ships and aircraft are regularly deployed on '**Mission Based Deployments**' in the Indian Ocean Region to enhance maritime security.
  - It also undertakes surveillance to enhance **Maritime Domain Awareness and address** contingencies that may arise.
- These are consistent with the Government of India's vision of **Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) and the Maritime Security Strategy,** which aims to position India as the **"Preferred Security Partner"** in our extended maritime neighbourhood.
- India works proactively with regional Navies to strengthen friendship/cooperation and promote marine security in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
- Operational interactions with friendly foreign countries include activities like **Joint Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) Surveillance,** Coordinated Patrols on an annual/bi-annual basis along the **International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL)**, **Maritime Exercises,** etc.
- India participates in regional frameworks such as the **Association of Southeast Asian Nations Regional Forum (ARF), East Asia Summit (EAS), and the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM Plus)** to expand its cooperation and exchanges with the Indo-Pacific region.

Way Forward:

The unfettered use of the **"Indian Ocean Region - a global commons"** for human prosperity cannot be achieved without addressing maritime security challenges.

Information sharing, **cooperation**, and **expertise development** are prerequisites to responding to such challenges effectively.

Free Movement Regime (FMR)

News Excerpt:

The Union government is all set **to scrap the Free Movement Regime (FMR) along the Myanmar border.**

- The Ministry had constituted a **committee headed by Rina Mitra** to examine various methods **to curb the misuse of free movement along the Myanmar border**.

Background:

- India and Myanmar share an **unfenced border**, and people on either side have familial and ethnic ties, which prompted the arrangement in the 1970s.
  - The migrants belonging to the **Kuki-Chin-Zo ethnic group** share ethnic ties with communities in Mizoram and Manipur.
- **Under the FMR**, every member of the hill tribes, either a citizen of India or a citizen of Myanmar, who **resides within 16 km on either side of the border**, can **cross the border** on the production of a **border pass**.
  - The border pass **remains valid for a year**, and they can **stay for up to two weeks per visit.**
  - The **FMR was implemented in 2018** as part of the Indian Government's Act East policy when diplomatic relations between India and Myanmar were on the upswing.
- Under the **upcoming regulation**, around **300 km of the border will be fenced.**
- The **Manipur government has suspended the FMR since 2020** following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Significance of FMR:

- The **British demarcated the border** between India and Myanmar **in 1826 without seeking the people's opinion in the region.**
  - The border effectively divided people of the same ethnicity and culture into two nations without their consent.
- People in the region have **strong ethnic and familial ties across the border.**
- Apart from facilitating people-to-people contact, the FMR provide impetus to **local trade and business.**
  - The region has a long history of **trans-border commerce through customs and border haats.**
  - Given the low-income economy, such exchanges are vital for **sustaining local livelihoods.**
- For border people in Myanmar, too, **Indian towns are closer to business, education, and healthcare** than those in their own country.

Need to scrap FMR:

- The move comes in the wake of the **large-scale displacement of Rohingya people from the Rakhine State in Myanmar to India.**
- The free movement regime is **misused by militants and trans-border criminals who smuggle weapons, contraband goods and fake Indian currency notes.**
- Taking advantage of the free-movement regime, they enter India, **commit crimes and escape to their relatively safer hideouts.**
- After a **military coup in Myanmar in February 2021**, there has been an **influx of undocumented migrants**; over 40,000 refugees have taken shelter in Mizoram, and around 4,000 refugees have entered Manipur.
- The **illegal migration of tribal Kuki-Chin peoples into India from Myanmar** is one of the key issues in the ongoing **ethnic conflict between Meiteis and Kukis in Manipur.**
  - It was reported that in 2023, armed Kuki militants comprising the Kuki National Army (KNA) and People's Defence Force (PDF) of Mynamar and security personnel arrived in India, paving the way for a major clash between Kukis and Meiteis in the border town of Moreh in Manipur's Tengnoupal district.

MAP NOT TO SCALE

Way Forward:
- The regime has been reviewed from time to time, and most experts agree that the **FMR needs better regulation.**
- Given the interests of the local population, however, **neither the complete removal of the FMR nor full border fencing may be desirable.**
- Livelihoods will be impacted, and essential travel for health care and education may be hit.
- **Oinam's paper** argued that "it is **imperative for India to tackle the issue by pursuing the 'killing the snake without breaking the stick' approach."**

- FMR or no FMR is not an easy task. And all borders, even the fenced ones, are struggling to deal with drug trafficking.

7th Indian Ocean Conference 2024

News Excerpt:
The 7th Indian Ocean Conference was recently held in **Perth, Australia,** which brought together leaders, ministers, and officials from **Indian Ocean rim countries** to discuss diverse issues.

About the news:
- The India Foundation organized the 7th edition of the Conference in association with the Ministry of External Affairs and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.
- The theme of the conference is "**Towards a Stable and Sustainable Indian Ocean."**

Indian Ocean Conference (IOC)
- Indian Ocean Conference (IOC) is an **annual event** with over 300 delegates from 22 countries, including **ministers, political leaders, diplomats, strategic thinkers, academics, and media.**
- Over the years, the Conference has emerged as the **flagship consultative forum** for countries in the region.
- The Conference endeavours to bring critical states and principal maritime partners of the region together on a common platform to deliberate upon the prospects of regional cooperation for **Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR).**
- The 6th Indian Ocean Conference 2023 was held in **Dhaka, Bangladesh.**

Indian Ocean Region:
- The Indian Ocean is a vast theatre stretching from the **Strait of Malacca and the Western Coast of Australia** in the **East to the Mozambique Channel** in the West.
  - It encompasses the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea in the North, all the way down to the southern Indian Ocean.
  - The Indian Ocean's key subregions are **South Asia, the Middle East, the eastern coast of Africa,** and the islands dotting the ocean from Sri Lanka in the East to the Comoros Archipelago in the West.

Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA):
- It is an inter-governmental organization that was established on **7 March 1997.**
- IORA's apex body is the Council of Foreign Ministers (COM), which meets annually.
- Presently, IORA is a dynamic organization of **23 Member States and 12 Dialogue Partners**, with an ever-growing momentum for mutually beneficial regional cooperation through a consensus-based, evolutionary and non-intrusive approach.
- **Members:** Commonwealth of Australia, People's Republic of Bangladesh, Union of Comoros, French Republic, Republic of India, Republic of Indonesia,

Islamic Republic of Iran, Republic of Kenya, Republic of Madagascar, Malaysia, Republic of Maldives, Republic of Mauritius, Republic of Mozambique, Sultanate of Oman, Republic of Seychelles, Republic of Singapore, Federal Republic of Somalia, Republic of South Africa, Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, United Republic of Tanzania, Kingdom of Thailand, United Arab Emirates and Republic of Yemen.

Indian Ocean region:

INDIAN OCEAN RIM ASSOCIATION (IORA)
MAP NOT TO SCALE

Challenges:

- **Maritime Security Challenges:** These include conflicts, threats to maritime traffic, piracy, and terrorism at one extremity, while challenges to international law, concerns about freedom of navigation, and safeguarding sovereignty and independence exist at the other.
- **Trans-national and Non-traditional Threats:** Trans-national and non-traditional threats, visible in interconnected illegal activities, contribute to instability.
- **Grey Areas and Environmental Concerns:** Grey areas stemming from climate change and natural disasters present additional concerns.
- **Financial and Strategic Ambiguities:** Distant crises such as fuel, food, and fertilizer shortages, manipulated "normalcy," unsustainable debt, opaque lending practices, and dual-purpose agendas also contribute to the complex landscape.
- **Globalization Structural Challenges:** These includes over-concentrations of manufacturing and technology, supply-side risks, and leveraging possibilities, further complicate the region's stability.

Way Forward:

- **Enhanced Consultation and Cooperation:** Fostering greater consultation and cooperation among states is imperative, utilizing existing mechanisms like the Indian Ocean Rim Association and Indo-Pacific initiatives.
- **Awareness and Understanding of Threats**: Heightened awareness and understanding of transnational threats, including climate change and dual-purpose agendas, are vital.
- **Strengthening Regional Forums and Initiatives:** Strengthening regional forums like **BIMSTEC, the Quad,** and initiatives such as the **Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative** is essential for collective security.
- **Sustainable Development and Maritime Safety:** Prioritizing sustainable development, addressing maritime safety, piracy, and **Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing,** and reinforcing regional organizations like **the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)** are critical steps toward achieving a stable and sustainable Indian Ocean.

Trans-border financial crimes

News Excerpt:

Cambodia, Myanmar, and Laos emerge as hubs of organized financial crimes targeting Indians.

Cases of financial crime in India:

- As per the Chief Executive Officer of **I4C (Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C))**, in the first four months of the year, Indians had lost **over ₹1,776 crore in 89,054 cases** of financial crimes.
  - Out of the total complaints on the portal, **85%** pertain to financial crimes, of which **48%** originate from **South-East Asia**.
  - Out of the total financial scams originating from Southeast Asia, the maximum number of complaints—62,687—were related to **investment scams.**
- The **recent** spate of **bomb threat emails** sent to schools, hospitals and airports in various parts of the country have been **sent using VPNs** (virtual private networks) and investigating agencies were taking help from various countries to trace the culprits.

Types of cybercrime:

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The I4C has identified **four broad categories of fraud (as shown in the figure below) originating** from these three countries, following certain modus operandi.

Steps taken by the government to curb it:

- **With the effort of I4C and the State police, 3.25 lakh** mule bank accounts**, 595 apps**, and more than **3,000 URL**s **were blocked i**n the past four months.
- Additionally, **5.3 lakh SIM cards** and **80,848 IMEI** numbers have been **suspended** since July 2023, and **3,401 WhatsApp groups** have been **taken down** in the past two months.

Way forward:

- **International Cooperation:** Strengthen cooperation and information-sharing mechanisms with law enforcement agencies in Cambodia, Myanmar, and Laos to track down and prosecute individuals involved in organized financial crimes targeting Indians.

- **Awareness Campaigns:** Launch extensive awareness campaigns to educate the public, especially vulnerable groups, about the tactics used in financial scams originating from South-east Asia.

- **Regulatory Measures:** Enhance regulatory measures to monitor and regulate online platforms and apps frequently used to perpetrate financial fraud. This may involve stricter licensing requirements for fintech companies and increased scrutiny of online investment platforms **capacity Building:** Provide training and resources to law enforcement agencies to effectively investigate and prosecute cases of financial fraud.

- **Technological Solutions:** Invest in advanced technological solutions like artificial intelligence and machine learning algorithms to detect and prevent financial crimes in real time.

SECURITY FORCES

Common Uniform

News Excerpt

Indian Army has decided that irrespective of the cadre and appointment all officers of the rank of Brigadier and above will wear Common Uniform items, in order to promote and strengthen common identity and approach.

Background

- The concept of common uniform was practiced 40 years ago, when there were changes towards regimental affiliations.
- Till Lt. Colonel the regimental service continued untilmid-1980s, Colonel and above rankers wore common uniform patterns and insignia. Colonel and brigadiers wore khaki beret, shed their regimental insignia and wore Ashoka emblem on their cap badges.
- Although for most officers, the regimental service in the army ends at the rank of Colonel. So, all the uniform affiliations with respect to corps or regiment also ends

there, representing that any regimental parochialism will not be promoted to higher ranks.

About Uniform Pattern of Senior Indian Army Officers
Current Uniform Pattern

- There are different uniform accoutrements such as berets, lanyards, and badges of ranks for different branches of the Army depending on their regiment affiliation.
- The uniform worn by officer of the rank of Colonel and above is termed as Staff Uniform, distinguishing it from residential uniform.
- The wearing of any item of regimental uniform, particularly headdress, along with staff uniform is unauthorized.
- At present armoured corps officers wear black berets, military intelligence and infantry officers wear dark green berets while other corps officer wear dark blue berets.
- Officers from Lieutenant to General rank wear as per their regimental or corps affiliation.
- Officers from the rifle regiments such as Gorkha Rifles, Garhwal Rifles and Rajputana Rifles wear black rank badges currently.

New Uniform Pattern

- Officers from **Brigadier, Major General, Lt. General to General** are bound to wear berets having same color, common badges of rank, a common pattern of shoes and a common belt buckle.
- Meanwhile, the color for the shoulder rank will be golden for all officers.
- Also, the headgear, gorget patches, belts, shoes and shoulder rank badges will be standardized and it will be common for officers of Brigadier and above ranks.
- No change has been made to the uniform worn by colonels and below –rank officers but now on they will no longer wear regimental lanyards (cords) on their shoulders. Any shoulder flashes like 'Special Forces', 'Arunachal Scouts', 'Dogra Scouts', etc. will not be worn anymore.
- No particular uniform will represent any one regiment or corps as all the officers of higher ranks will dress in the same pattern.

Significance

- It will enhance a culture which is more **cohesive and integrated** in approach within the Indian Army.
- It will help in dealing with **tinkering syndrome' which is triggered by tendency of chasing legacy** towards end of tenure.

> **Accoutrements** are worn and carried by military personnel which are additional items of dress or equipment that are worn or carried, especially, to complete a uniform or outfit.

- It will ensure **common identity** to all senior rank officers representing real ethos of the Indian Army.
- It will help in **eliminating regimental parochialism** and **common identity** among officers will help to meet the different challenges of modern warfares and adapting changing strategic circumstances.
- It will help **in changing the mindset and dismantling the entire eco-system**, which gives disproportionate advantage to one Arm and few regiments affiliated with senior officers.
- It will help in **commanding troops of mixed regimental lineage** for senior officers.
- It will help in **establishing a more inclusive and collaborative leadership** style that transcends traditional loyalties and affiliations.

> **Regimental Parochialism** is the term used for loyalty towards one's regiment or corps. It creates a sense of pride and attachment to one's unit that can result in lack of cooperation or competition with other units.

Conclusion

With this initiative the aim is to lower down the elitism and parochialism which has existed in the army, since long time. Along with this issue other issues like vacancy allocation, objectivity in placement and selection to make it merit oriented Army can be addressed with this initiative and without parochialism. So, this initiative can be taken as bold initiative side-lining the fixed mindsets and residual baggage.

INDIAN ARMY'S AIR DEFENCE WIDENS WINGS

About

The Indian Army's reorientation from the western borders to the northern borders in the aftermath of the 2020 standoff with China, along with lessons from the ongoing war in Ukraine, are impacting the ongoing transformation of the Army Air Defence (AAD).

India's Initiatives

Networked automation

- The nearly ₹2,000 crore contract for Akashteer, a networking and automation project on the same lines as the Indian Air Force's Integrated Air Command and Control System network, was signed in March 2023.
    - o It is a major initiative and the entire implementation should be done by March 2024.
- Akashteer will link all the radars and control centres of AAD and consolidate the air defence picture, removing duplications or overlaps and also integrate all the weapons.
    - o It will also be able to communicate with the IAF's network.

Shifting focus

- Before the 2020 standoff with China, the Army's focus was predominantly on India's western border with Pakistan. However, air defence requirements on the northern borders are different from the western front; the need is for light-weight radars and weapon systems with mobility for deployment in the mountains while catering to the infantry's requirements.
- The war in Ukraine has also changed the requirements, forcing the army to factor in new threats to air defence such as unmanned aerial vehicles or UAVs, loitering munitions, swarm drones and cruise missiles.

New technology

- The Ukraine conflict has shown that Man Portable Air Defence Systems (MANPADS) are highly effective when in range with night vision enabled. The Indian Army is focussing on laser beam-riding MANPADS and has already initiated the procurement process.
- Another focus area is gallium nitride-based modules for radars which can significantly reduce weight, a critical factor in the mountains.
- Another emerging threat to air defences is loitering munitions, for which the best counter is high-rate gun systems, better optic sights, fragmented ammunition and active electronically scanned array radars.

Inducting new SAMs

Defence Ministry signed a contract worth more than ₹8,160 crore with Bharat Dynamics Limited for two regiments of improved Akash surface-to-air missile systems.

NIA to build its terror database

News Excerpt:

The **National Terrorism Data Fusion & Analysis Centre (NTDFAC)**, modelled along the lines of the US Global Terrorism Database, has been inaugurated by the Union Home Minister.

> The Army Air Defence — called Air Defence Artillery till 2005 — has been in existence since 1940, though its ground-based air defences have increasingly moved to the Air Force.
> The modernisation of the AAD has stagnated post-1996; over the last decade too, several attempts at procurement in various segments were unsuccessful.
> It has now picked up pace and with the push for indigenisation, there are several made-in-India systems coming in, defence sources noted.

About the news:

- The details of the terrorists and their associates, including their **case history, fingerprints, videos, pictures, social media profiles,** and information on the terror groups they belong to, have been compiled.

- At the NTDFAC, the NIA has the **National Automated Fingerprint Identification System** with over 92 lakh fingerprint records -
  - **Integrated Monitoring of Terrorism**, which includes data from more than 22,000 terrorist cases along with their case studies.
  - **National Integrated Database on Arrested Narco-Offenders** with data of more than 5 lakh narco offenders, their source of funding, their involvement along with their cases registered in India, their latest pictures, and social media profiles.
- The NTDFAC will also have a **face recognition system**, which will **help them scan pictures of suspects from any CCTV footage.**
- The NTDFAC will **help the NIA officers and state police forces** identify their suspects' details from this server.
  - Currently, they have uploaded videos and photographs of the terrorists and their associates, but in the future, there are plans also to put **voice samples** to help identify the terrorists.

Upon the recommendations of the **National Police Commission in 1986**, the **Central Fingerprint Bureau first began to automate the fingerprint database** by digitizing the existing manual records through India's first Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFI) in 1992, called **Fingerprint Analysis & Criminal Tracing System (FACTS 1.0).**

National Automated Fingerprint Identification System (NAFIS):

- It is a **biometric system used by law enforcement agencies and government organizations** in various countries to **store and manage fingerprint data.**
- It is designed to facilitate the rapid and accurate identification of individuals by comparing their fingerprints with a database of known fingerprints.
- It enables law enforcement agencies to **upload, trace, and retrieve data from the database in real-time on a 24×7 basis.**
- It assigns a **unique 10-digit National Fingerprint Number (NFN)** to each person arrested for a crime.
  - This unique ID is used for the person's lifetime, and **different crimes registered under different FIRs are linked to the same NFN.**
  - The ID's first two digits are that of the state code in which the person arrested for a crime is registered, followed by a sequence number.
- By automating the collection, storage, and matching of fingerprints, along with digitizing the records of fingerprint data, it **provides the much-needed unique identifier for every arrested person in the CCTNS** (Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems) database as both are connected at the backend.

Since when has India relied on fingerprinting as a crime-fighting tool?

- A **fingerprinting identification system** first emerged in colonial India, where it was tested before it spread to Europe and beyond.
- At first, it was used by British colonial officials for **administrative rather than criminal purposes.**
- William Herschel, the chief administrator of the Hooghly district of Bengal, from the late-middle 1800s onwards, used **fingerprinting to reduce fraud and forgeries** in order to ensure that the correct person was receiving government pensions and signing land transfer deeds and mortgage bonds.
- **Anthropometry**, the measurement of physical features of the body, was used by officials in India but was soon replaced with a system of fingerprints, which were seen to be more accurate as it was believed that no two people could have identical sets of patterns.

Way Forward:

The fight against terrorism requires collaboration from the global level to the grassroots, involving various states within the country and international cooperation. **We need to not only combat terrorism but also dismantle its entire ecosystem. Technology can be of great help in this regard.**

MISCELLANEOUS

Improvised Explosive devices

News Excerpt

Recent soldiers in Jammu Division and security personnel of the District Reserve Guard in Chattisgarh Dantewada area were killed because of Improvised Explosive Devices.
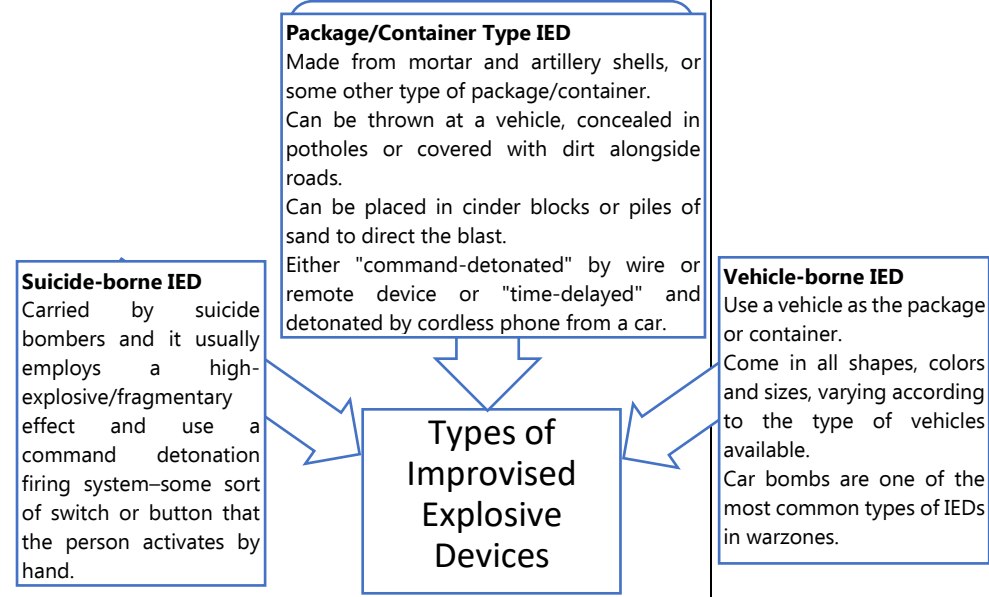
About Improvised Explosive Device

- In 1970's, after Irish republican army (IRA) used bombs made from agricultural fertilizer and SEMTEX smuggled from Libya to make highly remote-controlled bombs, improvised explosive device were used by British Army. {SEMTEX is a plastic explosive containing RDX (i.e.- Research Department Explosive) and PETN (Penta-erythritol tetra-nitrate}.
- It was commonly used during Iraq War around 2003.
- It comes in many forms, from a small pipe bomb to a sophisticated device capable of causing massive damage and loss of life.
- They are easy to carry and can be placed in vehicle, kept in package or concealed on the roadside.

- Common materials such as **fertilizer, gunpowder, and hydrogen peroxide,** can be used as explosive materials in IEDs.
- The explosion depends on the type of material used as explosive but can be triggered by various methods, including remote control, infra-red or magnetic triggers, pressure sensitive bars or trip wires (victim operated).
- Its damage is based on its size, construction, and placement, and whether it incorporates a high explosive or propellant.

Package/Container Type IED
Made from mortar and artillery shells, or some other type of package/container.
Can be thrown at a vehicle, concealed in potholes or covered with dirt alongside roads.
Can be placed in cinder blocks or piles of sand to direct the blast.
Either "command-detonated" by wire or remote device or "time-delayed" and detonated by cordless phone from a car.

Suicide-borne IED
Carried by suicide bombers and it usually employs a high-explosive/fragmentary effect and use a command detonation firing system–some sort of switch or button that the person activates by hand.

Vehicle-borne IED
Use a vehicle as the package or container.
Come in all shapes, colors and sizes, varying according to the type of vehicles available.
Car bombs are one of the most common types of IEDs in warzones.
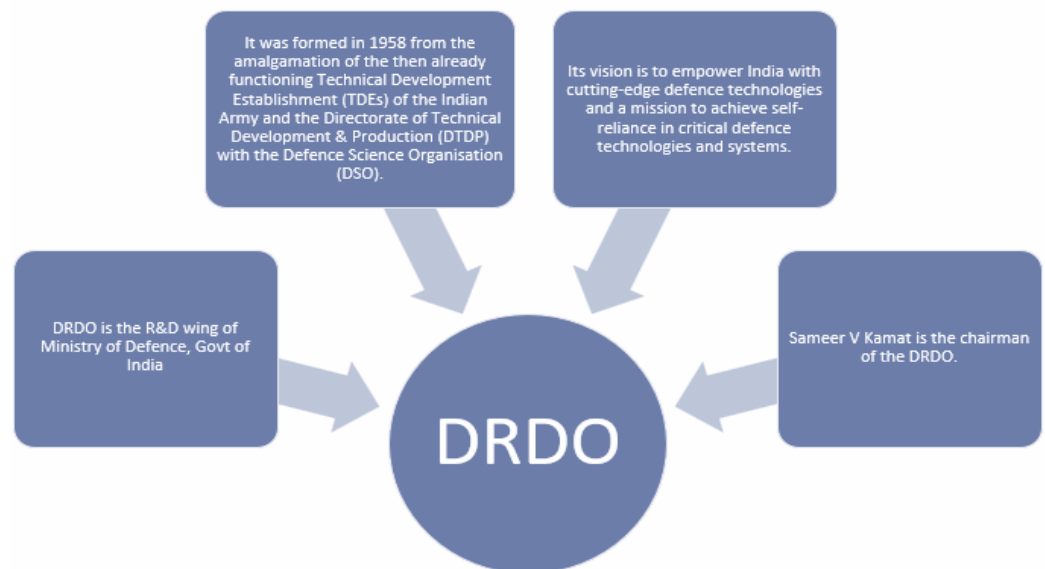
Types of Improvised Explosive Devices

Impacts

- Damage may include explosion in nearby buildings, public transports, effects on ventilation, water/sewage, release of hazardous material and even exit routes may be disrupted.
- Secondary hazards include possibly toxic smoke, disruption of electric power, ruptured natural gas lines and water mains, along with debris.
- It can also lead to uncontrolled traffic in the area of blast with stampede and overcrowding.
- It may cause health impacts like high blood pressure, anxiety, eye injuries, abdominal injury, basic injuries, psychological impacts and even fatalities especially if the area is closed.

Way Forward

- **Stealth, camouflage and concealment are integral way to avoid such accidents.**

- Strict measures such as mandatory addition of odoriferous chemicals or biosensors should be added to industry and mining for early and easy detection during transport.
- Stricter controls on manufacture, supply and sale of explosives and detonators with strict legislative measures are required.
  - In War Zones, security forces should be provided with appropriate protective gear, such as blast resistant clothing, helmets and eye protection.
  - Vehicle should be equipped with blast-resistant technology and 360-degree observation should be adopted.
  - Security forces should always have a group of vehicles, so that in time of crisis, they can help each other.
  - **Various detection methods**, such as metal detectors, ground-penetrating radar, and trained sniffer dogs, to locate and clear landmines and IEDs should be implemented well.
- **Road opening parties with Unmanned Ground Vehicle and drones for aerial surveillance can** play an important role in detection of ambushes.
- Vulnerable areas can be mapped and contingency plans can be prepared for them.

Karbi Anglong **and Dima Hasao (earlier North Cachar Hills)** districts are protected under the **Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.**

It was formed in 1958 from the amalgamation of the then already functioning Technical Development Establishment (TDEs) of the Indian Army and the Directorate of Technical Development & Production (DTDP) with the Defence Science Organisation (DSO).

Its vision is to empower India with cutting-edge defence technologies and a mission to achieve self-reliance in critical defence technologies and systems.

DRDO is the R&D wing of Ministry of Defence, Govt of India

Sameer V Kamat is the chairman of the DRDO.

DRDO

Ballistic missile 'Agni Prime'

News Excerpt

Recently, the new generation ballistic missile, 'Agni Prime', was successfully flight-tested by Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) from Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Island off the coast of Odisha.

About Agni prime

Agni Prime
Shot in the arm
• Agni-P's range of 1,000-2,000 km is too short to reach targets in China's mainland, but can cover all of Pakistan's territory
• Being a canisterised missile, it can be transported easily and fired at very short notice
• It will replace the Prithvi, Agni-1 and Agni-2 missiles in India's arsenal that were built two decades ago with tech now considered obsolete
• It will enter service as a two-stage, solid propellant missile. Both stages will have composite rocket motors and guidance systems with electro-mechanical actuators
• Agni-P and Agni-5 originate from the Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme launched by then DRDO chief Dr APJ Abdul Kalam in the early 1980s

- This was the first pre-induction night launch conducted by the users after three successful developmental trials of the missile, validating the accuracy and reliability of the system.
- The purpose of the trial of the sea-based missile was to engage and neutralize a hostile ballistic missile threat thereby elevating India into an elite club of nations having such a capability.
- India has been developing capabilities to intercept hostile ballistic missiles both inside and outside the earth's atmospheric limits.
- In April 2023, India successfully carried out the maiden flight trial of an endo-atmospheric interceptor missile from a ship off the coast of Odisha in the Bay of Bengal as part of its ambitious ballistic missile defence programme.
- The Agni 1 to 4 missiles have ranges from 700 km to 3,500 km and they have already been deployed.
- In December 2022, India successfully test-fired Agni-V missile that can strike targets at ranges up to 5,000 km.
- Agni-V can bring almost the entire Asia including the northernmost part of China as well as some regions in Europe under its striking range.

The Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme (IGMDP)

- The Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme (IGMDP) was conceptualized by Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, a renowned scientist with the purpose to make India self-sufficient in missile technology.

- The team included members from the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), Army, Navy, Air Force, and Defence Production.
- On July 26, 1983, the IGMDP received approval from the Government of India.
- The ambitious project brought together India's scientific community, academic institutions, research and development laboratories, industries, and the three Services.
- The collaborative efforts aimed to create strategic indigenous missile systems.

The missiles developed under the programme were:-

1. Short-range surface-to-surface ballistic missile Prithvi
2. Intermediate-range surface-to-surface ballistic missile Agni
3. Short-range low-level surface-to-air missile Trishul
4. Medium-range surface-to-air missile Akash
5. Third generation anti-tank missile Nag

The Agni, which was initially conceived as a technology demonstrator project in the form of a re-entry vehicle, was later upgraded to a ballistic missile with different ranges.

After achieving the goal of making India self-reliant in missile technology, DRDO on January 8, 2008, formally announced successful completion of IGMDP.
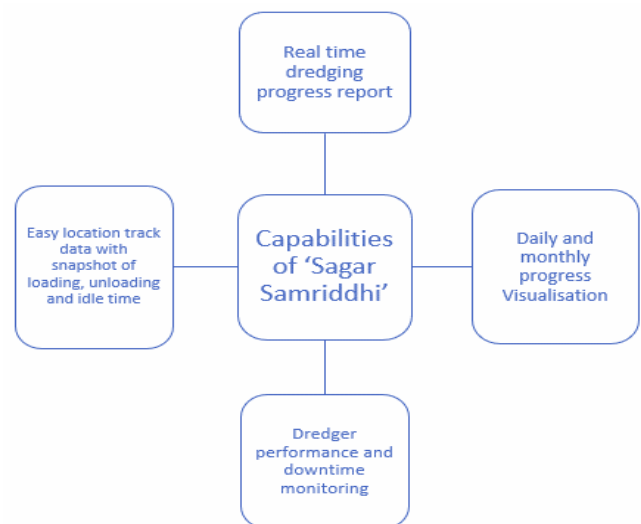
SAGAR SAMRIDDHI

News Excerpt

Recently, Union Minister of Ports, Shipping & Waterways (MoPSW) launched 'SAGAR SAMRIDDHI' - the online dredging monitoring system - in order to accelerate 'Waste to Wealth' initiative.

SAGAR SAMRIDDHI

- This system has been developed by National Technology Centre for Ports, Waterways and Coasts (NTCPWC) the technological arm of MoPSW.
- The new technology brings in marked improvement against the old system of Draft & Loading Monitor (DLM) system.

- The system will bring in synergy among multiple input reports like daily dredging report, the pre and post dredging survey data before processing and producing real time dredging report.
- The 'Sagar Samriddhi' monitoring system will also allow Daily and monthly progress Visualisation, Dredger performance and downtime monitoring, easy location track data with snapshot of loading, unloading and idle time. This system strengthens the Atmanirbhar Bharat and Make in India vision.

NTCPWC

The NTCPWC was established under the Sagarmala Programme of MoPSW with the total investment of ₹ 77 Crores at IIT Madras which was inaugurated by the Minister on 24th April 2023.

The aim of the centre is to enable research & development for the marine sector, enabling solutions towards achieving the ultimate goal of building a robust marine industry in the country.

- To address the objective of carrying out dredging with essential technical investigation the MoPSW issued 'Dredging Guidelines for Major Ports' in 2021.
- The Dredging Guidelines outlined the procedure for planning and preparation, technical investigations, dredged material management, estimating the cost of dredging etc., to enable the Major Ports to formulate the dredging projects in order to complete in time.
- In March 2023 Ministry issued Addendum to the Dredging Guidelines 2021 for Major Ports for disposal of dredged material by incorporating a necessary provision in bidding documents which will help in reducing the dredging cost in form of 'Waste to Wealth'.
- It outlines a wide range of beneficial use of dredged material including engineering use for construction purposes, environmental enhancement including beach nourishment etc. to bring down the cost of the dredging.

Armed Drones Deal

News Excerpt

Recently, India's defence ministry on Thursday approved the acquisition of 31 MQ-9B armed drones from the US.

Armed Drones Deal

- The clearance for procuring the drones made by General Atomics was given by a meeting of the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) chaired by defence minister.
- India is expected to buy the drones, which have an endurance of more than 27 hours and can operate at up to 50,000 feet, in a deal worth a little more than $3 billion.

o Fifteen drones will be for the navy, and eight each for the army and the air force.

- India and the US have engaged in talks on the acquisition of the drones for almost eight years, primarily to bolster the Indian armed forces' surveillance capabilities. The Indian Navy currently operates two MQ-9 drones leased from the US in November 2020.
- The acquisition of the drones gained urgency after the military standoff with China in the Ladakh sector of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) began in May 2020, increasing the Indian military's need to enhance its vigil along the disputed border.
- The defence ministry's "acceptance of necessity" is the first step in the formal procurement process, which will need to be cleared by the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) chaired by the

Prime Minister. The two sides will also need to conclude negotiations on the final pricing of the drones.

UAVs are already in service

➤ The Indian Navy has leased two MQ-9As from General Atomics with the maiden flight taking place on November 21, 2020. In their two years of operation till November 2022, they had completed 10,000 flight hours.

➤ India's DRDOs in the final stages of development of its indigenous drone RUSTOM II, also known as TAPAS (Tactical Airborne Platform for Surveillance Past Horizon). Significantly, RUSTOM drones will use Indian GPS GAGAN (GPS Aided Geo Augmented Navigation) developed by ISRO. RUSTOM can be controlled upto 100 km away via line-of-sight system and beyond that by SATCOM. It can carry payloads upto 350 kgs. With its array of sensors, it is capable of monitoring at least 250 km inside enemy territory.

India's Defence Dependency

News Excerpt

In recent years, India has made attempts to reduce its dependence on arms imports and strengthen its domestic arms manufacturing industry. Russia's war in Ukraine has disrupted some military supplies to India, reinforcing its long-term desire to diversify imports or replace them with home-built hardware.

- India is the **world's largest arms importer**. India bought weapons worth over $60 billion in the last 20 years, of which 65 per cent or nearly $39 billion were from Russia, according to **Stockholm International Peace Research Institute data** (SIPRI).
- Almost all of major weapon purchases now include **provisions for joint manufacture** or technology transfer, irrespective of which country it is dealing with.
- **Russia** was India's largest arms supplier in the periods between 2013-17 and 2018-22, but its share of arms imports to India fell from 64 per cent to 45 per cent.
- France emerged as the **second-largest arms supplier** to India between 2018-22 at 29 per cent, followed by the US at 11 per cent.
- According to SIPRI, India's arms import from France included **62 combat aircraft and four submarines** and increased by 489 per cent between 2013-17 and 2018-22.

Challenges

- **Decreasing over-reliance on Russia**: A big shift away from Russia will take multiple decades.
- **Gap with China**: India aims to narrow the technological gap with better-armed arch-rival China, which is also closely allied with Pakistan.
- **Delayed Russian Supply**: Russia's war in Ukraine has severely dented its ability to deliver weapons and equipment.

India- US defence Deal

- India announced significant purchases of US defence equipment including:
- Over one-billion-dollar order for **GE engines for fighter jets**.
- A possible $3 billion deal for **MQ-9B Sea Guardian drones**.
- In line with self-reliance in defence and Make in India policy, the jet engine deal includes **joint manufacturing in the future**, while the assembly and maintenance of the Sea Guardians will likely be in India.
- These UAVs can sustain for long duration, fly at high altitude, and have encrypted communication.
- USA is now **easing India's access to military technologies** sharing more with India than it had with some its closest allies.

- It would delay deliveries of spares for **Sukhoi Su-30 MKI and MiG-29 jet** fighter planes.
- The remaining two of the five Russian **S-400 air defence** systems has also been delayed.
- **Drop in arms imports**: According to SIPRI, it can be attributed to several factors including India's slow and complex arms procurement process, and efforts to diversify its arms suppliers, among others.
- **USA Policy Issues**:
  - Stringent US **International Trafficking in Arms (ITAR)** regulations and the two countries are not treaty allies which means the level of technology sharing provided under the **AUKUS deal to supply Australia** with nuclear-powered submarines is not on the cards.
  - **US's suspicions**: That their systems might help the

India, arms imports by country, %
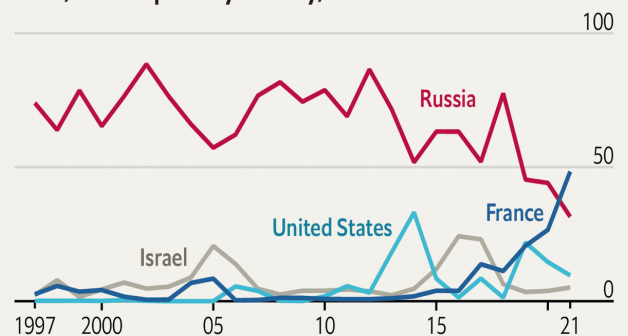
Russians in some sort of way, because of that close India-Russia partnership.

Way Forward

- **Diversification of Imports**: India needs to decrease its reliance on Russia for major defence procurement thus it is buying French fighter jets, Israeli drones, American jet engines and potentially German submarines.

- **Collaboration with friendly nations**: Collaborating in defence research, joint production, and technology sharing can accelerate India's defence diversification efforts. India is also a member of the **QUAD alliance** with the US, Japan and Australia, which deepens its ties with the West.
- **Promoting domestic defence industry**: This involves providing incentives, tax breaks, and favourable regulations to encourage foreign and domestic companies to manufacture defence equipment in India and continue to policies such as the "**Make in India**" initiative.
- **Enhancing research and development**: The government should allocate sufficient funds and resources to research institutions and defence organizations to develop cutting-edge technologies and innovations.
- **Public-private partnerships**: The measures such as domestic capital procurement, **defence industrial corridors, iDEX, increase in FDI to 100%** through government route etc. encourage public private partnerships.
- **Export promotion**: India is actively seeking opportunities to export defence equipment and technology to other countries. India's defence exports **surpassed ₹16,000 crores** in financial year 2022-23.

Stapled Visa

News Excerpt
India withdrew its eight-athlete wushu contingent from the Summer World University Games beginning in Chengdu on July 28, after China issued stapled visas to three athletes from the team who belong to Arunachal Pradesh.

About stapled visa
A stapled visa is simply an unstamped piece of paper that is attached by a pin or staples to a page of the passport and can be torn off or detached at will. China has made it a practice to issue stapled visas to Indian nationals from Arunachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir.

Types of Indian Visa
▪ Employment visa
▪ Business visa
▪ Project visa
▪ Entry visa
▪ Tourist visa
▪ Research visa
▪ Transit visa
▪ Conference visa
▪ Medical visa

About
- Chinese authority signalled their intention by refusing to give a visa to an Indian government official who was serving in Arunachal Pradesh in late 2006.
- Subsequently, they started the practice of issuing 'stapled' visas – the visa was not affixed to the passport but was given on a separate piece of paper stapled to the passport – to all Indian citizens from Arunachal Pradesh (as well as Jammu and Kashmir).

Reasons behind issuance of stapled visa by China

- China challenges the legal status of the McMahon Line, the boundary between Tibet and British India that was agreed at the Convention Between Great Britain, China, and Tibet at the Shimla Convention of 1914.
- It is this disagreement that lies at the heart of Chinese claims over the position of the Line of Actual Control (LAC), and its repeated transgressions into Indian territory.
- China claims some 90,000 sq km of Arunachal Pradesh as its territory. It calls the area "Zangnan" in the Chinese language and makes repeated references to "South Tibet".
- It issues lists of Chinese names for places in Arunachal Pradesh — it has issued three such lists in 2017, 2021, and in April 2023 this year — and takes steps such as issuing stapled visas.

India's concerns
- Government of India has consistently refused to accept the issue of stapled visa by Chinese authority. India has clearly expressed its concern and stressed that there should be no discrimination or differential treatment based on domicile or ethnicity in the visa regime for Indian citizens holding valid India passports.
- India alleges China to dispute India's unequivocal and internationally accepted sovereignty over Arunachal Pradesh by issuing stapled visa.

Conclusion
Passports, visas, and other kinds of immigration controls reiterate the idea of a nation-state and its sovereignty which is inalienable and inviolable. A passport is the certificate of its holder's identity and citizenship. Both India and China need to resolve the issue in an expeditious manner and maintain the momentum of dialogue and negotiations through diplomatic channels.

Defence Testing Infrastructure Scheme

News Excerpt
India's first Unmanned Aerial Systems (Drone) Common Testing Centre under Defence Testing Infrastructure Scheme (DTIS) will be established in Tamil Nadu.

About
- The Scheme has an outlay of 400 crore for creating state-of-the-art testing infrastructure over the duration of five years.
- It envisages to setup new test facilities in partnership with private industry.
- The projects under the scheme will be provided with up to 75% government funding in the form of Grant-in-Aid.
- The remaining 25% of the cost will be borne by the Special Purpose Vehicles (SPV), whose constituents will be Indian private entities and State Governments.
- The SPV will be made of State Governments and Private entities and the scheme will be registered under Companies Act 2013.

- While a majority of test facilities are expected to come up in the two Defence Industrial Corridors (DICs).
- The test facilities are not going to be limited just in the two Defence Industrial Corridors (DIC) in Uttar Pradesh & Tamil Nadu.
- It will is a Greenfield Defence Testing Infrastructure which will help in boosting production in both the defence and aerospace sector which had been lacking such facility for the private players.

About

➢ This centre will be established on an area of 2.3 acres at the SIPCOT Industrial Park, Vallam Vadagal near Sriperumbudur.

➢ The testing centre to be set up at an estimated cost of ₹45 crore will enable the State to be a significant contributor to the self-reliance of the country in the aerospace and defence sectors.

Key Benefits

Setting up a drone testing lab in India can provide significant security-related benefits, like-

- **Counterterrorism and Surveillance**: A drone testing lab can help develop and test advanced surveillance drones that can be employed for counterterrorism operations. These drones can monitor sensitive areas, detect suspicious activities, and enhance situational awareness for security agencies.
- **Border and Coastal Monitoring:** Drones equipped with high-resolution cameras and sensors can be used to monitor borders and coastlines, helping prevent illegal crossings, smuggling, and other security threats.
- **Critical Infrastructure Protection**: Drones can be used to inspect critical infrastructure such as power plants, pipelines, and communication towers for vulnerabilities and potential security breaches.
- **Emergency Response and Disaster Management**: Drones can provide real-time aerial views during natural disasters, assisting in search and rescue operations and enabling better disaster response coordination.

Conclusion

The establishment of drone testing labs in India holds immense promise for advancing technology, security, and innovation. With the rapid evolution of drone technology and its multifaceted applications, such labs offer a strategic platform to explore, experiment, and refine the capabilities of unmanned aerial vehicles.

INDIA-US DEFENCE ACCELERATION ECOSYSTEM (INDUS-X) initiative

The **US delegation** met with a team of Innovations for Defence Excellence-Defence Innovation Organization **(iDEX-DIO)**.

About:

- **India** registered historic growth in **defence exports** in the financial year ending March 2023. India's total

defence exports were pegged at **$1.95 billion**. India has been exporting a range of defence equipment, including helicopters, naval vessels, aircraft, missiles, armoured vehicles, etc.
- The government has set a **target** of achieving **$5 billion** in defence exports by **2025**.

About:

- **iDEX**, in partnership with the **US Department of Defence**, launched the India-US Defence Acceleration Ecosystem (INDUS-X) in early 2023.
- INDUS-X **aims** to:
  - Pave the way towards the goals in the US-India roadmap for defence industrial cooperation.
  - Capitalize on the tech-releasability outcomes that the industry anticipates from the US-India **Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET).**
  - Strengthen bilateral trade relationships and defence establishment linkages.
- The initiative will expand the strategic technology partnership and defence industrial cooperation between start-up ecosystems, businesses and academic institutions. It seeks to explore possibilities for co-producing jet engines, long-range artillery, and infantry vehicles.
- It has been launched as a part of the vision to build a '**Defence Innovation Bridge**' which is a part of iCET.

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iDEX:

Aim- Creation of an **ecosystem** to foster innovation and technology development in Defence and Aerospace by engaging industries including MSMEs, start-ups, individual innovators, Research institutes & academia.

It fosters innovation, in critical domains like Artificial Intelligence (AI), unmanned solutions, domain awareness, communications, space, cybersecurity etc.

It is funded and managed by Defence Innovation Organization **(DIO).**

Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET):

- It is a **framework** agreed upon by India and the US for cooperation on **critical and emerging technologies**. It was launched in January 2023.
- Key takeaways include:
  - developing new defence industrial cooperation and common standards in AI.
  - developing a roadmap to accelerate defence technological cooperation and innovation bridges to connect defence startups.

- supporting the development of a semiconductor ecosystem.
- strengthening cooperation on human spaceflight.
- advancing cooperation on development in 5G and 6G.
- adopting **OpenRAN network technology** in India.

> **OpenRAN technology:** The Radio Access Network (RAN) provides the critical technology to connect users, including mobile phones or enterprises, to the mobile network over radio waves. **Current RAN technology is provided as a hardware and software integrated platform.** The ambition for Open RAN is to create a multi-supplier RAN solution that allows for the separation between hardware and software with open interfaces.

INDUS-X - A game changer:

- **Make-in-India:** It will help India **diversify** its **defence portfolio**, and also **boost** the Make-in-India campaign. India is making efforts to reduce its reliance on defence exports and instead boost the **local manufacturing sector**.
- **Exports:** India will be in a better position to achieve the **$5 billion target** in defence exports by 2025.
- **Trade and Investment:** It will pave the way for **US companies** to **invest massively** in India and build a defence ecosystem. India has already undertaken such a defence partnership with Russia in the **BrahMos joint venture**. Now, India will look forward to **replicating the success** of the BrahMos model, this time in partnership with the US.
- **Indo-Pacific:** The initiative serves as a significant indication of the **US's commitment** to advancing policies and initiatives promoting a **free and open** Indo-Pacific region.
- **Countering China:** Recognising the **shared objective** of countering China's expanding influence, the US and India are aligning their efforts to foster a robust and cooperative relationship.
- **Less dependence on Russia:** To **pull India away** from its security dependence on Russia, the US administration has been eagerly upgrading its defence ties with India. Russia continues to be **India's biggest arms supplier**, which is a **major concern for the US** government. However, Russia's share in India's arms market has dropped significantly from 62% (2017) to 45% (2022). The **US** is India's **third-largest arms supplier** with an 11% share, below France's 29%.

Other India-US defence partnerships:

- **GE F414 Engine Co-production:** General Electric will jointly produce the F414 jet engine in India.
- **General Atomics MQ-9Bs**: India intends to procure armed MQ-9B **Sea Guardian UAVs**. The drones will increase India's intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities.

- **Service and repair of US Navy ships:** The US Navy has concluded a Master Ship Repair Agreement (MSRA) with L&T Shipyard in Kattupalli (Chennai) and is finalizing agreements with Mazagon Dock Limited (Mumbai) and Goa Shipyard (Goa).
- **Signing of the 4 defence foundational agreements**: Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-Spatial Cooperation (BECA), General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) and Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) have been signed by India and USA.

Conclusion:

Overall, INDUS-X provides a unique opportunity for India and the US to step up defence innovation cooperation. Enabled by the emergence of the defence and space startup ecosystem in India, the initiative is rightly positioned to complement other areas of defence as well. It can also play a key role in bridging a vital information gap. INDUS-X needs to be based on consistent interaction between the two countries.

Indian Maritime Blue Economy

News Excerpt:

The Prime Minister recently unveiled **'Amrit Kaal Vision 2047'**, a blueprint for the Indian maritime blue economy, during the **Global Maritime India Summit 2023.**

About 'Amrit Kaal Vision-2047':

- **On Port Infrastructure**: It aims to quadruple port capacity to 10,000 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) by 2047, aiming to get **100% public-private partnership (PPP) for 12 major ports.**
  - The plan includes the development of Next Generation Mega Ports, International Container Trans-shipment Ports, island development, inland waterways, and multi-modal hubs.
  - Increased infrastructure investments worth Rs 75-80 trillion over the next 25 years will be used to achieve the following goals:
    - Carbon neutrality at all major ports
    - Attaining the highest rank in cruise tourism
    - Development of 25 cruise terminals
    - Increasing operational waterways more than twofold
    - 500 million tons (mt) of cargo
- **Global Partnerships**: Over 300 Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) were signed, further solidifying India's international and national maritime partnerships.
- **Transformative Projects:**
  - **Make in India**: Maritime clusters are being established, with shipbuilding and repair centres in development.
  - **Sustainable Maritime Sector:** Efforts are underway to make major Indian ports carbon-neutral through

a net-zero strategy for the sector, as India aims to create a '**Green Planet**' through its blue economy.

- ○ **Ease of doing business:** The initiative aims to reduce business costs and mitigate environmental deterioration.
- ○ **Sustainability**: The plan includes making major ports carbon-neutral and pushing for domestic hydrogen production and distribution.

Indian Scenario:

India towards Embracing the Blue Ocean Dream:

- India **stands at the threshold of immense untapped potential** in the maritime domain, powered by its abundant naval resources.
- India's maritime sector emerges as a pivotal force that can propel the nation towards becoming a **$20 Trillion economy by 2040**.
- In the coming decade, India aspires **to lead the cruise sector, offering world-class experiences and attracting travellers** from around the globe.
- As a responsible maritime nation, India is determined to be a global leader in ship recycling, adhering to environmentally sound practices and setting high standards for the industry.

Government Initiative to Build Maritime Infrastructure:

- Initiatives like the '**Sagarmala Programme'** stand tall as a testament to the power of port-led development, streamlining logistics and propelling the coastal regions into vibrant centres of progress.
  - ○ By optimizing the transportation of goods, this initiative has made it cost-effective and faster and elevated India's position in the international trade landscape. As a result, major ports' capacity has soared by 102%, reaching a staggering 1617 MTPA (Metric Tonnes Per Annum) from 800 MTPA.
- **Digitization** of operational processes has been a game-changer, introducing a seamless and efficient single-window platform, i.e., **Sagar Setu – National Logistics Portal (Marine**). Empowering exporters, importers, and service providers, it has revolutionized logistics solutions, facilitating smooth document exchange and transactions.
- The **Jal Marg Vikas Projects** have unlocked the potential of waterways, promoting commercial navigation. This green and economically viable mode of transportation has elevated the sector to new heights, with National Waterways experiencing an astounding **1734% increase in cargo handling**, rising to 126 MTPA from 6.89 MTPA.
- The **Revised Model Concession Agreement** has further catalyzed the sector's growth by reducing arbitrations and litigations. Embracing public-private partnerships (PPP) has ushered in clarity, transparency, and a favourable environment for investors. The operationalized **PPP projects** have witnessed a **150% increase** in value, reaching INR 40000/- crore.
- The **Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways** has taken bold steps to modernize infrastructure, promote coastal shipping, and foster a thriving Blue Economy.

Challenges in the Maritime sector:

- **Inadequate infrastructure**: **Subdued capacity utilization** at ports is an area that needs a complete overhaul. To meet this target, major investments would have to be made in the capacity enhancement of all ports and harbours, regardless of their status, whether major or minor, public or private.
- **Coastal Security**: Coastal security includes **preventing ships from running around and other challenges like smuggling**, piracy, maritime terrorism, etc. In addition to these aspects, the environmental impact of offshore economic activities like fishing also has security implications for the country.
- **Poor connectivity**: The lack of expressway connectivity between major ports and the hinterland impacts the turnaround time of ports and India's trade competitiveness.
- **Regulatory hurdles:** Several **export-import (EXIM) processes** are not digitized, impacting the efficiency of logistics. Currently, ports and harbours in India are governed by several laws, resulting in a lack of standardization and management. **For example**, the definition of a major or minor port is not based on its cargo handling capacity or its financial capacity/turnover but instead on its inception at the outset as an entity under the law.
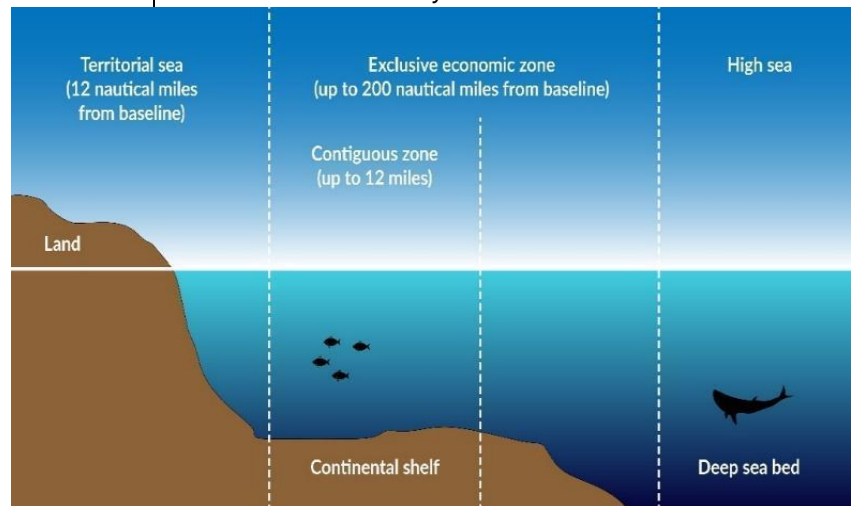
Way Forward:

- **Inclusion in Maritime activity:** Ports, shipbuilding, ship repair, deep sea shipping, coastal shipping and offshore economic activities need to be grouped together and given the status of an Infrastructure Sector or Strategic Sector, highlighting their importance and emphasising their rapid development.

- **Capacity Building**: There is also a need to revisit the country's tariff and tax policies to provide a level playing field to Indian shipping entities. This is important as foreign shipping companies do not have to bear an unfavourable tariff regime, unlike their Indian counterparts.
- **Finalizing the maritime borders**: The environmental impact of offshore economic activities like fishing and its security implications on the country's security needs to be sorted—for example, Pakistan and Sri Lankan fisherman issues.

DNA and face-matching systems at police stations

News Excerpt:
The Indian Union government plans to install **"DNA and Face Matching"** systems at 1,300 police stations.

Background:
- The **Criminal Procedure Identification Act (CrPI,2022)** enables police and central investigating agencies to **collect**, **store,** and **analyze** physical and biological samples, including **retina** and **iris scans** of arrested persons.
  - It **replaced** the **Prisoners Act, of 1920** whose scope was limited to capturing **finger impressions**, **foot-print impressions,** and **photographs**.
- The **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)** is assigned to finalize the Standard Operating Procedure **(SOP)** to be followed by police officials while recording the measurements.

DNA profiling:
- It is the process of identifying individuals based on their unique **genetic makeup**. Even though people may have similar facial features, and eye and hair colour, their **DNA is different**, which makes this procedure useful in solving crimes more accurately.
- By comparing DNA found at the crime scene, such as blood or hair, to DNA samples from suspects, forensic scientists can either rule out or confirm a suspect. If there is a match, the police are likely to investigate the suspect more closely.
- After a convict is found guilty, their DNA is collected and stored for any future investigations.

Face matching system:
- **Facial recognition technology (FRT)** refers to a technique used to **identify** or **verify** individuals by their unique facial features as a **biometric identifier**. This technology captures a person's facial features through a digital image or video and then uses **algorithms** to compare that image or video to a database.
- It has numerous advantages in law enforcement – identifying criminals, improving public safety, reducing the workload of law enforcement personnel, and enhancing the accuracy of criminal investigations.

However, the use of FRT also raises concerns regarding privacy and civil liberties.

Challenges:
- **Misuse of databases:** The use of derivative data, such as **"analysis"** and **"behavioural attributes"**, has raised concerns that data could be exploited for **predictive policing**.
- **Overburdening:** The "measurements" are to be taken after a conviction or arrest, even for minor offences. The necessity of such measurements for investigations is unclear, and the **discretionary power** involved can lead to **abuse** and overburdening of the **storage system**. **These records are kept for 75 years.**
- **Privacy concerns:** Such collection can also result in **mass surveillance**, with the database being combined with **other databases** such as those of the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems **(CCTNS).**
- **Burden of Funding:** Although Union Home Ministry will cover the cost of hardware, the **state** will have to bear the **cost** of a secure internet connection and other technological and operating expenses like advanced tools and proper training of police personnel.

Way Forward:
- It is crucial to **define the purposes** for which the "measurements" will be processed. Simply recording core measurements without conducting the necessary forensics would considerably limit their usability.
- The authorities must ensure that appropriate **safeguards** are **identified** and **deployed** and that only **designated officials** have real-time access to the measurements.
- The **tools** and **systems** used by the police must be technologically, legally, and forensically sound and accredited.
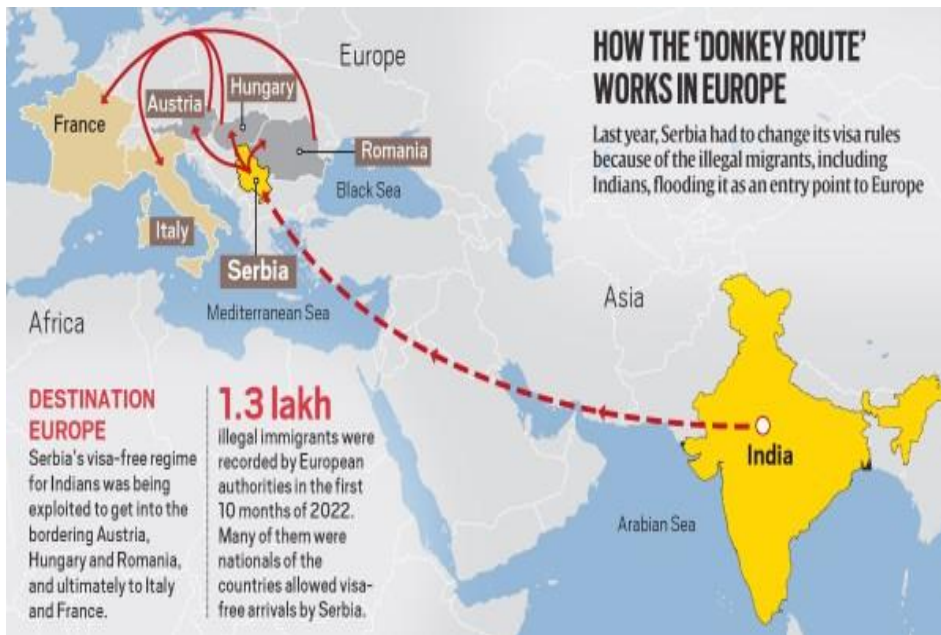
Indians travelling to Nicaragua

News Excerpt:
The case of a chartered flight with Indian passengers from the UAE flying to **Nicaragua** has raised questions about illegal immigration. This brings back the focus on illegal immigration and the concept of '**donkey flights'.**

About the news:
- In recent months, there has been a notable increase in interest among Indians to travel to **Nicaragua, a Central American** nation not traditionally popular among Indian travellers.
- While some may genuinely be interested in **tourism or business**, sources suggest that Nicaragua is becoming a gateway for illegal immigration to the **United States and Canada**.
- The recent case involved passengers from **Punjab and Gujarat**, and the process involved obtaining visas on arrival or travel authorization, posing challenges due to language barriers and unfamiliarity with Indian travellers.

HOW THE 'DONKEY ROUTE' WORKS IN EUROPE

Last year, Serbia had to change its visa rules because of the illegal migrants, including Indians, flooding it as an entry point to Europe

DESTINATION EUROPE
Serbia's visa-free regime for Indians was being exploited to get into the bordering Austria, Hungary and Romania, and ultimately to Italy and France.

1.3 lakh illegal immigrants were recorded by European authorities in the first 10 months of 2022. Many of them were nationals of the countries allowed visa-free arrivals by Serbia.

Illegal migration:

- Post-independence, many families that migrated to more developed nations **found better social, economic, and sometimes even political conditions** than their Indian counterparts. This may have built the desire to migrate to the West, hoping for a better life.
- As migration increases, illegal and irregular migration has also grown significantly.
- The cases of illegal migration often come to light when a prospective migrant falls prey to fraudsters and is cheated by unscrupulous agents or is apprehended in a foreign country.
- According to a recent report presented during India's winter parliamentary session, which cited US homeland security data, US authorities encountered **over 200,000 illegal Indian immigrants in the past five years**, with the highest number, 96,917 cases, reported in 2022-23.

What are 'donkey flights'?

- It refers to an illegal method in which people cross a country's borders through a back-door route with multiple stops in other countries.
- The use of donkey flights by **undocumented immigrants** can be traced back to an era when people relied on donkeys for travel, a practice considered unconventional in today's world.
- While the conventional legal route involves obtaining visas for education and work in countries like the US and UK, the **'donkey flight' method is chosen by those who cannot do so through legal or financial means.**
- Central American countries such as **Mexico and Nicaragua are commonly perceived as the easy nations** from where one can land in the US without much hassle.
- The term "donkey flight" finds its roots in the **native language of Punjabi** where it means the act of hopping from place to place.
- This process involves **illegal border crossings, hiding**

in ships and containers, and also poses the risk of being caught and being deported.

Related data:

According to data from the US Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the number of Indians attempting to enter the US land borders illegally increased by 51.61 per cent in the 2023 American fiscal year (1 October 2022-30 September 2023), compared to the 2022 fiscal year.

The CBP had encountered a total of 96,917 Indians at the Canadian and Mexican borders, of which 41,770 had tried to enter the US via the Mexican border (the Southwest Land Border) and 30,010 via the Canadian border (the Northern Land Border). Some Indians also overstayed tourist visas after landing directly in the US or travelled through other means apart from the two land borders.

Way Forward:

- Address the **root causes of illegal migration** from the country, especially Punjab, by enhancing economic opportunities, raising awareness about legal channels, and cracking down on fraudulent agents.
- **Strengthening diplomatic ties** with other countries to ensure transparent visa processes and cooperation in curbing illegal immigration while fostering international collaboration on border control measures.

DAC clears heavyweight torpedoes deal

News Excerpt:

The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) accorded **Acceptance of Necessity (AoN)** for some long-pending deals, such as for **heavyweight torpedoes** (HWT) for the Navy's Scorpene-class submarines and **flight refueller aircraft** (FRA) for the Indian Air Force (IAF).

What is DAC?

- The DAC is the **highest decision-making body of the Defence Ministry on procurement.**
- It was formed after the Group of Ministers (GoM)'s recommendations as a part of 'reforming the National Security System' in 2001 post-Kargil War (1999).
  - The chairman of the council is the Defence Minister, and the other members of the DAC are the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) and chiefs of the Army, Navy, and Air Force.
- **Post-Kargil war, several loopholes surfaced** in the procurement of defence equipment and arms.
  - As a part of the reform in defence, the DAC was formed **to ensure expeditious procurement of the approved requirements of the armed forces.**

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- The Defence Acquisition Council was given the right to give in-principle approval of a 15-year 'Long Term Integrated Perspective Plan' (LTIPP) for defence forces.

How DAC functions:

- DAC makes an Accord of acceptance of the necessity of acquisition proposals.
- It also actively participates in the categorization of the acquisition proposals relating to **'Buy', 'Buy & Make', and 'Make'.**
- It entertains the subjects related to single vendor clearance.
- The council makes decisions on 'offset' provisions with respect to acquisition proposals above Rs 300 crore.
- DAC makes decisions regarding the Transfer of Technology under the 'Buy & Make' category of acquisition proposals.

The procedure of defence procurement:

- DAC's AoN (Acceptance of Necessity) is the first step towards procuring military equipment/hardware/arms/jets.
  - o **The DAC's clearance under the defence procurement policy is the most important category of defence acquisition.**
  - o After AoN, the concerned department proceeds with the deal under DPP 2016.

New Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP- 2016):

- The new DPP - 2016 has been implemented by the government and has been effective since April 1, 2016.
- DPP-2016 focuses on **institutionalizing, streamlining, and simplifying the procedure to give a boost to the 'Make in India'** initiative through Indigenous design, development and manufacturing of defence equipment.
  - o In order to promote indigenous design and development of defence equipment, DPP-2016 has introduced the following new category for capital procurement.
    - ■ 'Buy (Indian-IDDM)' (Indigenously Designed, Developed and Manufactured). While categorizing a case, **this category is accorded the highest priority by the Buyer.**

Way Forward:

These developments aim to streamline benchmarking, cost computation, and procurement quantities, providing a significant boost to startups and MSMEs under the Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) and Technology Development Fund (TDF) schemes, aligning with the government's vision of 'Ease of Doing Business.'

Defence Ministry denotifies civil areas of 10 cantonments

News Excerpt:

The Centre has issued a gazette notification to denotify the country's civil areas of 10 cantonments. These areas will now be merged with the state municipalities (local bodies) concerned.

About the news:
Cantonment areas which are to be denotified:

- Dehradun and Clement Town Cantonments **in Uttarakhand;**
- Fatehgarh, Babina, Shahjahanpur and Mathura Cantonments **in UP;**
- Deolali Cantonment **in Maharashtra;**
- Ramgarh Cantonment **in Jharkhand;**
- Ajmer and Nasirabad Cantonments **in Rajasthan.**

Significance of the Denotification:

- The decision to abolish cantonments is in keeping with the needs of the times.
- Given the presence of adverse countries around India, the military needs to completely devote itself to the major task of defending the borders. It should not be weighed down by functions unrelated to soldiers and war.
- Once all 62 cantonments are disbanded, the defence budget can redirect the funds to core military requirements and social infrastructure wherever needed.

Cantonment Areas and their administration:

- 61 Cantonments in the country have been notified under the **Cantonments Act of 1924 (succeeded by the Cantonments Act, 2006).**
  - ○ **Regarding Entry 3 of the Union List (Schedule VII)** of the Constitution of India, Urban Self Governance of the Cantonments and the Housing Accommodation therein is the subject matter of the Union of India.
- **The Station Commander of the Cantonment is the ex-officio President** of the Board, and an officer of the IDES or Defence Estates Organization is the Chief Executive Officer who is also the Member-Secretary of the Board.
- The Cantonment Boards, democratic bodies, function as the overall municipal administration of the notified Cantonments**.**
  - ○ The Board has **equal representation of the elected and nominated/ex-officio members** to balance the official representation with the democratic composition.
- The Cantonment Boards have a **unique structure** because they are and were **primarily meant to accommodate the military population and their installations.**
  - ○ Cantonments are **different from Military Stations** in that Military Stations are purely meant for the use and accommodation of the **armed forces** and are **established under an executive order.**
  - ○ **The Cantonments are areas that comprise both military and civil populations.**
- There are **four categories of cantonments**, each depending on the size of the population residing inside it.
- **Directorate General of Defence Estates (DGDE)** is an Inter-Services Organization of the **Ministry of Defence**, which **directly controls the Cantonment Administration.**

About the Cantonments:

Origin and Purpose:

- Cantonments in India originated during the British East India Company's (EIC) rule, particularly **after the Battle of Plassey in 1757.**
- The EIC obtained significant territorial rights following this victory and established **permanent military stations along trade routes**, such as the Ganga River.
- These cantonments were strategically located away from urban areas to **minimize interaction between the military and local populations**. They aimed to maintain discipline and prevent emotional ties that could undermine British authority.

Establishment:

- The first three cantonments: - **Barrackpore, Danapur,** and **St Thomas Mount,** were established **before 1800.**
- Over time, a total of **56 cantonments** were established under **British rule,** strategically positioned to monitor local populations **for signs of dissent or rebellion.**
- **After India gained independence, six more cantonments** were established, with the **last one in Ajmer in 1962.**
- Presently, **there are 62 cantonments** distributed across various military commands.

Layout and Function:

- During British rule, the **military was granted ownership of lands strictly for barracks construction**, with certain lands freely transferable between military officers.
- Civilians were employed to provide amenities and services within cantonments, although **land ownership rights remained with the military.**
- Cantonments were initially strictly military areas for quartering troops, but civilian populations also resided within, providing various amenities and services. Later, urbanization blurred these distinctions.

Regulatory Framework:

- The regulatory framework for cantonments was established through various Acts, such as the Cantonments Act of 1889, the Cantonment Code of 1899, and the Cantonments Act of 1924.
- **The 1924 Act** introduced cantonment boards with **civilian representation** to manage civic affairs within cantonments.
- **In 2006, the Cantonments Act replaced the 1924 Act,** introducing reforms **to ensure greater democratization** within cantonment boards. The Act provided for elected civilian members and reserved seats for women.
- These boards **provide civic amenities** such as health services, water supply, education, and street lighting within cantonments.
- **Administrative control remains with military authorities**, with the station commander serving as the Board's ex-officio President.

Way Forward:

Disbanding cantonments will mean that the civilian areas will become part of the democratic decentralization process prevalent across other urban areas in the country. The 74th Constitutional Amendment Act and individual state statutes will become the operational regulation for the erstwhile cantonment civilian areas, replacing the Indian Cantonments Act of 2006. The decision to abolish cantonments is in keeping with the needs of the times and, as such, is well-considered.

Strategic military infra upgrade for A & N Islands

News Excerpt:

The **Andaman and Nicobar (A & N) Islands** are undergoing a **significant upgrade** in military infrastructure.

Key points regarding the infrastructure upgrade in the A & N Islands:

- The **enhanced infrastructure aims** to facilitate the deployment of a**dditional military forces, larger warships, aircraft, missile batteries, and troops.**
- The upgrade includes the modernization of airfields and jetties, enhancement of logistics and storage capacities, improvement in troop accommodations, and establishment of a strong surveillance system.
- The ongoing construction activities come **amid growing Chinese attempts to expand its influence in the region**, including constructing a military facility at **Myanmar's Coco Islands**, which are 55 km north of **the A & N Islands.**
- There are plans to significantly **enhance the surveillance infrastructure** at one of the **northern islands** and construct a **permanent habitat for troop**s there.
- The **length of an airstrip** at a vital naval air station is being increased to enable the landing of larger aircraft like **P8Is and fighter jets,** and its **jetty is also being expanded** for use by larger ships.
- There are **836 Islands** in A&N, of which only **38 are inhabited.**
- **The Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC), established in 2001,** is the first and only **tri-service command** in the islands.

Other major infrastructure upgrades:

- **The Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC), established in 2001,** is the first and only **tri-service command** in the islands.
- The **Chief of Defence Staff (CDS)** and the **Navy Chief** have inaugurated various facilities to enhance the **operational capability of the ANC**, including:
  - a **modern hangar and dispersal system at INS Utkrosh in Port Blair,**
  - a **Precision Approach Radar (PAR)**
  - **an Integrated Underwater Harbour Defence and Surveillance System,**

○ **Naval Communication Network (NCN) Centres**
● The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) held a **Multi-Agency Maritime Security Group (MAMSG) Policy meeting** with officials of coastal security of A&N and Lakshadweep, the Navy, and NRSC to discuss the surveillance of uninhabited islands.

What is the strategic importance of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands?

● The island chain is located **700 nautical miles (1,300 km)** southeast of the **Indian mainland.**
● The **Malacca Strait,** the main waterway that connects the Indian Ocean to the Pacific, is less than a day's steaming from Port Blair.
● The islands share **four of India's international maritime zone delimitations** with **Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia, and Bangladesh.**
● They also give India **substantial ocean space** under the **United Nations Conference on the Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS)** in terms of **exclusive economic zone and continental shelf.**

Centre to train State police forces on new criminal laws

News Excerpt:
The Central Government has rolled out an intense training program for the police and prison department personnel throughout the country on the new criminal laws.

About the News:
● The main aim is to sensitize them to the transition from the colonial legacies to a new system of justice. The Indian government is replacing three outdated criminal laws with new, modern legislation.
● Effective from July 1, 2024, these laws aim to **expedite justice delivery and enhance the judicial system**, prioritizing universal access to justice.
● The ministry emphasized that the new criminal law includes several contemporary provisions **aligned with modern times and technologies,** envisioning a **more efficient policing** and justice system.

Old Laws Replaced:	New Laws Implemented:
● Indian Penal Code (1860) ● Code of Criminal Procedure (1973) ● Indian Evidence Act (1872)	● Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023 ● Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita 2023 ● Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam 2023

How it will be done?
● To facilitate this, the **Bureau of Police Research & Development (BPR&D)**, a key research and training body under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), has devised comprehensive **training modules for trainers** and various other programs tailored to different levels of police and prison personnel.

● These resources are now available on the **Integrated Government Online Training (iGOT) portal for easy access.** Furthermore, BPR&D has shared these training modules with all States and Union Territories, urging them to conduct training sessions in their respective Police Training Institutes.
● The MHA **encourages active participation from Heads of police forces and prison departments** in organizing intensive training sessions for all personnel, ensuring no one is left behind.
● Additionally, the **National Informatics Centre (NIC) is conducting online training sessions** focusing on the technical aspects of implementing the new criminal laws.

Definition of Police:
● The police are an important organ of the State's justice system.
● The term **'police' refers primarily to agents of the State whose function is the maintenance of law and order, especially the enforcement of the regular criminal Code**.
● **"Police' and 'Public order' are State subjects under the Seventh Schedule to the Constitution of India.**

BPRD:
● The Government of India in **1970 formally established the Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D), under the Ministry of Home Affairs** giving a new orientation to the **existing Police Research and Advisory Council (1966)** with the primary objective of modernization of the police force.
● The Bureau actively supports states in the modernization efforts of both **State Police Forces and Correctional Administration**.
● Initially established with two divisions, Research, Statistics & Publication, and Development, the Bureau expanded its scope on the advice of the **Gore Committee by establishing a Training Division in 1973.**
● More recently, the BPR&D has been tasked with anchoring and coordinating the initiatives of the **National Police Mission**.

Key initiatives by BPRD:
● **VIMARSH 2023:** Vimarsh 2023 is jointly conducted by the Bureau of Police Research & Development (BPR&D), the Department of Telecom (DoT), and the Telecom Centre of Excellence (TCOE) to find indigenous solutions for some of the pressing issues of Cyber Security and Cyber Crime prevention, detection and investigation. BPR&D has been nominated as the Centre of Excellence for the purpose of 5G application use cases within MHA.
● **KAVACH-2023:** KAVACH 2023 is the National Level Cyber Security Hackathon, jointly conducted by MoE's Innovation Cell, AICTE, BPR&D, and I4C, MHA

to identify innovative ideas and technological solutions for addressing the cyber security and cybercrime challenges confronting Law Enforcement Agencies and common citizens.

- **Manthan (Intellithon):** India's first-of-its-kind hackathon focused on National Security and Surveillance and enabling the use of new technologies, including Artificial Intelligence and deep learning by our Law Enforcement Agencies, aims at Atma Nirbhar Bharat conducted with AICTE, launched in 2021 through a digital collaborative platform developed indigenously by Ministry of Education's Innovation Cell.
- **Smart India Hackathon-2020:** NCR&IC, BPR&D partnered with the AICTE, MHRD to conduct the hackathon, SIH-2020, which was organized from 1st to 3rd August 2020.

Akash Missile System

News Excerpt:

India became the **first country** to demonstrate the capability of engaging four aerial targets simultaneously at 25 km ranges by command guidance using a single firing unit.

About Akash Weapon System (AWS):

- It is a **Short-Range Surface Air Missile (SRSAM) Defence System.** The Akash Weapon System is indigenously designed and developed by the **Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO)** and produced by defence public sector units and other industries.
- AKASH Weapon System **can simultaneously engage Multiple Targets** in Group Mode or Autonomous Mode.
- AKASH Weapon Systems has been inducted and is operational with the Indian Air Force (IAF) and the Indian Army (I.A.).

Features:

- Fully automatic with quick response time from target detection to kill.
- Open system architecture ensures adaptability to existing and futuristic Air Defence environments.
- High immunity against active and passive jamming. Since it has built-in Electronic Counter-Counter Measures (ECCM) features.
- Secured mode of communication between combat elements.
- Self-sufficient in electrical power with in-built power sources.
- It is road and rail transportable with quick mobilization and deployment capabilities.

Demonstration of Akash Missile system:

- The demonstration was conducted by the IAF during **Astrashakti 2023** at Suryalanka Air Force Station on **December 12, 2023. Astrashakti** means the power of weapons.