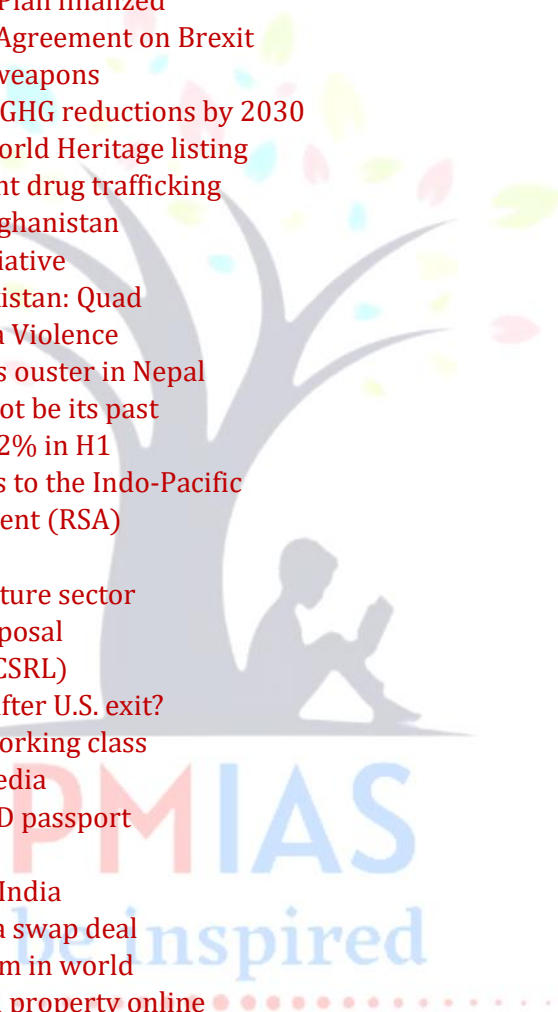


MASTER CHECKUP

GS 2 BILATERAL RELATIONS

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ROHINGYA PROTEST AT BHASHAN CHAR

Context:

Several thousand Rohingya staged protests against living conditions on a cyclone-prone island off Bangladesh where they were moved from vast camps on the mainland.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (India's Neighbors, Foreign Policy)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Who are the Rohingya?
2. About Bhasan Char
3. Concern regarding the Bhashan Char island relocation

Who are the Rohingya?

- The Rohingya people are stateless, Indo-Aryan ethnic group who reside in Rakhine State, Myanmar, and the Rohingya Muslims represent the largest percentage of Muslims in Myanmar.
- They have their own language and culture and say they are descendants of Arab traders and other groups who have been in the region for generations.
- They are described by the United Nations (UN) as one of the most persecuted minorities in the world.
- But the government of Myanmar, a predominantly Buddhist country, denies the Rohingya citizenship and even excluded them from the 2014 census, refusing to recognize them as a people. It sees them as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.
- Although Rohingya history in the region can be traced back to the 8th century, Myanmar law does not recognize the ethnic minority as one of the eight national indigenous races.
- Despite mounting evidence and international pressure, Myanmar continues to deny it all. It says, it is just countering violent insurgent groups.

How does India view the Rohingya issue?

- India maintains that Rohingyas are a threat to its national security and have links with international terror groups.
- India has so far refused to exert any pressure on Myanmar for taking the Rohingyas back and giving them recognition as the citizens of Myanmar.

About Bhasan Char

- Bhasan Char (Floating Island) also known as Char Piya or Thengar Char Island, is an island in Hatiya, Bangladesh. It surfaced only 20 years ago and was never inhabited.
- It was formed with Himalayan silt from the mouth of river Meghna in 2006 spanning 40 square kilometres.
- It is underwater from June to September because of the monsoon.
- The island, which was once regularly submerged by monsoon rains, now has flood protection embankments, houses, hospitals and mosques built at a cost of more than 112 million dollars by the Bangladesh navy.

- As Bhashan Char falls in an ecologically fragile area prone to floods, erosion and cyclones, it is not considered safe for human settlements.



Concern regarding the Bhashan Char island relocation

- In 2015, the Bangladesh government suggested resettling Rohingya refugees on the Bhashan Char island under its Ashrayan Project, and now it has started acting upon the idea and begun relocation of Rohingyas to the Bhashan Char island.
- Since the end of 2020, Bangladesh has shifted 18,000 out of a planned 1,00,000 refugees to the low-lying silt island of Bhashan Char from the Cox's Bazar region, where around 8,50,000 people live in squalid and cramped conditions.

AS BIRTHS DECLINE, CHINA ALLOWS HAVING THIRD CHILD

Context:

For the first time allowed couples to have a third child in a further relaxation of family planning rules five years after a “two-child policy” largely failed to boost birth rates.

Relevance:

GS-II: Social Justice (Population related issues), GS-II: International Relations (India's Neighbors, Foreign Policies affecting India's Interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. What is the Two-Child Policy?
2. About the recent census and trend in China's Population
3. About the Problem of China's dropping Population and Age
4. Population Growth in India and the Challenges

What is the Two-Child Policy?

- The two-child policy is a state-imposed limit of two children allowed per family or the payment of government subsidies only to the first two children.
- A two-child policy has previously been used in several countries including Iran, Singapore, and Vietnam.
- In British Hong Kong in the 1970s, citizens were also highly encouraged to have two children as a limit (although it was not mandated by law), and it was used as part of the region's family planning strategies.
- Since 2016, it has been re-implemented in China replacing the country's previous one-child policy.

About the recent census and trend in China's Population

- The latest census shows that the number of births in China in 2020 is lower than 1961 – to put it into perspective, 1961 is the year when China was in the midst of a four-year famine unleashed by Mao Zedong's Great Leap Forward policy in 1958 that devastated the farm sector and claimed millions of lives.
- China's population was 1.41 billion in 2020, according to the census, increasing by 72 million since the last census in 2010, recording a 5.38% growth in this period. The average annual growth was 0.53%.
- The slowing growth rate, a consequence of China's stringent family planning rules over decades – known as the "one-child policy" but involving a range of varying restrictions across urban and rural areas – has evoked concerns of a rapidly ageing society and the impact on China's labour force, and fears that China will, as some experts have said, "get old before it gets rich."
- The census recorded 264 million in the age group of 60 and over, up by more than 5% since 2010 and accounting for almost 20% of the population. Those in the 15-59 age group were just under 900 million persons, down by almost 7% since 2010 and accounting for just over 60% of the population.
- **The findings from the census were not entirely dire. The census also shed light on China's increasingly educated workforce and its rapid pace of urbanisation.**
- **With the number of births falling for the fourth consecutive year, experts say that we will likely see China's population peak – and be overtaken by India's – by as early as 2025.**

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When will India have more people than China?



knoema

Source: UN, World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision



About the Problem of China's dropping Population and Age

- Chinese experts acknowledged the seriousness of the problem, without linking it directly to the history of the Communist Party's harsh family planning policies.
- China loosened family planning rules and allowed couples to have two children in 2016, but that has failed to mark a boom amid changing lifestyles and declining preferences, particularly in urban areas, for larger families.
- The impact on the labour force and healthcare is a particular concern. China's workforce in the 15-59 age bracket peaked at 925 million in 2011, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security said previously. That number was down to 894 million in this census and would drop to 700 million by 2050, according to the ministry.
- The census did not offer a specific year for the population to peak, but experts said that could happen by 2025.

Population Growth in India and the Challenges

- According to the UN's World Population Prospects 2019 report, India is projected to become the most populous country by 2027 surpassing China and host 1.64 billion people by 2050. The fertility rate in the country still lies in the range of 2.1-4.
- It would be a challenge to achieve optimal fertility rate in states such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh — which have higher fertility rate as per Sample Registration System data.

- India's low literacy rate and poor skilling of human capital will turn demographic dividend into a burden. There will be a need to spend more on education, healthcare system, grow more food, and to add capacity to basic infrastructures, such as roads, transport, electricity, and sewage to provide a minimum quality of life to every citizen.
- As per India Ageing Report 2017 by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) the share of the population over the age of 60 could increase from 8% in 2015 to 19% in 2050. India will have to spend more on their health along with geriatric care.
- In the face of an increasing population, unequal distribution of income and inequalities within the country would be a possible outcome.

BRICS WILL ASSIST INDIA TO FIGHT COVID-19, SAYS CHINA

Context:

The Foreign Ministers of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) grouping expressed "grave concern" with regard to the global COVID-19 pandemic and the Chinese Foreign Minister expressed solidarity with India over the recent surge in COVID-19 cases.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (India's Neighbors, Important International Groupings)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. What is BRICS?
2. Achievements of BRICS
3. Highlights of the meeting of BRICS Ministers of Foreign Affairs

What is BRICS?

- BRICS is the international grouping of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.
- This was set up as a move towards greater multipolarity; hence the spread across three continents and both hemispheres.
- In terms of GDP, China occupies the second position; India the fifth; Brazil the ninth; Russia the 11th; and South Africa the 35th.
- In terms of growth rates, China grew at 6%; India at 4.5%, Russia 1.7%, Brazil 1.2% and South Africa 0.1%.
- BRICS does not exist in form of organization, but it is an annual summit between the supreme leaders of five nations.
- The Chairmanship of the forum is rotated annually among the members, in accordance with the acronym B-R-I-C-S.
- The BRICS seeks to deepen, broaden and intensify cooperation within the grouping and among the individual countries for more sustainable, equitable and mutually beneficial development.
- BRICS takes into consideration each member's growth, development and poverty objectives to ensure relations are built on the respective country's economic strengths and to avoid competition where possible.
- BRICS is emerging as a new and promising political-diplomatic entity with diverse objectives, far beyond the original objective of reforming global financial institutions.



Achievements of BRICS

- The main achievement of BRICS is the New Development Bank, with each country contributing equally to its equity
- The bank has so far financed over 40 projects at a cost of \$12 billion
- The BRICS countries are also developing a joint payments mechanism to reduce foreign trade settlements in U.S. dollars
- An offshoot of the group, dealing with climate change, is BASIC (BRICS without Russia), which met at the Spain conference in December 2019 and reiterated its support to the Paris Agreement.
- The BRICS called for the “the reform of multilateral institutions in order that they reflect the structural changes in the world economy and the increasingly central role that emerging markets now play”.
- BRICS managed to push for institutional reform which led to International Monetary Fund (IMF) quota reform in 2010. Thus the financial crises had momentarily reduced western legitimacy and briefly let the BRICS countries become “agenda setters” in multilateral institution

Highlights of the meeting of BRICS Ministers of Foreign Affairs

- Chinese Foreign Minister said the BRICS grouping was ready to assist the country to fight the pandemic “as long as needed”.
- The Ministers also agreed on reforming the multilateral system, which was the “first time” that such a consensus was reached.
- **India is the Chair of BRICS for 2021, when the organisation completes its 15th year of existence.**
- A joint statement issued after the meeting called for “equitable” access to vaccines, medicines and technologies as well as equipment to deal with the pandemic.

- India and South Africa have been demanding the TRIPS waiver for the COVID-19 vaccines. The mention of the term “flexibilities” in the joint statement is being viewed as a normative step forward towards greater vaccine equality and availability in the world.
- Apart from the support at the WTO, the Foreign Ministers also expressed support for the “comprehensive strengthening and reforming” of the UN Security Council, the General Assembly, the UN Secretariat and the Economic and Social Council.

US SETS, THEN SUSPENDS TARIFFS OVER DIGITAL TAXES

Context:

The United States government announced further suspension of punitive tariffs for six months on India, Austria, Italy, Spain, Turkey, and the United Kingdom while it continues to resolve the digital services taxes investigation amid the ongoing multilateral negotiations at the OECD and in the G20 process.

Relevance:

GS-III: Indian Economy (Growth and Development of Indian Economy, Taxation, International Trade), GS-II: International Relations

Dimensions of the Article:

1. What is Digital Services Tax (DST)?
2. How does India tax Digital Businesses?
3. Advantages of Imposing Digital Tax
4. Disadvantages of imposing Digital Tax
5. Issues with the Existing Taxation systems for taxing Digital Services
6. What are the Issues with India's DST that is taken by the USTR?
7. About the recent US move regarding suspension of tariffs

What is Digital Services Tax (DST)?

- Digital Services Tax (DST) is a tax levied on revenues that certain companies generate from providing certain digital services.
- The digital businesses include both the digital-only brands that focus on virtual commodities and services and the services traditional market players use for transforming their businesses with digital technologies.
- Virtual commodities include downloaded software, website applications and digital assets like eBooks, image files, audio clips/audio files, movies or digital files.
- Digital services include those provided by social media companies, collaborative platforms etc.

How does India tax Digital Businesses?

- India has been making use of an ‘equalisation levy’ to level the playing field for the domestic and the foreign players on the virtual platform.
- While the domestic businesses are subject to the Income Tax Act, their foreign counterparts are exempted from its provisions. Hence they enjoy an advantage over the domestic firms. This is what the levy seeks to equalize.

- Equalisation levy was first introduced in 2016 at the rate of 6%. However, this was only limited to advertisements online.
- It is noted that this is a transaction-based tax, as opposed to a tax on earnings. This is to ensure that India doesn't violate its international obligations.
- It was introduced based on the recommendations of the Committee on Taxation of E-Commerce.
- In 2018, the Finance Act introduced the Significant Economic Presence concept to IT Act of 1961. It incorporates a digital nexus to tax the profits of foreign businesses, based on its revenues and local user-base. This is yet to come into force.
- Currently, India too is involved in the talks to bring in a revamped framework for taxing digital businesses as the international taxation principles being used in the present are outdated (formulated in the 1920s).

Advantages of Imposing Digital Tax

- Tech giants like Google, Facebook, Amazon etc., which have a huge consumer base in developing countries like India will not be able to avoid taxation by shifting their offices to low-tax regimes.
- If the law prevents profit shifts, the countries from which the cross-border digital companies' profit will be able to stop losing corporate tax revenue.
- Digital tax will ensure a level playing field for both domestic and foreign players. In the absence of such a law, the goods and services provided by firms based in a foreign country would get taxed less and hence have a significant competitive advantage over the domestic firms.
- It seeks to create a clear international tax system with improved transparency and certainty for businesses and security for national tax revenues.

Disadvantages of imposing Digital Tax

- Taxing the gross revenues instead of the firm's profits is problematic.
- The move to bring in digital tax would hurt trade ties with the US.
- It may harm start-ups- especially during their initial expansion stages.
- There is a risk of 'double taxation' when shifting from a 'country-of-establishment' principle to a 'country-of-destination' principle.
- These platforms and broker service providers would pass on the burden of tax to the end consumers or the sellers. This will affect their affordability and popularity.
- The government had opted for low taxation on digital businesses to promote innovation. Increasing taxes may impede global economic and technological advancement.
- Compliance with the transparency guidelines would bring in additional cost burdens on the businesses.

Issues with the Existing Taxation systems for taxing Digital Services

- The sine qua non for taxing any person in India is either he should be resident of India, or the income should accrue or arise in India or deemed to accrue or arise in India i.e., the source of income should be from India.
- Residence-based and source-based are the two criteria to tax a person. Residence-based is largely followed by the developed nations whereas the source-based principle is largely followed by the developing nations.

- India is following basically residence-based taxation; however, foreign companies are taxed in accordance with source taxation and domestic companies are taxed on residence principle.
- The rules of the Income-tax Act 1961 are very clear for taxation of domestic companies, but the rules to tax MNCs having only digital presence are not as clear as that of domestic companies.

Permanent Establishment (PE) determination issue

- To tax foreign or any entity, there needs to be two essential things: one is the jurisdiction over the entity to be taxed and the second is taxable income. Jurisdiction is established through the Permanent Establishment (PE) and taxable income is as per the tax slabs under the Income-tax act 1961.
- With the advent of digital markets/ digital economy the concept of PE has undergone drastic change.
- With the rise of digital economic activities, the conventional PE definition (brick & mortar definition) has blurred and now, the companies have significant economic presence without even having a single asset in the source state.
- Digital businesses have three unique characteristics which are not considered by the current Tax regimes:
 1. They offer services by having limited or no physical presence. Example: Facebook, Twitter etc.
 2. They are highly dependent on intellectual property assets that are typically located in or can be shifted to a low-tax jurisdiction
 3. They can increase the value to their goods and services through highly engaged 'user participation' from other countries.

What are the Issues with India's DST that is taken by the USTR?

- The US is probing the 2% Digital Services Tax (DST) that India adopted in 2020.
- The tax applies only to non-resident companies with annual revenues over \$267,000, and covers online sales of goods & services to persons in India.
- Further, equalisation levy at 6% has been in force since 2016 on payment exceeding Rs. 1 lakh a year to a non-resident service provider for online advertisements.
- This is applicable for e-commerce companies that are sourcing revenue from Indian customers without having significant presence in the particular country.
- It is argued that India's equalisation levy is complex and ambiguous which includes the possibility of double taxation.
- Further, India continues to be on the 'Priority Watch List' of USTR for lack of adequate Intellectual Property (IP) rights protection and enforcement.
- In India's case, the probe could potentially affect the outcome of a bilateral trade deal that India has been looking to forge with the US.

About the recent US move regarding suspension of tariffs

- The US is focused on finding a multilateral solution to a range of key issues related to international taxation, including the US's concerns with digital services taxes.
- The suspension came after the conclusion of a year-long investigation into taxes which the US has stated are against tech companies like Apple, Amazon, Google and Facebook.
- In January 2021, following investigations, the USTR determined that the digital services taxes adopted by Austria, India, Italy, Spain, Turkey, and the UK discriminated against US digital firms.

- The US announced 25 per cent tariffs on over \$2-billion imports from these six countries, but then immediately suspended the duties to allow time for international negotiations.
- In case of India, USTR's proposed course of action includes additional tariffs of up to 25 per cent ad valorem on an aggregate level of trade that would collect duties on goods of India in the range of the amount of DST that India is expected to collect from US firms.

UNGA PRESIDENT ELECTION: INDIA VOTES FOR MALDIVES

Context:

India will vote in support of Maldives' Foreign Minister at the election for the President of the General Assembly (PGA) in the United Nations next week, a decision which will disappoint another close neighbor.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Important International Institutions, India's neighbors and foreign policies/developments affecting India's interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)
2. Functions of UNGA
3. India supports Maldives for the Presidency of the UNGA session
4. Significance of Maldives from India's Perspective

United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)

- The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations (UN), the only one in which all member nations have equal representation, and the main deliberative, policy-making, and representative organ of the UN.
- Popularly known as the parliament of the world, where all the 193 UN member states are represented, the UNGA is the deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the UN.
- Its powers are to oversee the budget of the UN, appoint the non-permanent members to the Security Council, appoint the Secretary-General of the United Nations, receive reports from other parts of the UN, and make recommendations in the form of General Assembly Resolutions.
- It is headquartered in New York City, U.S.A.

Functions of UNGA

- Takes a decision on important matters such as peace and security, discusses various global issues and budgetary matters.
- Decides on matters such as the admission of new members.
- Decisions are taken through a vote. Admission of new members and budgetary matters require a two-thirds majority, while the decisions on other issues are taken by a simple majority.
- Each sovereign state gets one vote and the votes are not binding on the membership, except in budgetary matters.
- The Assembly has no binding votes or veto powers like the UN Security Council.
- The UNGA can express world opinion, promote international cooperation in various fields and make recommendations to the UNSC and elect the Security Council's non-permanent members.

India supports Maldives for the Presidency of the UNGA session

- India expressed strong support to the candidature of Maldives Foreign Minister Abdullah Shahid for the President of the 76th session of the UN General Assembly.
- Indian External Affairs Minister said multilateral engagement was “very important” in the contemporary globalised system and maintained that India had always been “supportive” of the “larger participation of the Maldives”.
- By joining the Indian Ocean Regional Association, rejoining the Commonwealth three years after it had quit the Commonwealth over criticism of its human rights records and by playing a greater role in the United Nations, Maldives has demonstrated its value in the comity of nations.

Significance of Maldives from India’s Perspective

- Maldives – the Indian Ocean archipelago assumes geopolitical significance due to its strategic location.
- Located at the southern and northern parts of this island chain lies the two important sea lanes of communication (SLOCs).
- These SLOCs are critical for maritime trade flow between the Gulf of Aden and Gulf of Hormuz in West Asia and the Strait of Malacca in Southeast Asia.
- The SLOCs are of vital importance for India since nearly 50% of India’s external trade and 80% of her energy imports transit these westward SLOCs in the Arabian Sea.
- Maldives plays an integral role in realising the potential of Indian Ocean blue economy as a contributor to the security and sustainable development of sea resources.
- The growing Chinese presence in the archipelago could have serious security implications.
- The crucial oil supply coming from Gulf nations to India pass through this area.
- There are about 25,000 Indian expatriates in Maldives who are engaged in a number of professional pursuits and their security is also of prime concern for India.

INDIA’S ABSTENTION ON PALESTINE AT UNHRC NOT NEW

Context:

Palestine’s Foreign Minister said India’s abstention from the latest resolution on the Palestinian issue suppresses human rights of “all people”.

India’s latest abstention on a Palestine-related resolution at the Human Rights Council (HRC) of the United Nations is not a “new” stand, said Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (International Institutions, Groupings & Agreements Involving India and/or Affecting India’s Interests, Effect of Foreign Policies on India’s Interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
2. About the recent UNHCR Resolution

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

- The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is a UN agency mandated
- To aid and protect:

- refugees,
- forcibly displaced communities, and
- stateless people, and
- To assist in their:
 - voluntary repatriation,
 - local integration or
 - resettlement to a third country.
- The UNHCR was established in 1950 in the wake of the mass displacements caused due to the Second World War in Europe.
- Since then, it has provided relief to thousands of refugees and displaced persons in many parts of the world – and also won the Nobel Prize for Peace twice (1954 and 1981).
- The chief legal document that governs the work of the UNHCR is the 1951 Refugee Convention and its parent organisation is the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).
- It is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland and works in 135 countries and in India, has offices in New Delhi and Chennai.

About the recent UNHCR Resolution

- The resolution called on the UNHRC to set up a permanent commission to probe human rights violations in Gaza, West Bank and Palestine.
- It was adopted with the vote of 24 members. Nine voted against, and 14, including India, abstained.
- Among the countries that abstained on the vote, along with India, were France, Italy, Japan, Nepal, the Netherlands, Poland, and South Korea.
- China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Russia were among those who voted in favour; Germany, the UK, and Austria voted against the resolution.
- As it was passed, an independent commission of inquiry was formed to investigate violations of international law by Israel.

Palestine's Stand

- The resolution is not an aberration to the Human Rights Council. It is the by-product of extensive multilateral consultations.
- It is the consolidation of years and thorough investigations into and reporting on Israel's grave violations by States, UN's experts, Human Rights Treaty bodies, and international organisations.
- According to Palestine, the Palestinian people were deprived of applicability of international human rights law and the root causes of the injustice against the Palestinian people was dispossession, displacement, colonisation by Israel.
- Therefore, India's abstention stifles the important work of Human Rights Council at advancing human rights for all peoples, including those of the Palestinian people.

CABINET GIVES NOD RATIFYING SCO AGREEMENT

Context:

The Cabinet on accorded an ex post facto approval for signing and ratifying an agreement on cooperation in the field of mass media between all member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Groupings & Agreements Involving India and/or Affecting India's Interests, Effect of Policies & Politics of Countries on India's Interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)
2. About the 'Cooperation in the field of Mass Media'

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)

- The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is a Eurasian political, economic, and security alliance which was formed in 2001 in Shanghai, China.
- The SCO is the largest regional organisation in the world in terms of geographical coverage and population, covering three-fifths of the Eurasian continent and nearly half of the human population.
- The leaders of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan were involved in the formation; India and Pakistan joined SCO as full members in 2017.



The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is a regional intergovernmental security alliance involving Russia, China and four Central Asian states



Milestones

— 1996

Foundation of the Shanghai Five, the SCO predecessor

— 1999

Foundation of the Bishkek Group to counter border criminality

— 2001

Uzbekistan joins SCO

— June 15, 2001

Shanghai Cooperation Organization Founding Declaration signed

— 2008

Iran submits official application for full-right SCO membership

Basic documents

— 2001

Shanghai Convention on the Struggle against Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism

— 2002

SCO Charter

— 2002

Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) Founding Agreement

Goals and Objectives

- Strengthening of mutual trust and good-neighborly policies between member states
- Promotion of effective cooperation in politics, trade, economics, science, technology, and culture, as well as education, energy, transport, tourism and environmental protection
- Jointly ensuring peace, security and stability in the region
- Advancement to a new democratic, fair and rational global political and economic order

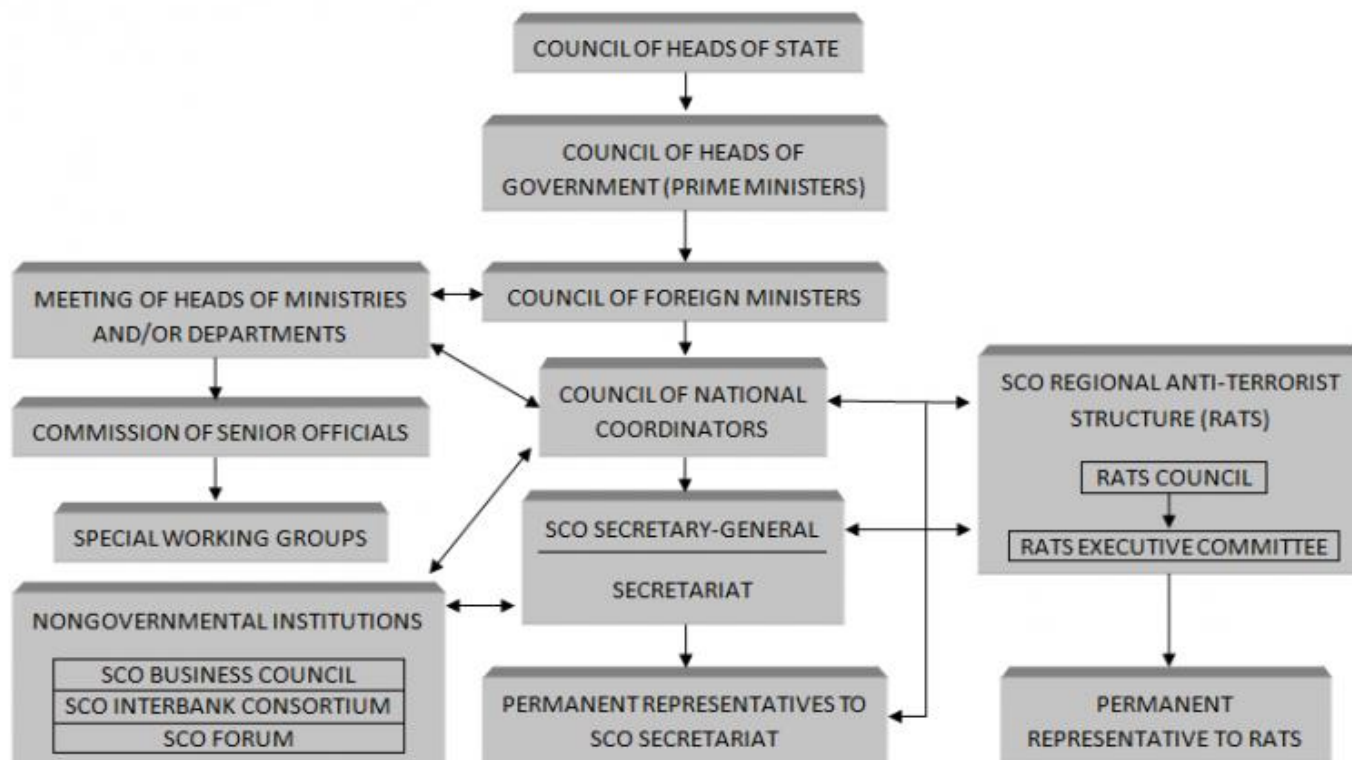
SCO Structure

- Council of Heads of State
- Council of Heads of Government
- Council of Foreign Ministers
- Meetings of Heads of Ministries and Departments
- Council of National Coordinators
- Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure

Russian Foreign Ministry Ambassador-at-Large Vitaly Vorobyov is the Presidential Envoy for SCO Affairs

- The Heads of State Council (HSC) is the supreme decision-making body in the SCO, it meets once a year and adopts decisions and guidelines on all important matters of the Organisation
- The SCO is widely regarded as the “alliance of the East”, due to its growing centrality in Asia-Pacific
- The Heads of State Council (HSC) is the supreme decision-making body in the SCO, it meets once a year and adopts decisions and guidelines on all important matters of the organisation.
- The Council of Heads of Government is the second-highest council in the organisation.
- Military exercises are also regularly conducted among members to promote cooperation and coordination against terrorism and other external threats, and to maintain regional peace and stability.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANISATION



About the 'Cooperation in the field of Mass Media'

Main Areas of Cooperation under 'Cooperation in the field of Mass Media':

- Creation of a favorable system for mutual and wide distribution of information via Mass Media in a bid to deepen the knowledge about the lives of the people of their States.
- Cooperation among the Editorial Offices of the Mass Media of their States as well as between the relevant Ministries, Agencies, and Organizations in the field of Mass Media.
- Promoting equal and mutually beneficial cooperation between professional associations of journalists of the States.
- Aiding broadcast of television and radio programs and those distributed legally within the territory of the State.
- Encouraging the exchange of specialists and experience in the field of Mass Media, offer mutual assistance in training media professionals, and promote cooperation between scientific research and educational institutions in the field of Mass Media.

G7 CORPORATE TAX DEAL

Context:

Advanced economies making up the G7 grouping have reached a "historic" deal on taxing multinational companies. Finance ministers meeting in London agreed to counter tax avoidance through measures to make companies pay in the countries where they do business.

They also agreed in principle to ratify a global minimum corporate tax rate to counter the possibility of countries undercutting each other to attract investments.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Important International Institutions , Foreign Policies affecting India's Interests),
GS-III: Indian Economy

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Group of Seven (G7)
2. What are the decisions taken by the G7?
3. Who are the targets minimum corporate tax rate?
4. What are the problems with the plan?
5. Where does India stand?

Group of Seven (G7)

- The Group of Seven (G7) is an international intergovernmental economic organization consisting of the seven largest developed economies (International Monetary Fund IMF- advanced economies) in the world.
- G-7 Countries are:
 1. Canada,
 2. France,
 3. Germany,
 4. Italy,
 5. Japan,
 6. The United Kingdom and
 7. The United States.
- The European Union is sometimes considered an eighth member of the G-7, since it holds all the rights and responsibilities of full members except to chair or host the meeting.
- G7 Summit is an event conducted annually where world leaders from seven powerful economies of the world come together to discuss burning issues happening around the globe.
- The major purpose of the G-7 is to discuss and deliberate on international economic issues.
- G7 is capable of setting the global agenda because decisions taken by these major economic powers have a real impact. Thus, decisions taken at the G7 are not legally binding, but exert strong political influence.
- It sometimes acts in concert to help resolve other global problems, with a special focus on economic issues.

G7 members



What are the decisions taken by the G7?

- The first decision that has been ratified is to force multinationals to pay taxes where they operate.
- The second decision in the agreement commits states to a global minimum corporate tax rate of 15% to avoid countries undercutting each other. The agreement will now be discussed in detail at a meeting of G20 financial ministers and central bank governors in July.
- The G7 committed to reaching an equitable solution on the allocation of taxing rights, with market countries awarded taxing rights on at least 20% of profit exceeding a 10% margin for the largest and most profitable multinational enterprises.
- The G7's decision provides for appropriate coordination between the application of the new international tax rules and the removal of all Digital Services Taxes, and other relevant similar measures, on all companies.

Who are the targets minimum corporate tax rate?

- Apart from low-tax jurisdictions, the proposal for a minimum corporate tax are tailored to address the low effective rates of tax shelled out by some of the world's biggest corporations, including digital giants such as Apple, Alphabet and Facebook, as well as major corporations such as Nike and Starbucks.
- These companies typically rely on complex webs of subsidiaries to Hoover profits out of major markets into low-tax countries such as Ireland or Caribbean nations such as the British Virgin Islands or the Bahamas, or to central American nations such as Panama.

- The US Treasury loses nearly \$50 billion a year to tax cheats, according to the Tax Justice Network report, with Germany and France also among the top losers.
- India's annual tax loss due to corporate tax abuse is estimated at over \$10 billion, according to the report.

What are the problems with the plan?

- Apart from the challenges of getting all major nations on the same page, especially since this impinges on the right of the sovereign to decide a nation's tax policy, the proposal has other pitfalls.
- A global minimum rate would essentially take away a tool that countries use to push policies that suit them.
- For instance, in the backdrop of the pandemic, IMF and World Bank data suggest that developing countries with less ability to offer mega stimulus packages may experience a longer economic hangover than developed nations.
- A lower tax rate is a tool they can use to alternatively push economic activity. Also, a global minimum tax rate will do little to tackle tax evasion.

Where does India stand?

- In a bid to revive investment activity, Indian Finance Minister in 2019 announced a sharp cut in corporate taxes for domestic companies to 22% and for new domestic manufacturing companies to 15%.
- The Taxation Laws (Amendment) Act, 2019 resulted in the Income-Tax Act, 1961 to provide for the concessional tax rate of 22% for existing domestic companies subject to certain conditions including that they do not avail of any specified incentive or deductions.
- Also, existing domestic companies opting for the concessional taxation regime will not be required to pay any Minimum Alternate Tax.

A CHINESE ENCLAVE IN SRI LANKA?

Context:

Recently, Sri Lanka passed the controversial Colombo Port City Economic Commission Bill, which governs the China-backed Colombo Port City project worth \$1.4 billion, amid wide opposition to the creation of a "Chinese enclave" in the island nation.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (India's Neighbours, Foreign Policies and Treaties affecting India's Interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About the Colombo Port City
2. Why is the project surrounded by controversies?
3. What is the extent of China's involvement?
4. What are the concerns?

About the Colombo Port City

- Colombo International Financial City (CIFC) is a special financial zone and International Financial Centre currently under construction in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The project is part of China's Belt and Road initiative.

- After the former planned 'Port City' was rejected by the new incoming government, a tripartite agreement was signed repackaging the project as the Colombo International Financial City (CIFC).
- The modern Port City is an unsolicited proposal submitted by China Harbour Engineering Company based on previous proposals.
- Construction of the Colombo Port City project was launched on 17 September 2014 by Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa and Chinese President Xi Jinping. The port city was suspended after the fall of the Rajapaksa government due to issues related to sovereignty of Sri Lanka and adverse environmental impacts. In 2017, it was predicted that the city would be completed by 2041.
- Named the "Colombo Port City" because of its proximity to Colombo's main harbour, the sea reclamation — carried out with considerable Chinese labour — completed in 2019 has doubled the size of Colombo's financial district by adding 269 hectares.
- In December 2020, Sri Lankan conglomerate LOLC Group signed an agreement with China Harbour Engineering for a mixed development project, with the investment value totalling \$1 billion.
- The project includes residential, commercial and retail assets set to break ground in mid-2021. This is the first major investment in Colombo Port City.



Why is the project surrounded by controversies?

- Almost an artificial island, the territory coming up on land reclaimed from Colombo's seafront has stirred controversy since its inception. Those backing it see in that patch of land their dream of an international financial hub — a "Singapore or Dubai" in the Indian Ocean.

- But sceptics claim that it could well become a “Chinese colony”, with the Bill, which is now an Act, providing the Port City and the powerful Commission that will run it substantial “immunity” from Sri Lankan laws, besides huge tax exemptions and other incentives for investors.

What is the extent of China’s involvement?

- The project is financed chiefly through Chinese investment amounting to \$1.4 billion, via CHEC Port City Colombo, a unit of the State-owned China Communications Construction Company (CCCC). In return, the company will receive 116 hectares (of the total 269 hectares) on a 99-year lease.
- The Colombo Port City — separate from but located adjacent to the Colombo Port, the country’s main harbour — is the third major port-related infrastructure project where China has a significant stake.
- China Merchants Port Holdings has an 85% stake in the Colombo International Container Terminals Ltd. (CICT) at the Colombo Port, under a 35-year ‘Build Operate and Transfer’ agreement with the Sri Lanka Port Authority.
- In 2017, the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe administration, unable to repay the Chinese loan with which it was saddled by the previous government, handed over the Hambantota Port in the Southern Province to China on a 99-year lease.
- **Effectively, China has substantial control over two key infrastructure projects in Sri Lanka for a century.**
- These projects are within the ambit of China’s ambitious Belt and Road Initiative, in which it sees strategically located Sri Lanka as a trusted partner. In March this year, Mr. Xi told Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa that the two countries must “steadily push forward” in major projects and promote “high-quality collaboration in jointly building the Belt and Road”, Xinhua reported.

What are the concerns?

- Since its launch, the Colombo Port City project has faced opposition from environmentalists and fisherfolk, who feared that the project would affect marine life and livelihoods. However, in the absence of wider political and societal support, their resistance did not dent successive governments’ resolve to pursue the project.
- The more recent opposition was specific to the Colombo Port City Economic Commission Bill. The resistance came from Opposition parties and civil society groups, including many who do not oppose the project per se, but rather its governance by “an all-powerful commission answerable to no one”. Significantly, a section of Buddhist monks, wielding much influence in Sri Lankan politics and the Sinhala society, also opposed the Bill and said that it eroded Sri Lanka’s sovereignty.
- During a heated parliamentary debate, Opposition MPs said the Bill paved the way for a “Cheelam” or “ChiLanka”, referring to China’s “control” over the Colombo Port City. Trade unions resisted too, contending that labour rights had no protection under the new physical and legal entity. For the first time, there was widespread resistance to a Chinese-backed project from within the Rajapaksas’ support base.
- The government accepted these promptly to avert the constitutional requirement of a two-thirds majority in Parliament and/or a referendum of people. The amended Bill received a parliamentary majority.

CHINA HOSTS ASEAN MINISTERS, WITH MESSAGE FOR QUAD

Context:

China is hosting foreign ministers from the 10 ASEAN countries with Beijing pushing for closer economic cooperation and aligning COVID-19 recovery efforts even as it looks to push back against the recent regional outreach of the Quad grouping.

Relevance:

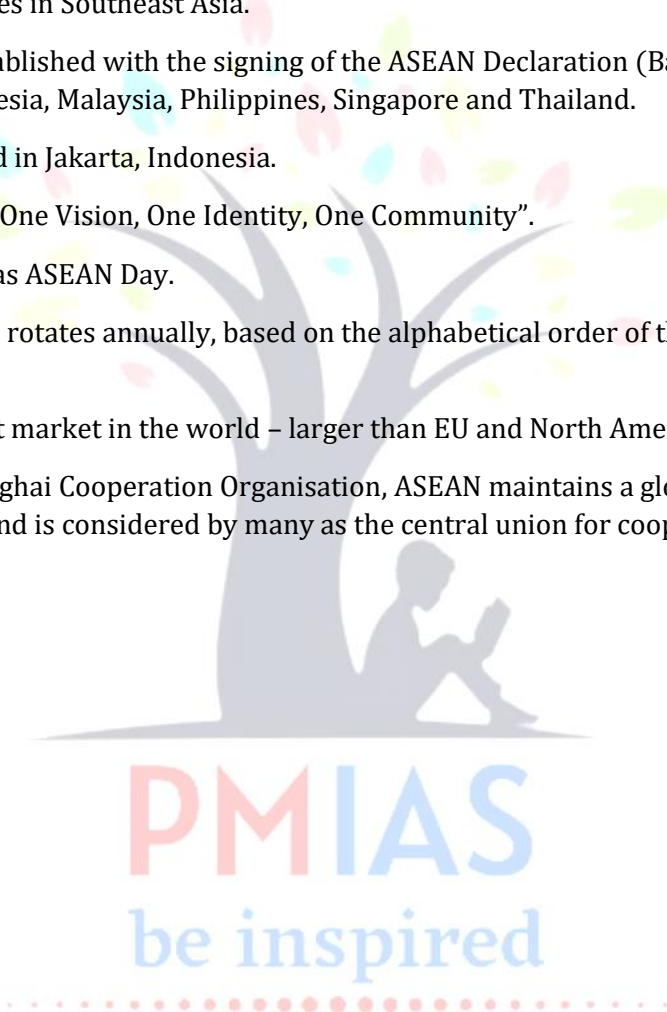
GS-II: International Relations (Important International Groupings, Foreign Policies affecting India's Interests)

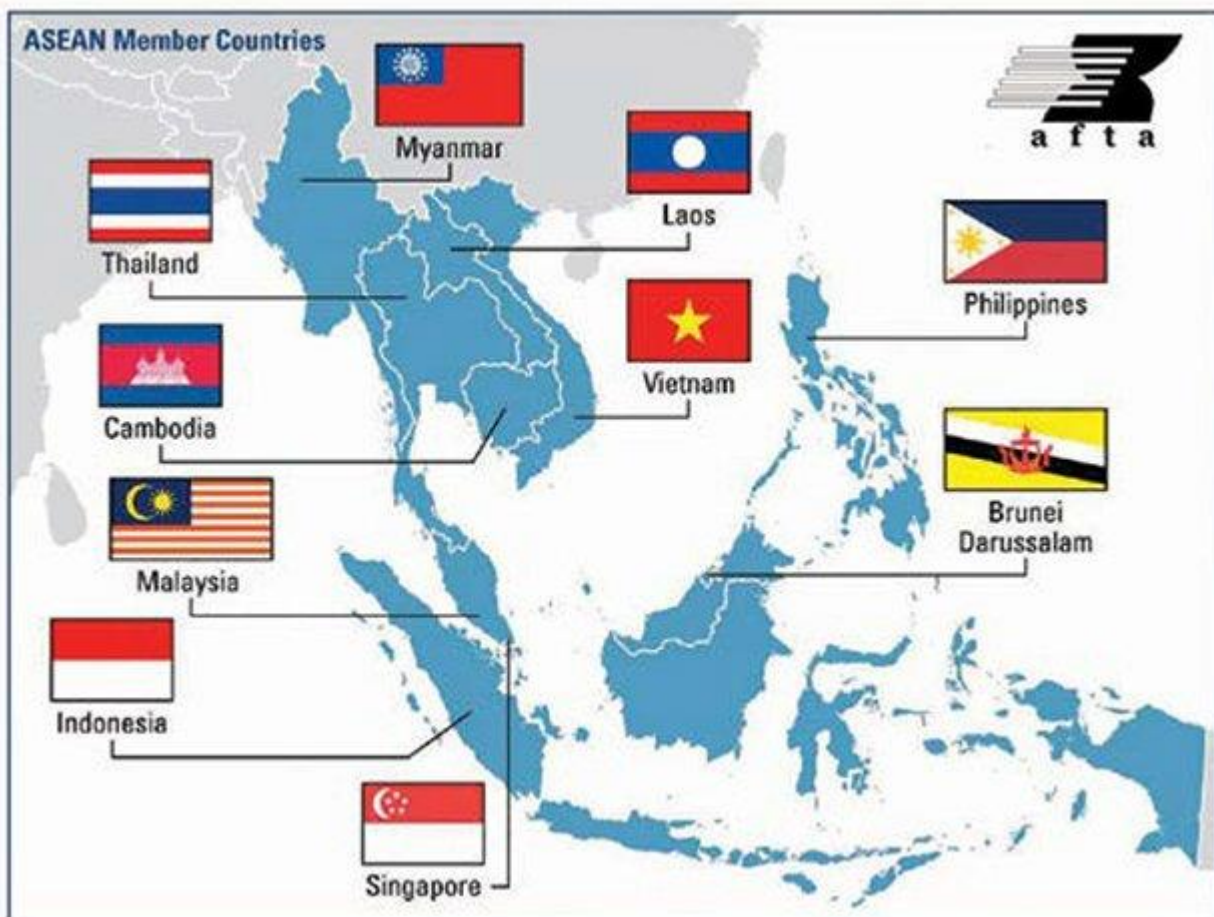
Dimensions of the Article:

1. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)
2. About the ASEAN ministers meeting hosted by China
3. What is the Quad grouping?

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

- The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a regional intergovernmental organization comprising Ten Countries in Southeast Asia.
- In 1967 ASEAN was established with the signing of the ASEAN Declaration (Bangkok Declaration) by its founding fathers: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.
- ASEAN is headquartered in Jakarta, Indonesia.
- The motto of ASEAN is "One Vision, One Identity, One Community".
- 8th August is observed as ASEAN Day.
- Chairmanship of ASEAN rotates annually, based on the alphabetical order of the English names of Member States.
- ASEAN is the 3rd largest market in the world – larger than EU and North American markets.
- A major partner of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, ASEAN maintains a global network of alliances and dialogue partners and is considered by many as the central union for cooperation in Asia-Pacific.
- Members of ASEAN
 - Indonesia
 - Malaysia
 - Philippines
 - Singapore
 - Thailand
 - Brunei
 - Vietnam
 - Laos
 - Myanmar
 - Cambodia





About the ASEAN ministers meeting hosted by China

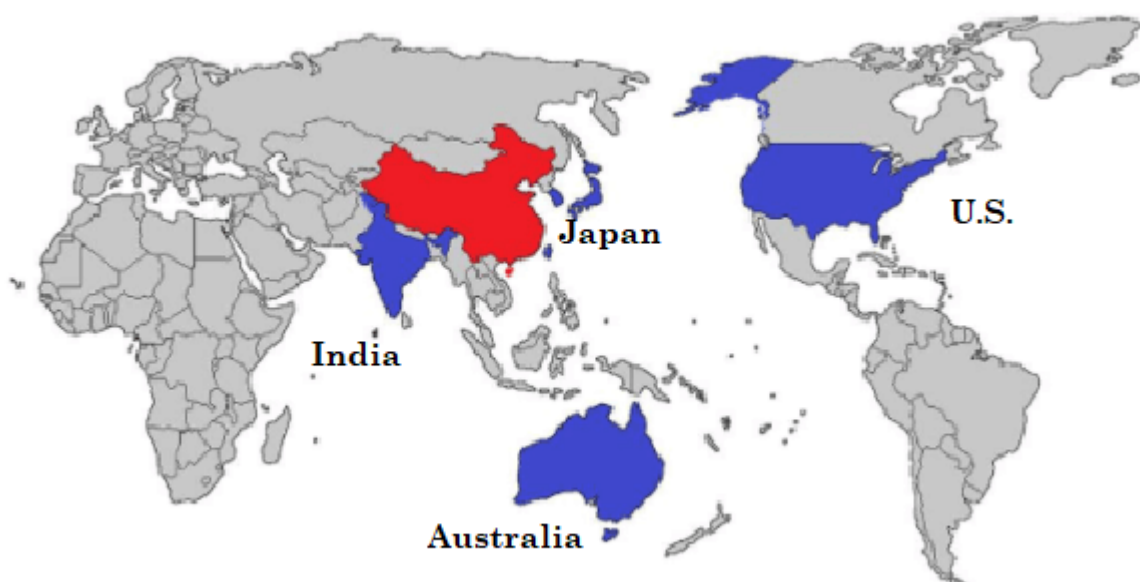
- Chinese officials have in recent weeks stepped up criticism of the Quad — the informal India, Australia, Japan and United States grouping — and of Washington in particular.
- During recent visits to Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, China's Defence Minister called on both countries to reject "military alliances" — a term that some Beijing are using to describe the Quad, but a label that the group rejects.
- China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson said that a vaccine passport connecting China and ASEAN countries is also being discussed.
- According to China deepening economic cooperation, particularly following the signing of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) trade deal, would be China's focus.

What is the Quad grouping?

- The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD) also known as Quad, is an Inter-governmental security forum. It comprises of 4 countries– India, the United States, Japan and Australia. The member countries of the Quad organise summits, exchanges the information and military drills.
- In the year 2007, Prime Minister of Japan Shinzo Abe proposed the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. The forum was joined by the Vice President of the US Dick Cheney, Prime Minister John Howard of Australia and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. It was paralleled by joint military exercises of an unprecedented scale with the name Exercise Malabar.
- India's past experiment: Over the years, India has experimented with alliances of different kinds:

- During World War I, some nationalists aligned with imperial Germany to set up the first Indian government-in-exile in Kabul.
- During World War II, Subhas Chandra Bose joined forces with imperial Japan to set up a provisional government in Port Blair.
- Jawaharlal Nehru, who unveiled and championed non-alignment, signed security treaties with Bhutan, Nepal, and Sikkim. Also, Nehru, who actively opposed American alliances in Asia, turned to the US for military support in 1962.

The "Quad" Counter to China



OPCW ON SYRIA & CHEMICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION

Context:

The head of the international chemical weapons watchdog, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), told the U.N. Security Council that its experts have investigated 77 allegations against Syria, and concluded that in 17 cases chemical weapons were likely or definitely used.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Important International Organizations, Policies and Agreements affecting India's Interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), 1997
2. Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)
3. India's Initiative – Chemical Weapons Convention Act, 2000

Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), 1997

- The Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), officially the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction, is an arms control treaty administered by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), an intergovernmental organization based in The Hague, The Netherlands.

- The treaty entered into force in 1997, and prohibits the large-scale use, development, production, stockpiling and transfer of chemical weapons and their precursors, except for very limited purposes (research, medical, pharmaceutical or protective).
- The main obligation of member states under the convention is to affect this prohibition, as well as the destruction of all current chemical weapons. All destruction activities must take place under OPCW verification.
- As of March 2021, 193 states have become parties to the CWC and accept its obligations. Israel has signed but not ratified the agreement, while three other UN member states (Egypt, North Korea and South Sudan) have neither signed nor acceded to the treaty.
- As of 2021, 98.39% of the world's declared chemical weapons stockpiles had been destroyed.
- The convention has provisions for systematic evaluation of chemical production facilities, as well as for investigations of allegations of use and production of chemical weapons based on intelligence of other state parties.
- Most recently, the State of Palestine deposited its instrument of accession to the CWC in 2018 and in 2013, Syria acceded to the convention as part of an agreement for the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons.

Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)

- The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) is an intergovernmental organisation and the implementing body for the Chemical Weapons Convention, which entered into force in 1997.
- The OPCW, with its 193 member states, has its seat in The Hague, Netherlands, and oversees the global endeavour for the permanent and verifiable elimination of chemical weapons.
- The organisation promotes and verifies the adherence to the Chemical Weapons Convention, which prohibits the use of chemical weapons and requires their destruction. Verification consists both of evaluation of declarations by member states and onsite inspections.
- The organisation was awarded the 2013 Nobel Peace Prize "for its extensive efforts to eliminate chemical weapons".
- The OPCW has the power to report on whether chemical weapons were used in an attack it has investigated.
- While the OPCW is not a specialised agency of the United Nations, it cooperates both on policy and practical issues as a related organisation.

India's Initiative – Chemical Weapons Convention Act, 2000

- The Chemical Weapons Convention Act, 2000 was passed to implement the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), 1997.
- Chemical Weapons Convention Act, 2000 gives effect to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.
- It provided for the establishment of a National Authority for Chemical Weapons Convention or NACWC.
- NACWC, formed in 2005, is the chief liaison between the government of India and the OPCW. **NACWC is an office in the Cabinet Secretariat of the GoI.**

U.S. SENATE PASSES BILL TO BOOST U.S. TECH INDUSTRY

Context:

The U.S. Senate overwhelmingly approved a bill that aims to boost U.S. semiconductor production and the development of artificial intelligence and other technology in the face of growing international competition, most notably from China.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Foreign Policies of Interest to India), GS-III: Industry and Infrastructure

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About the U.S. Bill on boosting semiconductor production
2. About India's PLI scheme for Large Scale Electronics Manufacturing

About the U.S. Bill on boosting semiconductor production

- The Passing of this bill at the Senate demonstrates how confronting China economically is an issue that unites both parties in Congress.
- The centerpiece of the bill is a \$50 billion emergency allotment to the Commerce Department to stand up semiconductor development and manufacturing through research and incentive programs previously authorised by Congress.
- It comes as the nation's share of semiconductor manufacturing globally has steadily eroded from 37% in 1990 to about 12% in 2021, and as a chip shortage has exposed vulnerabilities in the U.S. supply chain.
- One of the bill's provisions would create a new directorate focused on artificial intelligence and quantum science with the National Science Foundation.

About India's PLI scheme for Large Scale Electronics Manufacturing

- In 2020, the government of India notified three schemes involving total incentives of around Rs 48,000 crore for electronics manufacturing,
- The Production Linked Incentive Scheme (PLI) for large scale electronics manufacturing.
- The scheme for Promotion of Manufacturing of Electronic Components and Semiconductors (SPECS).
- The modified Electronics Manufacturing Clusters (EMC 2.0) Scheme.
- PLI for Large Scale Electronics Manufacturing scheme proposes a financial incentive to boost domestic manufacturing and attract large investments in the electronics value chain including electronic components and semiconductor packaging. Under the scheme, electronic manufacturing companies will get an incentive of 4 to 6% on incremental sales (over base year) of goods manufactured in India and covered under target segments, to eligible companies over a period of next 5 years.
- The Scheme for Promotion of Manufacturing of Electronic Components and Semiconductors proposes a financial incentive of 25% of capital expenditure has been approved by the Union Cabinet for the manufacturing of goods that constitute the supply chain of an electronic product. The SPECS notified for manufacturing of electronics components and semiconductors has a budget outlay of Rs 3,285 crore spread over a period of eight years.
- Modified Electronics Manufacturing Clusters Scheme 2.0 has a total incentive outlay of Rs 3,762.25 crore spread over a period of 8 years with an objective to create 10 lakh direct and indirect jobs under the scheme. The EMC 2.0 scheme will provide financial assistance up to 50% of the project cost subject

to a ceiling of Rs 70 crore per 100 acres of land for setting up of Electronics Manufacturing Cluster projects.

MALDIVES IN UNGA AND INDIAN CONSULATE IN ADDU ATOLL

Context:

- Maldives Foreign Minister Abdulla Shahid, who has been elected President of the 76th United Nations General Assembly, with a striking majority shared his thoughts throwing light on what is expected out of the new leadership.
- The Maldives has made no decision on opening an Indian consulate in its southern Addu Atoll – said the Maldives president a fortnight after the Indian Cabinet cleared a proposal for it.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Important International Institutions, India's Neighbors, Foreign Policy Affecting India's Interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About the UNGA president on Vaccine Nationalism
2. On Indian consulate in Addu Atoll
3. About Addu Atoll

[Click Here to read more about the UNGA and India supports Maldives for the Presidency of the UNGA session](#)

About the UNGA president on Vaccine Nationalism

- United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) president-elect and Maldivian Foreign Minister Abdulla Shahid has warned against Vaccine nationalism and said that it would destroy countries' efforts to eradicate the pandemic and must be avoided "at all costs".
- He termed the disparity in vaccination coverage in developed countries and the rest of the world "unacceptable".
- Vaccine nationalism occurs when a country manages to secure doses of vaccine for its own citizens or residents before they are made available in other countries. This is done through pre-purchase agreements between a government and a vaccine manufacturer.
- Vaccine nationalism is harmful for equitable access to vaccines and it disadvantages countries with fewer resources and bargaining power.
- Vaccine nationalism deprives populations in the Global South from timely access to vital public health goods and if it is taken to its extreme, it allocates vaccines to moderately at-risk populations in wealthy countries over populations at higher risk in developing economies.

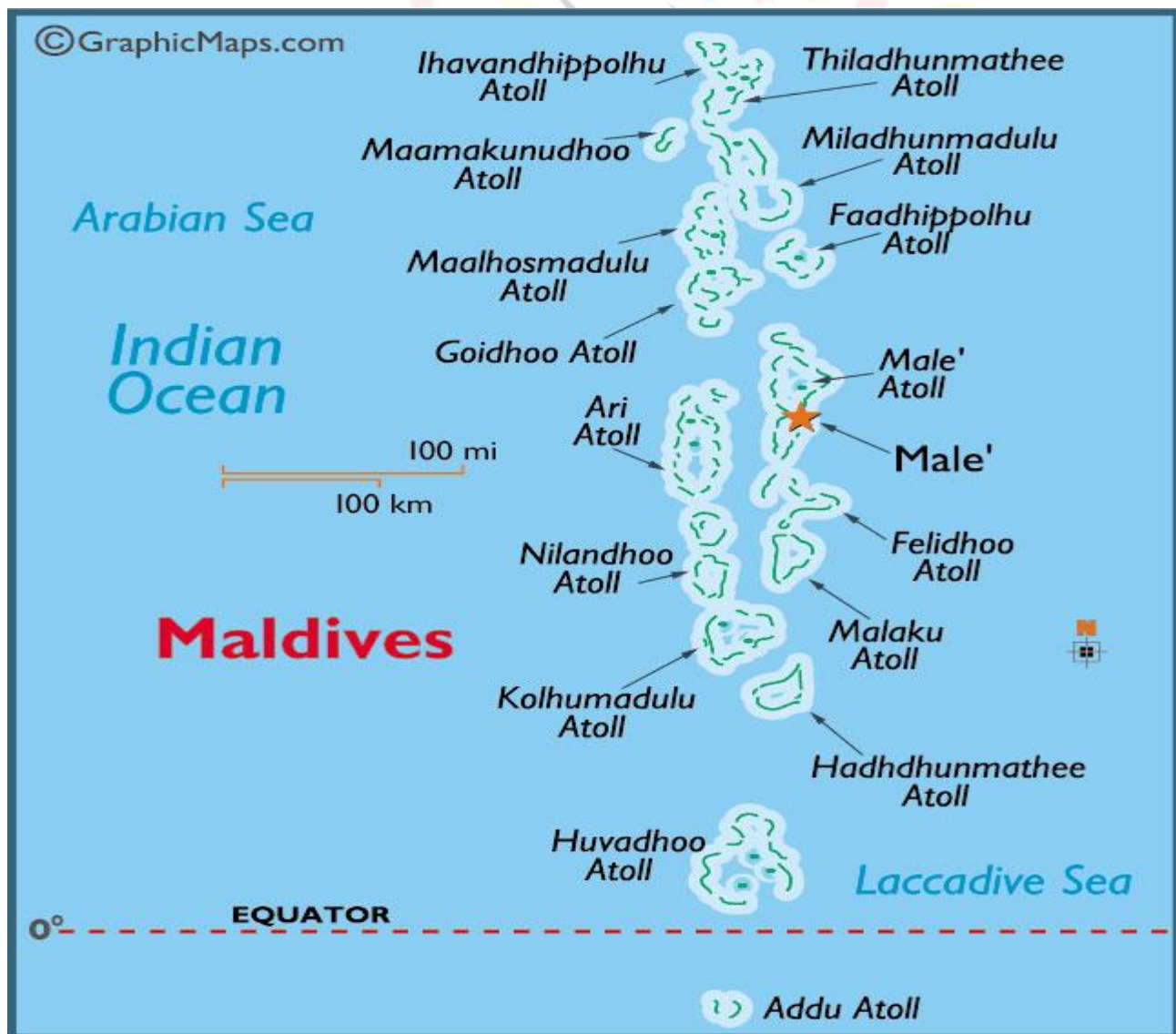
On Indian consulate in Addu Atoll

- The Maldives President remarked on the proposed Indian consulate in the southern Addu Atoll, appearing to keep the option open, amid an ongoing "#SaveAddu" social media campaign by a section of Maldivians sceptical of another Indian mission presence, in addition to the Embassy in Male.
- Legislators from Addu and local body representatives — from the ruling coalition widely perceived as India-friendly — have pledged support to the initiative.
- Opposition voices, which earlier led an '#Indiaout' campaign against enhanced military cooperation between the neighbours, have opposed the proposed consulate.

- Apart from its strategic location in the Indian Ocean, Addu is the second largest city in the archipelago, home to over 30,000 people. Indian government sources familiar with the proposal said the rationale for the consulate was to help Addu residents with speedy visa services.
- Further, the fact that the announcement appeared in the Indian media last month, before either government made an announcement, has prompted criticism of Indian “heavy handedness”.

About Addu Atoll

- Addu Atoll, also known as Seenu Atoll, is the southernmost atoll of the Maldives.
- Administratively, Addu Atoll is the location of Addu City, one of the three cities of the Maldives.
- Unlike other atolls of the Maldives, Addu Atoll has a lagoon that is a natural anchorage, accessible through four natural channels.
- This results in a natural harbor that is very calm and safe for sea vessels at all times and is not affected by seasonal changes.
- The islands are protected from the storms and high waves of the Indian Ocean by barrier reefs.



NAGORNO-KARABAKH REGION AND TURKISH VISIT

Context:

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said he will visit Azerbaijan to celebrate its victory over Armenia in a brief war in 2020, touring a region recaptured in disputed Nagorno-Karabakh.

Relevance:

Prelims, GS-II: International Relations (Important Foreign Policies and Developments), GS-I Geography (Maps), GS-I: History (World History)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Nagorno-Karabakh conflict
2. About the 2020 Conflict
3. How the ceasefire in 2020 was achieved?

Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

- The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is an ethnic and territorial conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh, inhabited mostly by ethnic Armenians, and seven surrounding districts, inhabited mostly by Azerbaijanis until their expulsion during the First Nagorno-Karabakh War between 1988 and 1994.
- The conflict has its origins in the early 20th century, though the present conflict began in 1988, when the Karabakh Armenians demanded that Karabakh be transferred from Soviet Azerbaijan to Soviet Armenia.
- During the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1989, ethnic tensions between Armenians and Azerbaijanis increased in the Nagorno-Karabakh region.
- In the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, 1988-94 Armenia and Azerbaijan, both former Soviet Republics, entangled themselves in a protracted, undeclared war in the mountainous heights of Karabakh as Azerbaijan attempted to curb the secessionist movement in Nagorno-Karabakh.
- A ceasefire signed in 1994 provided for two decades of relative stability, which significantly deteriorated along with Azerbaijan's increasing frustration with the status quo, at odds with Armenia's efforts to cement it.
- A four-day escalation in 2016 became the deadliest ceasefire violation (until the 2020 conflict) and the 2016 fighting stopped with a ceasefire agreement in 2020 by which most of the territories lost by Azerbaijan during the First Nagorno-Karabakh war were returned to Azerbaijan.



be inspired





About the 2020 Conflict

- In 1994, Russia mediated a ceasefire between Armenia and Azerbaijan, but the conflict has continued for three decades, with instances of ceasefire violations and violence instigated from both sides.
- In 2016, the region was particularly tense because of violent fighting between the two countries in what came to be known as the Four-Day War.
- Experts say the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan has been tense since 2018, particularly after Azerbaijan moved troops into the area, close to its border with Georgia.
- In a break from the violence that the disputed region has witnessed for over 30 years, this area had been relatively calm in 2018 and 19.
- It was not immediately clear what started the round of fighting in 2020, with multiple reports from the two countries reporting deaths of soldiers in the border.
- According to one report, Azerbaijan had said it had destroyed an Armenian fortification and artillery and had inflicted casualties on “hundreds” of Armenian soldiers, a claim that Armenia had denied. Armenia in turn said Azerbaijan had triggered the conflict.

How the ceasefire in 2020 was achieved?

- Russia, which has a security agreement with Armenia, remained neutral in the early days of the war when Turkey threw its weight behind Azerbaijan. Russia brokered a ceasefire two weeks into the conflict, but it didn't hold.
- Later, Russia established small military outposts along the Armenian border, apparently to prevent the conflict spilling into mainland Armenia and also to send a message to Baku.
- Also, Russia conducted a massive air strike in Syria's Idlib against Turkish-backed militants, killing dozens of them, which is seen as Moscow's warning against Turkey.

- Russian President Putin accepted Azerbaijan's victory (as the ceasefire allows Azeri troops to control the territories they have seized) but prevented a total defeat of Armenia. Under pressure from a decisive Moscow, both sides agreed to cease the operations.

What are the terms of the ceasefire?

- According to the ceasefire, Armenia agreed to withdraw its troops from much of the territories around Nagorno-Karabakh.
- The core of the enclave with ethnic Armenians and Stepanakert as its capital would remain outside the control of Azerbaijan.
- Baku will build a road linking the newly captured territories to Nakhchivan, an autonomous republic of Azerbaijan which had been geographically separated from the mainland.
- As the broker of the truce, Russia would send some 2,000 peacekeepers to the region, who would patrol between the Azeri troops and Nagorno-Karabakh, including the Lachin corridor, which connects the enclave with Armenia.
- Basically, Azerbaijan gained territories, but not the whole of Nagorno-Karabakh.
- Armenia lost territories it controlled since the 1990s but avoided a total defeat as much of Nagorno-Karabakh would remain independent of Azeri control.
- And Russia gained a bigger foothold in the region with its troops being deployed within Azerbaijan.



MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS HINTS AT TALKS WITH TALIBAN

Context:

India is in contact with “various stakeholders” in Afghanistan, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said, in response to specific questions about whether the government has opened direct talks with the Taliban.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (India’s Neighbors, Foreign Policies affecting India’s Interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. India and Views on communicating with Taliban
2. India’s Concerns with the U.S. deal with Taliban
3. Afghanistan–India relations
4. India’s Interests in Afghanistan

India and Views on communicating with Taliban

- While the MEA did not confirm the talks, which would represent a major shift for Indian policy, it did not deny recent reports that indicated that Indian security officials have exchanged messages with several “nationalist” Taliban factions.
- MEA said that India is in touch with various stakeholders in pursuance of our long-term commitment towards development and reconstruction of Afghanistan.
- **India has thus far refused to open direct dialogue with the Taliban leadership**, which it held responsible for facilitating terror attacks along with groups like the Lashkar-e Taiba and Jaish-e Mohammad on Indian missions in Afghanistan.
- However, according to experts, India has reconsidered its position in the aftermath of the U.S. announcement that it would pull out all its troops by September 2021.
- The clarity over the U.S. decision to pull out, which could be as early as September 2021 has added to the sense of urgency for Delhi to make these direct contacts with the stakeholders in Afghanistan.
- The exercise of India opening these channels and being comfortable with this information being out in the public is a signal to both the policymaking community in India and the interlocutors on the other side that they are serious about the talks with the Taliban.
- India’s engagement with groups in Afghanistan can be thought of as driven by a desire to “limit damage” to its security interests as a result of the U.S.’s decision to leave and the Taliban gaining military strength in several key provinces.

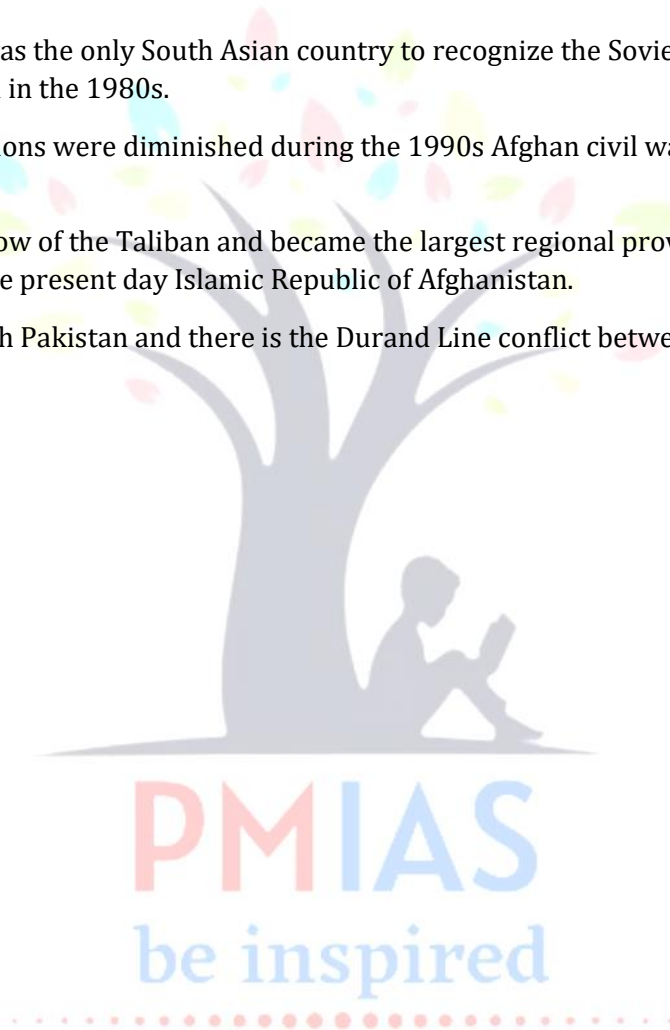
India’s Concerns with the U.S. deal with Taliban

- In the Doha agreement, The U.S. appears to submit to the possibility of a Taliban-led government, by extracting promises that the Taliban will not provide “visas, passports, travel documents or asylum” to those threatening the U.S. and its allies.
- This sidelines the “Intra-Afghan” dialogue, and India’s support for the election process for leadership in Afghanistan.
- India cannot look at the agreements or the route to Kabul via Washington’s view that the Ghani government (which India has recognised as winner of the 2019 election) will only serve for an interim period.

- This also raises a big question mark on the future of Afghanistan's government, and whether it will remain a democracy.
- India has raised concerns over the future of democracy, human rights, women's rights and other achievements made in Afghanistan since 2001, when the Taliban regime was last defeated.

Afghanistan–India relations

- Bilateral relations between Afghanistan and India have remained strong and friendly over the decades, tracing back to the Indus Valley Civilisation.
- Between the 10th century to the mid-18th century, northern India has been invaded by a number of invaders based in what today is Afghanistan. Among them were the Ghaznavids, Ghurids, Khaljis, Suris, Mughals and Durranis.
- The Republic of India was the only South Asian country to recognize the Soviet-backed Democratic Republic of Afghanistan in the 1980s.
- India-Afghanistan relations were diminished during the 1990s Afghan civil war and the Taliban government.
- India aided the overthrow of the Taliban and became the largest regional provider of humanitarian and reconstruction aid to the present day Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.
- India shares border with Pakistan and there is the Durand Line conflict between Pakistan and Afghanistan.





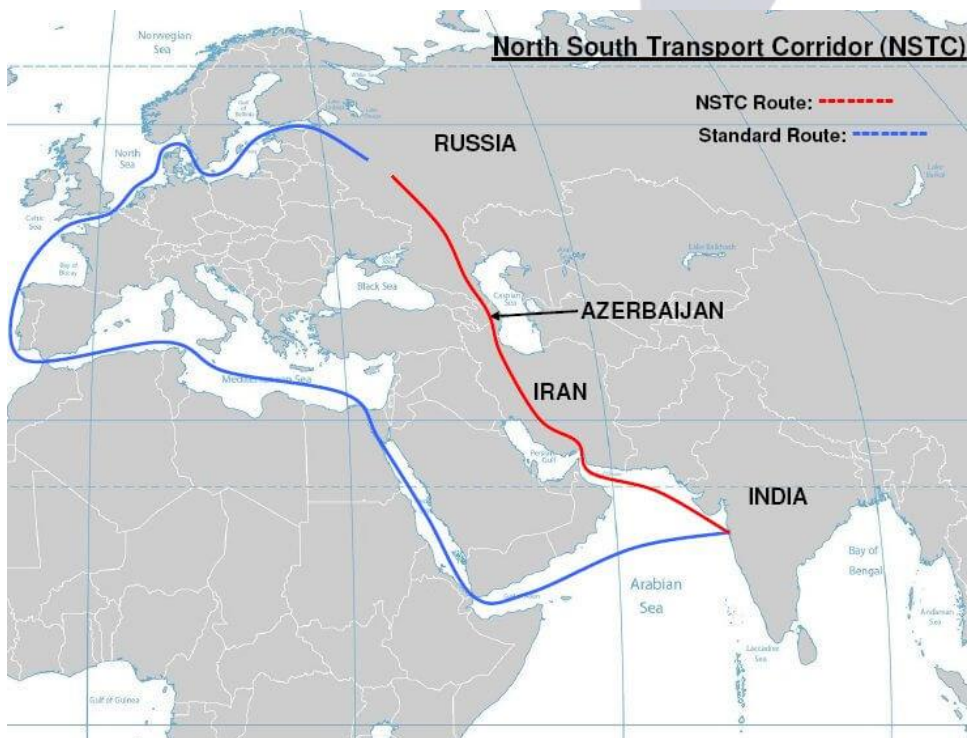
India's Interests in Afghanistan

- **Economic and Strategic Interest:** Afghanistan is a gateway to the oil and mineral-rich Central Asian republics.
- **Afghanistan's main advantage is its geography,** as anyone who is in power in Afghanistan controls the land routes connecting India with Central Asia (via Afghanistan).
- **Developmental Projects:** The massive reconstruction plans for the country to offer a lot of opportunities for Indian companies.

- Three major projects: the Afghan Parliament, the Zaranj-Delaram Highway, and the Afghanistan-India Friendship Dam (Salma Dam), along with India's assistance of more than \$3 billion in projects, hundreds of small development projects (of schools, hospitals and water projects) have cemented India's position in Afghanistan.
- Security Interest: India has been the victim of state-sponsored terrorism emanating from Pakistan supported terrorist group operating in the region (e.g., Haqqani network).

INSTC

- The International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) is a multi-modal connectivity project to establish transport networks (ship, rail, and road route) for moving freight between India, Russia, Iran, Europe and Central Asia.
- It links Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea via Iran, and then onwards to northern Europe via St. Petersburg in Russia.
- The route primarily involves moving freight from India, Iran, Azerbaijan and Russia via ship, rail and road.
- The objective of the corridor is to increase trade connectivity between major cities such as Mumbai, Moscow, Tehran, Baku, Bandar Abbas, Astrakhan, Bandar Anzali and etc.
- The current members are India, Iran, Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Belarus, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Oman, Syria, Turkey, Ukraine, and Bulgaria (observer).
- Turkmenistan currently is not a formal member but is likely to have road connectivity to the corridor, after being formally invited by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.



Chabahar Port

- This port is Located on the Gulf of Oman and is the only oceanic port of the country.
- With this, India can bypass Pakistan in transporting goods to Afghanistan.

- It will also boost India's access to Iran, the key gateway to the International North-South Transport Corridor that has sea, rail and road routes between India, Russia, Iran, Europe and Central Asia.
- It also helps India counter Chinese presence in the Arabian Sea which China is trying to ensure by helping Pakistan develop the Gwadar port. Gwadar port is less than 400 km from Chabahar by road and 100 km by sea.
- With Chabahar port being developed and operated by India, Iran also becomes a military ally to India. Chabahar could be used in case China decides to flex its navy muscles by stationing ships in Gwadar port to reckon its upper hand in the Indian Ocean, Persian Gulf and Middle East.
- Trade benefits: With Chabahar port becoming functional, there will be a significant boost in the import of iron ore, sugar and rice to India. The import cost of oil to India will also see a considerable decline. India has already increased its crude purchase from Iran since the West imposed ban on Iran was lifted.
- From a diplomatic perspective, Chabahar port could be used as a point from where humanitarian operations could be coordinated.



TAPI

- The Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India Pipeline (TAPI), also known as Trans-Afghanistan Pipeline, is a natural gas pipeline being developed by the Galkynysh – TAPI Pipeline Company Limited.
- The pipeline will transport natural gas from the Galkynysh Gas Field in Turkmenistan through Afghanistan into Pakistan and then to India.
- The pipeline will begin pumping natural gas by the beginning of 2020 and supply life is expected to last for 30 years.
- The TAPI Project is considered as an important initiative of these four countries to connect energy rich Central Asia with energy starved South Asia.

- It will provide an alternative supply source of gas with dependable reserves leading to enhanced energy security.
- It will further diversify the fuel basket to the benefit of Indian economy as it would be used mainly in power, fertilizer and city gas sectors.

GROUP OF 7 (G7) AND THE RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Context:

Advanced economies making up the G7 grouping have reached a “historic” deal on taxing multinational companies. Finance ministers meeting in London agreed to counter tax avoidance through measures to make companies pay in the countries where they do business.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Important International Institutions, Foreign Policies and Developments affecting India’s Interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. What is the G7?
2. History of the G7
3. G7 Summit Participation
4. Agenda of the G7 Summit
5. Key developments in G7 Summits
6. India and the G7

What is the G7?

- The Group of 7 (G7) is an informal group of seven countries — the United States, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United Kingdom, the heads of which hold an annual summit with European Union and other invitees.



- Together the member countries represent 40% of global GDP and 10% of the world’s population.
- Unlike other bodies such as NATO, the G7 has no legal existence, permanent secretariat or official members.

- It also has no binding impact on policy and all decisions and commitments made at G7 meetings need to be ratified independently by governing bodies of member states.
- The major purpose of the G-7 is to discuss and deliberate on international economic issues.
- G7 is capable of setting the global agenda because decisions taken by these major economic powers have a real impact. Thus, decisions taken at the G7 are not legally binding, but exert strong political influence.
- It sometimes acts in concert to help resolve other global problems, with a special focus on economic issues.



History of the G7

- A meeting between the current G7 members, excluding Canada, in 1975 laid the basis for the formation of G7. At the time, the global economy was in a state of recession due to the OPEC oil embargo.
- As the energy crisis was escalating, the then US Treasury Secretary decided that it would be beneficial for the large players on the world stage to coordinate with each other on macroeconomic initiatives.
- After this first summit, the countries agreed to meet annually and a year later, Canada was invited into the group which marked the official formation of the G7 as we know it.
- The President of the European Commission was asked to join the meetings in 1977 and following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and a subsequent thaw in relations between the East and West, Russia was also invited to join the group in 1998. Thereafter the group was named the G8 until 2014, when Russia was expelled for its annexation of Crimea from Ukraine.

- The presidency of G7 meetings is held by each of the seven countries in turn, each year. The country holding the presidency is responsible for organising and hosting the meeting.

G7 Summit Participation

- Summits are held annually and hosted on a rotation basis by the group's members.
- The leaders of important international organizations like the European Union, IMF, World Bank and the United Nations are also invited.
- The groundwork for the summit, including matters to be discussed and follow-up meetings, is done by the "sherpas", who are generally personal representatives or members of diplomatic staff such as ambassadors.

Agenda of the G7 Summit

- The G7 summit provides a forum for member countries to discuss shared values and concerns.
- While it initially focused on international economic policy, in the 1980s, the G7 extended its mandate to include issues related to foreign policy and security as well.
- In recent years, G7 leaders have met to formulate common responses to challenges encompassing counterterrorism, development, education, health, human rights and climate change.

Key developments in G7 Summits

- In 1997, the G7 countries agreed to provide \$300 million to the effort to contain the effects of the reactor meltdown in Chernobyl.
- Then, at the 2002 summit, members decided to launch a coordinated response to fight the threat of AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.
- Their efforts led to the formation of the Global Fund, an innovative financing mechanism that has disbursed more than \$45 billion in aid and, according to its website, has saved the lives of over 38 million people.
- Global Apollo Program was launched out of the 2015 G7 summit meeting designed to tackle climate change through clean energy research and development. The programme calls for developed nations to commit to spending 0.02% of their GDP on tackling climate change from 2015 to 2025; an amount that would total USD 150 billion over a 10-year period.
- The election of Donald Trump in 2016 also caused some friction between the G7 member nations. Ahead of the G7 summit in Sicily in 2017, Trump refused to recommit the US to the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement and criticised Germany for its trade surplus, threatening to block the US import of German cars.
- In 2020, the G7 summit was cancelled for the first time as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

India and the G7

- The G7 has been criticised for being outdated and ineffective in recent decades due to its exclusion of two of the world's largest economies in India and China.
- Several think tanks have called for India's inclusion into the group; however, some argue against it, pointing to India's much lower GDP per capita relative to other states.
- While not being an official member of the group, India has been invited to the 2021 G7 summit as a special guest, making this year the second time that Prime Minister Modi has been asked to participate in discussions.

- India will be particularly interested in the talks related to global vaccine delivery as both a major manufacturer and consumer of vaccines.

SIPRI YEAR BOOK 2021 ON EXPANDING NUCLEAR ARSENAL

Context:

China is in the middle of a significant modernisation and expansion of its nuclear weapon inventory, and India and Pakistan also appear to be expanding their nuclear arsenals, according to Swedish think tank Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Year Book 2021.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Foreign Treaties and Policies affecting India's Interests), GS-III: Science and Technology (Nuclear Technology)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. SIPRI Year Book 2021
2. Chinese Nuclear Advancement
3. India's Cause for concern
4. International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) report
5. Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)

SIPRI Year Book 2021

- The overall number of warheads in global military stockpiles now appears to be increasing, a worrisome sign that the declining trend that has characterized global nuclear arsenals since the end of the cold war has stalled.
- According to the year book, India possessed an estimated 156 nuclear warheads at the start of 2021 compared to 150 at the start of 2020, while Pakistan had 165 warheads, up from 160 in 2020.
- China's nuclear arsenal consisted of 350 warheads up from 320 at the start of 2020.
- The nine nuclear armed states – the U.S., Russia, the U.K., France, China, India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea – together possessed an estimated 13,080 nuclear weapons at the start of 2021.
- Russia and the U.S. together possessed over 90% of global nuclear weapons and have extensive and expensive modernisation programmes under way, SIPRI said.

Signs that decline in nuclear arsenals has stalled

- The nine nuclear-armed states—the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, China, India, Pakistan, Israel and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea)—together possessed an estimated 13080 nuclear weapons at the start of 2021. This marked a decrease from the 13400 that SIPRI estimated these states possessed at the beginning of 2020.
- Despite this overall decrease, the estimated number of nuclear weapons currently deployed with operational forces increased to 3825, from 3720 last year. Around 2000 of these—nearly all of which belonged to Russia or the USA—were kept in a state of high operational alert.
- While the USA and Russia continued to reduce their overall nuclear weapon inventories by dismantling retired warheads in 2020, both are estimated to have had around 50 more nuclear warheads in operational deployment at the start of 2021 than a year earlier.

- Russia also increased its overall military nuclear stockpile by around 180 warheads, mainly due to deployment of more multi-warhead land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and sea-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs).
- Both countries' deployed strategic nuclear forces remained within the limits set by the 2010 Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (New START), although the treaty does not limit total nuclear warhead inventories.

| Country | Deployed warheads* | Other warheads** | Total 2021 | Total 2020 |
|-----------------|--------------------|------------------|---------------|---------------|
| USA | 1 800 | 3 750 | 5 550 | 5 800 |
| Russia | 1 625 | 4 630 | 6 255 | 6 375 |
| UK*** | 120 | 105 | 225 | 215 |
| France | 280 | 10 | 290 | 290 |
| China | | 350 | 350 | 320 |
| India | | 156 | 156 | 150 |
| Pakistan | | 165 | 165 | 160 |
| Israel | | 90 | 90 | 90 |
| North Korea**** | ... | [40–50] | [40–50] | [30–40] |
| Total | 3 825 | 9 255 | 13 080 | 13 400 |

Source: SIPRI Yearbook 2021.

Other nuclear-armed states investing in future capabilities

- All the other seven nuclear-armed states are also either developing or deploying new weapon systems or have announced their intention to do so.
- The UK's 'Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy', published in early 2021, reversed a policy of reducing the country's nuclear arsenal and raised its planned ceiling for nuclear weapons from 180 to 260.
- China is in the middle of a significant modernization and expansion of its nuclear weapon inventory, and India and Pakistan also appear to be expanding their nuclear arsenals.
- North Korea continues to enhance its military nuclear programme as a central element of its national security strategy. While it conducted no nuclear test explosions or long-range ballistic missile tests during 2020, it continued production of fissile material and development of short- and long-range ballistic missiles.

Chinese Nuclear Advancement

- China is pursuing a planned modernisation of its nuclear arsenal because it fears the multi-layered missile defence capabilities of the United States.
- China is arming its missiles with Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicles (MIRVs) capabilities to neutralise America's missile shield.

- The Peoples Liberation Army Rocket Force (PLARF) fields a range of Medium Range Ballistic Missiles (MRBMs) and Short-Range Ballistic Missiles (SRBMs), and China also on a sizeable inventory of fissile material.
- China's expansion is cause for concern because even as the U.S. and Russia are attempting to reduce the size of their respective arsenals, the PRC is on an expansionist mode.

India's Cause for concern

- This increase might not seem large relative to the size of the nuclear arsenal of the U.S. and Russia but it indicates a gradual shift toward a larger arsenal.
- This presents India with challenges because New Delhi has to contend with a nuclear-armed Pakistan as well.
- The Indian nuclear arsenal, according to the SIPRI, stands at roughly 150 nuclear warheads with the Pakistani slightly ahead with 160 warheads.
- China's nuclear modernisation and diversified nuclear capabilities during conventional military escalation along the China-India boundary is one of the major concerns for India.
- The PRC is believed to base a part of its nuclear arsenal in inland territories such as in the Far-Western Xinjiang Region, which is close to Aksai Chin.

International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) report

- A report by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), London, in May titled 'Nuclear Deterrence and Stability in South Asia: Perceptions and Realities' said that chance played an important ameliorative role in the India-Pakistan crisis of February 2019 and the two countries "risk stumbling into using their nuclear weapons through miscalculation or misinterpretation in a future crisis."

Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)

- The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, commonly known as the Non-Proliferation Treaty or NPT, is an international treaty whose objective is to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, to promote cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, and to further the goal of achieving nuclear disarmament and general and complete disarmament
- The NPT is often seen to be based on a central bargain: "the NPT non-nuclear-weapon states agree never to acquire nuclear weapons and the NPT nuclear-weapon states in exchange agree to share the benefits of peaceful nuclear technology and to pursue nuclear disarmament aimed at the ultimate elimination of their nuclear arsenals."
- The treaty defines nuclear-weapon states as those that have built and tested a nuclear explosive device before 1 January 1967; these are the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, and China.
- Four other states are known or believed to possess nuclear weapons: India, Pakistan, and North Korea have openly tested and declared that they possess nuclear weapons, while Israel is deliberately ambiguous regarding its nuclear weapons status.
- The Treaty has 189 States Parties, which is the largest number of any arms control agreement.
- However, India, Israel and Pakistan have not signed the NPT.
- North Korea announced its withdrawal in 2003, and further announced that it had conducted an underground nuclear explosion in 2006 and 2009.

THE 47TH G7 SUMMIT ON INTERNET CURBS AND CHINA

Context:

Recently, the Indian Prime Minister addressed the 47th G7 Summit 2021 through video conferencing.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Important International Groupings, Foreign Policies affecting India's Interests)

Highlights of the 47th G7 Summit 2021

Earlier, the Finance Ministers from the G7 nations reached a landmark accord setting a Global Minimum Corporate Tax Rate (GMCTR).

Apart from India, Australia and South Korea were also invited to participate in the proceedings of the summit as "guest countries".

This year's summit was hosted by the UK. The last G-7 summit was in France in 2019, with last year's event in the US canceled due to the pandemic.

Build Back Better for the World Project

The Build Back Better for the World Project is aimed squarely at competing with China's trillion-dollar Belt and Road infrastructure initiative, which has been widely criticised for saddling small countries with unmanageable debt but has included even G7 member Italy since launching in 2013.

It will collectively catalyse hundreds of billions of infrastructure investment for low- and middle-income countries (in Asia and Africa) and offer a values-driven, high-standard and transparent partnership with G7.

Democracies 11

Signed off on a joint statement (Democracies 11) by G-7 and guest countries on "open societies" that reaffirm and encourage the values of freedom of expression, both online and offline, as a freedom that safeguards democracy and helps people live free from fear and oppression.

The statement also refers to politically motivated internet shutdowns as one of the threats to freedom and democracy.

While the statement is directed at China and Russia, India has been under scrutiny over Internet curbs in Jammu and Kashmir even as the Government is locked in a face-off over its New IT rules 2021 with tech giants.

Democracies 11 is facing threats to freedom and democracy from rising authoritarianism, electoral interference, corruption, economic coercion, manipulation of information, including disinformation, online harms and cyber attacks, politically motivated internet shutdowns, human rights violations and abuses, terrorism and violent extremism.

Carbis Bay Declaration

The G7 signed the Carbis Bay Declaration. It is aimed at preventing future pandemics.

The G7 also pledged over 1 billion coronavirus vaccine doses for poorer nations with half of that coming from the United States and 100 million from Britain.

Climate Change

Renewed a pledge to raise their contributions to meet an overdue spending pledge of USD 100 billion a year to help poorer countries cut carbon emissions.

Promised to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030.

Pledged to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Against China

The G-7 statement which was not signed by India and other outreach countries hit out at China on “human rights and fundamental freedoms” in Xinjiang (Uyghur Muslims) and Hong Kong, and the unilateral attempts to change the status quo in the South China Sea.

It also called for a transparent and timely World Health Organization’s Covid origins study in China.

India had also called for the same in a statement during the World Health Assembly.

On Internet shutdowns

Internet freedoms are subject to national security, said government sources, claiming that India’s tough negotiations on the joint communique issued by G7 and Guest Countries at the session on Open Societies, had ensured that the original language criticising “Internet shutdowns” had been amended to include New Delhi’s concerns.

The explanation came after the ‘G7 and Guest Countries: 2021 Open Societies Statement’ referred to “politically motivated Internet shutdowns” which indirectly addresses Internet blackouts in various parts of the world including India.

AMERICA’S MISTAKES IN THE AFGHANISTAN WAR

Context:

President Joe Biden has set the September 11 deadline for all American troops to leave Afghanistan, winding up 20 years of the invasion by the United States.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (India’s Neighbours, Foreign Policies and Developments affecting India’s Interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About the U.S. Afghanistan War
2. America’s Mistakes

About the U.S. Afghanistan War

- The United States invasion of Afghanistan occurred after the September 11 attacks in late 2001 and was supported by close US allies which had officially began the War on Terror.
- Its public aims were to dismantle al-Qaeda and deny it a safe base of operations in Afghanistan by removing the Taliban from power.
- US President George W. Bush demanded that the Taliban hand over Osama bin Laden and expel al-Qaeda; bin Laden had already been wanted by the FBI since 1998.
- The US and its allies rapidly drove the Taliban from power by December 2001, and built military bases near major cities across the country. Most al-Qaeda and Taliban members were not captured, escaping to neighboring Pakistan or retreating to rural or remote mountainous regions during the Battle of Tora Bora.

Peace deal

PMIAS

Be Inspired

- Donald Trump's 2017 policy on Afghanistan, was based on breaking the military stalemate in Afghanistan by authorising an additional 5,000 soldiers, giving US forces a freer hand to go after the Taliban, putting Pakistan on notice, and strengthening Afghan capabilities.
- However, the US realised that the Taliban insurgency could not be defeated as long as it enjoyed safe havens and secure sanctuaries in Pakistan, the US changed track and sought Pakistan's help to get the Taliban to the negotiating table.
- The negotiations began in September 2018 with the appointment of Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad to initiate direct talks with the Taliban. After nine rounds of US-Taliban talks in Qatar, the two sides seemed close to an agreement.

America's Mistakes

Learning from History

- First, the U.S. went into Afghanistan without considering history sufficiently – i.e., from when Afghanistan was invaded by great powers in the 19th and 20th centuries as well.
- The British empire, which feared a Russian invasion to India via Afghanistan, sent troops to the country in 1839, ousted its ruler Dost Muhammad and established a client regime of its ally, Shah Shujah. But the British had to withdraw in the face of Afghan resistance, mostly by Pashtun warriors; while retreating in 1842, all of the British and Indian troops, except one doctor, were massacred by Afghans.
- In 1979, the Soviet Union sent troops to Afghanistan to salvage the country's nascent communist regime, orchestrated a coup and established a friendly regime. The Soviets, faced with a bloody Mujahideen resistance (which was bankrolled and trained by the U.S., Saudi Arabia and Pakistan), had to pull back in 1989 in ignominy.
- Once they invaded Afghanistan, the U.S., given the mistakes the British and the Soviets committed, could have had a strategically focused campaign, targeting its enemy, al-Qaeda, which was behind the September 11 attacks.
- The U.S. should have gone after the terrorists, destroyed their networks and then withdrawn, but it wanted to topple the Taliban and rebuild a centralised "democratic" state in Afghanistan.

Strategic failure

- After the Taliban regime was toppled and al-Qaeda driven back into the caves and mountains, the U.S. still had a chance to stabilise the country with help from its different factions and leave.
- The Taliban sought modest terms — Mullah Omar, their leader, should be allowed to return home. But the Americans rejected the offer and promised to destroy the Taliban in every corner of the country.
- The Taliban are an indigenous militancy with deep roots in Afghanistan's Pashtun majority. Toppling them from power was easy, but defeating them in their country was not.
- The U.S. took Pakistan's tactical support for its war on terror for granted, overlooking the fact that Pakistan had deep strategic ties with the Taliban.
- When the U.S. declared victory in Afghanistan prematurely and went on to invade Iraq in 2003, it became easier for Pakistan to assist the Taliban's regrouping, at a time when the Afghan government was grappling with corruption and infighting on ethnic lines.

Surrender to the Taliban

- For the U.S., with the war becoming increasingly unpopular at home, President elects of the U.S. had to promise to wind it up. The U.S. has also been shifting its focus to East Asia where China is rising.

- The U.S. could have opted for a more orderly withdrawal. Instead, it surrendered to the Taliban's terms to pull back its troops
- The Taliban have not defeated the Afghan troops yet. The Afghan government has about 200,000 battle-hardened soldiers, including the U.S.-trained elite special forces. The government still controls most of the country's population centres. The U.S. should have used this stalemate, coupled with mounting pressure on Pakistan, to extract concessions from the Taliban.

Context:

The U.S. President Biden has announced withdrawal of all US troops from Afghanistan by September 11, 2021 (20th anniversary of the 9/11).

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (India's Neighbours, Foreign Policies affecting India's Interests)

Mains Questions:

What are the implications of the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan for the Afghan govt, the Taliban, and neighbours India, Pakistan and China? (10 Marks)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. A victory for the Taliban?
2. Concerns: 'No excuse for war'
3. Pakistan: gains, concerns
4. India: time to be wary
5. What is expected by Russia, China & Iran?
6. Way Forward for India: Making a leap

A victory for the Taliban?

- Violent attacks in Afghanistan have spiked since the signing of the US-Taliban agreement in Doha in 2020 to end the protracted war. The Taliban deny involvement in these attacks, but their refusal to agree to a nationwide ceasefire has raised doubts about their intentions.
- The result of the upcoming Afghan conference in Turkey in April 2021, will determine how the withdrawal of US troops will impact the future of the country – If the conference succeeds in forming a government that includes Taliban and other Afghans, then the damage of such a hurried exit from Afghanistan will be manageable. However, Afghanistan could face an all-out civil war if the conference fails, and the Taliban continue to reject peace.
- The US decision to pull out all troops from Afghanistan would also leave President Ashraf Ghani's elected government at the mercy of militants.
- The Taliban have always rejected elections as un-Islamic, and the government of Afghanistan as a "puppet" of the US.
- It is also important to note that the Taliban are not the only threat to Afghan forces; other militant groups, such as "Islamic State" (IS), have also gained a foothold in the war-ravaged country.

Concerns: 'No excuse for war'

- Concerns is great that gains made over the past two decades, especially in the area of women's rights, could be lost as the Taliban unleash further violence.
- It is unclear whether the Taliban would agree to protecting human rights and freedom of speech in Afghanistan.
- There is also the view that the withdrawal announcement could also put the Taliban into a difficult position as the international community expects the Taliban to join the political process and there is no excuse to continue the war.

Pakistan: gains, concerns

- The Taliban are a creation of the Pakistani security establishment and after the US invasion of Afghanistan, they removed themselves to safe havens in Pakistan territory, and the Taliban High Council operated from Quetta in Balochistan.
- It was Pakistan that persuaded the Taliban to do a deal with the Trump Administration.
- For the Pakistani Army, which has always seen Afghanistan in terms of "strategic depth" in its forever hostility with India, a Taliban capture of Afghanistan would finally bring a friendly force in power in Kabul after 20 years.
- India, which has had excellent relations with the Karzai and Ghani governments, would have its significance and importance reduced.

- Pakistan wants a strong role for the Taliban in future Afghan governance. Pakistan's regional interests are better served with a powerful Taliban presence in its western neighborhood.
- But a US withdrawal also means Pakistan will need to shoulder the entire burden of the chaos that experts predict.
- Civil war is not ruled out and with it, the flow of refugees into Pakistan once again, even as the country struggles with refugees from the first Afghan war.
- All this at a time when the economy is flailing, and Pakistan stays afloat on an IMF loan with strict conditionalities.
- Plus, the Taliban are not a monolith, and have recently shown streaks of independence from Pakistan. It has to guard against instability in Afghanistan from spilling over the border.

India: time to be wary

- New Delhi, which was hoping to be part of the U.S. initiative, would be nervous about the US withdrawal.
- India was on the outer edges of the Trump's actions towards the Afghan deal and was a reluctant supporter of the "intra-Afghan talks" between the Taliban and Afghan government.
- The new U.S. proposal gave India a role, by recognising it as a regional stakeholder, but this proposal seems to have no future. – Haqqani group, fostered by the ISI, would have a large role in any Taliban regime – and this is one of India's worries.
- Another concern would be India-focused militants such as Lashkar-e-Toiba and Jaish-e-Mohamed, which the Indian security establishment already believes to have relocated in large numbers to Afghanistan.

What dents India's goodwill?

- The building blocks of that goodwill are India's assistance in infrastructure projects, health care, education, trade and food security, and also in the liberal access to Afghans to study, train and work in India.
- India's example as a pluralistic, inclusive democracy also inspires many.
- Afghanistan's majority-Muslim citizens, many of whom have treated India as a second home, have felt cut out of the move to offer fast track citizenship to only Afghan minorities, as much as they have by reports of anti-Muslim rhetoric and incidents of violence in India.
- India's assistance of more than \$3 billion in projects, trade of about \$1 billion, a \$20 billion projected development expenditure of an alternate route through Chabahar, as well as its support to the Afghan National Army, bureaucrats, doctors and other professionals for training in India should assure it a leading position in Afghanistan's regional formulation.
- It would be a mistake, at this point, to tie all India's support in only to Kabul or the Ghani government; the government must strive to endure that its aid and assistance is broad-based, particularly during the novel coronavirus pandemic to centres outside the capital, even if some lie in areas held by the Taliban.

What is expected by Russia, China & Iran?

China

- China would have much to lose from instability in Afghanistan as this could have an impact on the China Pakistan Economic Corridor. A Taliban regime in Afghanistan might end up stirring unrest in the Xinjiang Autonomous region, home to the Uighur minority. Conversely, as an ally of Pakistan, it could see a bigger role for itself in Afghanistan.

Russia

- In recent years, Russia has taken on the role of peacemaker in Afghanistan, but both the Taliban and the Afghan government have been wary of its efforts.
- After a conference in March 2021 of Russia, US, China and Pakistan, along with Taliban and Afghan delegates, a joint statement by the four principals said they did not support the establishment of an Islamic Emirate, leaving the Taliban angry.
- Russia's growing links with Pakistan could translate into a post-US role for Moscow in Afghanistan.

Iran

- As a country that shares borders with Pakistan and Afghanistan, Iran perceives active security threats from both. And a Taliban regime in Kabul would only increase this threat perception.
- Despite the mutual hostility and the theological divide between the two, Iran opened channels to the Taliban a few years ago, and recently, even hosted a Taliban delegation at Tehran.

Way Forward for India: Making a leap

- India must also pursue opportunities to fulfil its role in the peace efforts in Afghanistan, starting with efforts to bridge the Ghani-Abdullah divide, and bringing together other major leaders with whom India has built ties for decades.
- An understanding between Iran and the U.S. on Afghanistan is necessary for lasting peace as well, and India could play a mediatory part, as it did in order for the Chabahar project.
- New Delhi should use the United Nations's call for a pause in conflicts during the novel coronavirus pandemic, to ensure a hold on hostilities with Pakistan.
- If there is one lesson that the the U.S.-Taliban talks have imparted, it is that both have found it necessary to come to the table for talks on Afghanistan's future.
- For India, given its abiding interest in Afghanistan's success and traditional warmth for its people, making that leap should be a bit easier.
- Above all, the government must consider the appointment of a special envoy, as it has been done in the past, to deal with its efforts in Afghanistan, which need both diplomatic agility and a firmness of purpose at a watershed moment in that country's history.

Conclusion

An inclusive peace process, involving the meaningful participation of women, youth and victims, upholding the human rights of every Afghan is the only path to peace. While each country seeks to align its engagement policy to its respective strategic objectives, the overarching goal for all is peace in Afghanistan. A consensus among major international stakeholders about how to deal with the Taliban is of utmost importance.

CHINA TRIES TO SINICISE TIBETAN LIFE WITHOUT THE DALAI LAMA

Context:

Tibetan groups talk about China's leader Xi Jinping and his Communist party as seeking to imprint on virtually every aspect of life across the vast county which has lately increasingly encompassed religion, both in central China and on its fringes, such as Tibet.

The party is pressing a programme to Sinicise Tibetan life to separate Tibetans from their language, culture, and especially, their devotion to the Dalai Lama, Tibet's traditional spiritual leader who has lived in exile since 1959.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (India's Neighbours, Foreign Policies and Developments affecting India's Interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About Tibet
2. India and Tibet
3. Sino-Indian Conflict Over Dalai Lama
4. What is Sinicization?
5. Modern examples of Sinicization
6. Concerns of Tibetan population

About Tibet

- Tibet is a region on the Tibetan Plateau in Asia, spanning to nearly a quarter of China's territory.
- It is the traditional homeland of the Tibetan people as well as some other ethnic groups.

- Tibet is the highest region on Earth, with an average elevation of 4,900 metres. The highest elevation in Tibet is Mount Everest.

History of Tibet

- From 1912 until the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, no Chinese government exercised control over what is today China's Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR).
- Many Tibetans insist they were essentially independent for most of that time and have protested what they regard as China's rule imposed after the People's Liberation Army occupied TAR in 1950.
- The Dalai Lama's government alone ruled the land until 1951. Tibet was not "Chinese" until Mao Zedong's People's Liberation Army (PLA) marched in and made it so.
- The 14th Dalai Lama fled to India in 1959 following a crackdown on an uprising by the local population in Tibet.
- India granted him political asylum and the Tibetan government-in-exile is based on Dharamsala in Himachal Pradesh since then.
- Since 1959, Tibet has been witnessing periodic incidents of violence, unrest and protest against Beijing.
- China asserts that Tibet has been its part since the 13th century and will remain so forever.

India and Tibet

- Apart from the border disputes, another major irritant for China has been over the Dalai Lama, who enjoys a spiritual status in India.
- China considers Dalai Lama a separatist, who has great influence over Tibetans. It must be mentioned that Dalai Lama gave up his support for Tibetan independence in 1974, and only wants China to stop repression against the community.
- The Government of India has built special schools for Tibetans that provide free education, health care, and scholarships. There are a few medical and civil engineering seats reserved for Tibetans.
- While India's role in the rehabilitation of Tibetan refugees has been criticised by China, it has drawn praise from international bodies and human rights groups.

PMIAS
be inspired



Sino-Indian Conflict Over Dalai Lama

- Apart from the border disputes, another major irritant for China has been over the Dalai Lama, who enjoys a spiritual status in India.
- China considers Dalai Lama a separatist, who has great influence over Tibetans. It must be mentioned that Dalai Lama gave up his support for Tibetan independence in 1974, and only wants China to stop repression against the community.
- Former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru agreed to provide all assistance to the Tibetan refugees to settle in India until their eventual return.
- The Government of India has built special schools for Tibetans that provide free education, health care, and scholarships. There are a few medical and civil engineering seats reserved for Tibetans.
- While India's role in the rehabilitation of Tibetan refugees has been criticised by China, it has drawn praise from international bodies and human rights groups.

What is Sinicization?

- Sinicization, sinofication, sinification, or sinonization (from the prefix sino-, 'Chinese, relating to China') is the process by which non-Chinese societies come under the influence of Chinese culture, particularly Han-Chinese culture, language, societal norms, and ethnic identity.
- Areas of influence include diet, writing, industry, education, language/lexicons, law, architectural style, politics, philosophy, religion, science and technology, value systems, and lifestyle.
- In particular, sinicization may refer to processes or policies of acculturation, assimilation, or cultural imperialism of norms from China on neighboring East Asian societies, or on minority ethnic groups within China.
- Evidence of this process is reflected in the histories of Korea, Japan, and Vietnam in the adoption of the Chinese writing system, which has long been a unifying feature in the Sinosphere as the vehicle for exporting Chinese culture to these Asian countries.

Modern examples of Sinicization

Xinjiang

- The Hui Muslim 36th Division (National Revolutionary Army) governed the southern region of East Turkestan (named Xinjiang by the Chinese government) in 1934–1937. The administration that was set up was colonial in nature, importing Han cooks and baths, changing the Uyghur language-only street names and signs to Chinese, as well as switching carpet patterns in state-owned carpet factories from Uyghur to Han.
- Strict surveillance and mass detentions of Uyghurs in the Xinjiang re-education camps is a part of the ongoing sinicization policy by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Since 2015, it has been estimated that over a million Uyghurs have been detained in these camps. The camps were established under CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping's administration with the main goal of ensuring adherence to national ideology.
- Critics of China's treatment of Uyghurs have accused the Chinese government of propagating a policy of sinicization in Xinjiang in the 21st century, calling this policy a cultural genocide, or ethnocide, of Uyghurs.

Taiwan

- After the Republic of China took control of Taiwan in 1945 and relocated its capital to Taipei in 1949, the intention of Chiang Kai-shek was to eventually go back to mainland China and retake control of it. Chiang believed that to retake mainland China, it would be necessary to re-Sinicize Taiwan's inhabitants who had undergone assimilation under Japanese rule.
- Examples of this policy included the renaming of streets with mainland geographical names, use of Mandarin Chinese in schools and punishments for using other regional languages (such as the fāngyán of Hakka and Hokkien), and teaching students to revere traditional ethics, develop pan-Chinese nationalism, and view Taiwan from the perspective of China.

Tibet

- The sinicization of Tibet is the change of Tibetan society to Han Chinese standards, which has been underway since the Chinese regained control of Tibet in 1951.
- In present-day Tibet, traditional Tibetan festivals have “been turned into a platform for propaganda and political theater” where “government workers and retirees are barred from engaging in religious activities, and government workers and students in Tibetan schools are forbidden from visiting local monasteries.”
- According to president of the Central Tibetan Administration, Lobsang Sangay, with the ongoing expulsion of monks and nuns from monasteries and nunneries, and destruction of the Larung Gar monastery, Tibet's largest Buddhist institution, “unfortunately what is happening is that the Chinese government is reviving something akin to cultural revolution in Tibet.”

Concerns of Tibetan population

- China is investing huge sums of money for infrastructure investments in Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) albeit at the cost of its environment.
- Tibet's downtown Lhasa has all the trappings of a modern city. But this is by destroying the unique Tibetan culture and mainstreaming Chinese culture into the region and also notably leading to significant demographic shift.
- The outflow of refugees from Tibet has been curtailed by the Chinese authorities by convincing Nepal to close a popular route.

- Many third generation Tibetans settled in India have no idea about their motherland and India's attitude towards giving them citizenship has been stern.
- In recent times there is also a rise in the younger and more radical "Rangtsen" (freedom) groups demanding an independent Tibet.
- The primary concern that looms over the community is that of its future leadership.
- This is because the present Dalai Lama is getting older and there is no firm announcement about their next leader.

INDIA EXTENDS \$100 MN LOAN TO SRI LANKA

Context:

India and Sri Lanka signed an agreement for a \$100-million loan from the Export Import Bank of India to support the island nation's efforts to expand solar power coverage.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (India's Neighbors, Foreign Policies and treaties affecting India's Interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. India – Sri Lanka and debt
2. Sri Lanka's Approach to India for help with Currency
3. About India's loan to Sri Lanka for Solar Power
4. About International Solar Alliance (ISA)

India – Sri Lanka and debt

- Sri Lankan Prime Minister has told that there was no final decision on the East Container Terminal (ECT) project at the Colombo Port, which Sri Lanka, India and Japan in 2019 agreed to jointly develop.
- The Sri Lanka government was accused of "giving away national assets" to India, though Sri Lanka's Port Authority was to retain 100% ownership of the facility, as per the 2019 tripartite Memorandum of Cooperation.
- South Asia watchers often resort to the India-China geopolitical lens, while analysing Sri Lanka's international relations in the neighbourhood and beyond.
- The examples of Singapore-Malaysia and New Zealand-Australia indicate that a smaller country's economic success is tied to having a strong or at least stable relationship with its larger neighbour.
- Both India and Sri Lanka should focus on increasing the volume and quality of people-to-people links.

Sri Lanka's Approach to India for help with Currency

- In 2020, the President of Sri Lanka requested India for a USD 1 billion credit swap, and separately, a moratorium on debts that the country has to repay to India.
- But India-Sri Lanka relations have been tense over Colombo's decision to cancel a valued container terminal project at Colombo Port, which made India put off the decision.
- Earlier, in July 2020, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) extended a USD 400 million credit swap facility to Sri Lanka, which the Central Bank of Sri Lanka settled in February. The arrangement was not extended.

About India's loan to Sri Lanka for Solar Power

- The Sri Lankan government said one of the “key plans” of the government was to generate solar power, with the contribution of state-owned buildings, places of worship and houses of the low-income families.
- Over the last five years, Sri Lanka has sought to tap more renewable sources of power, particularly solar power. The country’s electricity demand is expected to grow at an average 5.3% from 2015-2034, according to the Public Utilities Commission.
- India said the \$100 million line of credit will help finance various projects Sri Lanka’s solar energy sector, including those announced at the founding conference of the International Solar Alliance (ISA) held in March 2018, in New Delhi, such as rooftop solar photo-voltaic systems for households and government buildings.
- As many as 89 countries, including Sri Lanka, signed the framework agreement of the ISA, jointly launched by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi and former French President Francois Hollande in 2015, with the aim of bringing together countries to promote large-scale deployment of solar energy.
- The line of credit extended by India, according to officials, is for a period of 20 years, with an interest of 1.75 %. Sri Lanka owes about \$960 million in debt repayment.

About International Solar Alliance (ISA)

- The International Solar Alliance is an alliance of 121 countries initiated by India, most of them being sunshine countries, which lie either completely or partly between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn.
- The primary objective of the alliance is to work for efficient consumption of solar energy to reduce dependence on fossil fuels.
- The initiative was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the India Africa Summit, and a meeting of member countries ahead of the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris in November 2015.
- The Headquarters of ISA is in Gurugram, Haryana, India.
- The Purpose of ISA is Bring together a group of nations to endorse clean energy, sustainable environment, public transport and climate
- The membership of ISA is applicable to all UN Members.
- The alliance is a treaty-based inter-governmental organization.
- Countries that do not fall within the Tropics can join the alliance and enjoy all benefits as other members, with the exception of voting rights.
- After the United Nations, it is the largest grouping of states world-wide.
- The framework agreement of the International Solar Alliance opened for signatures in Marrakech, Morocco in November 2016, and 200 countries have joined.

BIDEN & PUTIN'S 'GREAT POWER' SUMMIT ANALYZED

Context:

- U.S. President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin had a summit meeting which the American leader called the meeting of “two great powers”.

- In a press conference held after the summit, Mr. Putin said they have agreed to return their ambassadors to their posts in a bid to lower tensions after Russia's Ambassador to the U.S. was recalled from Washington after Biden described Mr. Putin as a killer.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Foreign Policies and Treaties affecting India's Interests, Important Developments in foreign relations)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Recent USA-China Rivalries
2. India as Counterbalance to China for USA
3. The Current Development: Western alliance
4. Russian Distraction amidst Western Alliance against China

Recent USA-China Rivalries:

- **Competition for dominating world finances:** To counter the USA-dominated International Monetary Fund, World Bank and World Trade Organization, China has come out with alternative financial institutions like Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank, and New Development Bank.
- **Contending influence over international groupings:** In order to contain rising China's assertiveness, the USA under its 'pivot to Asia policy' has launched a Quad initiative, Indo pacific narrative. Most recently, the USA proposed to expand G7 to G-11 without including China in it.
- **New Cold War:** USA-China confrontation is on multiple fronts including ideological and cultural hegemonic rivalry, trade wars which has often been called the New Cold War.

India as Counterbalance to China for USA

- India is a preferred partner on security issues and to cooperate to preserve maritime security and counter Chinese influence in South Asia and Southeast Asia. To achieve this, USA aims to:
 - Support India's aspiration to be a leading global power, highlighting its compatibility with the USA, Japanese and Australian vision of the Indo-Pacific.
 - Work with India "toward domestic economic reform".
 - Enhance defence cooperation and interoperability.
 - Provide greater leadership roles for India in the East Asia Summit and ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus.
 - Support India's Act East policy.

The Current Development: Western alliance

- In the past, when American Presidents visited Europe and met NATO allies, Russia had been their main focus. But this time, when Mr. Biden went to Europe, his first foreign trip after becoming the President, the focus was on China – a sign of the emerging shifts in the global power balance. Hence, the American President held a host of talks with separate blocs in Europe — the Group of Seven (G7), NATO and the EU — with a focus on strengthening the western alliance.
- The G7 industrialised nations — the U.S., the U.K., Germany, France, Italy, Canada and Japan — issued a communique slamming China's human rights records. Issues such as the detention of Uighurs in Xinjiang, the crackdown on dissent in Hong Kong, growing tensions with Taiwan and the alleged lack of transparency on Covid-19 were all mentioned in the G7 statement.

- The 30-member NATO, whose traditional focus has been on Russia, has also issued a statement in which China has been mentioned multiple times. NATO members warned against the “systemic challenges to the rules-based international order” emanating from China’s rise.
- The U.S. and the 27-member EU have decided to cooperate more on technology, regulation, industrial development and trade in an attempt to help the West compete better with China. They have also decided to set up a high-level trade and technology council, which would boost innovation and investment.

Russian Distraction amidst Western Alliance against China

- While U.S. is keen on focusing on China, Russia remains a distraction as the ties between the two countries are at the lowest point since the end of the Cold War.
- There were allegations of Russian cyberattacks and election interference in the U.S., while Moscow is reeling under Western sanctions and seems determined to resist any move by NATO to expand into its backyard.
- Ukraine remains an unresolved crisis. Earlier this year, Mr. Putin had assembled Russian troops on the Ukraine border in a direct challenge to the U.S.
- Bilateral relations between the two countries practically collapsed after the U.S. recalled Russian Ambassador from Washington and asked the American Ambassador to return for consultations after Biden described Putin as a killer.
- It’s too early to see any meaningful change in Russia-U.S. relations. But the recent Geneva summit suggests that policymakers in Washington have at least started thinking of Russia as a secondary challenge that needs to be tackled diplomatically, not only through coercion, if the U.S. wants to take on a rising China.

INDIA ABSTAINS ON U.N. RESOLUTION ON MYANMAR

Context:

India has abstained on a U.N. General Assembly resolution on Myanmar, saying its views have not been reflected in the draft and New Delhi does not believe the resolution, tabled hastily, is conducive to “aiding our joint efforts towards strengthening democratic process” in the country.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Important International Institutions, Foreign Policies and developments affecting India’s Interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

About the UNGA resolution on Myanmar

- The General Assembly adopted the draft resolution “The situation in Myanmar” with 119 Member States voting in favour, including Myanmar while 36 nations abstained, including Myanmar’s neighbours India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Laos, Nepal and Thailand. Russia also abstained. Belarus was the sole country voting against it.
- The resolution expressed “grave concern” at the February 1 coup and called upon Myanmar’s military junta to immediately and unconditionally release President Win Myint, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and other government officials, politicians and those arbitrarily detained or arrested.
- It also called “upon all Member States to prevent the flow of arms into Myanmar”.

- The resolution called on the Myanmar armed forces to end the state of emergency and respect all human rights of all the people of the country.
- It also called on Myanmar to allow the sustained democratic transition, “including the opening of the democratically elected Parliament and by working towards bringing all national institutions, including the armed forces, under a fully inclusive civilian government that is representative of the will of the people”.
- It voiced concern at the human rights situation of persons belonging to ethnic, religious and other minorities in Myanmar, “including the Rohingya Muslim minority, in particular with respect to the violations committed against them and their rights related to citizenship status”.

India’s View of the resolution

- India’s Permanent Representative to the UN said that this resolution was tabled in the U.N. General Assembly in a hasty manner without adequate consultations with neighbours and regional countries, adding that this is not only unhelpful but may also prove counter-productive to the efforts of the ASEAN to find a solution to the current situation in Myanmar.
- India’s explanation said that as Myanmar’s immediate neighbour and close friend of its people, India is cognizant of the “serious impact of political instability” and the potential of its spillover beyond Myanmar’s borders.
- India has been calling for greater engagement with the objective of peacefully resolving all issues.
- However, India expressed its deep concern on the developments in Myanmar and strongly condemned the use of violence and urge maximum restraint.

Consultative, constructive approach suggested by India

- India said that its views have not been reflected in the draft being considered for adoption and reiterated that a consultative and constructive approach involving the neighbouring countries and the region, remains important as the international community strives for the peaceful resolution of the issue.
- India was also of the view that the fact that there is a lack of support from all neighbouring countries and several countries in the region itself “should, hopefully, serve as an eye-opener to those who chose to pursue a hasty course of action.

THE COMRADES AND THEIR DIVERGENT PERSPECTIVES

Context:

Russian President Vladimir Putin has recently asserted that both the Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, and the Chinese President, Xi Jinping, are “responsible” enough to solve issues between their countries, while underlining the need to debar any “extra-regional power” to interfere in the process.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Foreign Policies and developments affecting India’s Interests)

Mains Questions:

How will Russia’s uncritical advocacy of China’s global vision affect India’s vision of the Indo-Pacific? (10 marks)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Russian Conundrum: The Quad and Indo-Pacific factor

2. The recent issues and India – Russia relations
3. Back to the Basics: What is the Quad grouping?
4. Russia-India-China Grouping (RIC)
5. Indo-Pacific Region
6. Fundamental difference of Quad and Indo-Pacific:

Russian Conundrum: The Quad and Indo-Pacific factor

- Russia's remarks urging to avoid "extra-regional power" to interfere in the process of resolution of issues between India and China can only be seen as reinforcing China's claim that the Quadrilateral or Quad (comprising India, the United States, Japan and Australia) is aimed at containing Beijing's influence in the Indo-Pacific region.
- In fact, Russia's recent comments can be seen as the assertion of its previous comments advising India to take a "larger look at Chinese foreign policies", while describing the Indo-Pacific strategy as an effort to revive the Cold War mentality.
- Russia's continued criticism of the Indo-Pacific and the Quad give ample evidence of the divergent perspectives of New Delhi and Russia on how to deal with China's rise to global prominence. Russia has rejected the Indo-Pacific construct in favour of the Asia-Pacific on the ground that the first is primarily an American initiative designed to contain both China and Russia.
- Previously Russian foreign minister had termed the Quad — as "Asian NATO". In an unmistakable indication of India's attempt to reimagine a new geostrategic maritime role for itself. Indian Foreign Minister responded saying that no country can have a veto on India's participation in the Quad and that incorporation of the Indo-Pacific concept in Indian diplomacy means that India can no longer be confined between the Malacca Strait and Gulf of Aden.
- The Russians may have their reasons to remain blind to China's growing aggressiveness, but the Indians have learned to expect at Chinese hands an unremitting effort to undermine India's global position — to destroy their confidence in themselves and the confidence of others in them — and to reduce India to a state of isolation and impotence in global affairs.

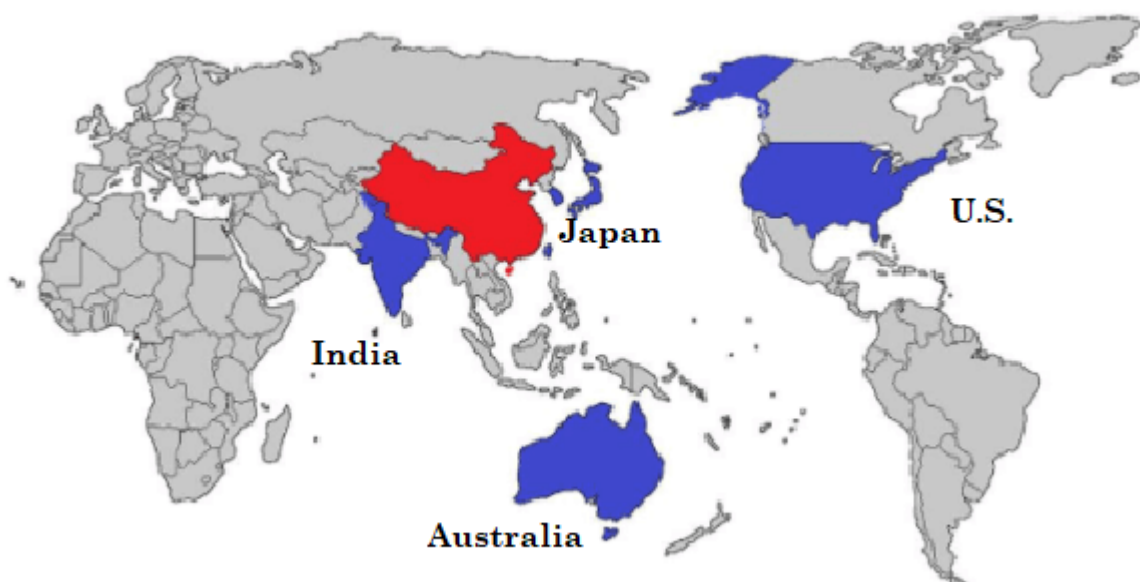
The recent issues and India – Russia relations

- Alignment with US: India aligning with US in the Quad in the Indo-Pacific strategy is one of the key issues between India and Russia.
- India insists that its Indo-Pacific initiatives seek a cooperative order, that the Quad dialogue (of India, Japan, Australia and the U.S.) is not the nucleus of a politico-military alliance.
- Russia – China friendship: Russia accounted for 77% of China's arms imports in 2016-20 and India has raised apprehensions about their technology- and intelligence-sharing.
- Russia – Pakistan angle: Russian foreign minister recently visited Pakistan and highlighted that Russia would strengthen Pakistan's "counter-terrorism capability". This is being seen as a step to increase the Russian weapon supply to Pakistan. Russia is Pakistan's second largest defense supplier, accounting for 6.6% of its arms imports in 2016-20. Further both are cooperating on joint "counter-terrorism" drills and sharing perspectives on military tactics and strategic doctrines.
- New cold war: US is taking on both China and Russia thereby driving the two together and this is accelerating the move to bipolarity towards a new cold war.

Back to the Basics: What is the Quad grouping?

- The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD) also known as Quad, is an Inter-governmental security forum. It comprises of 4 countries– India, the United States, Japan and Australia. The member countries of the Quad organise summits, exchanges the information and military drills.
- In the year 2007, Prime Minister of Japan Shinzo Abe proposed the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. The forum was joined by the Vice President of the US Dick Cheney, Prime Minister John Howard of Australia and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. It was paralleled by joint military exercises of an unprecedented scale with the name Exercise Malabar.
- India's past experiment: Over the years, India has experimented with alliances of different kinds:
- During World War I, some nationalists aligned with imperial Germany to set up the first Indian government-in-exile in Kabul.
- During World War II, Subhas Chandra Bose joined forces with imperial Japan to set up a provisional government in Port Blair.
- Jawaharlal Nehru, who unveiled and championed non-alignment, signed security treaties with Bhutan, Nepal, and Sikkim. Also, Nehru, who actively opposed American alliances in Asia, turned to the US for military support in 1962.

The "Quad" Counter to China



Russia-India-China Grouping (RIC)

be inspired

- RIC is a strategic grouping that first took shape in the late 1990s under the leadership of Yevgeny Primakov, a Russian politician as “a counterbalance to the Western alliance.”
- The group was founded on the basis of ending its subservient foreign policy guided by the USA and renewing old ties with India and fostering the newly discovered friendship with China.
- Together, the RIC countries occupy over 19% of the global landmass and contribute to over 33% of global GDP.
- Even though India, China and Russia may disagree on a number of security issues in Eurasia, there are areas where their interests converge, like, for instance, on Afghanistan. RIC can ensure stable peace in Afghanistan and by extension, in Central Asia.

Indo-Pacific Region

- The “Indo-Pacific” idea was originally conceived in 2006- 07. The term ‘IndoPacific’ combines the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and the Western Pacific Region (WP) – inclusive of the contiguous seas off East Asia and Southeast Asia – into a singular regional construct.
- The idea has gained eminence in recent times due to:
 - Increasing geopolitical connect between the Indian Ocean and the western Pacific in both the geo-economics
 - Eastward shift of the world’s economic “centre of gravity” towards the Asian continent .
 - Growing Eminence of India
 - Politico-military aggressiveness of China.

Fundamental difference of Quad and Indo-Pacific:

- The Indo-Pacific a politico-economic vision and the Quad is a military-strategic vision however the Quad does not form the military or strategic nucleus of the Indo-Pacific.
- While the Indo-Pacific provides a complex political and economic picture with a hesitant, but growing, articulation of China as a strategic challenge, the Quad is inherently more anti-China in character and intent.

India’s Vision for Indo-Pacific: In the Shangri La Dialogue, India embraced the concept of IndoPacific and highlighted following points-

- It stands for a free, open, inclusive region, which embraces all in a common pursuit of progress and prosperity. It includes all nations in this geography as also others beyond who have a stake in it.
- Southeast Asia is at its Centre. And ASEAN central to its future.
- Evolve, through dialogue, a common rules-based order for the region. These rules and norms should be based on the consent of all, not on the power of the few.
- Rather than growing protectionism, India seeks for a level playing field for all. India stands for open and stable international trade regime.
- Connectivity is vital and India is doing its part, by itself and in partnership with others like Japan – in South Asia and Southeast Asia, in the Indian Ocean, Africa, West Asia and beyond.

India’s view can be summarized into five S in Hindi: Samman (respect); Samvad (dialogue); Sahyog (cooperation), Shanti (peace), and Samridhi (prosperity)

EU SLAPS NEW SANCTIONS ON BELARUS

Context:

European Union foreign ministers agreed to impose sanctions on scores of officials and several organizations in Belarus, and prepared a series of economic measures aimed at hitting President Alexander Lukashenko and his allies.

Relevance:

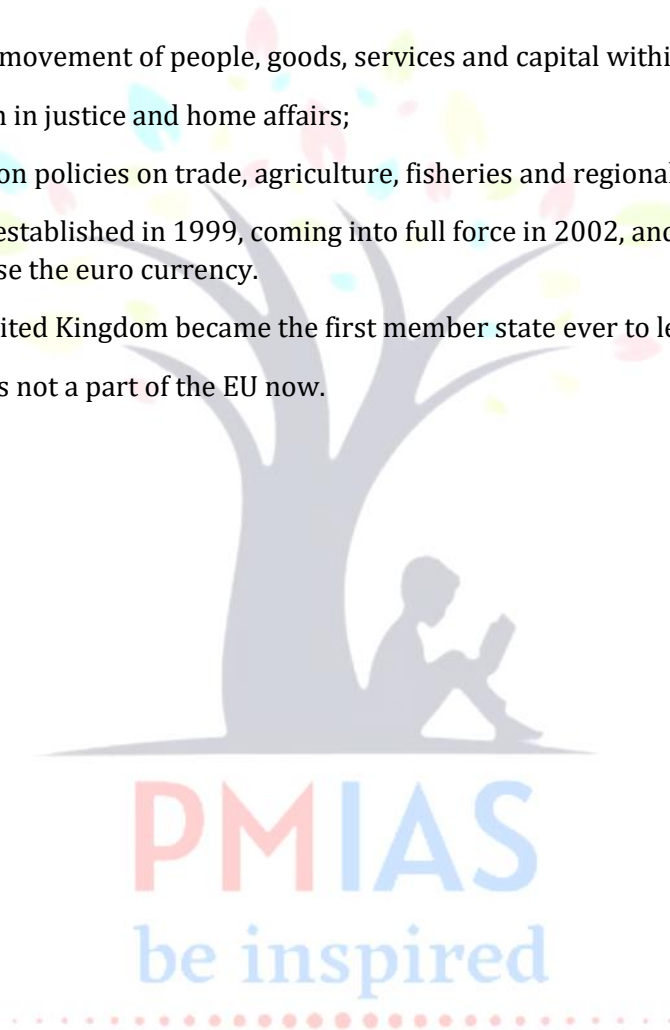
Prelims, GS-II: International Relations (Important International groupings), GS-I: Maps

Dimensions of the Article:

1. European Union
2. About Belarus
3. Recent Protests in Belarus

European Union

- The European Union (EU) is a political and economic union of 27 member states that are located primarily in Europe.
- The EU has developed an internal single market through a standardized system of laws that apply in all member states in those matters, and only those matters, where members have agreed to act as one.
- EU policies aim to
 - Ensure the free movement of people, goods, services and capital within the internal market;
 - Enact legislation in justice and home affairs;
 - Maintain common policies on trade, agriculture, fisheries and regional development.
- A monetary union was established in 1999, coming into full force in 2002, and is composed of 19 EU member states which use the euro currency.
- In January 2020, the United Kingdom became the first member state ever to leave the EU.
- Note: United Kingdom is not a part of the EU now.





About Belarus

- Belarus is a landlocked country in Eastern Europe bordered by Russia to the east and northeast, Ukraine to the south, Poland to the west, and Lithuania and Latvia to the northwest.
- Belarus is the thirteenth-largest and the twentieth-most populous country in Europe and Minsk is the capital and largest city.
- Belarus is a developing country ranking very high in the Human Development Index.
- It has been a member of the United Nations since its founding as well as a member of the CIS, the CSTO, the EAEU, the OSCE and the Non-Aligned Movement.
- It has shown no aspirations for joining the European Union but nevertheless maintains a bilateral relationship with the bloc, and likewise participates in two EU projects: the Eastern Partnership and the Baku Initiative.
- The parliament of the republic proclaimed the sovereignty of Belarus in 1990 and during the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Belarus declared independence in 1991.

- Alexander Lukashenko was elected Belarus's first president in the country's first and only free election post-independence, serving as president ever since.
- Lukashenko's government is widely considered to be authoritarian and human rights groups consider human rights in the country to be poor.
- Lukashenko has continued a number of Soviet-era policies, such as state ownership of large sections of the economy.



Recent Protests in Belarus

- Belarus is gripped by mass protests, triggered by an election widely believed to have been rigged in favour of the long-time leader Alexander Lukashenko.
- The scale of the protests is unprecedented for Belarus and more than 600 people were detained during the September 2020 protests.
- After violent clashes with opposition demonstrators, numerous allegations of police brutality, processions of women in white with roses and walkouts at major state enterprises.

What is the background?

- Europe's longest-serving ruler, President Lukashenko took office in 1994 amid the chaos caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.
- Often described as Europe's "last dictator", he has tried to preserve elements of Soviet communism. Much of manufacturing has remained under state control, and main media channels have been loyal to the government. The powerful secret police is even still called the KGB.
- At the same time, Mr Lukashenko has tried to style himself as a tough nationalist with a direct manner, defending his country from harmful foreign influences, and a guarantor of stability.
- These factors have given him – until now – a solid base of support, though elections under his rule have never been considered free or fair.

- The opposition protests have been fuelled by complaints about widespread corruption and poverty, a lack of opportunities and low pay. Dissatisfaction was compounded by the coronavirus crisis.

AT UNHRC, GRAVE CONCERNS RAISED OVER XINJIANG

Context:

More than 40 countries led by Canada voiced grave concerns at the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) about China's actions in Xinjiang, Hong Kong and Tibet — triggering a fierce backlash from Beijing.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Important International Institutions, India's Neighbors)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)
2. About the recent move in UNHRC against Chinese activities
3. Who are Uyghurs?
4. What are the accusations Levelled against China?

About United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)

- The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is a United Nations body whose mission is to promote and protect human rights around the world. The headquarters of the Council is in Geneva, Switzerland.
- The Council has 47 members elected for staggered three-year terms on a regional group basis.
- The Council investigates allegations of breaches of human rights in United Nations member states, and addresses thematic human rights issues such as freedom of association and assembly, freedom of expression, freedom of belief and religion, women's rights, LGBT rights, and the rights of racial and ethnic minorities.
- The members of the United Nations General Assembly elect the members who occupy 47 seats of the United Nations Human Rights Council. **The term of each seat is three years, and no member may occupy a seat for more than two consecutive terms.**
- The seats are distributed among the United Nations regional groups as follows: 13 for Africa, 13 for Asia, six for Eastern Europe, eight for Latin America and the Caribbean (GRULAC), and seven for the Western European and Others Group (WEOG).
- **The UNHRC holds regular sessions three times a year, in March, June, and September.** The UNHRC can decide at any time to hold a special session to address human rights violations and emergencies, at the request of one-third of the member states.

About the recent move in UNHRC against Chinese activities

- Countries voiced concerns against China's actions in Xinjiang, Hong Kong and Tibet and this statement was backed by Australia, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Spain and the U.S., among others.
- It was said that credible reports indicate that over a million people have been arbitrarily detained in Xinjiang and that there is widespread surveillance disproportionately targeting Uyghurs and members of other minorities and restrictions on fundamental freedoms and Uyghur culture.

- The statement cited reports of torture or cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment or punishment, forced sterilisation, sexual and gender-based violence, and forced separation of children from their parents.

Who are Uyghurs?

- Uyghurs are predominately Turkic-speaking Sunni Muslims who live primarily in the autonomous region of Xinjiang. Islam came to the region in the 10th century. Prior to Islam, the Uyghurs embraced Buddhism, Shamanism, and Manicheism.
- Uyghurs embraced Islam in 934 during the Karahanid Kingdom. Kashgar, the capital of the Kingdom, quickly became one of the major learning centers of Islam.
- Art, the sciences, music and literature flourished as Islamic religious institutions nurtured the pursuit of an advanced culture. In this period, hundreds of world-renowned Uyghur scholars emerged.
- Uyghurs played an important role in cultural exchanges between the East and West and developed a unique culture and civilization of their own based on Islam.



What are the accusations Levelled against China?

- China is accused of encouraging internal migration into the Xinjiang province to increase the non-Uyghur population and power in the region.
- In recent years, there have been many reports of students, teachers, and civil servants have been forbidden from fasting during Ramadan, forbidden from wearing their traditional dress and even keeping a beard.
- Uyghurs continue to be the only population in China consistently subjected to executions for political crimes, and these executions are often both summary and public. With the rise of China as the expected superpower of the 21st century, such repressive policies against the Uyghur Muslims are likely to get worse.

IAF, NAVY MATCH SKILLS WITH U.S. TEAM

Context:

The Indian Navy and the Air Force began a two-day passage exercise with U.S. Navy Carrier Strike Group (CSG) Ronald Reagan during its transit through the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

Relevance:

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About the U.S. India 2-day passage exercise
2. U.S. Security Cooperation With India

About the U.S. India 2-day passage exercise

- The Indian Naval warships along with aircraft from Navy and Indian Air Force (IAF) are engaged in joint multi-domain operations with the U.S. Carrier Strike Group.
- The exercise aims to strengthen the bilateral relationship and cooperation by demonstrating the ability to integrate and coordinate comprehensively in maritime operations.

U.S. Security Cooperation With India

- In 2016, the United States designated India as a Major Defense Partner. Commensurate with this designation, in 2018, India was elevated to Strategic Trade Authorization tier 1 status, which allows India to receive license-free access to a wide range of military and dual-use technologies regulated by the Department of Commerce.
- U.S.-India defense trade cooperation continues to expand with the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), Communications, Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), and the Industrial Security Agreement (ISA) now in place.
- Since 2015, the United States also authorized India over \$3 billion in defense articles via the Direct Commercial Sales (DCS) process, which licenses the export of the defense equipment, services, and related manufacturing technologies controlled under the 21 categories of the U.S. Munitions List (USML).
- From 2016 to 2019, India and the United States jointly taught the UN Peacekeeping Course for African Partners. These courses, conducted in New Delhi and organized for officers from 23 African troop and police contributing countries, were co-sponsored by the U.S. Global Peace Operations Initiative, and taught by U.S., Indian, and African course alumni.
- In November 2019, the United States and India conducted Tiger Triumph, the first-ever tri-service (ground, naval, and air forces) exercise between the two countries. Such military exercises enhance U.S.-India relations and help create a more stable and secure Indo-Pacific region.

THE ANTARCTIC TREATY IS TURNING 60

Context:

The 1959 Antarctic Treaty celebrates its 60th anniversary on June 23rd 2021.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Important International Treaties, Important International Groupings and Agreements)

Dimensions of the Article:

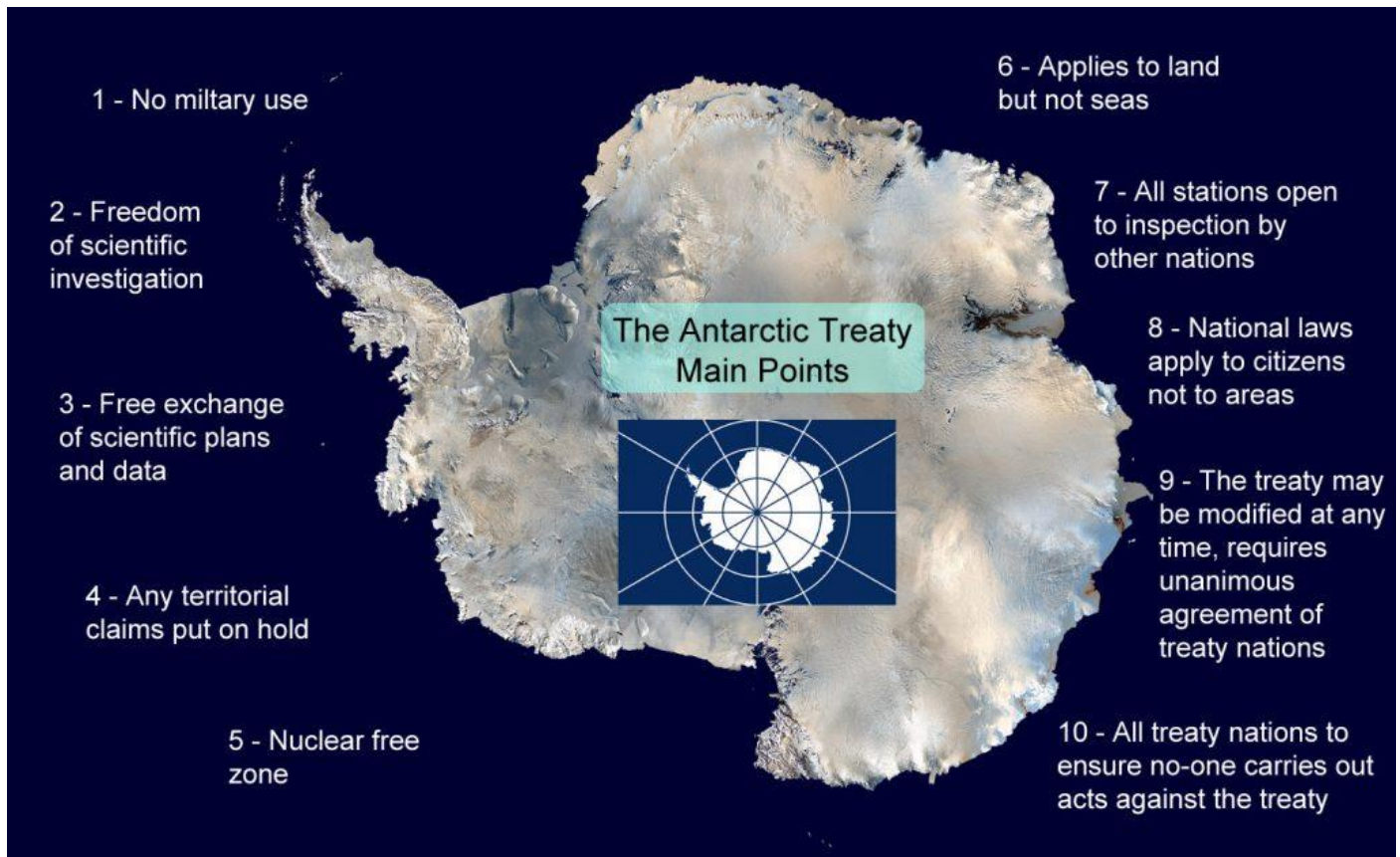
1. Antarctic Treaty System
2. About the Antarctic Treaty
3. About the claims on Antarctica and the principle of the treaty
4. India's programmes in Antarctica

Antarctic Treaty System

- The Antarctic Treaty and related agreements, collectively known as the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS), regulate international relations with respect to Antarctica, Earth's only continent without a native human population.
- For the purposes of the treaty system, Antarctica is defined as all of the land and ice shelves south of 60°S latitude. The treaty entered into force in 1961 and currently has 54 parties.
- The treaty sets aside Antarctica as a scientific preserve, establishes freedom of scientific investigation, and bans military activity on the continent.
- The treaty was the first arms control agreement established during the Cold War.
- The Antarctic Treaty System's yearly Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meetings (ATCM) are the international forum for the administration and management of the region.
- Only 29 of the 54 parties to the agreements have the right to participate in decision-making at these meetings, though the other 25 are still allowed to attend.
- Major International Agreements of the Treaty System:
 1. The 1959 Antarctic Treaty.
 2. The 1972 Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Seals.
 3. The 1980 Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources.
 4. The 1991 Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty.

About the Antarctic Treaty

- The Antarctic Treaty was signed between 12 countries in Washington on 1st December 1959 for making the Antarctic Continent a demilitarized zone to be preserved for scientific research only.
- The twelve original signatories are Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Chile, France, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the UK and the US.
- Major Provisions of the Antarctic Treaty:
 - Promoting the freedom of scientific research.
 - Countries can use the continent only for peaceful purposes.
 - Prohibition of military activities, nuclear tests and the disposal of radioactive waste.
 - Neutralising territorial sovereignty, this means a limit was placed on making any new claim or enlargement of an existing claim.
- It put a freeze on any disputes between claimants over their territories on the continent.



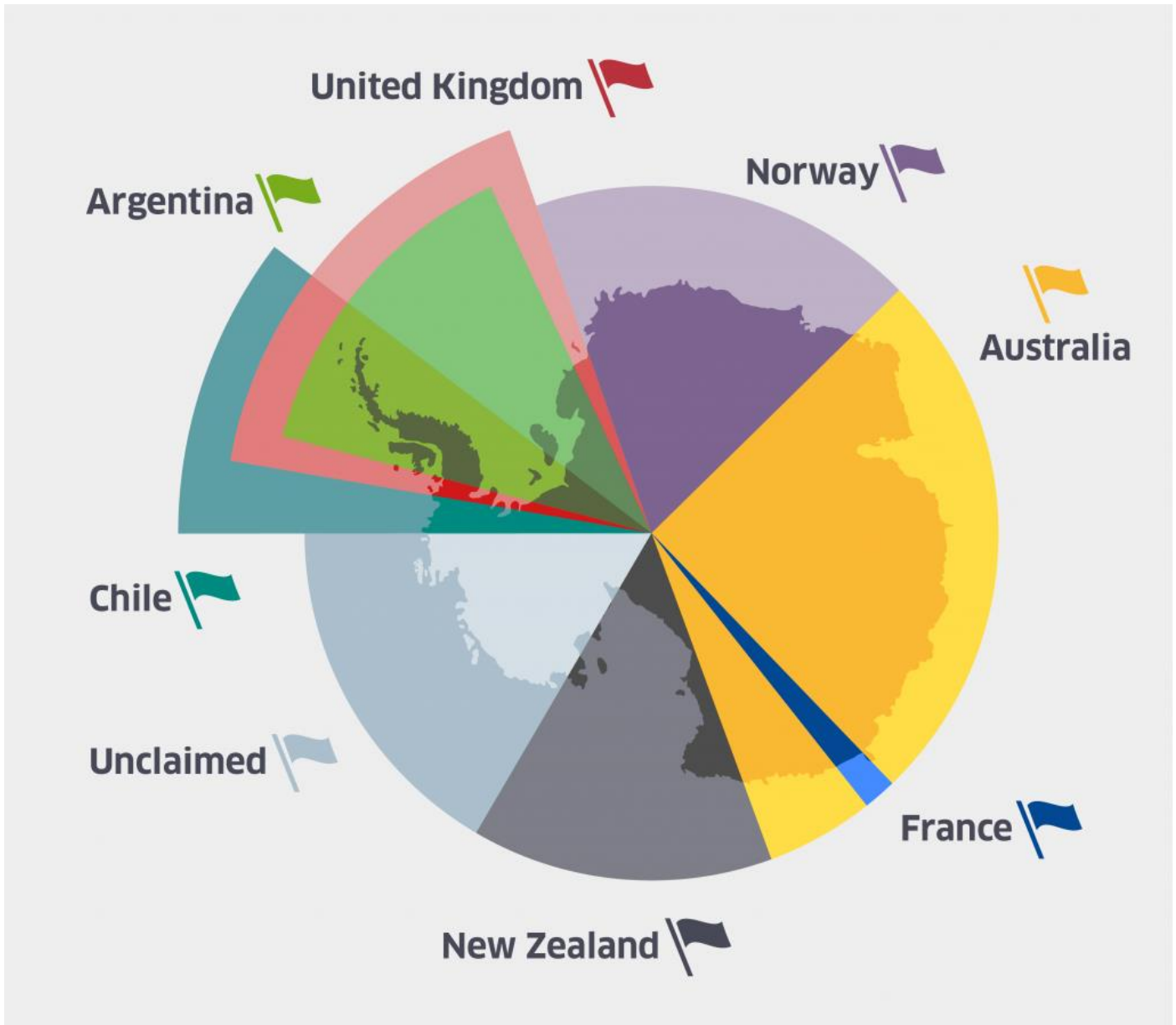
How the treaty has expanded in its 60 years?

- Though the compact has held for 60 years, there have been tensions from time to time. Argentina and the UK, for instance, have overlapping claims to territory on the continent. When combined with their ongoing dispute over the nearby Falkland (Malvinas) Islands, their Antarctic relationship remains frosty.
- A key reason why the treaty has been able to survive has been its ability to evolve through a number of additional conventions and other legal protocols. These have dealt with the conservation of marine living resources, prohibitions on mining, and the adoption of comprehensive environmental protection mechanisms.
- Membership of the treaty has grown in the intervening years, with 54 signatories today.
- Building, operating and conducting scientific research programs are key to the success not only of the treaty, but also to the claimants' credibility in Antarctica.

About the claims on Antarctica and the principle of the treaty

- Antarctica currently has no permanent population and therefore it has no citizenship nor government.
- Personnel present on Antarctica at any time are almost always citizens or nationals of some sovereignty outside Antarctica, as there is no Antarctic sovereignty.
- The majority of Antarctica is claimed by one or more countries, but most countries do not explicitly recognize those claims.
- The area on the mainland between 90 degrees west and 150 degrees west is the only major land on Earth not claimed by any country.
- Governments that are party to the Antarctic Treaty and its Protocol on Environmental Protection implement the articles of these agreements, and decisions taken under them, through national laws.

- These laws generally apply only to their own citizens, wherever they are in Antarctica, and serve to enforce the consensus decisions of the consultative parties: about which activities are acceptable, which areas require permits to enter, what processes of environmental impact assessment must precede activities, and so on.
- The Antarctic Treaty is often considered to represent an example of the common heritage of mankind principle.



India's programmes in Antarctica

- **Indian Antarctic Programme:** The Indian Antarctic Programme is a scientific research and exploration program under the National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research (NCPOR) that started in 1981 when the first Indian expedition to Antarctica was made.
- **Dakshin Gangotri:** Dakshin Gangotri was the first Indian scientific research base station established in Antarctica, as a part of the Indian Antarctic Program. However, now it has weakened and become just a supply base.
- **Maitri:** Maitri is India's second permanent research station in Antarctica. It was built and finished in 1989 and is situated on the rocky mountainous region called Schirmacher Oasis.

- **Bharti:** Bharti, India's latest research station operation since 2012. It has been constructed to help researchers work in safety despite the harsh weather and it is India's first committed research facility and is located about 3000 km east of Maitri.

RUSSIA, U.K. SPAR OVER BLACK SEA INCIDENT

Context:

Russia accused Britain of spreading lies over a warship confrontation in the Black Sea and warned Britain that it would respond resolutely to any further provocative actions by the British Navy off the coast of Russia-annexed Crimea.

Relevance:

Prelims, GS-II: International Relations, GS-I: Geography (Maps)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About the current issue between Russia and U.K.
2. Annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation
3. About the Black Sea

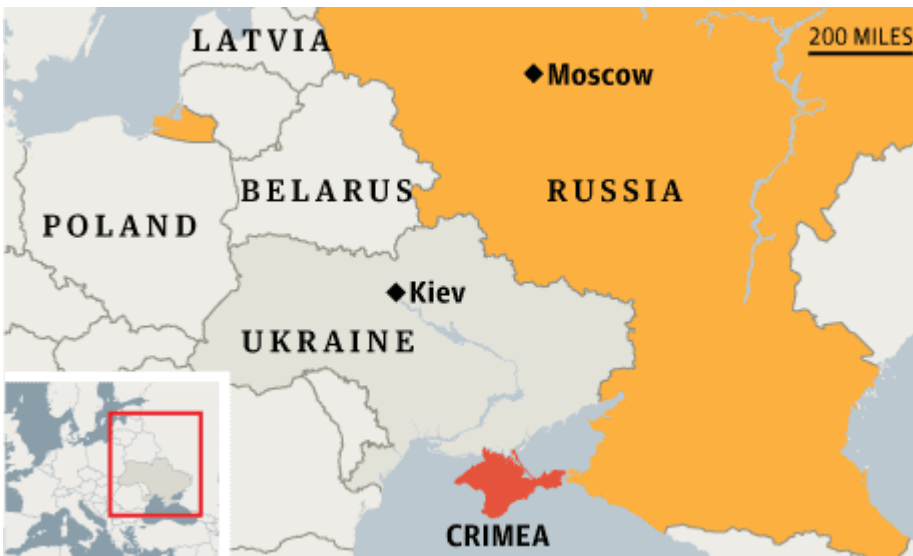
About the current issue between Russia and U.K.

- Russia said that it had fired warning shots and dropped bombs in the path of a British warship to chase it out of waters Moscow claims in the Black Sea off the coast of the Crimea peninsula.
- Britain rejected Russia's account of the incident, saying it believed any shots fired were a pre-announced Russian "gunnery exercise", and that no bombs had been dropped.
- However, Britain confirmed that its destroyer, HMS Defender, had sailed through what it described as waters belonging to Ukraine.
- According to Britain, the ship was "conducting an innocent passage through Ukrainian territorial waters in accordance with international law".
- Military experts said that whether or not the details of the Russian or British accounts were accurate, the incident appeared to represent an escalation in confrontation between the West and Russia over disputed sea lanes.
- Russia seized and annexed the Crimea peninsula from Ukraine in 2014 and considers areas around the peninsula's coast to be Russian waters. Western countries deem the Crimea part of Ukraine and reject Russia's claim to the seas around it.

Annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation

- The Crimean Peninsula, north of the Black Sea in Eastern Europe, was annexed by the Russian Federation in 2014 and since then has been administered as two Russian federal subjects—the Republic of Crimea and the federal city of Sevastopol.
- The annexation from Ukraine followed a Russian military intervention in Crimea that took place in the aftermath of the 2014 Ukrainian revolution and was part of wider 2014 pro-Russian unrest in Ukraine.
- Ukraine and many other countries condemned the annexation and consider it to be a violation of international law and Russian-signed agreements safeguarding the territorial integrity of Ukraine, including the 1991 Belavezha Accords, the 1975 Helsinki Accords, the 1994 Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances and the 1997 Treaty.

- In 2016, the UN General Assembly reaffirmed non-recognition of the annexation and condemned “the temporary occupation of part of the territory of Ukraine—the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol”.
- The Russian government opposes the “annexation” label, with Putin defending the referendum as complying with the principle of self-determination of peoples.



About the Black Sea

- The Black Sea is a marginal sea of the Atlantic Ocean lying between Europe and Asia; east of the Balkans (Southeast Europe), south of the East European Plain in Eastern Europe, west of the Caucasus, and north of Anatolia in Western Asia.
- The Black Sea is bordered by Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey, and Ukraine.
- The Black Sea ultimately drains into the Mediterranean Sea, via the Turkish Straits and the Aegean Sea.
- The Bosphorus Strait connects it to the small Sea of Marmara which in turn is connected to the Aegean Sea via the Strait of the Dardanelles. To the north, the Black Sea is connected to the Sea of Azov by the Kerch Strait.



RE-ENERGISING INDIA'S AFRICA POLICY

Context:

The Narendra Modi government designed a forward-looking strategy to deepen relations with African countries. Even as the COVID-19 era began in March 2020, New Delhi took new initiatives to assist Africa through prompt despatch of medicines and later vaccines.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Foreign Policies affecting India's Interests)

Mains Questions:

Critically examine the implementation of India's Africa policy and suggest ways to make new commitments and improve Africa-India relations. (10 marks)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. The History of Africa-India relations
2. Modern-day relations between India and Africa
3. India's Support to Africa
4. Asia-Africa Growth Corridor
5. The macro-picture: Latest Developments

The History of Africa-India relations

Ancient ties

- Africa and India are separated by the Indian Ocean and the geographical proximity between the Horn of Africa and the Indian subcontinent has played an important role in the development of the relationship since ancient times.
- Indo-African relations date back to the Bronze Age period of the Indus Valley civilization, Pearl millet first domesticated in Africa have been discovered from the site of Chanhru Daro and there is at least one burial of African women from the same site as well.
- It is thus postulated that Indus valley maritime activities included journey to the horn of Africa and bringing back African crops along with African diaspora to the Indus valley since Pearl millet was cultivated in South Asia since 2nd millennium BC but there is no such evidence from the Near East.
- In the 2nd century BC the Greek's accounts of Ptolemaic Egypt and its trade relations mention Indian ships making the trip and Greeks began to utilize this knowledge from Indian sailors to conduct maritime activities in the Indian Ocean and conduct business with the Indians directly instead of relying on the middle men, when Romans replaced the Greek administration in Egypt, this began a 400-year period of trade relations between the Roman Empire and India.
- The Greek Ptolemaic dynasty and India had developed bilateral trade using the Red Sea and Indian ports.
- With the establishment of Roman Egypt, the Romans took over and further developed the already existing trade.

- Relations attained stronger levels during medieval times due to the development of trade routes between the Mediterranean and Asia, through Arabia. Zheng He, a Chinese admiral met with the Malindi envoy present in Bengal.

Post-Independent relations

- During the British colonial rule in the Indian Subcontinent and large parts of Africa, the Indian city of Mumbai was already a center of ivory trade between East Africa and Britain.
- The stay of Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa between 1893 and 1915 remains one of the main events which paved the road to the modern-day political relations.
- At the wake of the Cold War, many African countries joined the non-aligned movement pioneered by Egypt, Ghana, India, Indonesia and Yugoslavia. During the years of decolonisation, India exerted considerable political and ideological influence in Africa as a role model and a leader of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Modern-day relations between India and Africa

- India, for the first time, constituted the basic framework for the relations under the South-South Cooperation platform in the India-Africa Forum Summit, which was held in 2008.
- The India–Africa Forum Summit (IAFS) is the official platform for African-Indian relations. The IAFS is held once in every three years.
- Trade between India & Africa has grown exponentially during the past 15 years and India has emerged as Africa's fourth largest trade partner behind China, EU & USA whilst Africa has emerged as India's sixth largest trading partner behind EU, China, UAE, USA & ASEAN.
- India's top three exports to Africa are mineral fuels and oils (processed petroleum products), pharmaceutical products and vehicles. Mineral fuels and oils, (essentially crude oil) and pearls, precious or semi-precious stones are the top two imports accounting for over 77% of our imports from Africa.
- Increasing Political and Economic Engagement: In the last few years, Africa has been the focus of India's development assistance and also diplomatic outreach, as evident in plans to open 18 new embassies.

India's Support to Africa

- In 2006, India launched its flagship aid initiative in Africa by constructing the \$125 million Pan-African e-Network, the continent's largest tele-education and telemedicine initiative.
- India's duty-free tariff preferential scheme for Least Developed Nation (LDCs) launched in 2008 has benefited 33 African states.
- After South Asia, Africa is the second-largest recipient of Indian overseas assistance with Lines of Credit (LOC) worth nearly \$10 billion (nearly 40% of the total LOC globally) spread over 100 projects in 41 countries.
- India is investing in the capacity building providing more than \$1 billion in technical assistance and training to personnel under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) program.
- Approximately 6,000 Indian soldiers are deployed in UN peace-keeping missions in conflict zones in Africa.

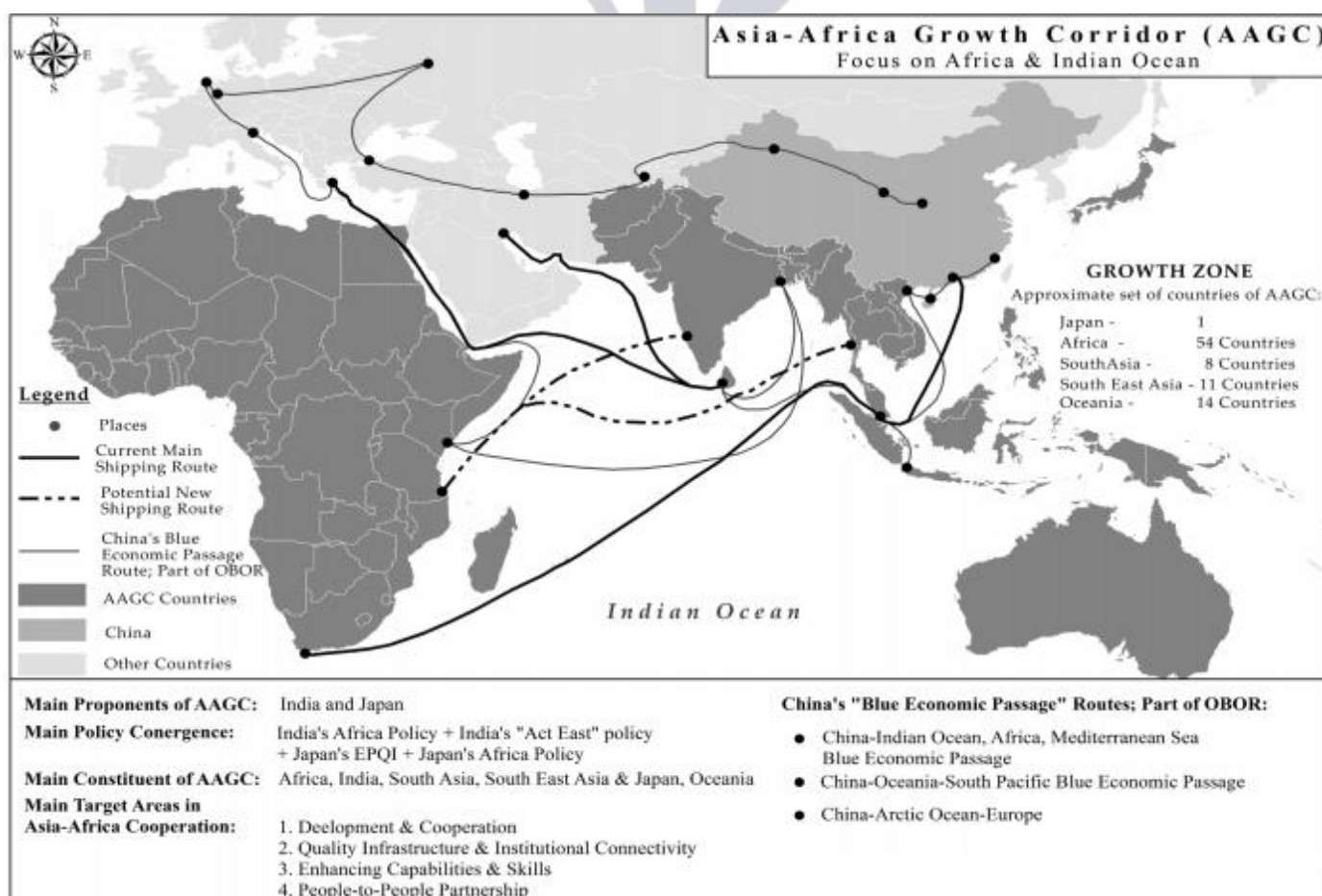
Support in Fight Against Covid-19

- Under the e-ITEC initiative, India has shared Covid-19 management strategies, training webinars exclusively aimed at training health-care professionals from Africa by Indian health experts.

- India is also sending consignments of essential medicines, including hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) and paracetamol, to many African countries in addition to doctors and paramedics.

Asia-Africa Growth Corridor

- The Asia-Africa Growth Corridor or AAGC is an economic cooperation agreement between the governments of India, Japan and multiple African countries.
- India launched a vision document for Asia-Africa Growth Corridor or AAGC at the African Development Bank meeting in 2017.
- It aims for Indo-Japanese collaboration to develop quality infrastructure in Africa, complemented by digital connectivity, which would undertake the realization of the idea of creating free and open Indo-Pacific Region.
- The AAGC will give priority to development projects in health and pharmaceuticals, agriculture and agro-processing, disaster management and skill enhancement.
- The connectivity aspects of the AAGC will be supplemented with quality infrastructure.
- Unlike OBOR, now BRI (Belt and Road Initiative), which entails development of both land corridor (new economic belt) and ocean (marine silk road), AAGC will essentially be a sea corridor linking Africa with India and other countries of South-East Asia and Oceania by reviving ancient sea-routes and creating new sea corridors that will link ports in Jamnagar (Gujarat) with Djibouti in the Gulf of Aden and similarly the ports of Mombasa and Zanzibar will be connected to ports near Madurai; Kolkata will be linked to Sittwe port in Myanmar.



The macro-picture: Latest Developments

- The latest economic data confirms what was apprehended by experts: India-Africa trade is on a decline.
- India's investments in Africa too saw a decrease from \$3.2 billion in 2019-20 to \$2.9 billion in 2020-21.
- India's total investments in Africa over 25 years, from 1996 to 2021 is only about one-third of China's investment in Africa.
- A recent Gateway House study showed that Africa experienced a sharpened international competition, known as 'the third scramble', in the first two decades of the 21st century – Countries from Americas, Europe and Asia have striven to assist Africa in resolving the continent's political and social challenges and, in turn, to benefit from Africa's markets, minerals, hydrocarbons and oceanic resources, and thereby to expand their geopolitical influence.
- Geopolitical tensions in Asia and the imperative to consolidate its position in the Indo-Pacific region have compelled New Delhi to concentrate on its ties with the United Kingdom, the EU, and the Quad powers, particularly the U.S. Consequently, the attention normally paid to Africa lost out.
- For mutual benefit, Africa and India should remain optimally engaged and, on this note, India's External Affairs Minister highlighted India's role in peacekeeping in Africa, in lending support to African counter-terrorism operations, and contributing to African institutions through training and capacity-enhancing assistance and assured that India's aid for economic development in the African continent is set to continue at the UNSC.

Way Forward

- The third India-Africa Forum Summit was held in 2015. The fourth summit, pending since last year, should be held as soon as possible, even if in a virtual format. Fresh financial resources for grants and concessional loans to Africa must be allocated, as previous allocations stand almost fully exhausted.
- The promotion of economic relations demands a higher priority. Industry representatives should be consulted about their grievances and challenges in the COVID-19 era.
- It is essential "to impart a 21st century complexion to the partnership with Africa" and this means developing and deepening collaborations in health, space and digital technologies.
- To overcome the China challenge in Africa, increased cooperation between India and its international allies takes priority and the recent India-EU Summit has identified Africa as a region where a partnership-based approach will be followed.
- India has an intrinsic interest in helping Africa achieve progress. The spirit of "developing together as equals" defines this bilateral partnership.
- A resurging Africa and a rising India can give a strong impetus to South-South Cooperation, especially when it comes to addressing challenges in areas like clean technology, climate-resilient agriculture, maritime security, connectivity, and Blue economy.

PAKISTAN TO STAY ON FATF 'GREYLIST'

Context:

Pakistan was retained on the greylist, or list of countries under "increased monitoring", at the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) once again, as the Paris-based UN watchdog judged it deficient in prosecuting the top leadership of UN Security Council-designated terror groups; the list includes Lashkar-e Taiba, Jaish-e Mohammad, Al Qaeda and the Taliban.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (International Groupings or Agreements affecting India's Interests, India's neighbors), GS-III: Internal Security Challenges (Terrorism in Hinterland & Border Areas)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Financial Action Task Force (FATF)
2. FATF Greylists
3. FATF Blacklists
4. About the recent FATF decision

Financial Action Task Force (FATF)

- The Financial Action Task Force (on Money Laundering) (FATF) is an intergovernmental organisation founded in 1989 on the initiative of the G7 to develop policies to combat money laundering.
- In 2001, its mandate was expanded to include terrorism financing.
- FATF is a “policy-making body” that works to generate the necessary political will to bring about national legislative and regulatory reforms in these areas.
- FATF monitors progress in implementing its Recommendations through “peer reviews” (“mutual evaluations”) of member countries.
- Since 2000, FATF has maintained the FATF blacklist (formally called the “Call for action”) and the FATF greylist (formally called the “Other monitored jurisdictions”).
- The objectives of FATF are to set standards and promote effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering, terrorist financing and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system.

FATF Greylists

- FATF greylist is officially referred to as Jurisdictions Under Increased Monitoring.
- FATF grey list represent a much higher risk of money laundering and terrorism financing but have formally committed to working with the FATF to develop action plans that will address their AML/CFT deficiencies.
- The countries on the grey list are subject to increased monitoring by the FATF, which either assesses them directly or uses FATF-style regional bodies (FSRBs) to report on the progress they are making towards their AML/CFT goals.
- While grey-list classification is not as negative as the blacklist, countries on the list may still face economic sanctions from institutions like the IMF and the World Bank and experience adverse effects on trade.
- Unlike the next level “blacklist”, greylisting carries no legal sanctions, but it attracts economic strictures and restricts a country’s access to international loans

FATF Blacklists

- FATF Blacklists is Officially known as High-Risk Jurisdictions subject to a Call for Action.
- FATF blacklist sets out the countries that are considered deficient in their anti-money laundering and counter-financing of terrorism regulatory regimes.
- The list is intended to serve not only as a way of negatively highlighting these countries on the world stage, but as a warning of the high money laundering and terror financing risk that they present.
- It is extremely likely that blacklisted countries will be subject to economic sanctions and other prohibitive measures by FATF member states and other international organizations.

Effects of FATF Blacklisting

- The effect of the FATF Blacklist has been significant, and arguably has proven more important in international efforts against money laundering than has the FATF Recommendations.
- While, under international law, the FATF Blacklist carried with it no formal sanction, in reality, a jurisdiction placed on the FATF Blacklist often found itself under intense financial pressure.
- FATF makes sure funds are not easily accessible by terror organisations that are causing crimes against humanity.
- FATF has helped to fight against corruption by 'grey-listing' countries that do not meet Recommended Criteria and this helps to cripple economies and states that are aiding terrorist and corrupted organisations.

About the recent FATF decision

- Announcing the decision at the end of its latest Plenary session held virtually from June 21-25, the FATF said despite completing 26 of the 27 tasks it had been handed, Pakistan's failure to complete the last task on convicting terrorists and terror entities meant it would not be delisted for now.
- In addition, the FATF has handed down another 6-point list of tasks mainly on money laundering actions to be completed as well.
- The FATF encourages Pakistan to continue to make progress to address as soon as possible the one remaining Countering Finance of Terrorism (CFT)-related item by demonstrating that Terror Financing investigations and prosecutions target senior leaders and commanders of UN-designated terrorist groups.
- During the FATF proceedings, Pakistan is believed to have provided documentation to show that it has prosecuted around 30 UNSC designated terrorists and their associates, charging them in 70 terror financing cases, of which convictions were granted in about 50 cases.
- Among the tasks handed down by the FATF on Friday, apart from the need to prosecute all UNSC terror entities successfully and seeking assistance from foreign countries to implement the UNSC designations, Pakistan is expected to amend its Money-Laundering Act, crackdown on Designated Non-Financial Businesses and Professions (DNFBPs) like real estate agencies and gemstone traders, confiscate and freeze assets of money laundering entities and monitoring businesses for proliferation financing, with sanctions for non-compliance.

India 'politicising' FATF process: Pakistan

- Reacting to the FATF decision at a press conference in Islamabad, Pakistan's Energy minister accused India of attempting to "politicise the process" at the FATF.
- In the weeks leading up to the FATF plenary, Pakistan had been fairly confident of being let off the greylist during this session.
- Pakistan's Foreign Minister had estimated a loss of \$10 billion annually to the Pakistani economy for every year Pakistan has been on the greylist.

TIBET GETS FIRST BULLET TRAIN FROM LHASA TO BORDER

Context:

China started operating the first bullet train line in Tibet, linking Lhasa to Nyingchi near the border with Arunachal Pradesh.

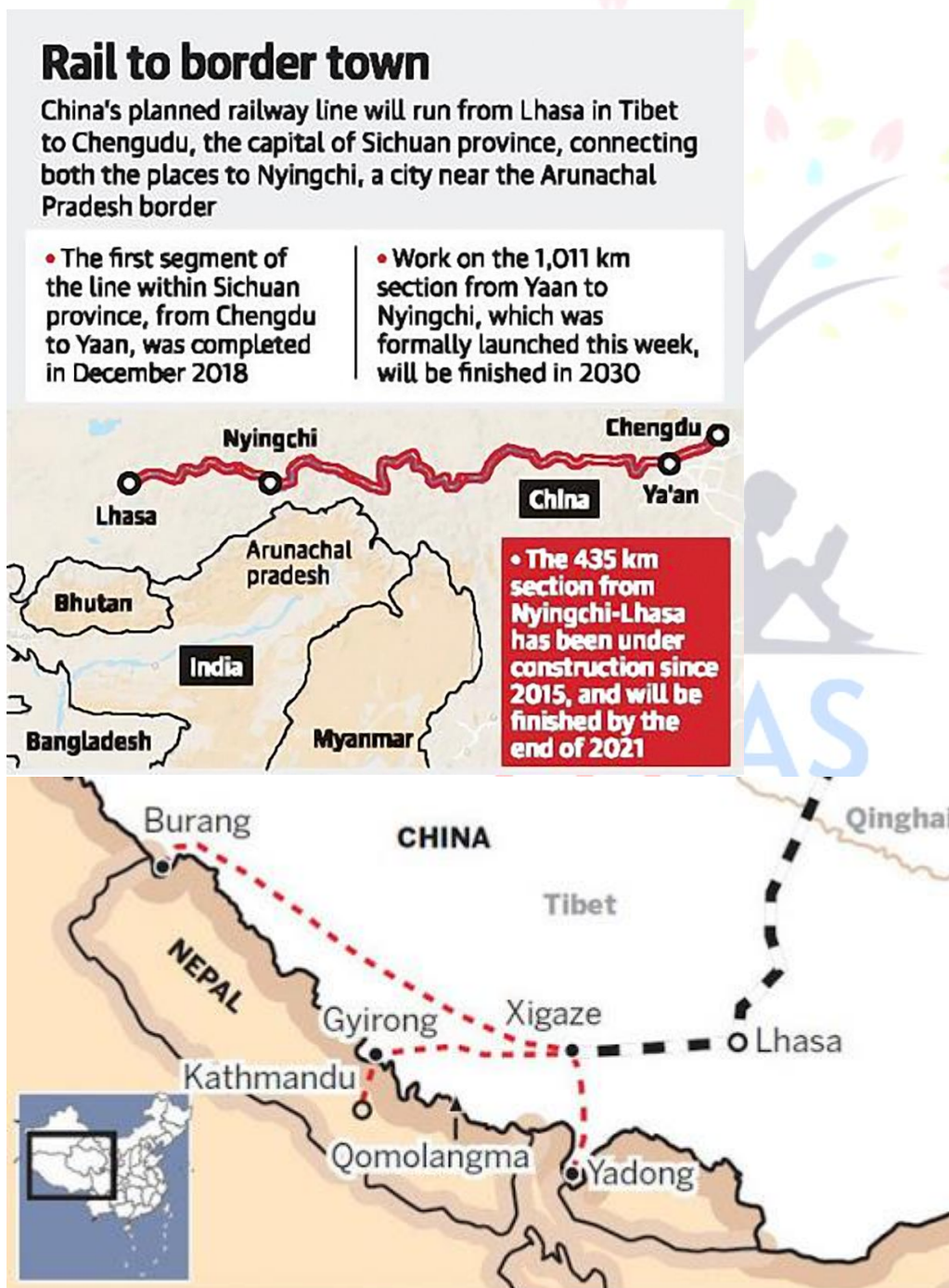
Relevance:

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About China's Railway Near Arunachal Border
2. China's push in Border Infrastructure and reasons
3. Steps Taken by India to counter Chinese infrastructure in Border
4. India's Border Area Development Programme (BADP)

About China's Railway Near Arunachal Border

- Lhasa-Nyingchi rail line is the second route linking Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) with mainland China – the Qinghai-Tibet railway line that connected Lhasa to the hinterland is the first such line.



Source: Tibet regional government

- The China State Railway Group said that the new Railway line operating the first bullet train, on which construction began in 2014, would connect the capital city of the Tibet Autonomous Region to the border city of Nyingchi with a travel time of three and a half hours.
- Over 90% of the track is 3000 metres above sea-level, state media quoted the railway group as saying, and the line is the first electrified high speed rail (HSR) line, as China refers to bullet trains, in Tibet.
- The Lhasa-Nyingchi rail is one among several major infrastructure projects recently completed in Tibet's southern and southeastern counties near the Arunachal border.
- The Lhasa-Nyingchi rail is one section of the Sichuan-Tibet railway line connecting the two provincial capitals

Security Concerns regarding the railway line for India

- The railway line will largely improve the efficiency and convenience of military personnel and material transportation and logistical supplies in the border area.
- In situations of direct standoff near Arunachal Pradesh border, as was seen during Doklam or recent Ladakh standoff, China might be at an advantageous position.

China's push in Border Infrastructure and reasons

- A part of the border infrastructure push is the construction of new civilian settlements — along with the expansion of existing smaller hamlets — along border areas, some of which lie in disputed territories claimed by India and Bhutan, to strengthen China's control over the land.
- In 2017, the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) government launched a plan to build “moderately well-off villages” in border areas, of which many would be developed in the prefectures of Ngari, Shigatse, Shannan and Nyingchi, along China's borders with India, Bhutan and Nepal.
- In 2020, satellite images emerged showing a new village called Pangda built 2-3 km into what Bhutan sees as its land.
- In January 2021, another village built newly 4-5 km into what India sees as its territory in Arunachal came to light via satellite images. Indian officials said this land has been under China's effective control since 1959 and there were military barracks there earlier.
- The civilian settlements, along with the new infrastructure connectivity, are seen as aimed at bolstering China's control over the areas.

Steps Taken by India to counter Chinese infrastructure in Border

- The Border Roads Organisation (BRO) constructed the Daporijo bridge over Subansiri river in Arunachal Pradesh which links roads leading upto the Line of Actual Control (LAC) between India and China, in a record span of just 27 days.
- The foundation of a tunnel at Nechiphu in West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh which will shorten travel time for troops till the LAC through Tawang, which China claims to be its territory was laid.
- The BRO is already constructing an all-weather tunnel under the Se La pass in Arunachal Pradesh which connects Tawang to the rest of Arunachal and Guwahati.
- The state government of Arunachal Pradesh has advocated selection of 10 census towns along the India-China border as pilot projects for infrastructure development in order to stop people living along its international borders, specifically with China, from migrating to faraway urban centres in the State.

- Sisseri River Bridge located at lower Dibang Valley in Arunachal Pradesh connecting Dibang Valley and Siang was inaugurated.
- In 2019, the Indian Air Force inaugurated resurfaced runway at India's easternmost Village-Vijaynagar (Changlang district) in Arunachal Pradesh.
- Bogibeel bridge, which is India's longest road-rail bridge connecting Dibrugarh in Assam to Pasighat in Arunachal Pradesh was inaugurated in 2018.
- India is set to spend 10% funds of the Border Area Development Programme (BADP) only to improve the infrastructure along the China border.

India's Border Area Development Programme (BADP)

- The Border Area Development Programme (BADP) was launched by the Ministry of Home Affairs in 1986-87 as part of a comprehensive approach to Border Management.
- BADP was initiated in the border areas of the western region during the Seventh Five Year Plan (1985-90), for ensuring balanced development of border areas through development of infrastructure and promotion of a sense of security among the border population.
- It is a centrally sponsored scheme. Funds are provided to the states as a non-lapsable special central assistance for the execution of projects relating to infrastructure, livelihood, education, health, agriculture and allied sectors.
- The States covered are Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and West Bengal.

BHUTAN'S TAX INSPECTORS WITHOUT BORDERS (TIWB)

Context:

- Tax Inspectors Without Borders (TIWB), a joint initiative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), launched its programme in Bhutan.
- India was chosen as the Partner Jurisdiction and has provided the Tax Expert for this programme.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (India's Neighbors, Foreign Policies and programmes affecting India's Interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About the TIWB Programme in Bhutan
2. About TIWB

About the TIWB Programme in Bhutan

- Bhutan's Tax Inspectors Without Borders (TIWB) programme is launched in partnership with India.
- This programme is expected to be of about 24 months' duration.
- The focus of the programme will be in the area of International Taxation and Transfer Pricing.
- Through this India in collaboration with the UNDP and the TIWB Secretariat aims to aid Bhutan in strengthening its tax administration by transferring technical know-how and skills to its tax auditors, and through sharing of best audit practices.

About TIWB

- The TIWB Programme is a joint initiative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).
- The objective of the TIWB Initiative is to enable sharing of tax audit knowledge and skills with tax administrations in developing countries through a targeted, real time “learning by doing” approach.
- TIWB is focused on promoting hands-on assistance by sending Experts to build audit and audit-related skills pertaining to specific international tax matters and the development of general audit skills within developing tax administrations.

INDIA, GREECE CALL FOR RESPECT OF TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY

Context:

India and Greece have held discussions over the situation in Cyprus during the visit of External Affairs Minister to Athens.

The Ministry of External Affairs said both sides emphasised upon respect of sovereignty and territorial integrity by all members of the international community.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Important Foreign Policies and Developments affecting India's Interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Greece-India relations
2. About Turkey-Greece Stand-off
3. New diplomatic campaign by Athens
4. Conclusion

Greece-India relations

Historical relations

- For the Ancient Greeks “India” meant only the upper Indus and they referred to the Indians as “Indói” literally meaning “the people of the Indus River”, till the time of Alexander the Great. Afterwards, “India” meant to the Greeks most of the northern half of the Indian subcontinent.
- There is now tangible evidence indicating that the settlement of Greek merchants in Bengal must have begun as early as the beginning of the seventeenth century.
- Dimitrios Galanos (1760–1833) was the earliest recorded Greek Indologist and he translated Sanskrit texts into Greek.
- Greek and Indian civilizations survived the test of times when others went into the pages of history permanently, such as the Babylonians.
- But despite these thousands of years of history, Greece and India have not quite reached the glories of their ancient forefathers just yet due to centuries of foreign invasions and colonialism that saw untold riches leave the shores of the Indian subcontinent and the Greek peninsula to the treasuries of foreign conquerors.

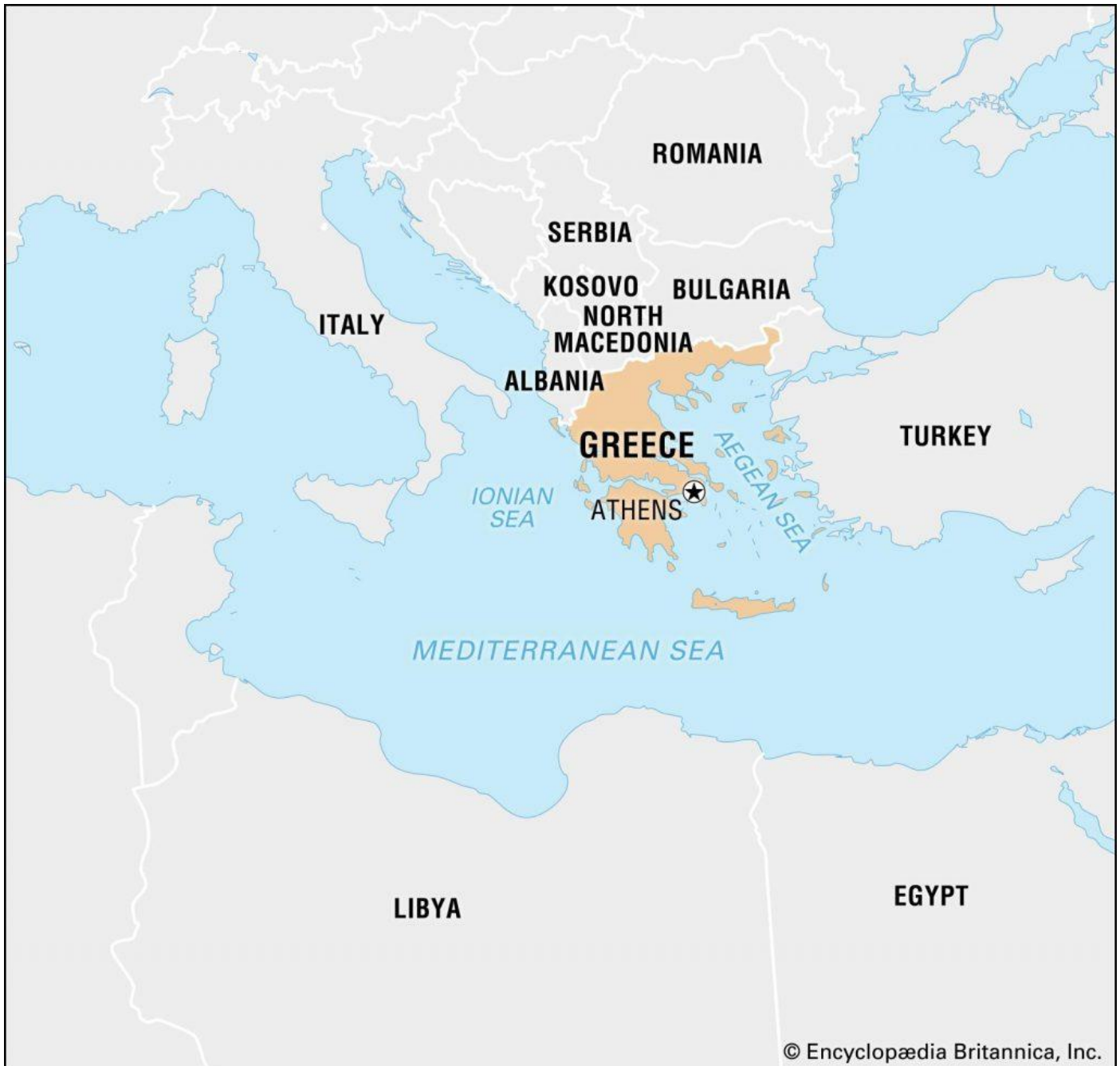
Greece and India sharing Invaders

- From the 1200s, Indians experienced the brutality of various conquering Turkic warlords, followed by the Mughals, and then finally the British.
- Greeks, too, have experienced over a millennium of warfare against various Turkic tribes, most prominently the Ottomans, who just like the British in India, drained Greeks of their wealth, leaving Greece backwards, destitute and underdeveloped when it achieved independence in 1821.
- In fact, it was these conquering Turkic tribes that disconnected Greek and Indian civilizations from each for nearly a thousand years.

Modern relations

- Modern Relations between Greece and India started in May 1950 and India opened its resident Embassy in Athens only by 1978.
- India and Greece enjoy close bilateral relations and annual bilateral trade stands at \$0.70 billion.
- India has been an honored country at the 74th (2009) and the 84th (2019) Thessaloniki International Fair.
- The Greek Foreign Ministry describes the Indian-Greek friendship as “excellent, with relations being multifaceted, harmonious and warm, as the two peoples are linked by close ties of friendship and mutual cooperation, and represent ancient cultures.”
- This close relationship was reflected in a busy 2020 that saw relationship building between Athens and New Delhi reach unprecedented heights despite the COVID-19 pandemic.
- It was recently announced that a direct air flight between Athens and India will be established. This will allow Greece to benefit from India’s burgeoning middle class who are increasingly traveling abroad for pleasure.





About Turkey-Greece Stand-off

- The European Union (EU) and its allies in West Asia and North Africa made plans to build a gas pipeline from the Mediterranean to Europe's mainland to transport the gas. However, they had kept Turkey out of it, which had infuriated Turkey.
- Turkey challenged the EU pipeline project and reached an agreement with Libya to form an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) from its southern shores to Libya's northern coast across the Mediterranean.
- However, Greece claimed the Turkish zone violated its maritime sovereignty and later announced its EEZ with Egypt, which clashed with Turkey's zone.
- Turkey and Greece, vehemently disagree over overlapping claims to hydrocarbon resources in the region based on conflicting views on the extent of their continental shelves in waters dotted with mostly Greek islands.
- The highly complicated issue now has the potential to involve Europe, West Asia and North Africa.

New diplomatic campaign by Athens: From the Mediterranean to India

- There is a new diplomatic campaign by Athens that extends from the Mediterranean to India.
- One of the goals of Greek diplomacy for 2021 is the continuation and expansion of cooperation with countries that share the same views with Greece on the problems that exist not only in the eastern Mediterranean, but in the region in general, and for their resolution based on International Law.
- This enlargement, which has been set as a goal by the Greek Foreign Minister, will be carried out, according to information, with the creation of an arc of states starting from the southeastern Mediterranean, with the participation of Greece, Cyprus, Egypt and Israel, and pass into the Persian Gulf, with the participation of the United Arab Emirates, and will extend as far as India.
- Essentially, this move is the evolution of tripartite agreements in which Greece participates and will be a resounding message to Turkey.
- The next diplomatic goal of Greece is, according to information from Dimokratia, the renewal of Greece's defense cooperation with the United States, which will be achieved by expanding the American military footprint in our region to existing Greek military installations.

Conclusion

- It is on the basis of our ancient ties in exchanging ideas, knowledge and philosophy that today's relationship between Greece and India should be built upon.
- With India rising to Great Power status on the global stage and Greece having the most formidable military and exciting economic prospects in the East Mediterranean region, the time is ripe for Indian-Greek relations to flourish.
- Although Greece and India want a peaceful rise to achieve economic prosperity for the betterment of citizens, both countries face revisionist and aggressive neighbours who are increasingly adopting Turkic medieval conquering ideology that not only bloats their own military budget, but that of their neighbours.
- Greek and Indian ties are far deeper, richer and historical to only be viewed as a friendship of convenience to counter the collective threats posed by the Turkish-Pakistani expansionist axis. But there is no hiding that this must be one of the immediate and more critical components of this expanding relationship.

DMCA & PROTECTION OF INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY ONLINE

Context:

Union Minister for Electronics and Information Technology and for Law and Justice was locked out of his Twitter account allegedly over a notice received for violation of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA).

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Important International Institutions, Groupings & Agreements Affecting India's Interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. What is WIPO?

2. What is the DMCA?
3. Why were WIPO's treaties needed?
4. Raising Issue and Resolution of issues through DMCA

What is WIPO?

- The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) is one of the 15 specialized agencies of the United Nations (UN) created to promote and protect intellectual property (IP) across the world by cooperating with countries as well as international organizations.
- WIPO currently has 193 member states and headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, WIPO has “external offices” around the world. The only non-members are the Federated States of Micronesia, Palau and South Sudan.
- WIPO's activities include:
 - Hosting forums to discuss and shape international IP rules and policies,
 - Providing global services that register and protect IP in different countries,
 - Resolving transboundary IP disputes,
 - Helping connect IP systems through uniform standards and infrastructure, and
 - Serving as a general reference database on all IP matters.
- WIPO also works with governments, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and individuals to utilize IP for socioeconomic development.
- WIPO administers 26 international treaties that concern a wide variety of IP issues, ranging from the protection of broadcasts to establishing international patent classification.

What is the DMCA?

- The Digital Millennium Copyright Act, or DMCA, is a 1998 law passed in the US and is among the world's first laws recognising intellectual property on the internet.
- Signed into law by the then US President Bill Clinton, the law oversees the implementation of the two treaties signed and agreed upon by member nations of the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) in 1996.

2 treaties of WIPO

- WIPO members had in December 1996 agreed upon two treaties, namely the WIPO Copyright Treaty and the WIPO Performances and Phonograms Treaty.
- Both the treaties require member nations and signatories to provide in their respective jurisdictions, protection to intellectual property that may have been created by citizens of different nations who are also co-signatories to the treaty.
- The said protection, accorded by each member state, must not be any less in any way than the one being given to a domestic copyright holder.
- Further, it also obligates that signatories to the treaty ensure ways to prevent circumvention of the technical measures used to protect copyrighted work.
- It also provides the necessary international legal protection to digital content.

Why were WIPO's treaties needed?

- With the rapid commercialisation of internet in late 1990s which started with static advertisement panels being displayed on the internet, it became important for website owners to get the user to spend more time on their webpage.
- For this, fresh content was generated by creators and shared over the Internet. The problem started when the content would be copied by unscrupulous websites or users, who did not generate content on their own.
- Further, as the Internet expanded worldwide, websites from countries other than the one where the content originated, also started to copy the unique content generated by the websites.

Raising Issue and Resolution of issues through DMCA

- Any content creator of any form, who believes that their original content has been copied by user or a website without authorisation can file an application citing their intellectual property has been stolen or violated.
- Users can either approach the website on which the content has been hosted, or third party service providers like DMCA.com, which utilise a team of experts to help take down the stolen content for a small fee.
- In the case of social media intermediaries like Facebook, Instagram or Twitter, content creators can directly approach the platform with a proof of them being original creators.
- Since these companies operate in nations which are signatories to the WIPO treaty, they are obligated to remove the said content if they receive a valid and legal DMCA takedown notice.
- Platforms, however, also give the other users against whom allegations of content cheating have been made, a chance to reply to the DMCA notice by filing a counter notice. The platform shall then decide which party is telling the truth, and shall accordingly, either restore the content or keep it hidden.

CHINA TURNS ON SECOND-BIGGEST DAM IN WORLD

Context:

The first two generating units of the world's second-biggest hydroelectric dam were officially turned on in southwestern China.

Relevance:

Prelims, GS-I: Geography, GS-II: International Relations

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About China and its large hydropower dams
2. Important Rivers of China

About China and its large hydropower dams

- China is the world's leader in hydropower capacity, with a total of 1.302 terawatt-hours as of 2019. Canada is a distant second with 398 TWh.
- As befits the global leader, China is home to four of the world's largest hydropower plants, including the massive Three Gorges dam and Xiluodu, with a capacity of 13.86 GW.

Chinese Dams in news recently

- Despite environmentalists criticizing China for putting up massive dams on the Yangtze River and its tributaries, Chinese authorities proceed with hydropower construction as they seek to reduce the carbon footprint of electricity generation in the country.
- The Baihetan Dam, built by the Chinese Three Gorges Corporation, will be the second-largest hydropower generating facility in the world – it comes second after the largest hydropower project in the world (also in China) the Three Gorges which has a capacity of 22.5 GW.
- Recently, another massive hydropower project became fully operational in China, the Wudongde hydropower plant on the Yangtze River – the Wudongde hydropower plant would have the capacity to produce 38.91 billion kWh annually at full capacity. This will be the equivalent of saving some 12.2 million tons of standard coal and eliminating 30.5 million tons of carbon dioxide annually.

Important Rivers of China

Yangtze River

- Yangtze River is the largest and longest river in China, even in Asia (surpassed only by the Nile of Africa and the Amazon of South America).
- It originates from the Tuotuo River on the southwestern side of the snow-draped Geladandong, flowing from west to east through 9 provinces and city of Shanghai before running into the East China Sea.
- Yangtze river is responsible for half of China's agricultural produce and 35% population of China lives along it.
- Hydroelectricity is generated by the massive dams on the river including the Three Gorges Dam.

Yellow River

- Huang He (yellow river) is a perennial river cutting across the loess plateau and it is the second longest river of China. It is the highest sediment carrying river in the world that shifts constantly.
- It originates from Kariqu Stream on the northern side of Bayan Har Mountains in Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, flowing from west to east and finally pouring into Bohai Sea.
- It is "the cradle of Chinese civilization" as its basin, specifically, the Wei valley that cuts across the long Ordos loop, was the birthplace of ancient Chinese civilizations and the most prosperous region in early Chinese history.

Heilongjiang River / Amur River

- Heilongjiang River (black water) forms the border between the Russian Far East and Northeastern China. It is also known as the Amur River.
- It rises in the hills of western Manchuria and as it flows through China, Mongolia and Russia, it can be called an "international river".
- Within the river basin, there are abundant mineral resources and fish stocks, especially Salmon and Huang Fish.
- The Amur is an important symbol of, and geopolitical factor in, Chinese–Russian relations. The Amur became especially prominent in the period of the Sino–Soviet political split of 1956–1966.

SRI LANKA 'BANKING ON' \$1 BN INDIA SWAP DEAL

Context:

Sri Lanka is "banking on" a \$1 billion currency swap from India to meet its debt repayment obligations in 2021 and tide over the current economic crisis, a senior official of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka said.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (India's Neighbors, Foreign Policies and Developments affecting India's Interests), GS-III: Indian Economy

Dimensions of the Article:

1. What is a Currency Swap?
2. How a Currency Swap Works
3. About Sri Lanka's Current position on Debt servicing

What is a Currency Swap?

- A currency swap is a transaction in which two parties exchange an equivalent amount of money with each other but in different currencies.
- The parties are essentially loaning each other money and will repay the amounts at a specified date and exchange rate.
- The purpose of a Currency Swap exercise could be to:
 1. Hedge exposure to exchange-rate risk,
 2. Speculate on the direction of a currency, or
 3. Reduce the cost of borrowing in a foreign currency.

How a Currency Swap Works

In a currency swap, or FX swap, the counter-parties exchange given amounts in the two currencies.

Example for Understanding Currency Swap between 2 countries

- During a Currency Swap deal, say the U.S. might receive 100 million British pounds (GBP), while the U.K. receives \$125 million. This implies a GBP/USD exchange rate of 1.25.
- At the end of the agreement, they will swap again at either the original exchange rate or another pre-agreed rate, closing out the deal.
- Central banks and Governments engage in currency swaps with foreign counterparts to meet short term foreign exchange liquidity requirements or to ensure adequate foreign currency to avoid Balance of Payments (BOP) crisis till longer arrangements can be made.
- These swap operations carry no exchange rate or other market risks as transaction terms are set in advance.

About Sri Lanka's Current position on Debt servicing

- For Sri Lanka, Currency Swap is cheaper than borrowing from the market, and a lifeline as it struggles to maintain adequate forex reserves even as repayment of its external debts looms.
- Sri Lanka has already serviced part of its debt in 2021 and is preparing to repay the remaining more than \$3 billion debt by the end of 2021.
- With an international sovereign bond maturing soon, a \$1 billion repayment is due in July.
- Sri Lanka is expecting a \$400 million swap from the Reserve Bank of India in a couple of months through the SAARC facility but the additional \$1 billion is going to be crucial for Sri Lanka.

- While official sources in New Delhi earlier indicated that negotiations on the issue were “ongoing”, the Indian government is yet to respond to requests of currency swap as well as the 2020 request for a debt freeze, even as bilateral talks have continued at high levels.
- Sri Lanka’s gross official reserves currently stand at \$4 billion, excluding the “standby” about \$1.5 billion swap agreement with the People’s Bank of China.
- There is also the Currency Swap deal with Bangladesh that is effectively a loan that Bangladesh will give to Sri Lanka in dollars, with an agreement that the debt will be repaid with interest in Sri Lankan rupees.

MÉNDEZ’S ANTI-TORTURE VISION AND INDIA

Context:

Launched in June 2020, the ‘Principles on Effective Interviewing for Investigations and Information Gathering’, dubbed the ‘Méndez Principles’, were developed through a comprehensive, expert-driven consultative process.

Relevance:

GS-II: Polity and Governance (Constitutional Provisions and Historical Underpinnings, Government Policies and Interventions), GS-II: International Relations (Important International Treaties and Agreements)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About Méndez Principles
2. Benefits and the need to change the way Investigation works
3. Torture as a part of Indian Police culture
4. Report on Torture in India
5. Supreme Court on torture
6. Legislations related to Torture
7. United Nations Convention against Torture
8. Way Forward

About Méndez Principles

- The Méndez Principles aim to provide a cohesive blueprint of practical measures to replace torture and coercive interrogation with “rapport-based” interviews, reinforced through legal and procedural safeguards at every step.
- They offer practical guidance for non-coercive interrogations; address heightened vulnerabilities in custody; and provide specific guidance on training, accountability and implementation.
- They are to apply to all authorities who have the power to detain and question people, including the police, military, and intelligence.
- At their core, the Mendez Principles seek to prevent coercive techniques and torture by introducing a paradigm shift away from “confession” based information gathering.
- The primary innovation of the Méndez Principles is to present positive, normative guidance for what police should do in effective and ethical investigations, rather than simply restating the absolute prohibitions against torture and ill-treatment. Telling police what they can’t do doesn’t work.

- Crucially, they are grounded in scientific empirical studies across disciplines — psychology, criminology, sociology, neuroscience — which establish that coercive interrogation is counterproductive.

Proved disadvantages of torture tactics

- Extreme torture tactics, such as forced stress positions or waterboarding, have been shown to significantly damage the affected person's memory and recollection of information.
- Aggressive questioning is more likely to make the interviewee resistant, or 'say anything' just for the threat of violence to stop.
- Coercive interviewing leads to unreliable information and false confessions.
- These studies provide scientific evidence to reject the widely-held misconception that a certain degree of 'pressure', or physical pain, will yield accurate information.

Benefits and the need to change the way Investigation works

- It may seem counterintuitive that the integration of human rights safeguards and rapport-based interviewing produces better investigative outcomes, but that is exactly what the body of scientific evidence on interviewing shows.
- When police act in an ethical and trustworthy manner, and when the rights and dignity of people being interviewed are respected, investigative results are more accurate and more comprehensive.
- Experts point to public trust and cooperation of witnesses as one of the most important factors in solving crime.
- Abusive practices do not keep the public safe and do not help police solve crimes.
- However, murder clearance rates are consistently higher in countries where investigative interviewing consistent with the Méndez Principles is used, and where safeguards like the presence of a lawyer during interrogation are implemented.

Torture as a part of Indian Police culture

- Torture is, in fact, an integral part of police culture all over the country and it would not be amiss to argue that this culture in India today is reminiscent of the brutality of the colonial police forces that we are so keen to forget.
- Official data also accept that police torture is a reality, but the quality of such data is always suspect.
- The data on torture show that it is not only an integral part of India's policing culture; in some investigations (such as terror cases), it is treated as the centrepiece.
- The fact is that the current laws facilitate such torture, such as through the admissibility of confessions as evidence under the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act and the Prevention of Terrorism Act, which continues refurbished as the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act.
- Unfortunately, policing has also not mainstreamed the upgrade to newer technologies, like DNA analysis, which can directly impact law enforcement practices.

Tacit acceptance by law

- Additionally, Indian law creates conditions which further permit torture through the "back door". While confessions before a police officer are not admissible evidence, to prevent the police from resorting to torture, other legal provisions have the effect of indirectly accommodating the use of torture in investigative practice.

- Section 27 of the Indian Evidence Act permits the admissibility of statements before the police to the extent that they relate to the recovery of material objects, often called 'recovery evidence'.
- Thus, investigators still have incentive to seek "disclosures", and information implicit in a confession, as central to their investigation. Torture and falsification, by forcing an accused to sign on blank papers, are known abuses in the use of this provision.

Report on Torture in India

- Every day, an average of five people die in custody in India, with some of them succumbing to torture in police or judicial custody.
- 2019 was no better, as 117 people died in police custody while 1,606 deaths were recorded in judicial custody.
- And yet, there has not been a single conviction in the deaths of 500 persons allegedly due to torture in police custody between 2005 and 2018.
- The belief that a certain degree of fear and pressure is necessary to compel a suspect to cough up the "truth" is widely held by police officers. This emerged strongly in a 2019 survey of about 12,000 police personnel across India.

A report by the National Campaign Against Torture in 2019

- In 2019, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) recorded 1,723 cases of death in custody.
- It noted that "most deaths in police custody occur primarily as a result of torture".
- Of the 125 deaths in police custody, 93 (74.4%) were due to alleged torture or foul play while 24 people (19.2%) died under suspicious circumstances – such as suspected suicide (16 persons), illness (7 persons) and slipping in bathroom (1 person).
- Uttar Pradesh had the highest incidence of such deaths with 14 cases, followed by Tamil Nadu and Punjab with 11 cases each.
- The report also highlighted how while probing non-heinous crimes, police personnel in several states went to the extent of torturing the suspects to death.

Examples of Torture incidents

- The report said from acts like slapping, kicking with boots, beating with sticks, pulling hair, torture also includes barbaric methods like hammering iron nails in the body (as in the case of Gufran Alam and Taslim Ansari of Bihar), applying roller on legs and burning (as happened to Rizwan Asad Pandit of Jammu & Kashmir), and 'falanga' or beating with sticks on the soles (as with Rajkumar of Kerala).
- Sometimes, the police and jail staff even go to the extent of stabbing people with a screwdriver (as Pradeep Tomar of Uttar Pradesh was subjected to) or giving electric shock (as with Yadav Lal Prasad of Punjab and Monu of Uttar Pradesh). Often, private parts are also targeted. There have been instances of cops pouring petrol on private parts (as in the case of Monu of Uttar Pradesh) or applying chilly powder to them (in the case of Raj Kumar of Kerala)
- As part of torture, the report pointed to cases where the victims were forced to perform oral sex (as in the case of Hira Bajania and 12 others of Gujarat). Also, it said women continue to be tortured or targeted for sexual violence in custody.
- **The report said most victims were from poor and marginalised sections and were targeted because of their socio-economic status.**

Supreme Court on torture

- Even before India signed the UNCAT, our Supreme Court had brought about glorious jurisprudence highlighting the many problems with the country's torture culture.
- In *Raghubir Singh v. State of Haryana* (1980), the Court was "deeply disturbed by the diabolical recurrence of police torture resulting in a terrible scare in the minds of common citizens that their lives and liberty are under a new peril when the guardians of the law gore human rights to death."
- These sentiments were revisited in *Francis Coralie Mullin v. Union Territory of Delhi* (1981) and *Sheela Barse v. State of Maharashtra* (1987), where the Court condemned cruelty and torture as violative of Article 21.
- This interpretation of Article 21 is consistent with the principles contained in the UNCAT. The UNCAT aims to prevent torture and other acts of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment around the world. Although India signed the UNCAT in 1997, it is yet to ratify it.

Legislations related to Torture

- In 2010, Prevention of Torture Bill was passed by the Lok Sabha, and the Rajya Sabha later sent it to a Select Committee for review in alignment with the UNCAT, but the Committee's recommended law, submitted in 2012, never fructified.
- By 2017, the Law Commission had submitted its 273rd report and an accompanying draft torture law. But the Supreme Court dismissed the petition on grounds that the government cannot be compelled to make a law by mandamus; treaty ratification was a political decision; and that it was a policy matter.
- Such reluctance is arguably because all governments appear to collectively agree that police brutality is a necessary evil to maintain law and order.
- There have been opportunities for 23 years to enact a law on torture, but they have been studiously avoided. State consultation also has no meaning.

United Nations Convention against Torture

- The United Nations Convention against Torture (UNCAT) is an international human rights treaty, under the review of the United Nations, that aims to prevent torture and other acts of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment around the world.
- The Convention requires states to take effective measures to prevent torture in any territory under their jurisdiction, and forbids states to transport people to any country where there is reason to believe they will be tortured.
- Since the convention's entry into force, the absolute prohibition against torture and other acts of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment has become accepted as a principle of customary international law.
- The Convention prohibits torture, and requires parties to take effective measures to prevent it in any territory under their jurisdiction. This prohibition is absolute and non-derogable.
- The Convention defines "torture" as any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him, or a third person, information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in, or incidental to, lawful sanctions.

Way Forward

- What we really need is a recognition that torture is endemic and a systemic problem, and the only answer lies in stringent legal framework that is aligned with and committed to the principles of international law under the UN Convention Against Torture (UNCAT) to which India has been a signatory since 1997, and a watertight enforcement mechanism that deters such practices.
- The introduction of so-called scientific techniques of interrogation, such as lie detectors and narco-analysis, are often presented as the solutions to end physical torture. While the scientific validity of these techniques in determining the “truth” is held suspect, Indian law allows evidence voluntarily given by an accused through these techniques to be used as corroborative evidence. Hence, introduction of these techniques should be done only with addressing the existing conditions which perpetuate torture.

Applying Mendez’s principles in Indian Context

- With their emergence as a new set of aspirational standards, it is tempting to assess whether the Méndez Principles can readily apply to the Indian context.
- There would need to be a fundamental shift in police thinking before the goal set by the Méndez Principles of moving from coercive practices to “rapport-based interrogation” can be realised.

SC ON PROMOTION OF PWDS

Context:

The Supreme Court said that a disabled person can avail the benefit of reservation for promotion even if he or she was recruited in the regular category or developed the disability after gaining employment.

Relevance:

GS-II: Social Justice (Welfare Schemes, Government Policies and Interventions, Social Empowerment, Issues Relating to Development), GS-II: Polity and Governance, International Relations

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About the SC’s recent Judgement on promotion of PwDs
2. About the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016
3. United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)

About the SC’s recent Judgement on promotion of PwDs

- The important thing is the employee should be a ‘person with disability’ (PwD) at the time of the promotion to avail of the disabled quota.
- The SC said that the Persons with Disabilities Act of 1995 [which has been replaced with the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016] does not make a distinction between a person who may have entered service on account of disability and a person who may have acquired disability after having entered the service.
- Similarly, the same position would be with the person who may have entered service on a claim of a compassionate appointment. The mode of entry in service cannot be a ground to make out a case of discriminatory promotion.
- The court said the responsibility to provide equal opportunities to disabled persons does not end with giving them reservation at the time of recruitment.

- Legislative mandate provides for equal opportunity for career progression, including promotion. Thus, it would be negation of the legislative mandate if promotion is denied to PwD and such reservation is confined to the initial stage of induction in service.

About the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016

- The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 replaces the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995.
- It fulfills the obligations to the United National Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), to which India is a signatory.

Key Changes brought in the by the 2016 act

- Disability has been defined based on an evolving and dynamic concept.
- The types of disabilities have been increased from 7 to 21.
- The act added mental illness, autism, spectrum disorder, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, chronic neurological conditions, speech and language disability, thalassemia, hemophilia, sickle cell disease, multiple disabilities including deaf blindness, acid attack victims and Parkinson's disease which were largely ignored in earlier act.
- It increases the quantum of reservation for people suffering from disabilities from 3% to 4% in government jobs and from 3% to 5% in higher education institutes.
- Every child with benchmark disability between the age group of 6 and 18 years shall have the right to free education (Government funded educational institutions as well as the government recognized institutions).
- Stress has been given to ensure accessibility in public buildings in a prescribed time frame along with Accessible India Campaign.
- The Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities and the State Commissioners will act as regulatory bodies and Grievance Redressal agencies, monitoring implementation of the Act.
- A separate National and State Fund be created to provide financial support to the persons with disabilities.
- The Government has been authorized to notify any other category of specified disability.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)

- The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is an international human rights treaty of the United Nations intended to protect the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities.
- Parties to the Convention are required to promote, protect, and ensure the full enjoyment of human rights by persons with disabilities and ensure that persons with disabilities enjoy full equality under the law.
- The Convention was adopted by the General Assembly in 2006 and came into force in 2008.
- The convention seeks to engage member countries in developing and carrying out policies, laws and administrative measures for securing the rights recognized in the Convention and abolish laws, regulations, customs and practices that constitute discrimination.
- It requires countries to identify and eliminate obstacles and barriers and ensure that persons with disabilities can access their environment, transportation, public facilities and services, and information and communications technologies.

- It asks member countries to recognize the right to an adequate standard of living and social protection which includes public housing, services and assistance for disability-related needs, as well as assistance with disability-related expenses in case of poverty.

INDIA TOUGHENS STAND ON EU COVID PASSPORT

Context:

India took issue with the European Union's plans to institute a "green pass" from July 1, with government sources warning that India will introduce a "reciprocal policy" only allowing ease of travel for those European countries that recognise Indian vaccines Covishield and Covaxin.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Important Foreign Policies and Agreements Affecting India's Interest)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. What is a Vaccine Passport?
2. Concerns Raised in Instituting Vaccine Passport
3. How are countries viewing the concept of Vaccine Passport?
4. Digital Green Certificates by EU
5. Controversy of the European Union's Digital Covid Certificate

What is a Vaccine Passport?

- Sometimes, vaccine tourism is confused with vaccine passport, which is a more regulated practice gaining currency around the world.
- A vaccine passport is an e-certificate that stores and records jabs and Covid-19 test status.
- The idea is modelled on the proof of vaccination that several countries required even before the pandemic.
- Function of Vaccine Passports:
 - Will digitise vaccination records across countries.
 - Supposed to function as proof that the holder has been vaccinated against Covid-19 and is, therefore, safe.
- The primary benefit will be to the tourism and the hospitality industries, which are both seen as being at the heart of Covid-19 spread and are the worst hit by the pandemic.
- The international air travel, which suffered massively because of the outbreak.

Concerns Raised in Instituting Vaccine Passport

- The World Health Organisation (WHO) is against the introduction of Covid-19 vaccination proofs as a requirement for international travel. There are still critical unknown facts regarding the efficacy of vaccination in reducing transmission.
- The major difficulty in implementation will be the lack of uniformity across jurisdictions in requirement and issuance of proofs of vaccination.
- Preferential vaccination of travellers could result in inadequate supplies of vaccines for priority populations considered at high risk of severe Covid-19 disease.

- Introducing a requirement of vaccination as a condition for travel has the potential to hinder equitable global access to a limited vaccine supply and would be unlikely to maximize the benefits of vaccination for individual societies and overall global health.
- Experts argue that vaccine passports, in any form, might make travel inequitable. Adoption of these digital passports can perpetuate discrimination and inequality, increasing the divide between socioeconomic groups.
- Rich countries that have already bought millions of doses from pharmaceutical companies are ahead in the race. The poorer nations may have to wait for months, if not years, to start inoculations. This means that if vaccine passports become a norm, then these lower-income nations will lose out on the advantage. It will lead to exclusion of the younger generation who would be last in line to be vaccinated.
- These are mainly digital certificates that are accessed by a particular service provider to check for proof of vaccination, there is a possibility that they would be used by authorities to track the movement of their holders.

How are countries viewing the concept of Vaccine Passport?

- In the EU and across the world, the tourism industry has been severely impacted due to the spread of the disease. Many countries have, therefore, been contemplating digital certificates or passports that will be proof that a person has been vaccinated or has recovered from COVID-19.
- Israel became the first country to issue certificates called “vaccine passports” that will allow vaccinated individuals to use some facilities and attend events.
- Denmark also said that it was in the process of rolling out digital passports that would act as proof for those individuals who have been vaccinated.
- Even so, as early as May 2020, countries such as Chile had proposed “release certificates” meant for those who had recovered from COVID-19.

Digital Green Certificates by EU

- The European Union is creating a Digital Green Certificate to facilitate the safe and free movement of citizens within the European Union (EU) amid the COVID-19 pandemic.
- A Digital Green Certificate is proof that a person has either been vaccinated against COVID-19, has received a negative test result or has recovered from COVID-19.
- The key features of the certificate are that it will be in digital or paper format complete with a QR code and will be free of charge.
- The certificate can be issued by authorities, including hospitals, testing centres and health authorities.
- All EU citizens or third-country nationals who are legally staying in the EU will be able to use these digital certificates and thereby will be exempted from free movement restrictions.

Controversy of the European Union’s Digital Covid Certificate

- India’s External Affairs Minister indicated that he raised the issue of possible restrictions on Indian travellers in the EU if they don’t have one of four vaccines approved by the European Medicines Agency (EMA), that include the Europe made Astra Zeneca vaccine but not the Indian made Serum Institute of India’s (SII) Covishield or Bharat Biotech’s Covaxin.
- India has also conveyed EU Member States that India will institute a reciprocal policy for recognition of the EU Digital Covid Certificate.

- The African Union had also issued a letter of protest over the EU proposal saying that it promoted “inequality” for those from India and “lower-income” countries for whom the Covishield vaccine was the “backbone” of the international COVAX alliance programme.
- The EU had also explained that SII had not applied for the requisite permissions with the EMA, and had promised to consider its case as soon as it applied.
- The government’s stand is especially significant since while Covishield has received World Health Organization authorisation, Covaxin is yet to be cleared by the global health body.

INDIA TO MALDIVES ON ATTACKS IN MEDIA

Context:

India has sought Maldivian government action on persons behind media reports and social media posts “attacking the dignity” of its resident diplomats, while seeking greater security for the officials.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (India’s Neighbors, Foreign Policies affecting India’s Interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About India’s message to Maldives on Media Attacks
2. India–Maldives relations
3. Cooperation Between India & Maldives
4. Irritants in India – Maldives relations

About India’s message to Maldives on Media Attacks

- In a letter the High Commission of India said the “repeated attacks” were “motivated, malicious and increasingly personal” against India’s resident diplomats.
- India urged the Maldives Foreign Ministry to take steps to “ensure enhanced protection” of the Indian Mission and its officials and to “ensure action, in accordance with International Law and Maldivian Law” against the perpetrators for “these gross violations” of the Vienna Convention of Diplomatic Relations.
- While India-Maldives ties came under considerable strain during former Maldives President’s term, the current President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih’s government is seen to be a close ally of India, with enhanced development and defence cooperation since 2018.
- However, some government critics in the Maldives are wary of greater military ties with India that they see as paving way for “boots on the ground”.
- In 2021, an announcement made in New Delhi, on the Cabinet clearing a proposal to set up a second mission in the Indian Ocean Archipelago, sparked concern among sections, prompting a renewed “#Indiaout” campaign on Maldivian social media.

India–Maldives relations

- India and Maldives are neighbors sharing a maritime border and relations between the two countries have been friendly and close in strategic, economic and military cooperation.
- Maldives is located south of India’s Lakshadweep Islands in the Indian Ocean.
- Both nations established diplomatic relations after the independence of Maldives from British rule in 1966.

- India has supported Maldives' policy of keeping regional issues and struggles away from itself, and the latter has seen friendship with India as a source of aid as well as a counterbalance to Sri Lanka, which is in proximity to the island nation and its largest trading partner.

Cooperation Between India & Maldives

- Through the decades, India has rushed emergency assistance to the Maldives, whenever sought.
- In 1988, when armed mercenaries attempted a coup against President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, India sent paratroopers and Navy vessels and restored the legitimate leadership under Operation Cactus.
- Further, joint naval exercises have been conducted in the Indian ocean and India still contributes to the security of the maritime island.
- The 2004 tsunami and the drinking water crisis in Male a decade later were other occasions when India rushed assistance.
- At the peak of the continuing COVID-19 disruption, the Maldives has been the biggest beneficiary of the Covid-19 assistance given by India among its all of India's neighbouring countries.
- When the world supply chains were blocked because of the pandemic, India continued to provide crucial commodities to the Maldives under Mission SAGAR.
- Recently, in 2021, India extended its support to the Maldives' Foreign Minister at the election for the President of the General Assembly (PGA) in the United Nations.

Irritants in India – Maldives relations

- In the past decade or so, the number of Maldivians drawn towards terrorist groups like the Islamic State (IS) and Pakistan-based madrassas and jihadist groups has been increasing. Political instability and socio-economic uncertainty are the main drivers fuelling the rise of Islamist radicalism in the island nation.
- China's strategic footprint in Maldives and the rest of India's neighbourhood has increased. The Maldives has emerged as an important 'pearl' in China's "String of Pearls" construct in South Asia.
- One of India's major concerns has been the impact of political instability in the neighbourhood on its security and development. The February 2015 arrest of opposition leader Mohamed Nasheed on terrorism charges and the consequent political crisis have posed a real diplomatic test for India's neighbourhood policy.

WB SUPPORT TO INDIA'S INFORMAL WORKING CLASS

Context:

World Bank said it has approved a USD 500 million (about Rs 3,717.28 crore) loan programme to support India's informal working class to overcome the current pandemic distress.

Relevance:

GS-III: Indian Economy (Inclusive growth, Government Policies and Interventions), GS-II: International Relations (Important International Institutions)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About India's Informal Workforce

2. Issues with having a majority in the informal sector
3. About the World Bank's Financial Support

About India's Informal Workforce

- India's estimated 450 million informal workers comprise 90% of its total workforce, with 5-10 million workers added annually. (As per Periodic Labour Force Survey, 2017-18, 90.6 per cent of India's workforce was informally employed.)
- Informal Labour is largely characterized by skills gained outside of a formal education, easy entry, a lack of stable employer-employee relationships, and a small scale of operations.
- The statistics of the ILO report indicates that 95% of the workforce is in the informal sector.
- India's informal sector is the biggest piece in our economy as it employs the vast majority of the workforce accounting for about half of GNP according to Credit Suisse, and the formal sector depends on its goods and services.
- Between 2004-05 and 2017-18, a period when India witnessed rapid economic growth, the share of the informal workforce witnessed only a marginal decline from 93.2 per cent to 90.6 per cent.
- Looking ahead, it is likely that informal employment will increase as workers who lose formal jobs during the COVID crisis try to find or create work (by resorting to self-employment) in the informal economy.
- Further, according to Oxfam's latest global report, out of the total 122 million who lost their jobs in 2020, 75% were lost in the informal sector.

Issues with having a majority in the informal sector

- The informal sector remains unmonitored by the government.
- No official statistics are available representing the true state of the informal sector in particular (and hence the economy as a whole) which makes it difficult for the government to make policies. Unlike the formal economy, the informal sector's components are not included in GDP computations.
- Informal sector workers have no job security, minimal benefits, very low pay, and often face hazardous working conditions.
- There is an expectation of increase in the number of people in informal sector with the issue that about 65-75% (15 million) of Indian youth, that enter the workforce each year are not job-ready or suitably employable.
- In India Restrictive labour laws- which promotes ad hocism and contract hiring in the labour market to circumvent the rigid labour laws.

About the World Bank's Financial Support

- Of the USD 500 million commitment, USD 112.50 million will be financed by its concessionary lending arm International Development Association (IDA) and the rest will be a loan from International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD).
- States can now access flexible funding from disaster response funds to design and implement appropriate social protection responses.
- The funds will be utilised in social protection programmes for urban informal workers, gig-workers, and migrants.

- Investments at the municipal level will promote National Digital Urban Mission that will create a shared digital infrastructure for people living in urban areas and will scale up urban safety nets and social insurance for informal workers.
- The programme will give street vendors access to affordable working capital loans of up to Rs 10,000.

WHAT LIES AHEAD FOR AFGHANISTAN AFTER U.S. EXIT?

Context:

On July 2, U.S. troops departed from the Bagram Air Base that coordinated the 20-year-long war in Afghanistan, effectively ending their military operations in the country.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (India's neighbours, Foreign Policies and Developments affecting India's Interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Why did the U.S. invade Afghanistan?
2. Why is the U.S. pulling back?
3. What does Pakistan want?
1. India: time to be wary
2. Why is India reaching out to the Taliban?

Why did the U.S. invade Afghanistan?

- Weeks after the September 11, 2001 (9/11) terrorist attacks, U.S. President George W. Bush declared war on Afghanistan. Mr. Bush said the Taliban regime had turned down his demand to hand over al-Qaeda leaders, including Osama bin Laden, who plotted the attacks.
- Inside Afghanistan, the NATO coalition troops led by the U.S. quickly dislodged the Taliban regime and established a transitional government.
- In 2003, the then U.S. Defense Secretary announced that major military operations in the country were over.
- The U.S. focus shifted to the Iraq invasion, while in Afghanistan, western powers helped build a centralised democratic system and institutions. But that neither ended the war nor stabilised the country.

Why is the U.S. pulling back?

- Presidents, starting with Barack Obama, had promised to bring American troops back home from Afghanistan after the U.S. had reached the conclusion long ago that the war was unwinnable.
- In 2015, the Obama administration had sent a representative to the first-ever meeting between the Taliban and the Afghan government that was hosted by Pakistan
- Later, President Donald Trump appointed a special envoy for Afghanistan with a mandate to directly negotiate with the Taliban.
- In the agreement, the Trump administration promised that it would withdraw all American troops from Afghanistan by 2021.

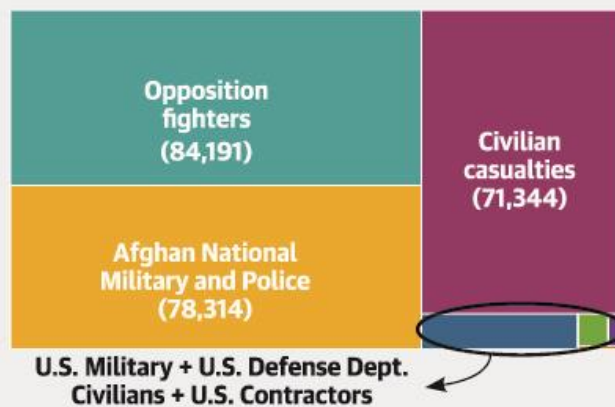
Insurmountable losses

The U.S.'s 20-year-war in Afghanistan has claimed over 70,000 civilian lives and has cost the country more than \$2 trillion. Even as all U.S. combat troops will withdraw by September 11, a large share of the country remains under the control of Taliban. A look at the impact of the war:

Loss of life

Nearly 2,41,000 lives have been lost in the two-decade-long war that ensued after the U.S. invaded Afghanistan. According to recent estimates by Brown University's Cost of War, at least 71,344 civilians died in the conflict while the Afghan national military police lost 78,314 personnel. An estimated 6,384 U.S. soldiers and 1,144 soldiers of Allied troops were also killed during the war

SOURCE : HUMAN AND BUDGETARY COSTS OF AFGHAN WAR, 2001-2021, BROWN UNIVERSITY



Impact of war on women and children

As many as 8,099 children and 3,352 women were killed between 2009 and 2020, according to data by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

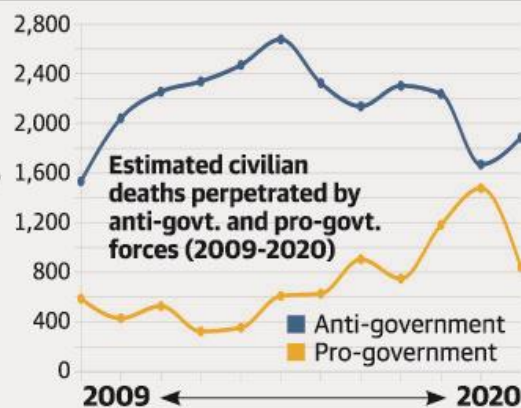


SOURCE: UNAMA

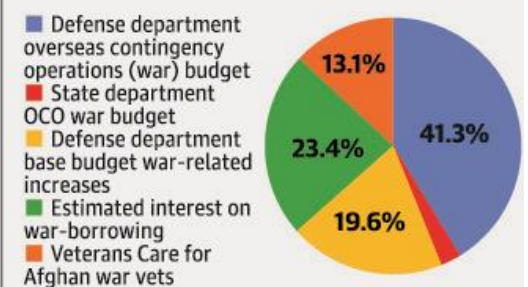
The humanitarian cost of war

Over 25,889 civilian casualties were inflicted by anti-government parties such as the Taliban and ISKP between 2009 and 2011, according to the United Nations. Since 2018, more than 3,500 civilians have been killed by pro-government forces

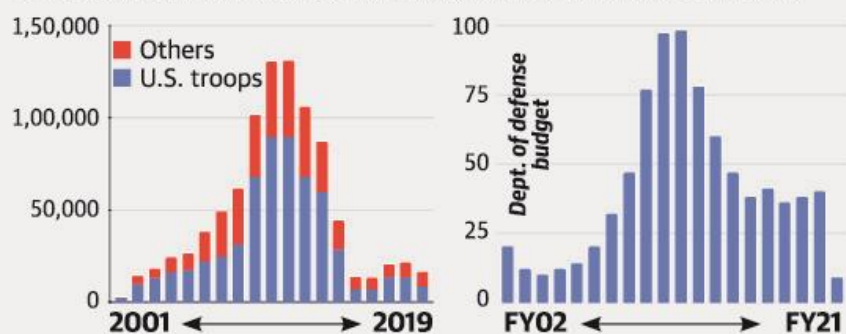
SOURCE: UNAMA



Financial drain | Chart shows % split of the \$2.2 trillion spent by various U.S. departments according to Brown University

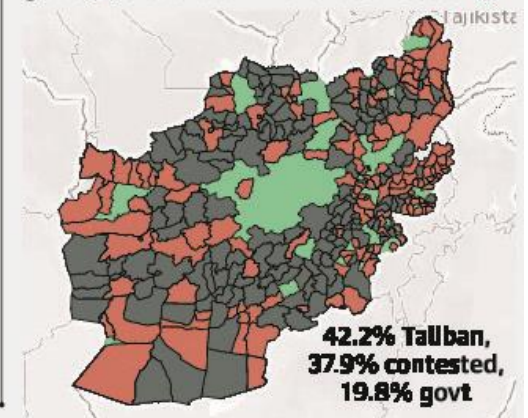


America's longest war | The first chart shows the number of U.S. troops and others (including those part of NATO) stationed in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2019. The second chart shows the yearly budget of the U.S. Department of Defense (in \$ billion) for the war from FY02 to FY21



SOURCE: BROOKINGS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Under control | Map shows districts under the control of Taliban (●), the Afghan govt. (●) and those which are contested (●)



What does Pakistan want?

- Pakistan was one of the three countries that had recognised the Taliban regime in the 1990s. The Taliban captured much of the country with help from Pakistan's ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence.)
- After the 9/11 attacks, Pakistan's military dictator Pervez Musharraf, under pressure from the Bush administration, cut formal ties with the Taliban and joined America's war on terror.
- But Pakistan played a double game. It provided shelter to the Taliban's Rahbari Shura, a group composed of their top leaders. In Pakistan, the Taliban regrouped, raised money and recruits, planned military strategy and staged a comeback in Afghanistan.

- The fractious Kabul government, faced with corruption allegations, incompetence, and the excesses of the invading forces, made matters easier for the Taliban.
- Now, when the U.S. is leaving and the Taliban are advancing, Pakistan is again in the spotlight. A violent military takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban may not serve Pakistan's core interests. Pakistan wants to check India's influence in Afghanistan and bring the Taliban to Kabul.
- But a violent takeover, like in the 1990s, would lack international acceptability, leaving Afghanistan unstable for a foreseeable future. In such a scenario, Pakistan could face another influx of refugees from Afghanistan and a strengthening of anti-Pakistan terror groups, such as the Tehrik-i-Taliban.
- From a strategic point of view, Pakistan would prefer the Taliban being accommodated in power through negotiations and a peaceful settlement, which would also allow Rawalpindi to stabilise its conflict-ridden western border. But it's not clear whether Pakistan has the capacity to shape the post-American outcome in Afghanistan.

Pakistan: gains, concerns

- The Taliban are a creation of the Pakistani security establishment and after the US invasion of Afghanistan, they removed themselves to safe havens in Pakistan territory, and the Taliban High Council operated from Quetta in Balochistan.
- It was Pakistan that persuaded the Taliban to do a deal with the Trump Administration.
- For the Pakistani Army, which has always seen Afghanistan in terms of "strategic depth" in its forever hostility with India, a Taliban capture of Afghanistan would finally bring a friendly force in power in Kabul after 20 years.
- India, which has had excellent relations with the Karzai and Ghani governments, would have its significance and importance reduced.
- Pakistan wants a strong role for the Taliban in future Afghan governance. Pakistan's regional interests are better served with a powerful Taliban presence in its western neighborhood.
- But a US withdrawal also means Pakistan will need to shoulder the entire burden of the chaos that experts predict.
- Civil war is not ruled out and with it, the flow of refugees into Pakistan once again, even as the country struggles with refugees from the first Afghan war.
- All this at a time when the economy is flailing, and Pakistan stays afloat on an IMF loan with strict conditionalities.
- Plus, the Taliban are not a monolith, and have recently shown streaks of independence from Pakistan. It has to guard against instability in Afghanistan from spilling over the border.

India: time to be wary

- New Delhi, which was hoping to be part of the U.S. initiative, would be nervous about the US withdrawal.
- India was on the outer edges of the Trump's actions towards the Afghan deal and was a reluctant supporter of the "intra-Afghan talks" between the Taliban and Afghan government.
- The new U.S. proposal gave India a role, by recognising it as a regional stakeholder, but this proposal seems to have no future. – Haqqani group, fostered by the ISI, would have a large role in any Taliban regime – and this is one of India's worries.

- Another concern would be India-focused militants such as Lashkar-e-Toiba and Jaish-e-Mohamed, which the Indian security establishment already believes to have relocated in large numbers to Afghanistan.

What dents India's goodwill?

- The building blocks of that goodwill are India's assistance in infrastructure projects, health care, education, trade and food security, and also in the liberal access to Afghans to study, train and work in India.
- India's example as a pluralistic, inclusive democracy also inspires many.
- Afghanistan's majority-Muslim citizens, many of whom have treated India as a second home, have felt cut out of the move to offer fast track citizenship to only Afghan minorities, as much as they have by reports of anti-Muslim rhetoric and incidents of violence in India.
- India's assistance of more than \$3 billion in projects, trade of about \$1 billion, a \$20 billion projected development expenditure of an alternate route through Chabahar, as well as its support to the Afghan National Army, bureaucrats, doctors and other professionals for training in India should assure it a leading position in Afghanistan's regional formulation.
- It would be a mistake, at this point, to tie all India's support in only to Kabul or the Ghani government; the government must strive to endure that its aid and assistance is broad-based, particularly during the novel coronavirus pandemic to centres outside the capital, even if some lie in areas held by the Taliban.

Why is India reaching out to the Taliban?

- A Qatari official said that India made contacts with the Taliban in Doha. New Delhi has not denied reports of its outreach to the Taliban. This signals a late but realist acknowledgement from the Indian side that the Taliban would play a critical role in Afghanistan in the coming years. India has three critical areas in dealing with the Taliban.
- One, protecting its investments, which run into billions of rupees, in Afghanistan; two, preventing a future Taliban regime from being a pawn of Rawalpindi; three, making sure that the Pakistan-backed anti-India terrorist groups do not get support from the Taliban.
- In the past, India chose not to engage the Taliban and the costs were dear when the Taliban was in power. This time, New Delhi seems to be testing another policy.

U.S. CHILD SOLDIER RECRUITER LIST (CSRL)

Context:

The United States of America has added Pakistan and 14 other countries to a Child Soldier Recruiter List that identifies foreign governments having government-supported armed groups that recruit or use child soldiers.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Important International Treaties and Agreements, India's Neighbors)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Child Soldiers and International Regulations
2. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)
3. About the US Child Soldiers Prevention Act (CSPA)
4. About the Child Soldier Recruiter List of 2021

5. Criticisms of the list

Child Soldiers and International Regulations

- The recruitment or use of children below the age of 15 as soldiers is prohibited by both the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the additional protocols to the Geneva Conventions, and is considered a war crime under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.
- Based on the Cape Town principles (1997), child soldiers are generally defined as “any person under eighteen years of age who is a member of or attached to the armed political forces or an armed political group, whether or not there is an armed conflict.”
- In addition, the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the involvement of children in armed conflict further prohibits kids under the age 18 from being compulsorily recruited into state or non-state armed forces or directly engaging in hostilities.
- The United Nations, too, has identified the recruitment and use of child soldiers as among six “grave violations” affecting children in war and has established numerous monitoring and reporting mechanisms and initiatives to combat this practice. The UN verified that over 7,000 children had been recruited and used as soldiers in 2019 alone.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is an international human rights treaty which sets out the civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights of children.
- The Convention defines a child as any human being under the age of eighteen, unless the age of majority is attained earlier under national legislation.
- Nations that have ratified this convention or have acceded to it are bound by international law.
- The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, composed of 18 independent experts, is responsible for supervising the implementation of the Convention by the states that have ratified it.
- Their governments are required to report to and appear before the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child periodically to be examined on their progress regarding the advancement of the implementation of the Convention and the status of child rights in their country.
- Also, individuals can appeal to the Committee on the Rights of the Child if they believe that rights, according to the Convention, have been violated.

About the US Child Soldiers Prevention Act (CSPA)

- The US Child Soldiers Prevention Act (CSPA) requires the publication in the annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report a list of foreign governments that have recruited or used child soldiers during the previous year.
- The law criminalizes leading a military force which recruits child soldiers. The law’s definition of child soldiers includes “any person under 18 years of age who takes a direct part in hostilities as a member of governmental armed forces.”
- The CSPA bans the United States from providing military assistance or arms sales to governments that use children in combat, but the president may waive the application of the law.
- It also requires the US Secretary of State to designate portions of the annual Human Rights Report to the issue of child soldiers.

About the Child Soldier Recruiter List of 2021

The countries which have been added to the annual TIP list of the US State Department this year are: Pakistan, Turkey, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, Venezuela and Yemen.

What are prohibited for countries in the list?

The following types of security assistance are prohibited for countries that are in the list:

1. Licenses for direct commercial sales of military equipment
2. Foreign military financing for the purchase of defense articles and services, as well as design and construction services
3. International military education and training
4. Excess defense articles
5. Peacekeeping operations

The countries will also not be eligible for the US Department of Defence's "train and equip" authority for building the capacity of foreign defense forces.

Criticisms of the list

- International treaties and instruments, such as the CRC and its Optional Protocol regarding children in armed conflict, are valuable and necessary tools to establish international norms as they raise awareness regarding human rights abuses. However, these treaties are limited in scope and nature, and they tend to be idealistic rather than practicable.
- The UN's mechanisms only bind state parties that ratify the treaties. It therefore has no authority over countries that are not parties to the convention or are non-state entities, such as rebel militias recruiting child soldiers.
- It also relies on the signatories themselves to implement its doctrines and prevent human rights abuses around the world. Therefore, most of the responsibility in preventing such abuses lies with the individual countries themselves.
- While the UN views its treaties and conventions as binding on state parties, it has no police power mechanism to enforce its decisions. Therefore, the CRC and its Optional Protocol are limited by the signatories' willingness to comply. Somalia, for example, is a signatory but it hasn't ratified the convention.

IMPACT OF OPEC'S OUTPUT PACT PROPOSAL

Context:

New discussions between OPEC+ countries which scheduled recently was reportedly called off as key players failed to make any progress in resolving key issues.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Important International Groupings, Foreign Policies affecting India's Interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)
2. The Story so far regarding OPEC decisions and Oil Prices
3. How will this impact India?

4. Way Forward Options for India

About Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)

- The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries is an intergovernmental organization of 14 nations, founded in 1960 in Baghdad by the first five members (Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela), and headquartered since 1965 in Vienna, Austria.
- As of 2018, the 14 member countries accounted for an estimated 44 percent of global oil production and almost 82% of the world's "proven" oil reserves, giving OPEC a major influence on global oil prices that were previously determined by the so-called "Seven Sisters" grouping of multinational oil companies.
- The stated mission of the organization is to "coordinate and unify the petroleum policies of its member countries and ensure the stabilization of oil markets, in order to secure an efficient, economic and regular supply of petroleum to consumers, a steady income to producers, and a fair return on capital for those investing in the petroleum industry."

The Story so far regarding OPEC decisions and Oil Prices

- In April 2020, the OPEC+ group of countries had entered into a two-year agreement, which entailed steep cuts in crude production to deal with a sharp fall in the price of oil as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic – The price of Brent crude hit an 18-year low in April 2020 as economic activity around the world crashed as countries dealt with the pandemic.
- In November 2020, however, the price of Brent crude started climbing consistently as it was buoyed by the steady rollout of vaccination programmes around the world.
- OPEC+, however, maintained lower levels of production despite crude oil prices reaching pre-Covid levels which helped boost rising prices even further – (Saudi Arabia, notably, announced a further cut in production for the February-to-April 2021 period.)
- The OPEC+ group ran into sharp criticism from developing economies, including India, for deliberately maintaining low supply levels to raise prices.
- In April, OPEC+ agreed to gradually increase crude production including a phased end to Saudi Arabia's 1 million barrel per day cut in production by July.

The Current Issue

- The UAE agreed that there was a need to increase crude oil production from August, but did not agree to a condition by the OPEC Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee (JMMC) that the two-year production agreement be extended by six months.
- The UAE's key objection to the existing agreement is the reference output used to calculate the total production apportioned to each oil-exporting country.

How will this impact India?

- If the UAE and other OPEC+ nations do not reach an agreement to increase production in August, expected relief in the form of lower crude oil prices could be delayed.
- India is currently facing record-high prices of petrol and diesel, with pump prices of the former exceeding Rs 100 per litre in several states and Union Territories.
- High crude prices have led to Indian oil marketing companies hiking the price of petrol and diesel by almost 20 per cent since the beginning of 2021.

Way Forward Options for India

- India needs pricing flexibility as well as the certainty of supply even during times when production falls due to any reason. Besides, choice of time of supply and flexibility on quantity (ability to reduce or increase) is what India should be looking at.
- Indian refiners can look to reduce the quantity they buy through term contracts and instead buy more from the spot or current market.
- Buying from the spot market would ensure that India can take advantage of any fall in prices on any day and book quantities. It's like the stock market where shares can be bought on a day or time when the prices are low.
- State-owned refineries have also been asked to coordinate buying and also explore joint strategy with private refiners such as Reliance Industries and Nayara Energy.

INDIA – EU COOPERATION IN AGRICULTURE SECTOR

Context:

Virtual meeting between Union Minister for Agriculture & Farmers Welfare of India and Member of European Commission-Agriculture was held recently.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Foreign Policies, Treaties and Agreements affecting India's Interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About the European Commission (EC)
2. Highlights of the India – European Commission meet
3. India's Points highlighted during the meet

About the European Commission (EC)

- The European Commission (EC) is an executive body of the European Union (EU), responsible for proposing legislation, implementing decisions, upholding the EU treaties and managing the day-to-day business of the EU.
- The Commission is divided into departments known as Directorates-General (DGs) that can be likened to departments or ministries headed by a director-general who is responsible to a commissioner.
- It operates as a cabinet government, with 28 members of the Commission. There is one member per member state. These members are proposed by member countries and European Parliament gives final approval to them.
- One of the 28 members is the Commission President proposed by the European Council and elected by the European Parliament.

Highlights of the India – European Commission meet

India-EU Summit in July, 2020

- The strong momentum of the India-European Union (EU) relations especially since the last India-EU Summit in July, 2020 was acknowledged in the meeting.
- Indian Prime Minister had participated in the India-European Union (EU) Leaders' Meeting in July 2020 and it was the first time that the EU hosted a meeting with India in the EU+27 format.
- During the meet, India and EU agreed to relaunch free trade negotiations by resuming talks that were suspended for the Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA).

- India and EU had launched talks for having a wide-ranging Free Trade Agreement (FTA), officially called broad-based BTIA, long ago in 2007.

EU Common Agriculture Policy (CAP)

- The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), a common policy for all EU countries, is a partnership between agriculture and society, and between Europe and its farmers.
- It aims to support farmers, improve agricultural productivity, ensure a stable supply of affordable food, safeguard EU farmers, tackle climate change and the sustainable management of natural resources etc.
- It is managed and funded at European level from the resources of the EU's budget.

EU Farm to Fork Strategy

- The EU Farm to Fork Strategy aims to make food systems fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly and it is one of the key components of the European Green Deal. It aims to accelerate transition to a sustainable food system.
- Reforms were undertaken by the EU in the CAP as well as the Farm to Fork Strategy to make agriculture green as well as sustainable.

United Nations Food System Summit 2021

- The United Nations (UN) Secretary General has called for the first ever UN Food Systems Summit to be held in September 2021 to strategize the actions for positive change in Agri-food systems in the world to realize the vision of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

India's Points highlighted during the meet

- 70% of its rural households still depend primarily on agriculture for their livelihood, with 82% of farmers being small and marginal.
- Agriculture Infrastructure Fund with a corpus of Rs One Lakh Crore for development of farm gate and agriculture marketing infrastructure in rural areas.
- Scheme of formation of 10000 Farmer Produce Organizations (FPOs) to help small and marginal farmers in marketing of agricultural produce.
- India raised the issue of fixing the Maximum Residual Limit (MRL) of Tricyclazole used in rice crop which has been a concern for India and is affecting India's Basmati Rice Exports to the EU.

MEA REJECTS OIC'S OFFER

Context:

Recently, the Ministry of External Affairs rejected the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation's (OIC) proposal to assist a dialogue between India and Pakistan.

Relevance:

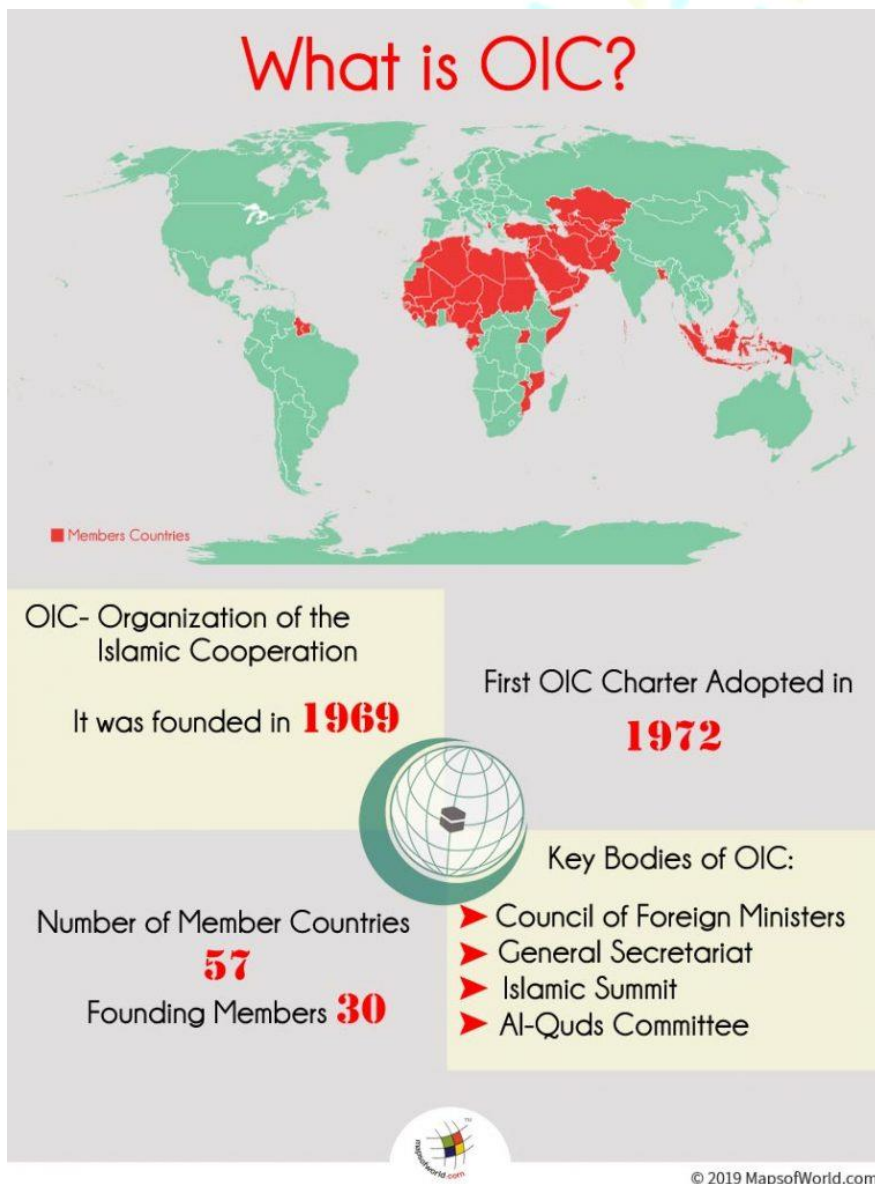
GS-II: International Relations (India's Neighbors, Foreign Policies, International Groupings and Organizations)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)
2. India and OIC
3. About the recent stand taken by OIC on Pakistan

Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)

- The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation is an international organization founded in 1969, consisting of 57 member states, with a collective population of over 1.8 billion as of 2015 with 53 countries being Muslim-majority countries.
- The organisation states that it is “the collective voice of the Muslim world” and works to “safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony”.
- The OIC has permanent delegations to the United Nations and the European Union.
- Some members, especially in West Africa and South America, are – though with large Muslim populations – not necessarily Muslim majority countries.
- A few countries with significant Muslim populations, such as Russia and Thailand, sit as Observer States.



India and OIC

- The OIC has been generally supportive of Pakistan’s stand on Kashmir, and has issued statements criticising the alleged Indian “atrocities” in the state/Union Territory.

- In 2018, the OIC General Secretariat had “expressed strong condemnation of the killing of innocent Kashmiris by Indian forces in Indian-occupied Kashmir”.
- OIC has criticised the Government of India over the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, and the Babri Masjid verdict of the Supreme Court. OIC has also criticised the Indian government for what it called “growing Islamophobia” in India.
- In 2019, India made its maiden appearance at the OIC Foreign Ministers’ meeting, as a “guest of honour” and this first-time invitation was seen as a diplomatic victory for India, especially at a time of heightened tensions with Pakistan following the Pulwama attack.
- At the 45th session of the Foreign Ministers’ Summit in 2018, Bangladesh, the host, suggested that India, where more than 10% of the world’s Muslims live, should be given Observer status, but Pakistan opposed the proposal.
- India has always maintained that OIC has no locus standi in matters strictly internal to India including that of Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir which is an integral and inalienable part of India.

About the recent stand taken by OIC on Pakistan

- The OIC offered to arrange a meeting between India and Pakistan and proposed to send a delegation to Jammu & Kashmir in line with resolutions of the OIC council of foreign ministers.
- Pakistan has repeatedly sought to raise the Kashmir issue at the OIC against the backdrop of India’s dramatically improved relations with several key players in West Asia and in the Islamic organisation, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, Indonesia and Bangladesh.
- The OIC should be watchful that their platform is not subverted by “vested interests” such as Pakistan to interfere in internal affairs of India or for anti-India propaganda through biased and one-sided resolutions.

INDIA-NEPAL RAIL SERVICES AGREEMENT (RSA)

Context:

Rail Transportation between India & Nepal got a major boost as authorization to all cargo train operators to utilize the Indian railway network to carry all containers bound for Nepal came into force with the signing of a Letter of Exchange (LoE) to the India-Nepal Rail Services Agreement (RSA) 2004.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (India’s Neighbors, Foreign policies and Agreements affecting India’s Relations)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About the Rail Services Agreement (RSA), 2004
2. About the 2021 Letter of Exchange (LoE) on RSA
3. India – Nepal relations
4. Tensions in India-Nepal relations

About the Rail Services Agreement (RSA), 2004

- The Rail Services Agreement was executed in 2004 between the Ministry of Railways, Government of India and the Ministry of Commerce, the Govt. of Nepal for introduction of freight train services between these two countries to and from Birgunj (Nepal) via Raxaul (India).

- The Agreement shall be reviewed every five years and may be modified (through Letters of Exchange) by the Contracting Parties by mutual consent.
- LoE's in the past: Second LoE was signed in 2008 at the time of introduction of bilateral cargo between the two countries which required introduction of new customs procedures.
- Third LoE was signed in 2016 enabling rail transit traffic to/from Visakhapatnam Port in addition to existing provision of rail transportation through Kolkata/Haldia Port.

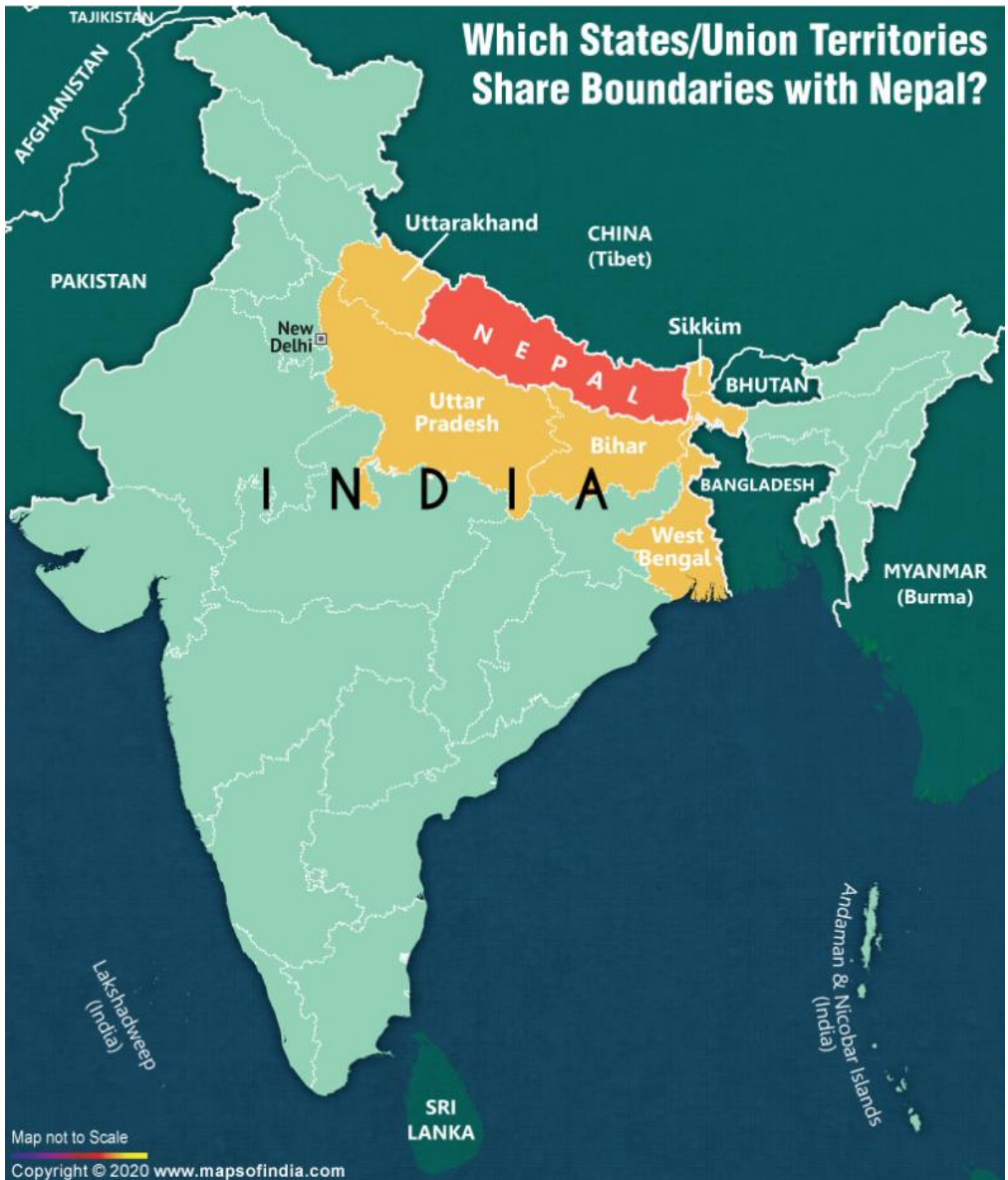
About the 2021 Letter of Exchange (LoE) on RSA

- The latest LoE will allow all authorized cargo train operators to utilize the Indian railway network to carry Nepal's container and other freight – both bilateral between Indian and Nepal or third country from Indian ports to Nepal.
- The authorized cargo train operators include public and private container trains Operators, automobile freight train operators, special freight train operators or any other operator authorized by Indian Railways.
- This liberalization will allow market forces (such as consumers and buyers) to come up in the rail freight segment in Nepal, and is likely to increase efficiency and cost- competitiveness, eventually benefiting the Nepalese consumer.
- The liberalisation will particularly reduce transportation costs for automobiles and certain other products whose carriage takes place in special wagons and will boost rail cargo movement between the two countries.

India – Nepal relations

- Nepal is an important neighbour of India and occupies special significance in its foreign policy because of the geographic, historical, cultural and economic linkages/ties that span centuries.
- Both countries initiated their relationship with the 1950 Indo-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship and accompanying secret letters that defined security relations between the two countries, and an agreement governing both bilateral trade and trade transiting Indian territory.
- India and Nepal share similar ties in terms of Hinduism and Buddhism with Buddha's birthplace Lumbini located in present day Nepal.
- The two countries not only share an open border and unhindered movement of people, but they also have close bonds through marriages and familial ties, popularly known as Roti-Beti ka Rishta.

PM IAS
be inspired



Tensions in India-Nepal relations

- India's Neighbourhood First Policy in connection with Nepal started with a highly successful visit to Nepal in August 2014. But the relationship turned sour in 2015 when India first got blamed for interfering in the Constitution-drafting in Nepal and then for an "unofficial blockade" that generated widespread resentment against the country.
- India has ignored the changing political narrative in Nepal for far too long.

- India remained content that its interests were safeguarded by quiet diplomacy even when Nepali leaders publicly adopted anti-Indian postures. This has also led to distortions in Nepali history textbooks and led to long-term negative consequences.
- In 2017, Nepal signed up to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which sought to create highways, airports and other infrastructure in the country. BRI was rejected by India and this move of Nepal was seen as an inclination towards China.
- Recently, India and Nepal had border disputes over Kalapani – Limpiyadhura – Lipulekh trijunction between India-Nepal and China and Susta area (West Champaran district, Bihar).

SHAPING A TRILATERAL AS ROME LOOKS TO THE INDO-PACIFIC

Context:

Recently, Italy has begun to signal its intention to enter the Indo-Pacific geography by seeking to join India and Japan in a trilateral partnership.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (India's Neighbours, Foreign Policies affecting India's Interests)

Mains Questions:

In the pushback against China a strategic cooperation between India, Italy and Japan can ensure a free Indo-Pacific. Discuss by throwing light on significance of the Indo-Pacific for India. (10 Marks)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. What is the Indo-Pacific Region?
2. Significance of Indo-Pacific for India
3. About Italy's Recent Interest
4. Significance of Italy's Interest in Indo-Pacific for India
5. Way Forward

What is the Indo-Pacific Region?

- The "Indo-Pacific" idea was originally conceived in 2006-07. The term 'IndoPacific' combines the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and the Western Pacific Region (WP) – inclusive of the contiguous seas off East Asia and Southeast Asia – into a singular regional construct.
- The idea has gained eminence in recent times due to:
 1. Increasing geopolitical connect between the Indian Ocean and the western Pacific in both the geo-economics
 2. Eastward shift of the world's economic "centre of gravity" towards the Asian continent.
 3. Growing Eminence of India
 4. Politico-military aggressiveness of China.
- Indo Pacific is an inclusive and representative term that reflects the contemporary interconnectedness of trade, technology and supply chains in a wider region.
- Moreover, the Indo-Pacific is being redefined, ironically, by China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), debt-trap diplomacy, fictional territorial claims and a divide-and-rule strategy.

- Indo Pacific is wider than the “Asia-Pacific” which represented the trans-Pacific strategic and economic impulses after World War II, and was confined to East and South-east Asia.



Significance of Indo-Pacific for India

- Greater Role in the Region-** This concept is a shift from the Asia-Pacific (included North-east Asia, Southeast Asia and Oceania), where India did not have a major role to play. The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) launched in 1989 did not include India, as did the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) launched in 1996, though India was admitted into ASEM in 2006. India still remains outside APEC despite stated US support for its inclusion. However, India is a key player in the Indo-Pacific region.
- Play the Role of a Net Security Provider** where India is expected to assume the responsibility for stability in the region by following capacity building, military diplomacy, military assistance and direct deployment.
- Ensure Freedom of Navigation-** as the region includes some vital trade routes and world's vital choke points for global commerce, including the Straits of Malacca. Around 95% of India's foreign trade comes by the Indian Ocean.
- Develop a Security Architecture-** as there are issues like territorial and water disputes between countries, piracy concerns, North Korean nuclear capability and greater militarization in the region.
- Containment of China-** In the backdrop of China's aggressive expansionists tendencies including Belt and Road Initiative, String Of Pearls Theory, Indo-Pacific presents an opportunity to capitalise on China's key strategic vulnerability, viz., its energy lifelines transiting the Indian Ocean and to showcase Indian Navy's capability to moderate China's behaviour, thereby dissuading its future aggressiveness.
- Help achieve Strategic Objectives**
 - Gives an extension to India's 'Act East Policy'

- Entry in multilateral groupings– such as Nuclear Supplier’s Group and permanent seat in UN Security Council.
- Create alliances with smaller powers– as it would entail continued engagement with China while simultaneously developing strong economic and security alliances in East and South East Asia and across the Indian Ocean region
- Increasing role of ports– where different countries are trying to setup their bases in different ports of the region. E.g., India has secured access to Duqm port in Oman for military use and develop the Agalega Island in Mauritius. The Indian Navy has secured a logistics facility in Singapore that will allow it to refuel and rearm and has similar facilities in Vietnam.
- Help achieve Economic Potential- India is targeting a sustained 7.5-8% economic growth and aims to be a \$5 trillion economy by 2025. The Indo-Pacific can aid this as there is
 - Presence of natural resources– like oil and hydrocarbons in South China sea, which can help India diversify its import basket.
 - Presence of high market potential for Indian exports such as engineering services, ICT services etc.
 - Development of North Eastern States- that can become a gateway for India to integrate with this region.
 - Integration of Blue Economy Aspirations– where, ocean ecosystems bring economic and social benefits that are efficient, equitable and sustainable for the entire region.

Why Western powers are looking towards Indo-Pacific?

- China has been asserting itself in the Indo-Pacific region.
- To counter the rise of Chinese, traditional alliances like NATO are not very effective, hence, there is a need for new multilateral alignments in the region. This is clearly visible in the new alignments – QUAD, Supply chain resilience Initiative, Malabar naval Exercise.
- In all these alignments participating nations are able to address specific common challenges, from maritime security to a coordinated pandemic response, including consolidating and further developing strong reciprocal trade relationships, without compromising the political autonomy of each participant.

About Italy’s Recent Interest

- Italy off late has become more vocal on the risks emanating from China’s strategic competitive initiatives. Recently, Italian PM described Chinese competitive practices as “unfair” and invited the European Union (EU) to be franker and more courageous in confronting Beijing on its violations of human rights, reiterating that with respect to China “the reciprocal visions of the world are very different”.
- Recently, Italy too, shedding its historic neglect of the region in its foreign policy realm has signalled its intention to enter the Indo-Pacific geography, by seeking to join India and Japan in a trilateral partnership.
- Italy has also expressed its intention to strengthen its otherwise below potential bilateral relations with India.
- This marked change in Italy’s actions is based on the following factors:
 - Risks emanating from China’s strategic competitive initiatives and the threat it poses to the EU in general and Italy in specific.

- The potential benefits that could accrue from a robust India-Italy bilateral relation.

Significance of Italy's Interest in Indo-Pacific for India

- The India, Italy and Japan trilateral initiative could be used as a forum to foster and consolidate a strategic relationship between the three countries, and specifically, expand India-Italy bilateral relations. The strengthening of the India-Italy partnership can help consolidate the EU-India strategic relationship further.
- A strategic trilateral between India, Italy and Japan has, in the medium to long term, a lot of potential. The compatible economic systems of the three countries could help create a virtuous and mutually beneficial contribution to the reorganisation of the global supply chains.
- In the security realm, Italy, through its presence in the western Indian Ocean (anti-piracy operations off the coast of Somalia), could easily complement the India-Japan Indo-Pacific partnership.
- That all three countries share the same values and the same rules-based world view could help them coordinate at multilateral organizations.

Way Forward

- In the pushback against China, strategic cooperation between India, Italy and Japan can ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific.
- Though the efforts towards the trilateral are welcome, they should be backed by appropriate efforts to institutionalize it. The three countries need to define a common economic and strategic agenda.
- The trilateral cooperation should also induce a strategic dialogue that should include the economic, security and political dimensions.

INDIA'S TRADE WITH CHINA SOARED 62% IN H1

Context:

India's trade with China in the first half of 2021 rose by a record 62.7%.

Relevance:

GS-III: Indian Economy (International trade), GS-II: International Relations (India and its Neighbors)

Dimensions of the Article:

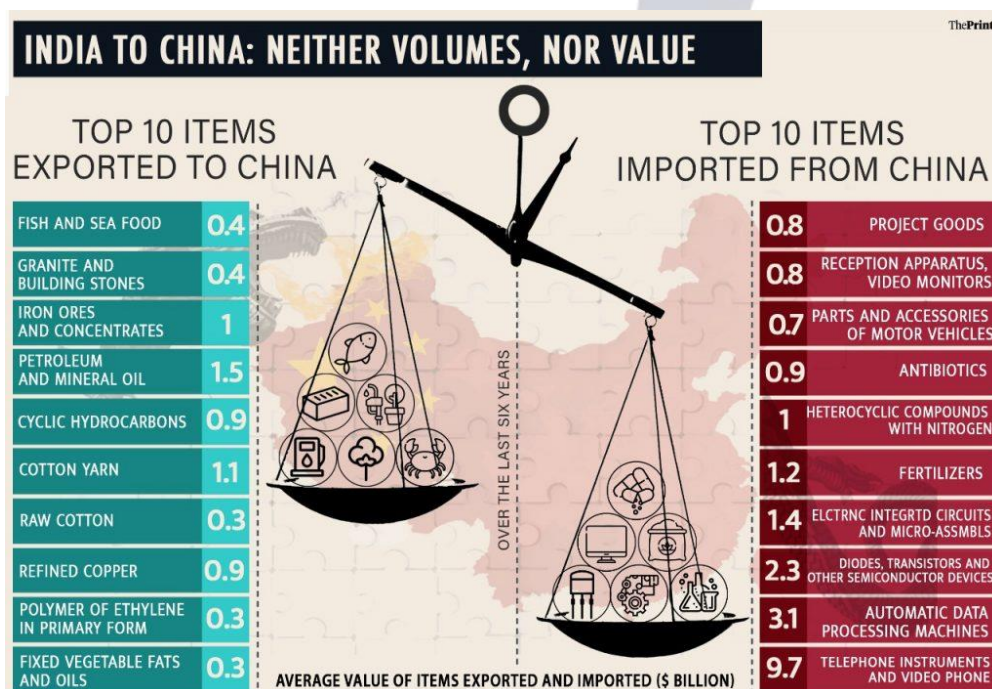
1. Highlights of the latest data on India-China trade
2. Understanding what we import and what we export to China
3. India's Dependence on Chinese Imports

Highlights of the latest data on India-China trade

- India's increase of trade with China by more than 60% in the first half of 2021 is the highest increase among China's major trade partners — with total two-way trade surpassing the pre-pandemic levels.
- India's imports, driven by record purchases of medical supplies increased by more than 60% and higher than the first-half 2019 figure.
- India's exports to China climbed by almost 70% which is also the highest figure on record for the first half of any year.
- The trade deficit for India with China after the first six months stood at \$28.04 billion.

Understanding what we import and what we export to China

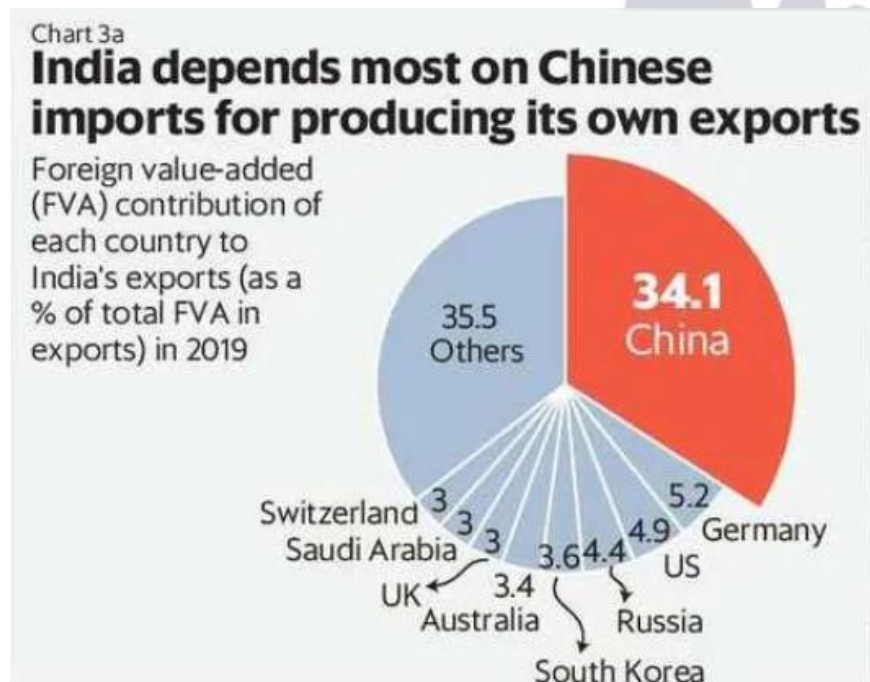
- India's exports to China have risen and imports have fallen over the last few years and a closer look at the items traded between the two countries shows the unequal bilateral trade.
- Trade numbers between 2014-15 and 2019-20 show that export of low-value raw materials and import of high-value manufactured goods has characterised India's trade relationship with China, akin to the ties the country had with its colonial ruler Britain in the years before Independence, said trade experts.
- This "colonial pattern" of trade has meant that India's exports to China over the last six years have been only fifth in value of India's imports from China.
- While average exports from China have been around \$13 billion in the six years 2014-20, the average value of imports from China has been \$66 billion in the period.
- India's exports have ranged from food items like fish and spices to essential inputs like iron ores, granite stones, and petroleum products.
- India's major exports to China in the last six years were iron ore, petroleum fuels, organic chemicals, refined copper and cotton yarn. Among food items, some of the other major items exported were fish and seafood, pepper and vegetable oils and fats. Blocks of granite and other building stones and raw cotton were also among exports.
- Its imports from China have been dominated by electrical machinery and equipment, and other mechanical appliances. India's major imports from China have been of items like automatic data processing machines and units, telephone equipment and video phones, electronic circuits, transistors and semiconductor devices, antibiotics, heterocyclic compounds including nitrogen, fertilisers, sound recording devices and TV cameras, automobile components and accessories and project goods.





India's Dependence on Chinese Imports

- India must remember that even though its widening trade deficit with China remains an eyesore for policymakers, dependence on Chinese products has only grown year after year.
- In 2019, Chinese imports alone accounted for 34% of all the foreign value-added in India's exports, data from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development shows. In 2009, this figure was just 1.8%.
- Over the last decade, India's dependence on China for inputs for the manufacture of drugs and consumer goods has shown a marked increase. All this will matter even more in this time of crisis after the coronavirus.
- A strengthening anti-China sentiment and louder calls for self-reliance could actually go against India's interests and economic logic.



INDIA: FUTURE OF AFGHANISTAN CANNOT BE ITS PAST

Context:

Amidst rapid advances made by the militant group Taliban on towns and border check-posts in various parts of Afghanistan – Indian External Affairs Minister said that the world won't legitimise a Taliban regime that comes to power in Kabul by force.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (India's Neighbors, Foreign Policies affecting India's Interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Taliban's advances in Afghanistan
2. Taliban back to old ways in newly seized Afghan territory
3. India's reaction
4. About Afghan peace process
5. The US Taliban Agreement
6. India's Concerns with the U.S. deal with Taliban
7. India and Views on communicating with Taliban

Taliban's advances in Afghanistan

- In recent weeks, the Taliban militants have made rapid advances across the country, seizing a series of border posts from Afghan forces, including crossings with Iran, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.
- The Taliban – a fundamentalist Islamist militia who were pushed out of power by the US invasion nearly 20 years ago – have also seized control of a number of key roads as they seek to cut off supply routes to major cities.
- Control over the Pakistani crossing (Spin Boldak border crossing) would be a major prize to Taliban as it would give them significant customs revenue from the trade which flows back and forth and would provide direct access to areas in Pakistan (Balochistan province), where Taliban leaders and fighters are known to have been based for many years.
- The seizure of the border crossing follows days of heavy fighting across Kandahar province, where the government was forced to deploy commando fighters to prevent the fall of the provincial capital even as the insurgents inched closer to taking the frontier.
- It comes as the US withdraws its forces from Afghanistan ahead of an 11 September deadline set by President Joe Biden.



be inspired

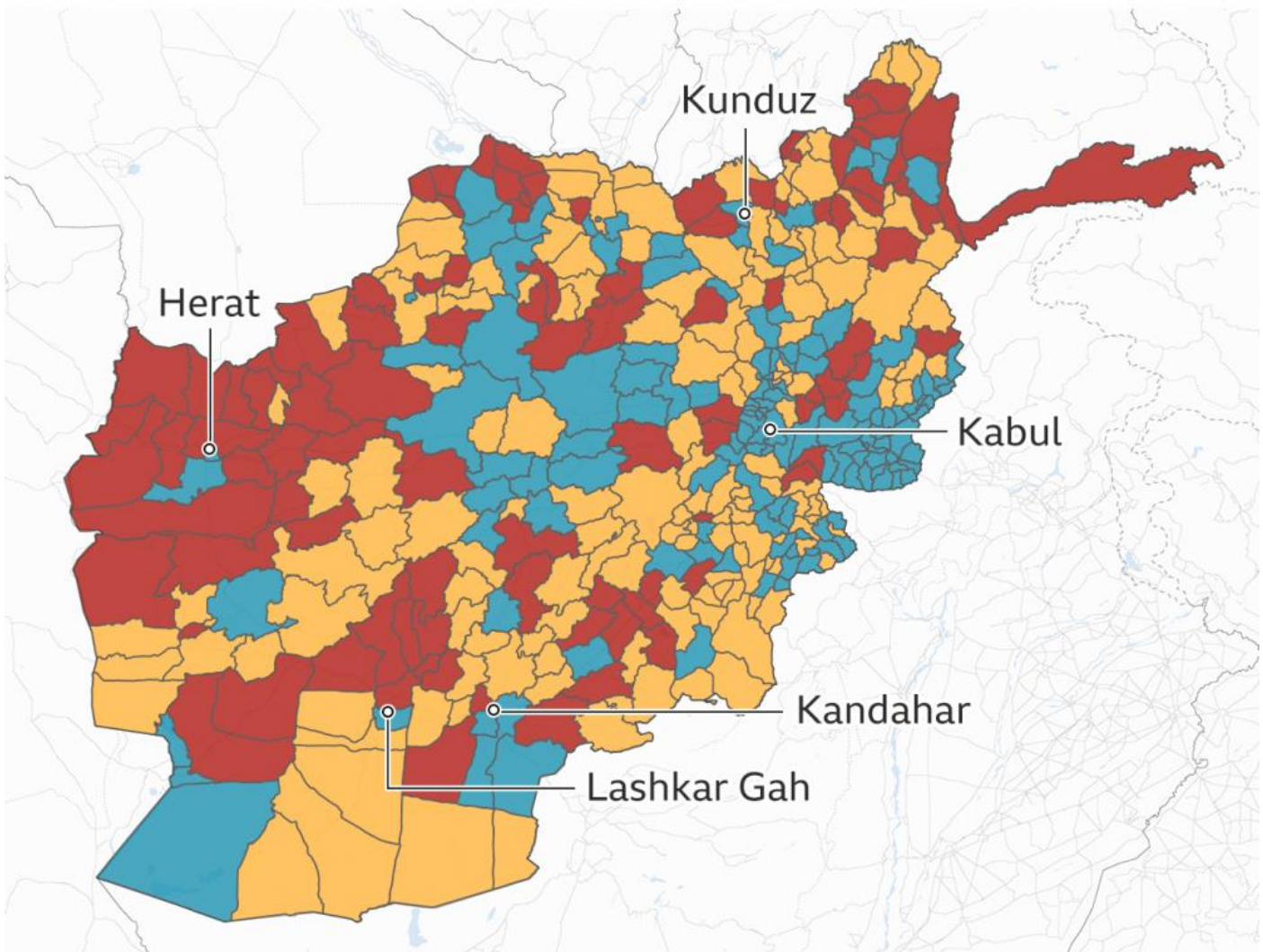


Who's in control in Afghanistan?

■ Taliban control

■ Government control

■ Contested*



*Contested is where fighting is ongoing or strong Taliban presence

Districts according to 2005 Afghanistan government boundaries

Source: BBC Afghan service 12 July 2021

BBC

Taliban back to old ways in newly seized Afghan territory

- Days after the Taliban captured a remote district in Afghanistan's north, they issued their first orders in the form of a letter to the local imam which said women can't go to the bazaar without a male companion, and men should not shave their beards.
- The insurgents also banned smoking and warned that anybody violating the rules "will be seriously dealt with".
- In some areas they are again introducing the harsh interpretation of Islamic rule that earned them notoriety until being overthrown by the U.S.-led invasion that followed the September 11 attacks.

Rules during the 1996-2001 Taliban regime

- Women were ordered to stay indoors unless accompanied by a male relative, girls were banned from school, and those found guilty of crimes such as adultery were stoned to death.
- Men had relatively more freedom but were ordered not to shave, would be beaten if they didn't attend prayers, and were told to only wear traditional clothing.
- Afghanistan is deeply conservative and some rural pockets of the country adhere to similar rules even without Taliban oversight — but the insurgents have tried to impose these edicts even in more modern centres.

India's reaction

- Reflecting the urgency and concern over the developing situation in Afghanistan, India said the world is “against seizure of power by violence and force”, and “peace negotiations in earnest are the only answer” at the meeting of foreign ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).
- India called for “ceasing violence and terrorist attacks against civilians and state representatives”, settlement of conflict “through political dialogue”, respect towards “interests of all ethnic groups”, and ensuring that “neighbours are not threatened by terrorism, separatism and extremism”.
- The challenge, the External Affairs Minister said, was to “act seriously and sincerely on these beliefs”, because there are “forces at work with a very different agenda” — in an oblique reference to Pakistan.
- India has pulled out its officials and staffers from its consulate in Kandahar in the past few days and is monitoring the situation in Mazar-e-Sharif where it has another consulate.

About Afghan peace process

- The Afghan peace process comprises the proposals and negotiations in a bid to end the ongoing war and conflict involving the Taliban in Afghanistan.
- In February, 2020, US president has struck a peace deal with the Taliban (see box) on the issues of counterterrorism and the withdrawal of U.S. and international troops. The intra-Afghan talks were part of the deal.
- Though the deal was to be held in march-April 2020, it got delayed due to disagreement on mutual release of prisoners by both Taliban and Afghan Government.

The US Taliban Agreement

- Withdrawal of foreign forces: The United States agreed to reduce its number of troops in the country from roughly 12,000 to 8,600 within 135 days.
- Release of prisoners- The deal also provides for a prisoner swap.
- Recognition to Taliban- The US will move to the United Nations Security Council to remove Taliban members from the sanctions list.
- Counter terror measures- The Taliban would prevent any terror group from using Afghanistan to threaten the security of US and its allies.
- Intra-Afghan Negotiations- will be started among all the stakeholders of the Afghan society and the Taliban would commit towards it.

India's Concerns with the U.S. deal with Taliban

- In the Doha agreement, The U.S. appears to submit to the possibility of a Taliban-led government, by extracting promises that the Taliban will not provide “visas, passports, travel documents or asylum” to those threatening the U.S. and its allies.

- This sidelines the “Intra-Afghan” dialogue, and India’s support for the election process for leadership in Afghanistan.
- India cannot look at the agreements or the route to Kabul via Washington’s view that the Ghani government (which India has recognised as winner of the 2019 election) will only serve for an interim period.
- This also raises a big question mark on the future of Afghanistan’s government, and whether it will remain a democracy.
- **India has raised concerns over the future of democracy, human rights, women’s rights and other achievements made in Afghanistan since 2001, when the Taliban regime was last defeated.**

India and Views on communicating with Taliban

- While the MEA did not confirm the talks, which would represent a major shift for Indian policy, it did not deny recent reports that indicated that Indian security officials have exchanged messages with several “nationalist” Taliban factions.
- MEA said that India is in touch with various stakeholders in pursuance of our long-term commitment towards development and reconstruction of Afghanistan.
- India has thus far refused to open direct dialogue with the Taliban leadership, which it held responsible for facilitating terror attacks along with groups like the Lashkar-e Taiba and Jaish-e Mohammad on Indian missions in Afghanistan.
- However, according to experts, India has reconsidered its position in the aftermath of the U.S. announcement that it would pull out all its troops by September 2021.
- The clarity over the U.S. decision to pull out, which could be as early as September 2021 has added to the sense of urgency for Delhi to make these direct contacts with the stakeholders in Afghanistan.
- The exercise of India opening these channels and being comfortable with this information being out in the public is a signal to both the policymaking community in India and the interlocutors on the other side that they are serious about the talks with the Taliban.
- India’s engagement with groups in Afghanistan can be thought of as driven by a desire to “limit damage” to its security interests as a result of the U.S.’s decision to leave and the Taliban gaining military strength in several key provinces.

SHOWING THE WAY OUT: ON K.P. OLI’S OUSTER IN NEPAL

Context:

Nepal has a new Prime Minister after the Supreme Court overrules Mr. Oli again.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (India’s Neighbors, Foreign Policies and Developments affecting India’s Interests)

Mains Question:

Nepal-India relations are deep, wide-ranging, and unique, but also fraught with complexities. Much of the complexity stems from the fact that the political leadership handles only a small part of this very important bilateral relationship. Discuss 15 marks

Dimensions of the Article:

- Political History of Nepal

- Evolution of India-Nepal relations
- Significance of Nepal for India
- Divergence between India and Nepal relations
- Way forward

Political History of Nepal

- **Ancient India:** The relation between India and Nepal goes back to the times of rule of **the Sakya clan and Gautama Buddha**. Initially, Nepal was under tribal rule and only with the coming of Licchavis rule in Nepal did its feudal era truly begin. Feudalism in Nepali society owes its origin to Licchavis.
- **Medieval History:** From 750 to 1750 AD was a period when Nepal came under **Newari rule** and they consolidated their presence in Kathmandu. This time period also saw a shift from Buddhism to Hinduism in Nepal and witnessed widespread cultural diffusion.
- **From 1700 to 1951:** The early 1700s witnessed a change in the Nepalese power structure. The subsequent period witnesses both monarchical and prime ministerial rule.
- **From 1951 to 1959:** In 1951 election **Nepali Congress Party** won the election and struggled for getting the power. In 1959, the confrontation between the king, Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah, and the NC reached a level where the king declared NC as corrupt, removed it from power and subsequently installed a party-less Panchayat system.
- **From 1959 to 1990 (Party Less Panchayat System):** This system was such where people would elect their representatives, but actual power would be wielded by the King. Thus, a highly centralised rule began from 1960. The period of party-less Panchayat System witnessed protests from NC and other sections of society.
- **1st Jan Andolan:**
 - A new government was formed under Nepali Congress.
 - **Anti-India Movement:** In 1994, the **Unified Marxist Leninist Party (UML)** tried to generate an anti-India feeling in Nepal. The UML began to assert that the NC is in reality controlled by Congress party of India. This led to a perception amongst the Nepali people about India's control and interference over Nepal and its internal affairs through the NC. The anti-India plan worked in favour of UML and they succeeded in capturing power.
 - **Maoism in Nepal:** Civil unrest gave the space to Maoist Movement in Nepal. The Maoist movement in Nepal became fully manifested by 2005. Perceiving the unrest and violence in society, King Gyanendra dissolved the Parliament again.
- **2nd Jan Andolan: 2006 Peace Accord:**
 - End of all violence
 - Rewrite constitution again
 - Conducting Fresh Election

Issues related to formation of the Nepali Constitution:

- **Presidential vs Parliamentary form of Govt:** Maoists favoured the Presidential system while others favoured Parliamentary system.
- **Issues related to Federalism:** Maoists favoured ethnic federalism while others rejected the idea.

- **Madhesi issues:** Madhesi are people living in South of Nepal in the region of Terai. They are people living close to the border of India. The Madhesi have always been discriminated against by Pahadis or the people living in the upper reaches of Nepal.

Evolution of India-Nepal relations

- As close neighbours, India and Nepal share a **unique relationship of friendship and cooperation** characterized by **open borders and deep-rooted people-to-people contacts of kinship and culture**. There has been a long tradition of free movement of people across the borders. To add up the formal flavour to such historic relations, the two countries established diplomatic relations on 17 June 1947.
- **The India–Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1950** forms the bedrock of the special relations that exist between India and Nepal. Under the provisions of this Treaty:
- **Indo–Nepal national treatment**, their citizens are empowered to the same privileges for **property, trade and residence and movement** in both countries. That means, a Nepali citizen can buy property in India while and Indian citizen can do so in Nepal if he/she so chooses. Also, an Indian citizen can reside anywhere in Nepal and a Nepali citizen too enjoys the right to residence in India under national treatment.
- **Movement of Goods:** The Treaty has allowed Nepal to overcome the disadvantages of being a land-locked country.
- **An open border** between the two countries.
- **Allows Nepali nationals to work in India** without a work permit, to apply for government jobs and the civil services (except for the IFS, IAS, and IPS) and also **to open bank accounts and buy property**.



Significance of Nepal for India

- **Strategic importance:** Nepal is a buffer state between India and China.
- **Internal security:** Nepal shares a long open border with India. There is alleged link between Naxalites and Maoist in Nepal.

- **Socio-economic development** of bordering states especially Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.
- **To counter terrorist activities** close to border areas: Many hard core terrorists had been apprehended in Nepal close to India's border.
- **Nearly 30 lakh Nepalis** (some 10 per cent of Nepal's population) are employed in India; this includes some 50,000-60,000 soldiers.
- **Disaster management:** India can cooperate with Nepal by constructing dams on rivers which flow from Nepal to India. It will address the flood in Gangetic plain specially in Bihar.
- **Hydroelectricity:** Nepal has huge potential of hydroelectricity, which will fulfil the energy demand in India. Nepal is an upper riparian state and has a hydropower generation potential of around 80,000 Megawatts power. However, it has installed a capacity of around 800 Megawatts only. On an average, 15 to 18 hours of power cuts are common throughout the country.

Areas of cooperation between India and Nepal

Trade and economy:

- India is Nepal's largest trade partner and the largest source of foreign investments, besides providing transit for almost the entire third country trade of Nepal.

Connectivity:

- Nepal being a landlocked country, it is surrounded by India from three sides and one side is open towards Tibet which has very limited vehicular access. India is looking to develop the inland waterways for the movement of cargo, within **the framework of trade and transit arrangements**, providing additional access to sea for Nepal calling it linking **Sagarmatha (Mt. Everest) with Sagar (Indian Ocean)**.
- **Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN) Motor Vehicle Agreement (MVA):**
 - **In June, 2015, the four SAARC nations, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN) concluded a sub-regional MVA for regulation of passenger personnel and cargo vehicular traffic.**
 - The MVA will not only facilitate economic development and integration of the region but will simultaneously facilitate seamless movement of goods and people amongst the four signatory states. The governments will boost regional connectivity.

PMIAS
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Development Assistance:

- Government of India provides development assistance to Nepal, focusing on creation of infrastructure at the grass-root level. The areas assistance include **infrastructure, health, water resources, and education** and rural & community development.

Defence Cooperation:

- Bilateral defence cooperation includes assistance to Nepalese Army in its modernization through provision of equipment and training.

Cultural:

- There have been initiatives to promote people-to-people contacts in the area of art & culture, academics and media with different local bodies of Nepal.
- India has signed three sister-city agreements for twinning of **Kathmandu-Varanasi, Lumbini-Bodhgaya and Janakpur-Ayodhya**.

Divergence between India and Nepal relations

India Nepal Border Issue:

- **Treaty of Sagauli, 1816:** The British and Nepal, after the Anglo–Nepal wars in 1814, concluded the Treaty of Sagauli in 1816. The Treaty of Sagauli was not signed by the King and thus led to troubles in later times but the Treaty established **Mahakali River as a dividing line in the Western sector**.
- **Open Border:** After Independence, India continued with the tradition of an open border and it was noted under the Indo–Nepal Friendship Treaty of 1950.
 - The open border has helped domestic Nepalese people to take advantage.
 - The people of Nepal, through the open border, also entered into India for economic opportunities.
 - The Nepalis who come to India for work are well accepted in India and are not treated as aliens.
 - Nepali citizens have important contribution in India's security setup as well.

Recent Territorial dispute

- Nepal's Parliament cleared a **Constitution Amendment Bill** that endorses the country's new map that includes territories with India — **Limpiadhura, Lipulekh and Kalapani**.
- The map is in retaliation of Nepal's objection to construction of road by India from **Dharchula to Lipulekh in Uttarakhand**. This road connects close to the Line of Actual Control and opens a new route for **Kailash Mansarovar yatra via Lipulekh pass**. This will help pilgrims to avoid dangerous high-altitude routes through Sikkim and Nepal.



About Indo-Nepal Territorial Dispute:

- The disagreements between India and Nepal over the border dispute is over the regions which includes **Kalapani, Lipulekh, Limpiyadhura (all three in Uttarakhand)** and Susta (Bihar).
- Kalapani area is the largest territorial dispute between Nepal and India consisting of at least 37,000 hectares of land in the High Himalayas.
 - It is located in the easternmost corner of Uttarakhand's Pithoragarh district.
 - It is a **tri-junction between India, China and Nepal** which is of strategic significance in South Asian diplomacy.
- **Susta in Bihar** is on the banks of River Gandak. The changing course of River Gandak often created issue between two countries.
- **Nepal considers the 1816 Treaty of Sugauli** (signed between Gurkha rulers of Kathmandu and the East India Company) as the only authentic document on boundary delineation. Under the provisions of the Sugauli Treaty, Nepal lost Sikkim, Kumaon, Garhwal and Western Terai (Flat) area. **River Mechi** became the eastern border with India while the river **Kali (called Mahakali in Nepal)** was demarcated as the north-western border.
 - The Treaty of Sagauli also defined Gandak as the international boundary between India and Nepal.
 - Nepal considers the source of Kali river near Limpiyadhura, which is higher in altitude than the rest of the river's flow. Thus, all the three areas Limpiyadhura, Lipulekh and Kalapani are considered to the east of the river Kali.
- **India on the other hand says** the border begins at Kalapani which India says is where the river begins.
 - Kali originates in springs well below the Lipulekh pass, and the Sugauli treaty does not demarcate the area north of these streams.
 - **Administrative and revenue records** going back to the nineteenth century show that Kalapani was on the Indian side.
 - India has controlled this territory since 1950s and built other infrastructure here before, besides conducting its administration and deploying military forces up to the border pass with China.
 - **China in 2015 statement** also recognised India's sovereignty over the area by agreeing to expand trade through the Lipulekh pass.

Issues in settling border dispute between India and Nepal

- **China factor:** The recent political map issued by the Nepal Government is seen to be the influence of China due to the two Communist governments and emerging close relations between them.
 - **China opening port facilities to Nepal** and providing access to Trans Himalayan Railway reduces Nepal's dependency on India and reduces the leverage that India has with the Nepal to settle the dispute.
- **Interpretation of the boundary:** The dispute is mainly because of the varying interpretation of the origin of the river and its various tributaries that slice through the mountains.
- **Big Brotherly attitude:** India's Big Brotherly attitude towards Nepal has created a sense of insecurity in the Nepalese government and its citizens and any settlement would be seen as a weakness.
- **Nepal internal politics:** also pose problems as political parties flip from pro-India positions to anti-India positions.

Nepal-China Connectivity Deal

China and Nepal signed agreements for all-weather road connectivity between Kathmandu and the Tibet Autonomous Region under the **Trans-Himalayan Multidimensional Connectivity Network**.

Reasons behind Nepal's growing proximity with China:

- **Dependency on India**– Because of its geographical constraints, Nepal has found itself heavily reliant on India, never acquiring the comparative advantage to increase exports.
- **Negative perception about India**- formed owing to following events:
 - Nepal's reservations towards India, due to the perceived treaty-based unequal treatment, the open border has always been a crucial area of contention.
 - India's delay in implementation of various projects in Nepal more so vis-a-vis China and its implementation of agreed-upon projects. E.g. Mahakali agreement has remained without start for over two decades.
- **Potential benefits from China**– Nepal's need for China far outweighs any potential challenges in the Sino-Nepal relationship.
 - Nepal views the Chinese railway as an opportunity to bring Chinese pilgrims and tourists to Lumbini, the birthplace of the Buddha, and to the popular valley of Pokhara.
 - The Chinese railway can help enhance Nepal's overall economic capacity.
- **Ideological basis**– The communist parties in Nepal have favoured and consistently protested against India. This time around the Nepali Congress also favoured them.

Possible implications of the Nepal-China Connectivity deal for India

- **Erosion of buffer state**– In the case of an India–China war, it is uncertain whether Nepal will take India's side as per the spirit of the 1950 treaty.
- **Effect on other neighbours**– including Bhutan, which also has faced similar circumstances with both India and China.
- **Impact on regional groupings**– Growing China-Nepal relations may become a hurdle in regional groupings like BIMSTEC in which Nepal holds a significant voice.

Way Forward

- Nepal cannot dispense with its reliance on India. India is and will remain vital for the country in many ways. However, India's strategy to keep Nepal's engagement with China to a minimum is no longer a viable option.
- India must introduce new economic, developmental and infrastructure initiatives with Nepal that will not only bring tangible benefits to Nepali citizens but also address the vulnerabilities that will emerge in Nepal as the country engages with China.

ATTACKS ON INDIANS IN SOUTH AFRICA VIOLENCE

Context:

Protests in South Africa began after the jailing of former President Jacob Zuma and amid escalating civil unrest in the country the Indian government raised concerns about attacks on people of Indian origin in South Africa.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Foreign Politics and Political Developments affecting India's Interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About recent violence in South Africa
2. India–South Africa relations

About recent violence in South Africa

- The unrest in South Africa, set off after the imprisonment of former President Jacob Zuma, has not escalated to high levels so much that the South African police and the military have resorted to firing stun grenades and rubber bullets to contain the situation.
- The former President of South Africa is serving a sentence for contempt of court, after failing to appear for a corruption inquiry.
- Since 2020, with the lockdown and restrictions on businesses, South Africa's economy has struggled to make a recovery – unemployment stood at a record high of 32.6 per cent in the first three months of 2021 and a survey found that nearly a sixth of the population in South Africa were hungry.
- India's External Affairs Minister spoke to his South African counterpart regarding reports of arson and looting against Indians and Indian-origin South Africans.





India–South Africa relations

be inspired

History

- India-South Africa relations have grown strong since the end of apartheid in South Africa in 1994 with links between India and South Africa dating back to the period during which Mahatma Gandhi started his Satyagraha movement in South Africa for the cause of freedom and justice in South Africa over a century ago.
- Mahatma Gandhi had commenced his political-legal career in South Africa, experimenting with civil disobedience in the 1890s and 1900s, to improve the quality of living of the Indians living there.
- The Indian government was an outspoken critic of the apartheid-era South African government, refusing to maintain diplomatic relations.

- Both countries established diplomatic relations after the end of apartheid in 1994. After South Africa achieved democracy in 1994, it was the Red Fort Declaration on Strategic Partnership between India and South Africa, signed in March 1997 which set the parameters for a rekindled relationship.
- The major part of the Indian origin community came to South Africa from 1860 onwards as farm labour to serve as field hands and mill operatives in the sugar and other agricultural plantations.

Recent developments

- The Strategic Partnership between the two countries was again reaffirmed in the Tshwane Declaration (October 2006).
- India is South Africa's fifth-largest export destination, and fourth-largest import origin and is the second-largest trading partner in Asia.
- In 2016 both the countries agreed to collaborate in the defence sector, especially in terms of the opportunities available for South African private sector under 'Make in India' initiative, energy sector, agro-processing, human resource development, and infrastructure development.
- India and South Africa also share an extensive energy partnership in 2010, India imported 1.4 million tonnes of South African coal – making it the largest purchaser of coal from the country.
- Ties with further solidified with South Africa's 2011 acceptance into the BRICS group.

U.S., AFGHANISTAN, PAKISTAN, UZBEKISTAN: QUAD

Context:

The US, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Uzbekistan have agreed in principle to establish a new quadrilateral diplomatic platform focused on enhancing regional connectivity,

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Important International Groupings, Foreign Policies affecting India's Interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About the new US, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Uzbekistan Quad
2. Significance of the new quad grouping
3. How will this impact China's BRI initiative?

About the new US, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Uzbekistan Quad

- The US State Department announced the setting up of the new diplomatic platform on July 2021 to help strengthen economic connectivity across the region.
- The department announced that representatives from Washington, Kabul, Islamabad, and Tashkent had agreed, in principle, to establish a new quadrilateral diplomatic platform focused on enhancing regional connectivity.
- All four nations- the US, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Uzbekistan intend to cooperate to expand trade, build transit links and strengthen business-to-business ties, recognising the historic opportunity to open flourishing interregional trade routes.
- The representatives from the four nations will be meeting in the coming months to determine the modalities of the cooperation with mutual consensus.
- The new diplomatic platform will work to expand trade, build transit links and strengthen business-to-business ties.

Significance of the new quad grouping

- Afghanistan is bordered by Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan to the north, Pakistan towards the east and south, Iran to the west and China to the northeast – The land-locked nation's location has for a long time been seen as a competitive advantage for the country.
- Afghanistan has since long been the crossroads of commerce between Asian countries by connecting them to Europe and enhancing religious, cultural and commercial contacts.
- The new 'quad' group appears to be a means for the United States to retain its foothold in the region after it completes its troop withdrawal from Afghanistan.
- However, ever since the US has begun withdrawing its troops, violence has been rising and efforts to broker a peace agreement between the Afghan government and Taliban have slowed down.

How will this impact China's BRI initiative?

- The new quad group's formation is significant as it comes amid China's efforts to extend its Belt Road Initiative (BRI) to Afghanistan.
- The Belt Road Initiative was launched by Chinese President Xi Jinping when he came to power in 2013.
- The Belt Road Initiative aims to link Southeast Asia, Central Asia, the Gulf region, Africa and Europe with a network of land and sea routes.
- Afghanistan due to its strategic location can provide China with a strategic base to spread its influence across the world.
- Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan had visited Uzbekistan in the past week for an official two-day visit during which he highlighted the benefits of regional connectivity and invited the nation to become party to China's Belt and Road Initiative.

G7'S BUILD BACK BETTER WORLD INITIATIVE

Context:

G-7 leaders finally came around with the proposed Build Back Better World (B3W) to counter China's rising influence across 100-plus countries through Belt Road Initiative (BRI) projects.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (India and its Neighborhood, Effect of Policies & Politics of Countries on India's Interests, Important International Groupings affecting India's Interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. What is the G7?
2. History of the G7
3. About the Build Back Better World (B3W)
4. Significance of B3W

What is the G7?

- The Group of 7 (G7) is an informal group of seven countries — the United States, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United Kingdom, the heads of which hold an annual summit with European Union and other invitees.
- Together the member countries represent 40% of global GDP and 10% of the world's population.

- Unlike other bodies such as NATO, the G7 has no legal existence, permanent secretariat or official members.
- It also has no binding impact on policy and all decisions and commitments made at G7 meetings need to be ratified independently by governing bodies of member states.
- The major purpose of the G-7 is to discuss and deliberate on international economic issues.
- G7 is capable of setting the global agenda because decisions taken by these major economic powers have a real impact. Thus, decisions taken at the G7 are not legally binding, but exert strong political influence.
- It sometimes acts in concert to help resolve other global problems, with a special focus on economic issues.



History of the G7

- A meeting between the current G7 members, excluding Canada, in 1975 laid the basis for the formation G7. At the time, the global economy was in a state of recession due to the OPEC oil embargo.

- As the energy crisis was escalating, the then US Treasury Secretary decided that it would be beneficial for the large players on the world stage to coordinate with each other on macroeconomic initiatives.
- After this first summit, the countries agreed to meet annually and a year later, Canada was invited into the group which marked the official formation of the G7 as we know it.
- The President of the European Commission was asked to join the meetings in 1977 and following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and a subsequent thaw in relations between the East and West, Russia was also invited to join the group in 1998. Thereafter the group was named the G8 until 2014, when Russia was expelled for its annexation of Crimea from Ukraine.
- The presidency of G7 meetings is held by each of the seven countries in turn, each year. The country holding the presidency is responsible for organising and hosting the meeting.

About the Build Back Better World (B3W)

- The B3W aims to address the infrastructure investment deficit in developing and lower income countries – the space which has been increasingly captured by China through 2,600 BRI projects with trillions of dollars of investment.
- The overall focus is on developing transportation, logistics and communications, which would reduce trade and transaction cost for China's trade, give more market access to Chinese markets and ensure stable supply of energy and other resources.
- B3W initiative will provide a transparent infrastructure partnership to help narrow about \$40 trillion needed by developing nations by 2035.
- It calls for spending hundreds of billions of dollars in collaboration with the private sector while adhering to climate standards and labour practices.
- However, the announcement is yet to be made about how exactly the plan would work or how much capital it would ultimately allocate.

Significance of B3W

- The re-emergence of China as a leading global power is considered to be one of the most significant geopolitical events of recent times, alongside the 1991 fall of the Soviet Union that ended the Cold War.
- China in 1979 had an economy that was smaller than Italy's, but after opening to foreign investment and introducing market reforms, it has become the world's second-largest economy and is a global leader in a range of new technologies.
- However, the West had failed to offer a positive alternative to the "lack of transparency, poor environmental and labour standards, and coercive approach" of the Chinese government that had left many countries worse off.

LEAVING THE PAST BEHIND: INDIA-AFGHANISTAN

Context:

- Two events in Central Asia last week, which India attended, saw Afghanistan's neighbours seeking solutions to the conflict there.
 - The first was a meeting in Dushanbe, of the Contact group on Afghanistan of SCO Foreign Ministers, and
 - The second, a Central and South Asia connectivity conference in Tashkent.

Relevance:

Mains Questions:

1. Afghanistan's neighbours must help it protect the democratic gains of the last two decades. Discuss 15 Marks

Dimensions of the Article:

- Origin of India Afghanistan Relations:
- Significance of Afghanistan for India:
- Areas of cooperation between India and Afghanistan
- Background of Conflict in Afghanistan:
- Why is US pulling out?
- Way Forward

Origin of India Afghanistan Relations:

- The origin of the relations goes back to **the 6th century Gandhara era**. However, in the modern times, the British Great Game got India closer to Afghanistan.
- **In 1949, Zahir Shah, Afghan King concluded the Treaty of Friendship with India** which opened up diplomatic relations. During 1950s and '60s, India developed its diplomatic proximity with Afghanistan. The 2400 km long boundary between Afghanistan and Pakistan is called Durand Line.
- **In 1979, when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan**, India did not condemn the invasion but began to instead drift away from engaging directly with Afghanistan as it had become actively involved in Cold War politics while India was the pro pounder and supporter of NAM.
- **In 1996, with the rise of the Taliban**, India joined hands with Russia and Iran in supporting the **United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan (UIFSA)**, also called as the **Northern Alliance** and provided it ample support during the Taliban rule.
- **Post US Operation Enduring Freedom and the Bonn-I conference**, India supported the development of Afghanistan and sided with Hamid Karzai. India has also continued to engage with Ashraf Ghani as of 2016. An analytical survey of Indian engagement and interests in Afghanistan shall now follow in the subsequent sections.

Significance of Afghanistan for India:

- **Economic importance:**
 - **Natural Resources:** Afghanistan has significant **oil and gas reserves** and has rich source of **rare earth materials**.
 - The massive reconstruction plans for the country offer a lot of opportunities for Indian companies for investment.
 - It has also signed **the TAPI pipeline project** that aims to bring natural gas from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan and Pakistan to India.
- **Security:**
 - **Countering Terrorism:** Stable government in Kabul is essential to reduce terror activities across south Asia also in Jammu and Kashmir. Thus, the most important goal for India remains the prevention of Pakistan from regaining its central role in Afghan affairs.

- **Gateway to energy rich central Asia:** Afghanistan is situated at crossroads between South Asia and Central Asia and South Asia and the Middle East.



Areas of cooperation between India and Afghanistan:

- **Trade relations:**
 - India is the second-largest destination for Afghan exports.
 - Major India's export items to Afghanistan include textiles, pharmaceuticals, tobacco, iron & steel and electrical machinery, while its imports from Afghanistan are fruits and nuts, gums and resins, coffee, tea and spices.
- **Infrastructure development:** India is the sixth largest donor to Afghanistan in diverse development projects in infrastructure, education and agriculture.
 - Some of the major projects include:

- Construction of a 218 km road from **Zaranj to Delaram** for facilitating movement of goods and services to the Iranian border.
- Construction of **Afghan-India Friendship Dam (Salma Dam)** in Herat province.
- Construction of **Afghan Parliament**.
- **New Development Partnership:** Due to the positive impact of the projects implemented under the US\$ 2 billion development and economic assistance extended by India to Afghanistan both countries have agreed to initiate a next generation 'New Development Partnership'. Under this 116 High Impact Community Development Projects will be implemented in the areas of education, health, agriculture etc.
- **Connectivity initiatives:**
 - **Chahbahar Port:** India is cooperating with Afghanistan and Iran for development of the Chahbahar Port which provides an alternative route to Afghanistan and Central Asia. In this context, a trilateral transport and transit agreement based on sea access through Chabahar has been signed.
 - **Air Freight Corridor:** India and Afghanistan inaugurated a dedicated air freight corridor service in 2017 which could provide Afghanistan greater access to markets in India.
 - **Afghanistan and Pakistan signed Afghanistan Pakistan Transit and Trade Agreement (APTTA) in 2011** which gives each country equal access up to the national boundaries of both. At present, Pakistan allows Afghan trucks carrying goods meant for India, only up to its last checkpoint at Wagah, and not to the Indian checkpoint at Attari, less than a kilometer away. India is keen to join APTTA and Afghanistan has backed India's readiness to be an APTTA member though Pakistan has so far rejected such a proposal.
- **Cultural Relations:**
 - Afghanistan has been an important trading and craft centre for over 2000 years connecting **the civilizations of Persia, Central Asia with India**. As part of India's restructuring programme for Afghanistan, India has regularly aimed to take up projects that will render Afghanistan's cultural heritage sustainable.
 - **Indian Diaspora in Afghanistan:** Presently, there are estimated to be about 2500 Indians in the country.
- **Political & Security Relations:**
 - **During the Soviet-Afghan war (1979-89)**, India was the only South Asian nation to recognize the Soviet-backed Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. India also provided humanitarian aid to then Afghan President Najibullah's government. **Following the withdrawal of the Soviet forces**, India continued to provide Najibullah's government with humanitarian aid.
 - India was the first country Afghanistan chose to sign **a strategic partnership agreement** with. India signed a strategic partnership agreement in 2011 to assist in "the training, equipping and capacity building programs for the Afghan National Security Forces".
 - **India aids the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces** in fighting the scourge of terrorism, organized crime, trafficking of narcotics and money laundering. Further India supports an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process.
 - **India donated three Mi-25 attack helicopters to Afghanistan** as part of the bilateral strategic partnership to counter the Taliban.

Background of Conflict in Afghanistan:

- The Afghan war dates back to **1978 when communist government** was established in Afghanistan.
- **Insurgency started against communist government led by Mujahedeen's and Soviet Union** entered Afghanistan in 1979 with troops to protect the communist government.
- Since then Afghanistan has been in a state of turmoil for the last 40 years including a Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and withdrawal in 1989.
- **The Taliban, ultraconservative political and religious faction** that emerged in Afghanistan, came to power in 1996 and were later ousted from power by International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in an effort to counter Al-Qaeda in 2001.
- **The Taliban has steadily expanded its reach since U.S. and NATO** forces formally concluded their combat mission at the end of 2014 and now it controls more than 14 districts (4% of the country).

Factors that aggravated the Afghan problem:

- **Great Game:**
 - **Intervention by global and regional powers** for e.g. **U.S.-Russia tensions** are creating space for proxies for both on Afghan soil, and the attacks by al-Qaeda and IS-related terror groups have their roots in the larger war between Iran and the Arab world.
 - **Tensions between India and Pakistan** also cast a shadow over Afghanistan, with India's development assistance under attack.
- **Failure of USA's strategy:**
 - USA has failed to evolve a cohesive strategy regarding military aid to Pakistan, troop presence in Afghanistan, indiscriminate use of airpower or infrastructure building in the country.
- **Military factors:**
 - **U.S. and Western governments** have tried to win the war for Afghans by deploying large numbers of Western military forces and flooding Afghanistan with large amounts of assistance, which has irked the indigenous tribes. Given the terrain and the tactics of avoiding set-piece battles adopted by the Taliban, the continuous use of air power has failed to change the trajectory of the war.
- **Role of Pakistan:**
 - The Taliban's sanctuary in Pakistan and support from Pakistan's spy agency, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) allowed senior Taliban leaders to run the war in relative security.
- **Legitimacy of the National Unity Government (NUG)** seems eroded due to
 - conflict between Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah and President Ashraf Ghani,
 - corruption and lack of implementation of Electoral reforms
 - refusal of Taliban to talk to Afghan government which it thinks as artificial, foreign imposed and not representative of Afghan people.
- **Socio-cultural factors:**
 - **The nomadic and tribal polity in Afghanistan** comprises of multiple tribes like Pashtuns, Turks and Persians and each dominant in different regions, asserting their own traditions and culture. The tribal factionalism didn't allow the democratically elected government to settle in Afghanistan.

- **Rise of IS:**
 - Despite the Afghan government's claims of cracking down on militants, threats from the IS and Taliban have only grown both of which have a goal to destabilize the state that and throw the country into further chaos.
- **Number of war and civilian casualties**
 - sdue to suicide bombings are on the rise after the international coalition forces embarked on Operation Resolute Support to "advise, train and assist" the Afghan forces and not to participate in war since 2014.

Why is US pulling out?

- **America First Policy:**
 - The withdrawal is in line with President Trump's America First policy.
 - According to Trump, US has been wasting its "blood and treasure" on distant conflicts, instead of rebuilding itself.
 - In 17th year since its inception in 2001, the Afghanistan conflict is US's longest running war & has had huge economic as well as human costs.
 - Despite prolonged investment of financial and human resources, the political solution is nowhere in sight and this has resulted in growing skepticism within the US administration over the futility of military involvement.
- **Uneven distribution of security costs:** Despite enjoying massive trade surpluses, many US allies like Germany, Japan, India etc. are not spending enough for their own security.
- **Under the new Af-Pak policy formulated in 2017,** US marginally increased troops in Afghanistan, declared their engagement to be open-ended with no fixed timeline for withdrawal & took unprecedented hard stance against Pakistan. It also sought enhanced Indian role in peace and reconstruction process. But this didn't seem to achieve the desired objective, in light of Pakistan-China nexus.
- **The withdrawal is acknowledgement of the fact that US** was not winning the war in Afghanistan and submission to the fact staying the course in Afghanistan wouldn't change the situation in their favour.

Consequences of withdrawal:

- **Impact on the peace process:** A strong U.S. military presence in Afghanistan is needed to bolster diplomatic peace efforts. U.S. officials are currently engaged in talks with the Taliban. However, the withdrawal at this time will reduce the incentive for the Taliban to strike a deal.
- **Fall of the democratic government & Resurgence of Taliban:** As observed in the US's AfPak policy in 2017 symbolic presence was seen to be necessary to back the National Unity Government. With the U.S. presence gone, the Taliban — with support from Pakistan & limited assistance from Russia and Iran — might seize all the remaining cities in the country that it currently does not control.
- **Breeding ground for terrorism:** A precipitous U.S. exit would allow Afghanistan to emerge as epicenter of global terror, as during the 1990s & would only embolden other transnational terror organizations like **Islamic State Khorasan** (the Islamic State's local province), **AlQaeda in the Indian Subcontinent** (al-Qaeda's local affiliate) and **Haqqani Network** to operate freely inside Afghanistan.
- **Poor capacity of Afghan forces:** The withdrawal of US forces might reduce the willingness of chronically under strength Afghan forces to fight. The training of Afghan forces, waging an air campaign against the Taliban etc. will face challenges.

- **Regional instability:** The withdrawal might further cement regional instability between nuclear powers India and Pakistan. An Islamist regime in Afghanistan would make Pakistan a central player in the country.
- **Refugee crisis:** The civil unrest might lead to a mass exodus of Afghans trying to flee the country could trigger another refugee crisis.

Consequences for India:

- **A destabilized and Talibanized Afghanistan** might lead to upsurge of violence in Jammu and Kashmir & can be used as a staging post for launching attacks on rest of India, as had been the case in late 1990s (IC 814 hijacking).
- **There is also an imminent security threat to India's** investments & developed infrastructure in Afghanistan.
- Since India is increasing its physical presence in the region through connectivity projects like **Chabahar, INSTC etc.**, an adverse national government will halt the connectivity efforts, increase in refugee crisis and will have a major impact on India's energy security and regional ties in the Middle East.
- **US's isolationism through non-interventionist foreign policy** could open gates to Chinese military intervention in Afghanistan.
- India must start preparing for **the inevitable geopolitical turbulence**, including the resurgence of the Islamic State and the potential return of the Taliban to power in Kabul.

Way Forward

- It is important that the Western nations keep funding the Afghan state and provisioning their armed forces so that there is a possibility of Afghan forces pushing back Taliban forces.
- As America pulls out, it leaves room for Russia and Iran to influence the region. India now needs to cooperate with both of them to push forward peace process.

INDIA AND 26 BILATERAL PACTS TO FIGHT DRUG TRAFFICKING

Context:

According to a Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) reply in the Lok Sabha – India has signed 26 bilateral pacts, 15 memoranda of understanding and two agreements on security cooperation with different countries for combating the drug trafficking problem.

Relevance:

GS-III: Internal Security Challenges (Organized Crime and Terrorism), GS-II: International Relations (Important International Agreements and Treaties affecting India's Interests), GS-I: Indian Society, GS-II: Social Justice (Health related issues, Government Policies and Interventions)

Dimensions of the Article:

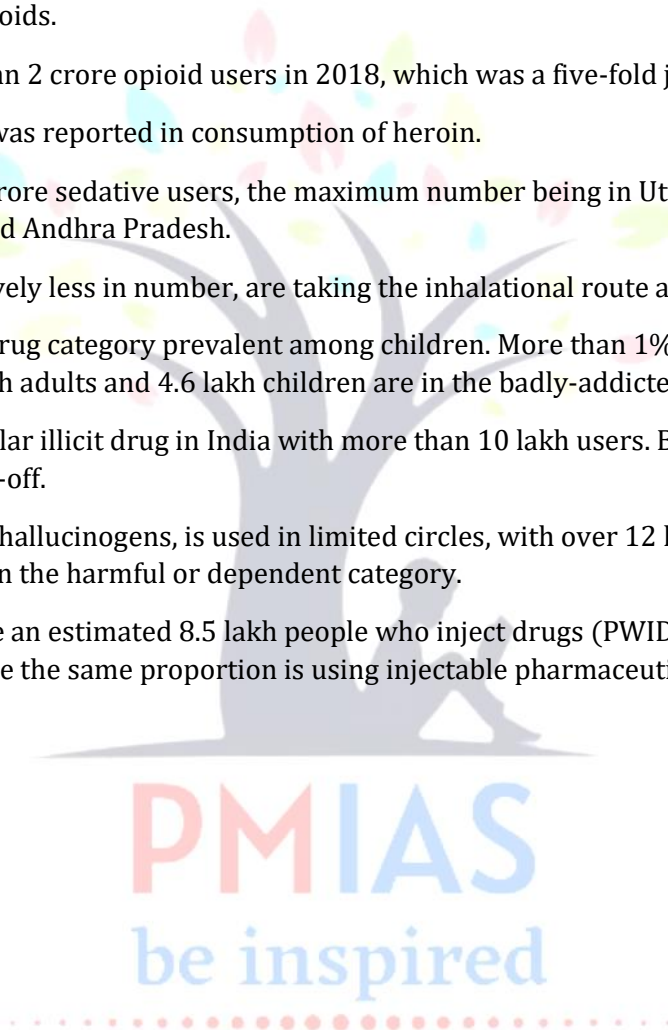
1. Data on Drug Abuse problem in India: Report by AIIMS
2. India's Vulnerability
3. Data Regarding Drug Abuse in the world
4. Drug Abuse problem worsening due to Covid-19 Pandemic
5. India's International Coordination to fight Drug Abuse
6. Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, (NDPS)

7. India's Anti-Drug Action Plan for 2020-21

8. Other Steps Taken in India

Data on Drug Abuse problem in India: Report by AIIMS

- In terms of users, India's illicit drug markets are mostly dominated by cannabis and opioids. Alcohol is the most abused substance in India.
- The use of illegal cannabis in India is much lower than the global average – less than one-third. However, opioid use is three times higher than the worldwide average.
- Cannabis in the form of bhang is legal in India, whereas its other forms – ganja (marijuana) and charas (hashish) – are illegal. Opioids are sold as opium (doda, phukki or poppy husk), heroin (brown sugar, smack) and pharma opioids.
- India reported more than 2 crore opioid users in 2018, which was a five-fold jump in 14 years.
- The maximum growth was reported in consumption of heroin.
- India has more than 1 crore sedative users, the maximum number being in Uttar Pradesh, followed by Maharashtra, Punjab and Andhra Pradesh.
- Some drug users, relatively less in number, are taking the inhalational route and psychoactive drugs.
- Inhalants are the only drug category prevalent among children. More than 1% of children consume inhalants. Nearly 18 lakh adults and 4.6 lakh children are in the badly-addicted category.
- Cocaine is the less popular illicit drug in India with more than 10 lakh users. Being pretty expensive, it is mostly used by the well-off.
- Another drug category, hallucinogens, is used in limited circles, with over 12 lakh users in this category, of which one-third are in the harmful or dependent category.
- Findings show there are an estimated 8.5 lakh people who inject drugs (PWID) in India. Almost half of them inject heroin, while the same proportion is using injectable pharmaceutical opioids.



HIGH USE OF ILLICIT DRUGS IN INDIA

PREVALENCE OF OPIOID USE IN INDIA IS MUCH
HIGHER THAN THE GLOBAL OR ASIAN AVERAGE

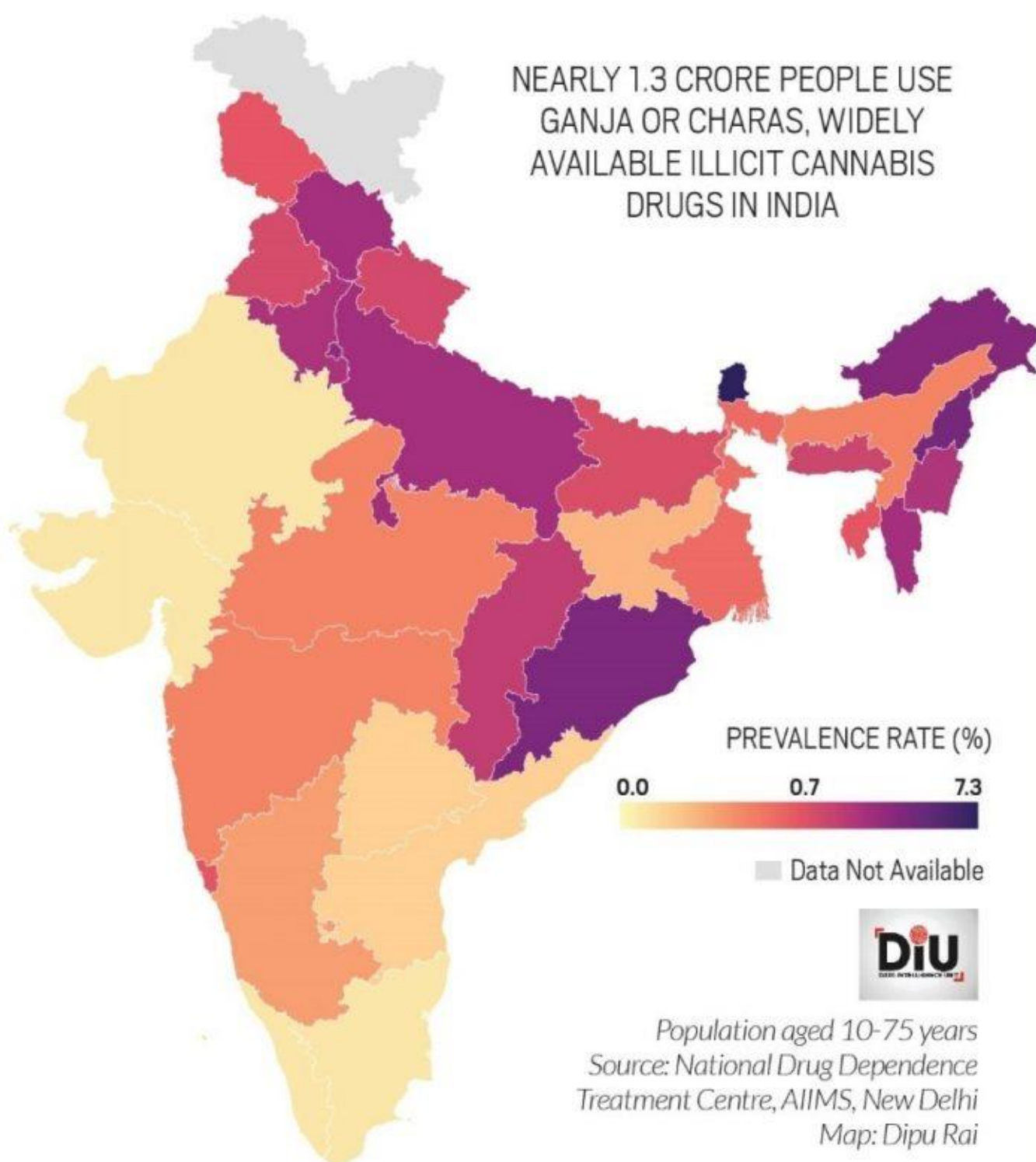
| DRUG CATEGORY | WORLD (15-64 YEAR) | ASIA (15-64 YEAR) | INDIA (10-75YEAR) |
|------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| OPIOIDS | 0.70% | 0.46% | 2.06% |
| CANNABIS | 3.90% | 1.90% | 1.20% |
| ATS | 0.70% | 0.59% | 0.18% |
| COCAINE | 0.37% | 0.03% | 0.11% |

Cannabis data presented here pertain to only the illicit forms-ganja/charas; Source: UNODC, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment Government of India, AIIMS



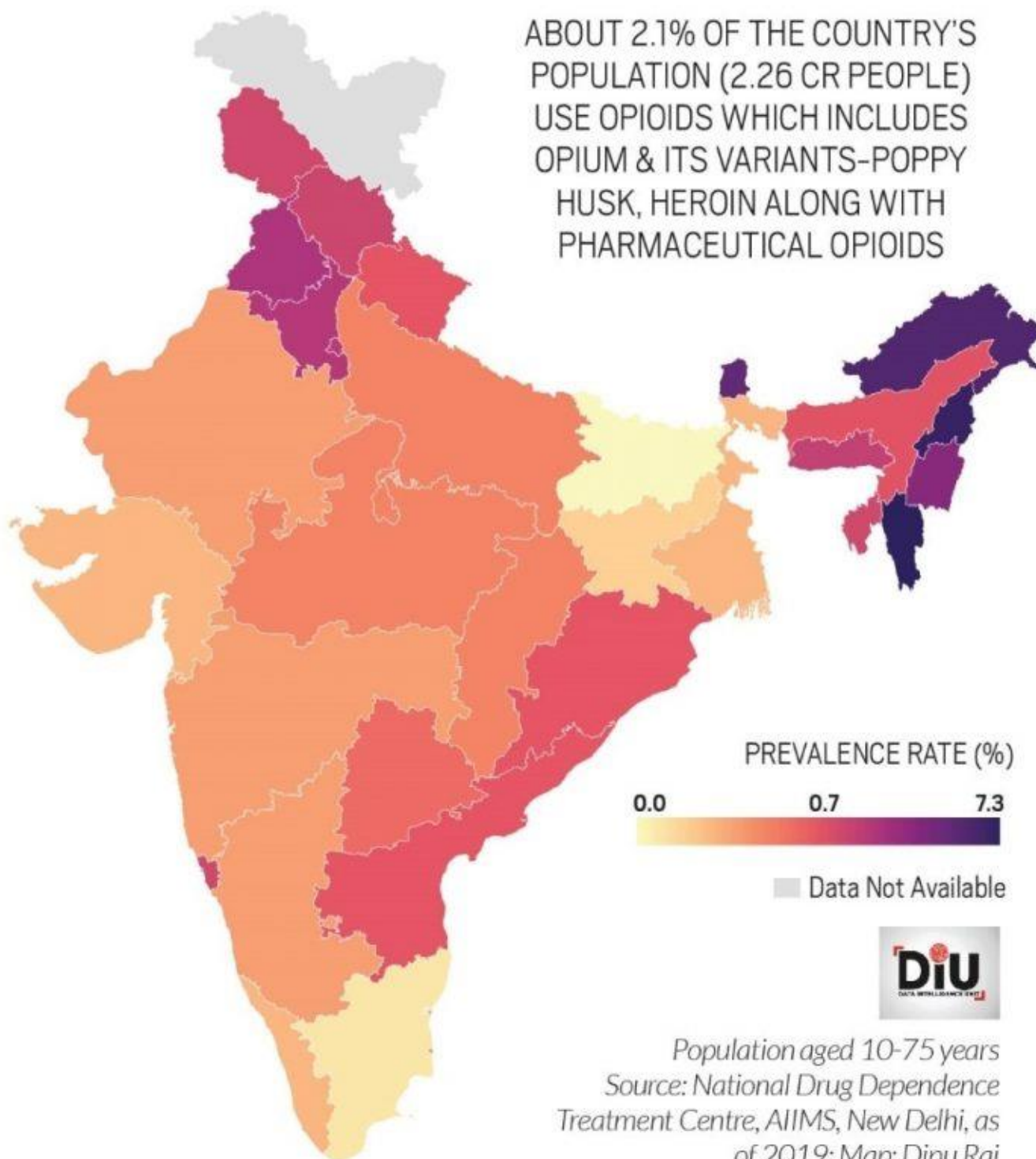
STATE-WISE PREVALENCE OF CURRENT USE OF CHARAS/GANJA

NEARLY 1.3 CRORE PEOPLE USE
GANJA OR CHARAS, WIDELY
AVAILABLE ILLICIT CANNABIS
DRUGS IN INDIA



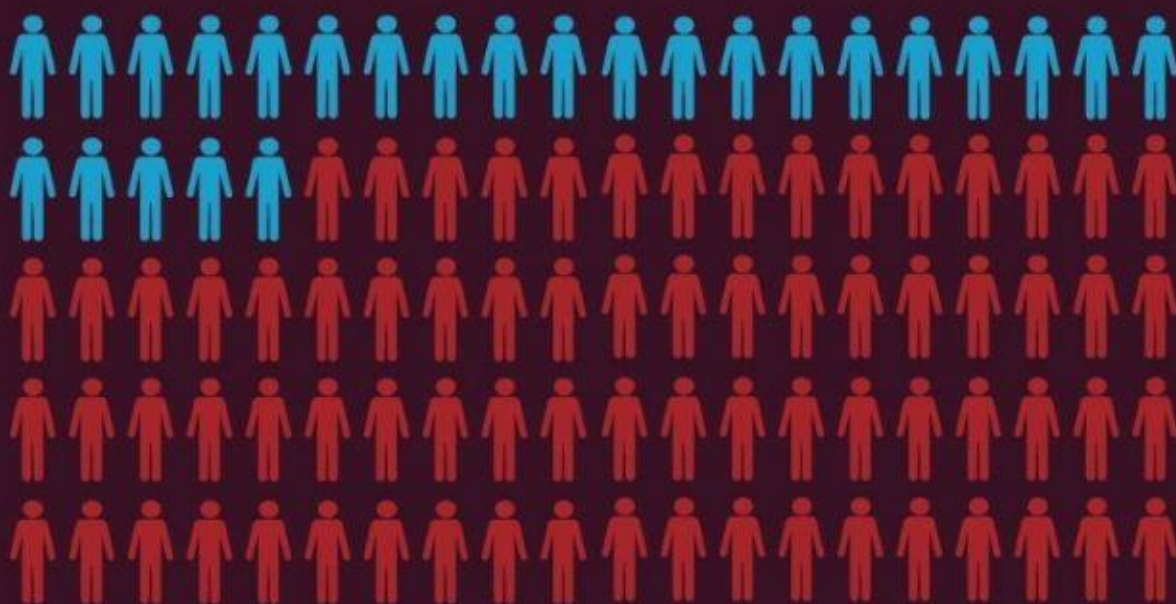
STATE-WISE PREVALENCE OF CURRENT USE OF OPIOIDS

ABOUT 2.1% OF THE COUNTRY'S
POPULATION (2.26 CR PEOPLE)
USE OPIOIDS WHICH INCLUDES
OPIUM & ITS VARIANTS-POPPY
HUSK, HEROIN ALONG WITH
PHARMACEUTICAL OPIOIDS



NO HOPE FOR DRUG ADDICTS?

NEARLY 44% OF THE REPORTED DRUG ADDICTS IN INDIA
ARE TRYING TO GIVE UP USING DRUGS, BUT ONLY
ONE-FOURTH OF THEM HAVE RECEIVED ANY TREATMENT



India's Vulnerability

Golden crescent

- The Golden Crescent is the name given to one of Asia's two principal areas of illicit Opium production, located at the crossroads of central, south and western Asia.
- This space overlaps three nations, Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan whose mountainous peripheries define the crescent.

Golden triangle

- The Golden Triangle is located in the area where the borders of Thailand, Myanmar and Laos meet at the confluence of the Ruak and Mekong Rivers.
- Along with the Golden Crescent, it is regarded as one of the largest producers of opium in the world since the 1950s until it was overtaken by the Golden Crescent in the early 21st century.

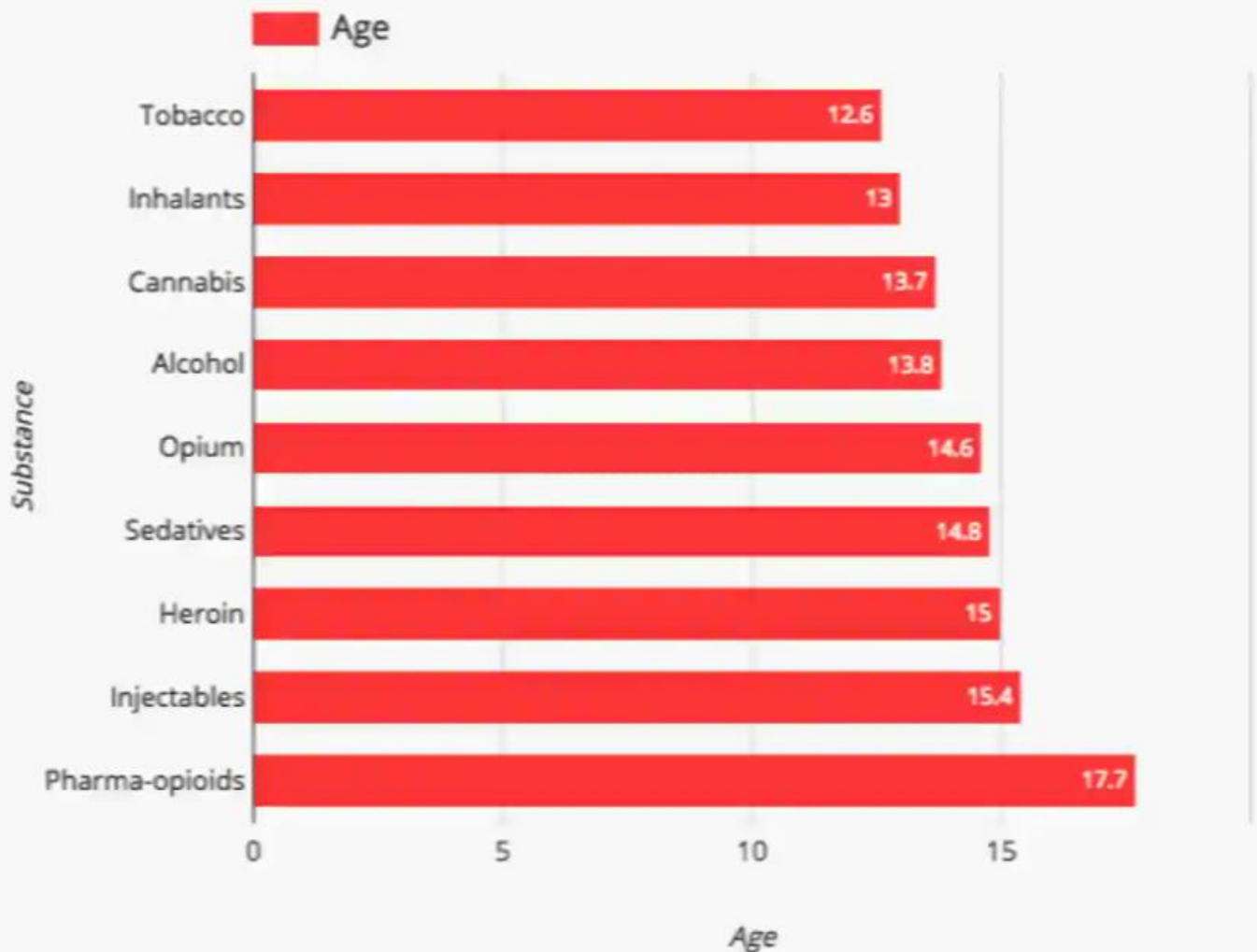


Data Regarding Drug Abuse in the world

- One out of three drug users is a woman but women represent only one out of five people in treatment.
- People in prison settings, minorities, immigrants and displaced people also face barriers to treatment due to discrimination and stigma.
- Number of people using drugs in 2018 increased by 30% from 2009, with adolescents and young adults accounting for the largest share of users.
- While the increase reflects population growth and other factors, the data nevertheless indicate that illicit drugs are more diverse, more potent and more available.
- At the same time, more than 80% of the world's population, mostly living in low- and middle-income countries, are deprived of access to controlled drugs for pain relief and other essential medical uses.

Addiction begins as young as 12

Mean age of initiation for substance abuse



SOURCE: NCPDR

ht

Drug Abuse problem worsening due to Covid-19 Pandemic

- The economic downturn caused by the global pandemic may drive more people to substance abuse or leave them vulnerable to involvement in drug trafficking and related crime.
- In the global recession that followed the 2008 financial crisis, drug users sought out cheaper synthetic substances and patterns of use shifted towards injecting drugs, while governments reduced budgets to deal with drug-related problems.
- All over the world, the risks and consequences of drug use are worsened by poverty, limited opportunities for education and jobs, stigma and social exclusion, which in turn helps to deepen inequalities, moving us further away from achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

India's International Coordination to fight Drug Abuse

- The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) coordinated with various international organisations for sharing information and intelligence to combat transnational drug trafficking.

- The Various International Organizations that the NCB works with include:
 1. The SAARC Drug Offences Monitoring Desk; Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS);
 2. Colombo Plan: A regional organisation of 27 countries designed to strengthen economic and social development of member countries in the Asia-Pacific region;
 3. Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and ASEAN Senior Officials on Drug Matters (ASOD);
 4. Bay of Bengal Initiative For Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Co-Operation (BIMSTEC);
 5. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC);
 6. The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB).
- For coordination among various Central and State agencies, **the Narco Coordination Centre (NCORD)** mechanism was set up by the MHA in year 2016 for effective drug law enforcement. This NCORD system has been restructured into a four-tier scheme up to district level on July 29, 2019, for better coordination.

Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, (NDPS)

- The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985, commonly referred to as the NDPS Act prohibits a person the production/manufacturing/cultivation, possession, sale, purchasing, transport, storage, and/or consumption of any narcotic drug or psychotropic substance.
- India had no legislation regarding narcotics until 1985.
- The Act is designed to fulfill India's treaty obligations under the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, Convention on Psychotropic Substances, and United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances.
- The Narcotics Control Bureau is a statutory body that was set up under the act with effect from 1986.

India's Anti-Drug Action Plan for 2020-21

- The annual Anti-Drug Action Plan for 2020-21 for 272 districts was launched by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment in June 2020.
- The action plan for 2020-21 included awareness generation programmes, identification of drug-dependent population, focus on treatment facilities and capacity-building for service-providers to curb drug abuse and alcoholism.
- De-addiction Facilities would be set up in the "most affected" 272 districts identified by the Narcotics Control Bureau focussing on building up treatment and de-addiction facilities and giving emphasis on reaching the youth and high-risk population.
- Integrated Rehabilitation Centre for Addicts (IRCA) funded by the Ministry would reach out to communities to help those affected by drug addiction.

Other Steps Taken in India

1. **Narco-Coordination Centre (NCORD):** Government had constituted Narco Coordination Centre (NCORD), the mechanism under Director General (DG), Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), in order to have effective coordination among all the drug law enforcement agencies and other stakeholders, and also to provide a common platform for discussions on drug-trafficking related issues.

2. **National Fund for Control of Drug Abuse:** The government has constituted a fund called “National Fund for Control of Drug Abuse” to meet the expenditure incurred in connection with combating illicit traffic in Narcotic Drugs; rehabilitating addicts, and educating the public against drug abuse, etc.
3. **Seizure Information Management System (SIMS):** SIMS is a step taken towards digitization of pan-India drug seizure data in 2019 for all the drug law enforcement agencies under the mandate of Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act (NDPS). Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) was provided with the funds for developing SIMS which will create a complete online database of drug offences and offenders.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE LISTING

Context:

The English city of Liverpool has been removed from UNESCO’s list of world heritage sites.

Turkey rejected UNESCO’s voicing of “grave concern” for the World Heritage Site Hagia Sophia in Istanbul after it was changed from a museum to a mosque.

Relevance:

Prelims, GS-I: Art and Culture, GS-II: International Relations

Dimensions of the Article:

1. What are UNESCO World Heritage Sites?
2. UNESCO World Heritage Committee
3. Developments in Liverpool as a World Heritage Site
4. About Hagia Sophia
5. About UNESCO

What are UNESCO World Heritage Sites?

- UNESCO World Heritage Site is a place that is recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as of distinctive cultural or physical importance which is considered of outstanding value to humanity.
- It may be a building, a city, a complex, a desert, a forest, an island, a lake, a monument, or a mountain.
- They have been inscribed on the World Heritage List to be protected for future generations to appreciate and enjoy as they have a special cultural or physical significance and outstanding universal value to the humanity.
- Italy is home to the greatest number of World Heritage Sites.
- At present, India has 38 World Heritage Properties. All the sites under the Ministry are conserved as per ASI’s Conservation Policy and are in good shape.

UNESCO World Heritage Committee

- The World Heritage Committee selects the sites to be listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites, including the World Heritage List and the List of World Heritage in Danger.
- It monitors the state of conservation of the World Heritage properties, defines the use of the World Heritage Fund and allocates financial assistance upon requests from States Parties.

- It is composed of 21 states parties that are elected by the General Assembly of States Parties for a four-year term.
- **India is NOT a member of this Committee.**

Developments in Liverpool as a World Heritage Site

- UNESCO found new buildings, including a football stadium, undermined the attractiveness of its Victorian docks and stripped Liverpool of its world heritage status.
- This makes Liverpool only the third place to be removed from the prestigious list. The only other sites stripped previously of the title are a wildlife sanctuary in Oman in 2007 after poaching and habitat loss and the Dresden Elbe valley in Germany in 2009 when a four-lane motorway bridge was built over the river.
- The UK ranks eighth in the worldwide list of UNESCO World Heritage sites.
- Liverpool made no effort to continue to comply with World Heritage criteria, instead pushing ahead with more major building projects — in 2012, UNESCO threatened to revoke Liverpool's World Heritage status because of "substantial" building interventions.

About Hagia Sophia

- Hagia Sophia is a Late Antique (Late antiquity is a periodization used by historians to describe the time of transition from classical antiquity to the Middle Ages in Europe) place of worship in Istanbul, designed by the Greeks.
- Built in 537 as the patriarchal cathedral of the imperial capital of Constantinople, it was the largest Christian church of the eastern Roman Empire.
- In 1453, after the Fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Empire, it was converted into a mosque.
- In 1935, the secular Turkish Republic established it as a museum.
- In 2020, it controversially re-opened as a mosque and the UNESCO expressed "grave concern" over the fate Hagia Sophia; but, Turkish foreign ministry dismissed UNESCO's concerns and said that the changes to Hagia Sophia had "no negative impact" on UNESCO standards.

PMIAS
be inspired

Istanbul's Hagia Sophia



- Built as a church in the 6th century under Emperor Justinian I
- Converted into a mosque after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople (*Istanbul*) in 1453
- Became a museum in 1953 after the establishment of the secular modern Turkish republic



AFP Photo



About UNESCO

- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations (UN). It seeks to build peace through international cooperation in Education, the Sciences and Culture.
- It is also a member of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG), a coalition of UN agencies and organizations aimed at fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- UNESCO's Headquarters are located in Paris and it has 193 Members and 11 Associate Members.
- Three UNESCO member states are not UN members: Cook Islands, Niue, and Palestine.
- While three UN member states (Israel, Liechtenstein, United States) are not UNESCO members.

- UNESCO sponsors many programmes such as in the fields of teacher training, science, promotion of media and press freedom, regional and cultural history, cultural diversity, natural and cultural heritage, translating world literature, human rights, etc.

Areas of Specialization of UNESCO are:

1. **Education** transforms lives and is at the heart of UNESCO's mission to build peace, eradicate poverty and drive sustainable development.
2. **Protecting Heritage and Fostering Creativity** is another area of focus for UNESCO and it has adopted a three-pronged approach to make culture takes its rightful place in development strategies and processes:
 1. Spearheads worldwide advocacy for culture and development.
 2. Engages with the international community to set clear policies and legal frameworks
 3. Works on the ground to support governments and local stakeholders to safeguard heritage, strengthen creative industries and encourage cultural pluralism.
3. **Science for a Sustainable Future** is another area where UNESCO works to assist countries to invest in Science, Technology and Innovation (STI), to develop national science policies, to reform their science systems and to build capacity to monitor and evaluate performance through STI indicators.
4. Regarding **Social and Human Sciences**, UNESCO helps to enable people to create and use knowledge for just and inclusive societies, support them in understanding each other and working together to build lasting peace.
5. UNESCO advances **freedom of expression** and the safety of journalists, combats online hate speech, as well as disinformation and misinformation through awareness raising initiatives.

INDIA: G20 NATIONS SHOULD PLEDGE GHG REDUCTIONS BY 2030

Context:

India urged the G20 nations to pledge for reductions by 2030 at the 2021 G20 climate meet.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Important International Groupings, Foreign Policies, Agreements and treaties affecting India's Interests), GS-III: Environment and Ecology (Environmental Pollution and Degradation, Conservation of Environment and Ecology)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About G20
2. Structure and functioning of G20
3. Highlights of the recent G20 climate meet
4. Carbon Neutrality

About G20

- The G20 is an informal group of 19 countries and the European Union, with representatives of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.
- The G20 membership comprises a mix of the world's largest advanced and emerging economies, representing about two-thirds of the world's population, 85% of global gross domestic product, 80% of global investment and over 75% of global trade.

- The members of the G20 are Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the European Union.
- Spain as a permanent, non-member invitee, also attends leader summits.



Structure and functioning of G20

- The G20 Presidency rotates annually according to a system that ensures a regional balance over time.
- For the selection of presidency, the 19 countries are divided into 5 groups, each having no more than 4 countries. The presidency rotates between each group.
- Every year the G20 selects a country from another group to be president.
- **India is in Group 2 which also has Russia, South Africa and Turkey.**
- The G20 does not have a permanent secretariat or Headquarters.
- The work of G20 is divided into two tracks:
- **The Finance track** comprises all meetings with G20 finance ministers and central bank governors and their deputies. Meeting several times throughout the year they focus on monetary and fiscal issues, financial regulations, etc.
- **The Sherpa track** focuses on broader issues such as political engagement, anti-corruption, development, energy, etc.

Highlights of the recent G20 climate meet

- India, at the conclusion of the G20 climate meet, said that pledges by some countries to achieve Net Zero GHG emissions or 'carbon neutrality' by mid-century were inadequate, when considering the rights of developing countries to economic growth.
- India urged G20 countries to commit to bringing down per capita emissions to Global average by 2030.
- India's position as the third largest greenhouse gas emitter but also with among the lowest per capita emissions means that it has always resisted a hard deadline — some countries have set their target years as 2050 or 2060 — to commit to a net-zero future.

- Countries periodically submit the National Determined Contributions (NDC) that outline their plans towards capping emission.
- As per India's NDC, India has to:
- Increase cumulative electricity generation installed capacity from non-fossil sources of energy to 40% by 2030, which currently stands at around 38%
- Lower emissions intensity of its GDP by 33-35% compared to 2005 levels by 2030
- Create additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 billion tons through additional forest and tree cover.

RUSSIA TO BOOST TAJIK ARMY WITH WEAPONS

Context:

Russia will bolster Central Asian ally Tajikistan's military with weapons, equipment and training amid a "deteriorating" situation in neighbouring Afghanistan.

Relevance:

Prelims, GS-II: International Relations (Important Foreign Policies and Political developments), GS-I: Geography (Maps)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Cooperation between Russia, Tajikistan and neighboring countries
2. Significance of the Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan etc., region for India

Cooperation between Russia, Tajikistan and neighboring countries

- Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan will hold joint military drills near Tajikistan's border with Afghanistan, where the Taliban has made huge military gains and claims to control 90% of the country's borders.
- Russia organized additional supplies of weaponry and equipment to bolster Tajikistan's Army.
- Russia continues to train qualified Tajik military personnel.
- Russia blamed the worsening security situation in the region around Afghanistan on the "hasty" withdrawal of U.S. forces and said that it was ready to offer "any necessary help to" countries like Tajikistan.

Map of the region:



Significance of the Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan etc., region for India

- Central Asia serves as a land bridge between Asia and Europe, making it geopolitically axial for India.
- The region is rich in natural resources such as petroleum, natural gas, antimony, aluminum, gold, silver, coal and uranium which can be best utilized by Indian energy requirements.
- Central Asia has huge cultivable areas lying barren and without being put to any productive use, offering enormous opportunity for cultivation of pulses.
- India intends expansion of International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC) to Afghanistan and Uzbekistan. This will act as a vital gateway to access Eurasian markets and optimally operationalize its use, requiring a Central Asian state joining the project as a direct stakeholder.
- India has proposed setting up of 'India-Central Asia Development Group' to take forward development partnership between India & Central Asian countries. This group will help India to expand its footprints in the resource-rich region amid China's massive inroads and to fight terror effectively, including in Afghanistan.
- India has a very wide array of interests in Central Asia covering security, energy, economic opportunities etc., therefore Security, stability and prosperity of Central Asia is imperative for peace and economic development of India.
- Both India and Central Asian Republics (CARs) share many commonalities and perceptions on various regional and world issues and can play a crucial role in providing regional stability.

RETURN TO TROUBLES: GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT ON BREXIT

Context:

The British government's demand to renegotiate parts of the Northern Ireland Protocol of the Brexit agreement with the EU has set the stage for another round of clashes between London and Brussels.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Foreign Policies and Agreements affecting India's Interests, Important Political developments). GS-I: World History

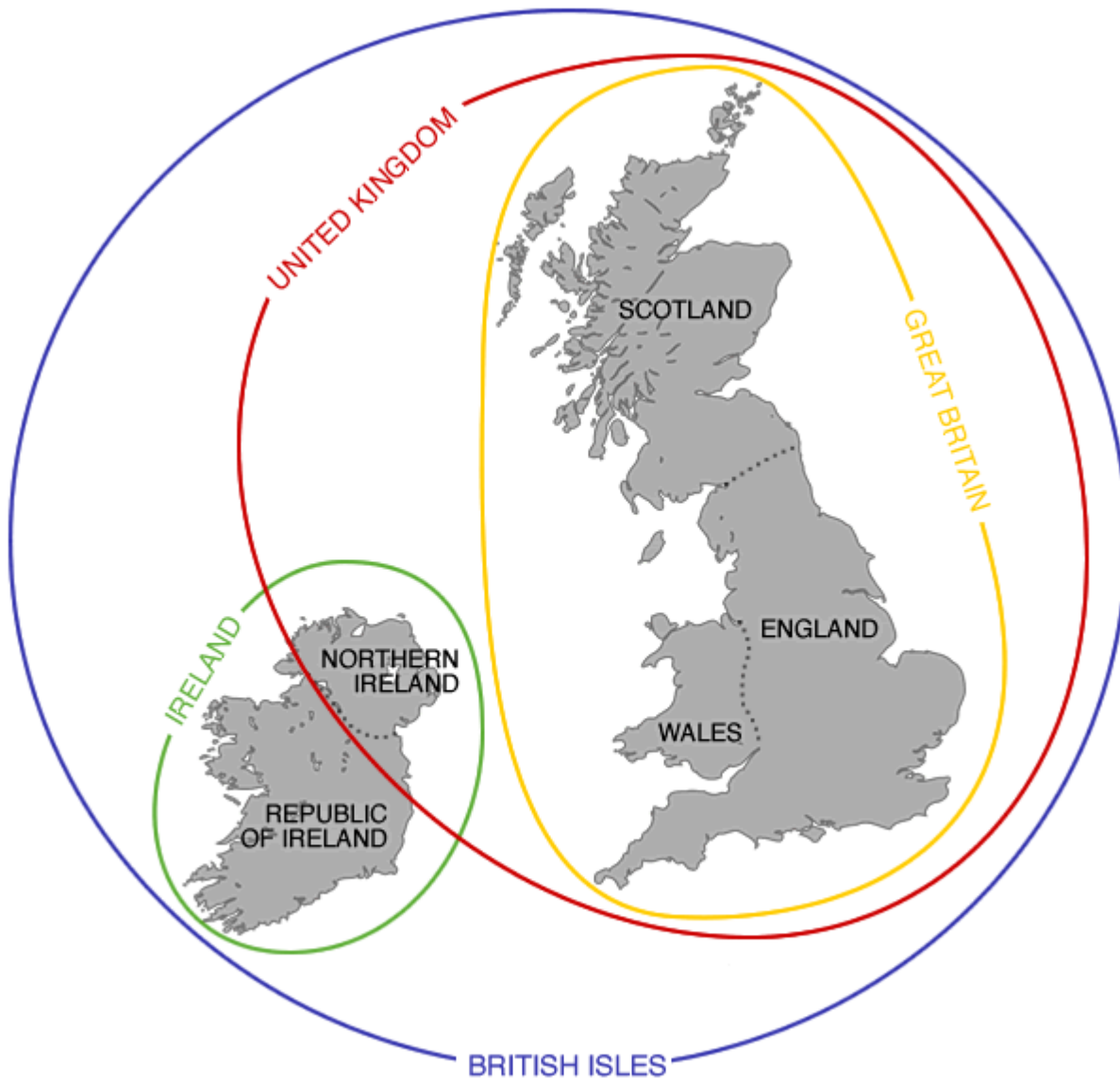
Dimensions of the Article:

1. Understanding the United Kingdom (UK) and the European Union (EU)
2. What is Brexit?
3. Withdrawal Agreement Between European Union and the United Kingdom
1. About the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) for Brexit
2. Why Scotland Voted in Favour of Staying
3. Good Friday agreement (Belfast agreement)
4. Northern Ireland protocol
5. Impact of Brexit

Understanding the United Kingdom (UK) and the European Union (EU)

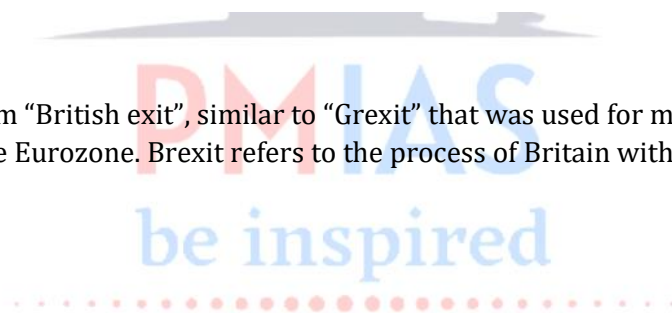
- The United Kingdom is an island nation in north western Europe.
- It is made up of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- The United Kingdom borders one European Union member state: Ireland.
- Relations between the EU and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK) date back to the foundation of the European Communities (EU predecessor) in 1957.
- The UK was a member state of the European Union after joining it in 1973, until it became the first country to voluntarily end its membership on 31st January 2020 after a referendum was held in 2016.





What is Brexit?

It is an abbreviation for the term “British exit”, similar to “Grexit” that was used for many years to refer to the possibility of Greece leaving the Eurozone. Brexit refers to the process of Britain withdrawing from the European Union (EU).



Brexit Countdown

Neither the withdrawal agreement nor the new trade agreement between the European Union and United Kingdom has been approved yet.



Some of the reasons for Britain to seek BREXIT are

1. **Sovereignty**- Although the British Government influences some form in selecting the members to the European Commission, the members are neither under the influence nor accountable to the British Parliament and some of the policy decisions such as competition policy, agriculture, copyright, and patent law go against the interests of Britain (these laws override the domestic laws)
2. **Regulations are becoming a Burden**- Some of the regulations such as –limits on the power of vacuum cleaners, non-recycling of tea bags, etc have often been seen as a burden on some of the conservatives in Britain. As per Michel Gove, these regulations have cost Britain to the tune of £3 billion per year.
3. **Issues with Euro as Currency**- although the Euro is the common currency for the EU, Britain still uses the pound as its currency. Now if the euro had to be successful then it would have required greater fiscal and monetary integration and this cannot be achieved unless all the member states have the same currency. The problem with the euro as a common currency has also been exposed wherein on one side countries such as Greece and Spain are suffering from high debt, high unemployment, whereas other countries such as Germany are enjoying higher growth. Now in this situation, the ECB (European Central Bank) is in a dilemma whether to go for fiscal stimulus or prudence.
4. **Immigration**- Britain is not a signatory of the Schengen Border free zone (allows easy travel across Europe), over the last ten years there has been a quite an opposition towards migration into the country from within the EU and its effects on wages and public services especially post 2008 recession wherein the workers from Lithuania, Poland, Italy, Romania, etc have moved to Britain

Withdrawal Agreement Between European Union and the United Kingdom

- Under this, a transition period of 11 months was finalized until December 2020. However, it might get delayed until 2022 or 2023.
- The transition period makes sure that there is not a sudden shock but a degree of continuity and allows both parties to secure an orderly Brexit, minimizing disruption for the citizens, businesses, public administrations, as well as for international partners.

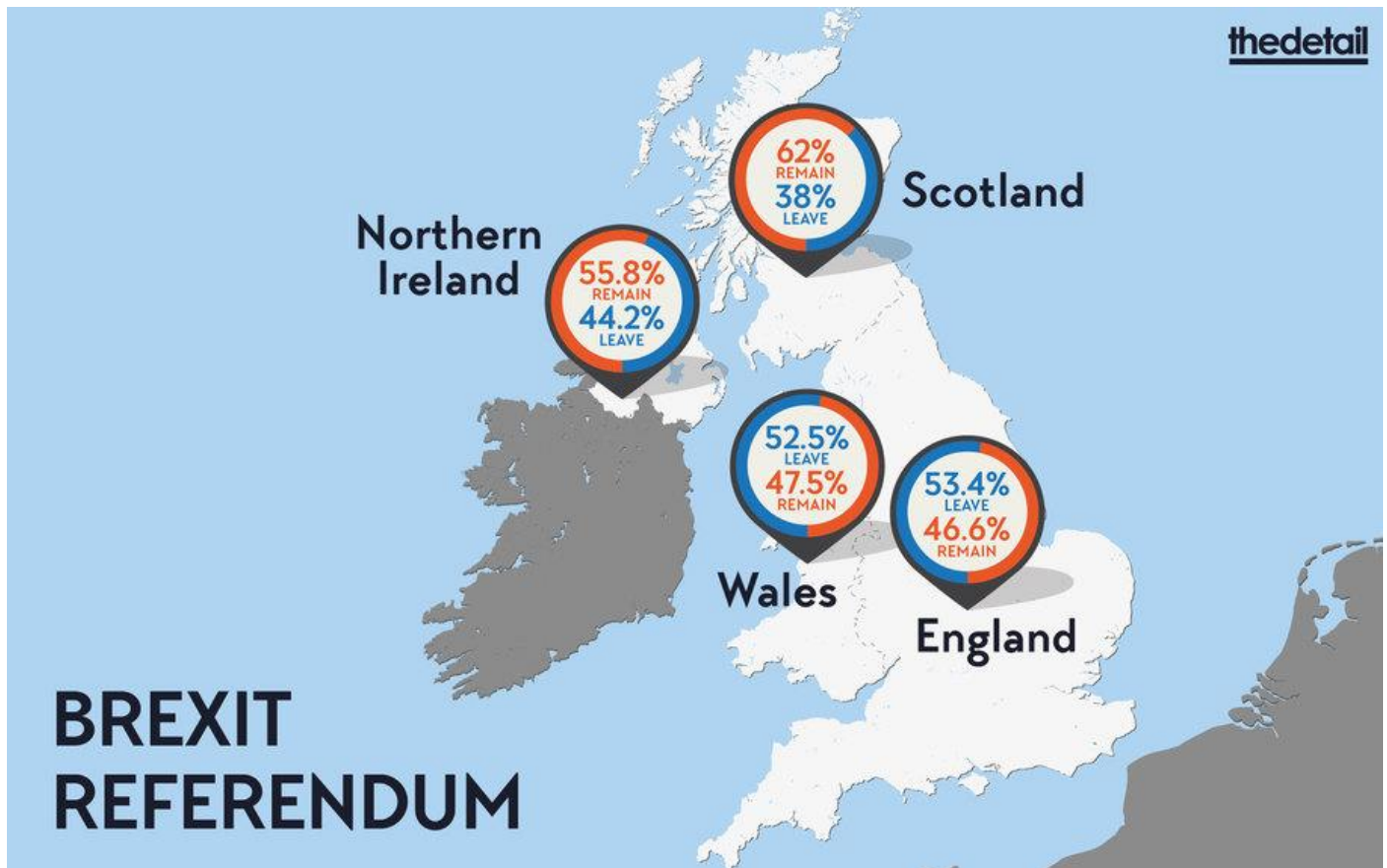
- During the transition period, the U.K. will continue to participate in the EU's Customs Union and in the Single Market.
- The United Kingdom will apply European Union law even if it is no longer a Member State and will also continue to abide by the international agreements of the EU.

About the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) for Brexit

- This Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) deal was provisionally enacted in January 2020 in order to minimize trade disruptions between the EU and the UK.
- Provisional approval was set to expire on 30th April 2021, so the European Parliament's ratification ensures that the flow of trade between the EU and the UK will continue uninterrupted.
- It essentially means that in order to trade with the EU's single market, the UK will have to follow the same rules and regulations to ensure that it does not have an unfair advantage over other EU businesses.
- The agreement gives free access to EU fleets to fish in UK waters, including up to six miles off the shoreline for a five-year transition period. At the end of the transition, everything will return to normal arrangements and the UK will have full control over its waters.
- It also provides for a framework governing law enforcement matters, which will allow UK and EU policing agencies to coordinate in the future.
- Agreement addresses other key aspects of international trade, including intellectual property protections and road transportation provisions.

Why Scotland Voted in Favour of Staying

- As per the numbers, it was found that 62% of the voters in Scotland chose to remain within the EU. The reasons for their decision are given below.
- EU is a common market which not only allows the movement of four freedoms (finance, goods, services, and labour) but also provides a huge market for Scotland to export
- With Scotland being a part of the EU, the trade barriers will be eliminated to a great extent (both for exports from and imports into Scotland)
- Scotland has been attracting foreign investments as a result of which there has been employment creation, contribution to growth, etc (in 2013, 40% of the companies in Scotland were foreign-owned which employed more than 3 lakh workers)
- When the EU negotiates a deal with other countries (has trade deals with more than 50 countries), it is automatically applicable to Scotland but with BREXIT, Scotland may be forced to sign all the deals again with the trade partners (the advantages may be lost)
- As a member of the EU, it will get access to various development funds (Regional Social Funding, Rural Development Programme, etc)
- With BREXIT, the citizens of Scotland may lose the freedom of movement i.e., to move freely in Europe
- In a nutshell, Scotland is much safer than remaining within rather than moving out of the EU. (On moving out it will face security/terrorist threats, climate change, trade barriers, etc., all alone).



Good Friday agreement (Belfast agreement)

- Great Britain had ruled Ireland for hundreds of years, but it split off from British rule – leaving Northern Ireland as part of the UK, and the Republic of Ireland as a separate country.
- When this happened, the population of Northern Ireland was divided in two:
 - Unionists (who were happy to remain part of the UK)
 - Nationalists (who wanted Northern Ireland to be independent from the UK and join the Republic of Ireland)
- Both unionists and Nationalists engaged in violent clashes regularly till the end of 1990s. In 1998 – after nearly after 30 years of conflict – The Good Friday Agreement (or Belfast Agreement) was signed which helped to bring to an end a period of conflict in Northern Ireland.
- As a compromise between both the parties- Though Northern Ireland was retained with in the UK (with a greater autonomy) the agreement ensured soft borders between northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland.

What happened after BREXIT?

- BREXIT involves exit of UK (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) from EU. This would create hard borders between Northern Ireland(part of UK) and Republic of Ireland(part of EU). This would be against the spirit of Good Friday agreement and may revive violent tendencies in the region again. To avoid that, a compromise was made between UK and EU in the form of “Northern Ireland protocol”.

Northern Ireland protocol

- Though Northern Ireland is no longer legally in the EU Customs Union, there will be no customs check points along the border between Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland.

- Instead, there will be a customs border between Northern Ireland and Britain (along the Irish sea). (This meant, in order to avoid an economic barrier between the two Irelands, Britain effectively set up one between the British mainland and the Island of Ireland).

What happened now?

- Though the above plan avoided a situation of hard border between the two Irelands. It resulted in more checks on goods entering Northern Ireland from mainland Britain, effectively creating a border down the Irish Sea and dividing the UK. Faced with all the new bureaucracy, some British companies have stopped supplying stores in Northern Ireland, saying they simply can't handle the added paperwork now needed.
- So, Prime Minister Boris Johnson is arguing to renegotiate the protocol. His government wants all customs checks on goods entering Northern Ireland to be removed.
- If Britain withdraws from the protocol, it will delay the BREXIT further.

Impact of Brexit

On India:

- Free Trade Agreement (FTA): India may start talks on free trade deals with Britain, EU after Brexit. EU and India have been negotiating a FTA since 2007. Despite growing trade between the EU and India, talks stalled in 2013, only resuming in 2018. Potential sectors to benefit from an FTA between the UK and Indian include textile, machinery, engineering goods, information technology and banking.
- Demand for Indian Labour: India's high proportion of skilled working-age population and high growth rate will be of particular interest for the UK.
- Service sector: India which is laying greater emphasis on innovation and high-end works could emerge as a major source of high-tech exports for the UK.
- Easy market access: India is the major Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) source for the UK because many Indian firms have used it as a gateway to Europe. With the UK moving out of EU, it might offer more incentives such as tax breaks, easy regulations and opening up markets to Indian firms to keep them attracted.
- Cheaper imports: The UK's currency is expected to remain weaker, so it would be less expensive for Indian firms to import from their subsidiaries in the UK.

On World Economy

- Uncertainty: Its global implications are harder to predict and may differ for different regions. It could also lead to a setback for free trade and globalisation.
- Flight to safety: Investors may start selling riskier assets such as stocks and seeking safety in government bonds.

BRICS COUNTER TERRORISM ACTION PLAN FINALIZED

Context:

BRICS has unveiled a counter-terrorism strategy to strengthen bilateral and multilateral cooperation among the member countries for effectively combating the threat.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Important International Groupings, Foreign policies and agreements affecting India's interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. What is BRICS?
2. About BRICS Counter-Terrorism Strategy

What is BRICS?

- BRICS is the international grouping of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.
- This was set up as a move towards greater multipolarity; hence the spread across three continents and both hemispheres.
- In terms of GDP, China occupies the second position; India the fifth; Brazil the ninth; Russia the 11th; and South Africa the 35th.
- In terms of growth rates, China grew at 6%; India at 4.5%, Russia 1.7%, Brazil 1.2% and South Africa 0.1%.
- BRICS does not exist in form of organization, but it is an annual summit between the supreme leaders of five nations.
- The Chairmanship of the forum is rotated annually among the members, in accordance with the acronym B-R-I-C-S.
- The BRICS seeks to deepen, broaden and intensify cooperation within the grouping and among the individual countries for more sustainable, equitable and mutually beneficial development.
- BRICS takes into consideration each member's growth, development and poverty objectives to ensure relations are built on the respective country's economic strengths and to avoid competition where possible.
- BRICS is emerging as a new and promising political-diplomatic entity with diverse objectives, far beyond the original objective of reforming global financial institutions.





About BRICS Counter-Terrorism Strategy

- In 2020, a new counter-terrorism strategy was adopted at the BRICS annual summit to strengthen bilateral and multilateral cooperation among the member countries for effectively combating the threat.

Overview of the Strategy:

- The aim of the strategy is to improve the practical cooperation among security and law-enforcement authorities of the member nations to prevent and combat terrorism, including by sharing timely and accurate information.
- The focus would be to “suppress” the facilitation of terrorist groups, entities and associated persons by not making available financial and material resources to them.
- The BRICS also resolved to counter “extremist narratives” conducive to terrorism and vowed to take steps to ensure that the Internet and social media platforms are not used for recruitment and radicalisation by terror groups.
- The BRICS high representatives for security shall be entrusted with leading the review of the implementation of this strategy, and the BRICS counter-terrorism working group (CTWG) shall be entrusted with its implementation.

Developments in the 2021 meeting

- In the 6th meeting of the BRICS Counter Terrorism Working Group under the Chairship of India, finalized the BRICS Counter Terrorism Action Plan containing specific measures to implement the BRICS Counter Terrorism Strategy adopted by BRICS Leaders in 2020.
- The Action Plan is aimed at further strengthening result oriented cooperation between BRICS countries in areas such as preventing and combating terrorism, radicalisation, financing of terrorism, misuse of internet by terrorists, and curbing travel of terrorists.

- During the Working Group meeting, the BRICS countries also exchanged views on terrorism threat assessment at national, regional and global level and resolved to further enhance counter terrorism cooperation in line with the Action Plan.

INDIA TAKES OVER UNSC PRESIDENCY FOR AUGUST

Context:

India assumed the presidency of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for the month of August 2021.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Important International Institutions and Groupings, Foreign Policies affecting India's Interests), Prelims

Dimensions of the Article:

1. United Nations Security Council
2. Functions and Powers of UNSC
3. About India's Membership and Presidency in 2021
4. India's Case for obtaining the UNSC Permanent Member Status:
5. Who Backs India for a Permanent Seat in UNSC and who Doesn't?
6. What is the benefit to India if made a permanent member of UNSC?
7. How does India's Inclusion as permanent member help UNSC?

United Nations Security Council

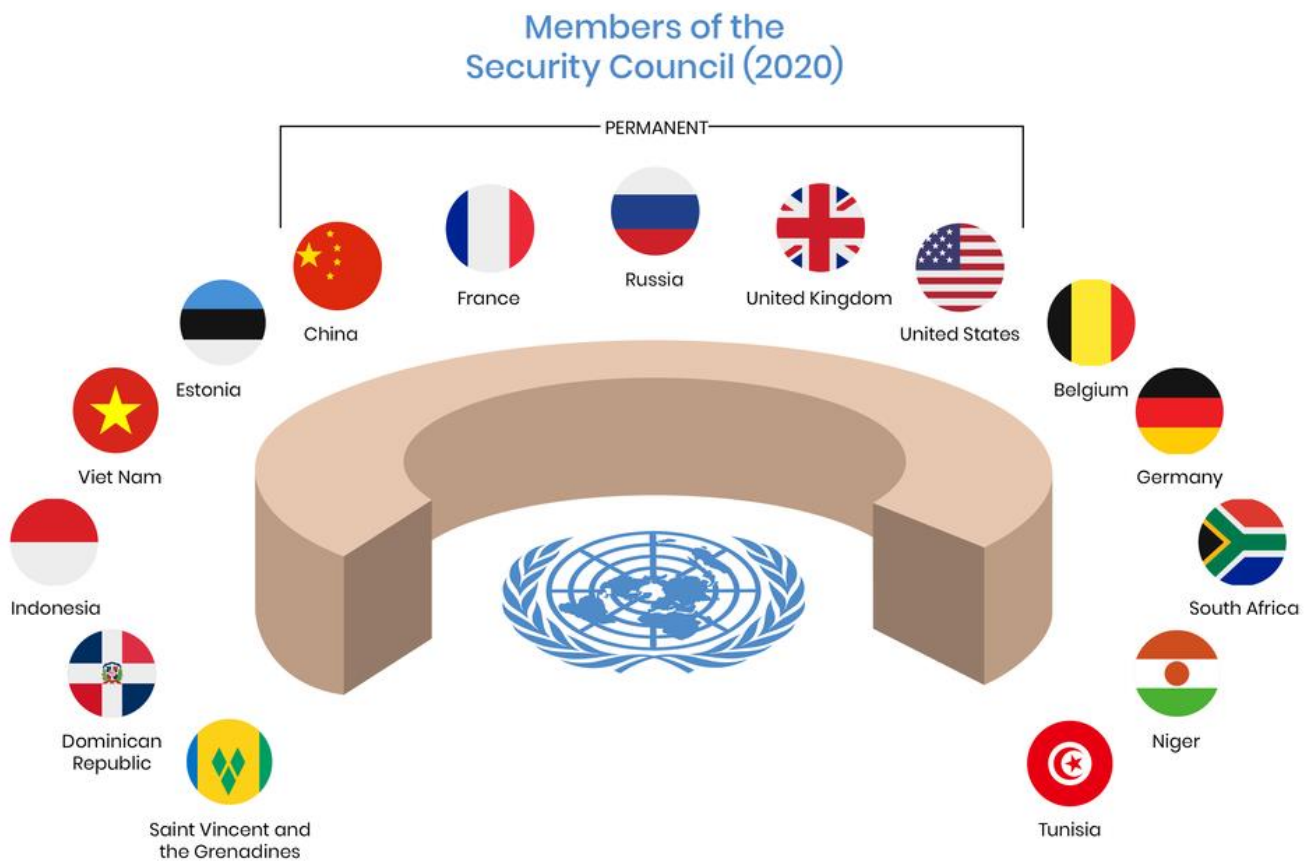
The Security Council is one of the six main organs of the United Nations.

- The Permanent Residence of UNSC in the UN Headquarters New York City, USA.
- Its primary responsibility is the maintenance of international peace and security.
- While other organs of the United Nations make recommendations to member states, only the Security Council has the power to make decisions that member states are then obligated to implement under the Charter- Hence, it is the only body of the UN with the authority to issue binding resolutions to member states.
- Resolutions of the Security Council are typically enforced by UN peacekeepers, military forces voluntarily provided by member states and funded independently of the main UN budget.

Membership

- It has 15 Members (5 as Permanent Members and 10 as Non- Permanent Members), and each Member has one vote.
- The Five permanent members are: China, France, Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Each of the Permanent Members has Veto Power over every decision of UNSC.
- The Ten non-permanent members are Elected for two-year terms by the General Assembly.
- Each year, the General Assembly elects five non-permanent members (out of ten in total) for a two-year term. The ten non-permanent seats are distributed on a regional basis.
- As per the rules of procedure, a retiring member is not eligible for immediate re-election and the election is held by secret ballot and there are no nominations.

- The presidency of the Council rotates monthly, going alphabetically among member states.



Functions and Powers of UNSC

Under the United Nations Charter, the functions and powers of the Security Council are:

1. to maintain international peace and security in accordance with the principles and purposes of the United Nations;
2. to investigate any dispute or situation which might lead to international friction;
3. to recommend methods of adjusting such disputes or the terms of settlement;
4. to formulate plans for the establishment of a system to regulate armaments;
5. to determine the existence of a threat to the peace or act of aggression and to recommend what action should be taken;
6. to call on Members to apply economic sanctions and other measures not involving the use of force to prevent or stop aggression;
7. to take military action against an aggressor;
8. to recommend the admission of new Members;
9. to exercise the trusteeship functions of the United Nations in "strategic areas";
10. to recommend to the General Assembly the appointment of the Secretary-General and, together with the Assembly, to elect the Judges of the International Court of Justice.

About India's Membership and Presidency in 2021

- India had entered the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) as one of the 10 rotating non-permanent members in January 2021 and will stay on the council for two years i.e., 2021-22.
- As part of its new role as president of the UNSC for the month of August 2021 (Rotating Presidency every month) that all 15 members get in rotation, India will decide the agenda of the UN's highest decision-making body whose resolutions and directives are binding on all member states. India will also coordinate important meetings on a range of issues during August.
- India is going to organise key events in three major areas of maritime security, peacekeeping and counter-terrorism.
- Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi will be the first Indian PM to preside over a meeting of the UNSC. (PM PV Narasimha Rao attended (not presided) a UNSC meeting in 1992).
- France has stated that it is dedicated to collaborating with India over strategic problems such as maritime security, peacekeeping, and counter-terrorism.
- Russia welcomed the country gaining the UNSC presidency saying it is very impressed by India's agenda, which embraces critical global concerns.

India's Case for obtaining the UNSC Permanent Member Status:

- India joined the U.N. in 1945 (2 years before independence) and India has been an active participant in all initiatives undertaken by the UN like Millennium Development Goals, Sustainable development goals and various UN summits, including on climate change
- In the past, India's was offered to join the UNSC by both the superpowers, the US and the then Soviet Union in 1950 and in 1955 respectively, India denied the offer due to Cold war politics in that era.
- Currently, there are more than 6,700 troops and police from India who have been deployed to UN peacekeeping missions, the fourth highest amongst troop-contributing countries (having almost twice the number of peacekeepers deployed on the ground by the Permanent 5 countries)
- India has been elected for seven terms for a two-year non-permanent member seat till now.
- India is the world's fifth-largest economy by nominal GDP and third largest by purchasing power parity and maintains the world's second-largest active armed force (after China) and is a nuclear-weapon state.
- India's acquired status of a Nuclear Weapons State (NWS) in May 1998 also makes India a natural claimant as a permanent member similar to the existing permanent members who are all Nuclear Weapon States.

Who Backs India for a Permanent Seat in UNSC and who Doesn't? ●●●●●●●●●●

- India's bid for permanent member of UNSC is now backed by four of the five permanent members, namely France, Russia, United Kingdom and United States.
- On 15 April 2011, China officially expressed its support for an increased Indian role at the United Nations, without explicitly endorsing India's Security Council ambitions.
- A few months later, China endorsed Indian candidacy as a permanent UNSC member provided that India revokes its support for Japanese candidacy.
- As part of the G4 nations, India is supported by Brazil, Germany, and Japan for the permanent seat.

What is the benefit to India if made a permanent member of UNSC?

- Permanent seat in the UNSC, would provide India with the much-needed leverage to expand its geo-political and geo-economic clout globally.
- Inclusion of India into UNSC will help in transforming its status from being a responsible stakeholder and pave the way for playing its part as one of the global rule makers.
- Indian presence at the Security Council would ensure Indian interests are not neglected amidst the decisions of great power politics.
- India will gain strength to act as a counterweight to China as China is growing to be a more potent rival, an emerging hegemony in Asia and an ever-increasing strategic and security concern.
- India will gain the ability stall any possible intervention by China, a permanent member which can take action at the behest of its ally Pakistan.

How does India's Inclusion as permanent member help UNSC?

- India in many ways is a sui generis (unique) country, the only example in history of a billion-plus people working together in a democratic framework, hence: A seat for India would make the body more representative and democratic. With India as a member, the Council would be a more legitimate and thus a more effective body.

PAKISTAN FINALISES BILL ON GILGIT-BALTISTAN

Context:

Pakistani authorities have finalised a law to award provisional provincial status to strategically located Gilgit-Baltistan.

Relevance:

GS-III: Indian Economy (Growth and Development of Indian Economy, Fiscal Policy, Taxation)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Gilgit-Baltistan
2. Developments in status of Gilgit Baltistan
3. Why does Pakistan want to make Gilgit-Baltistan a Province?

Gilgit-Baltistan

- Gilgit-Baltistan is one of the disputed territories of India.
- It is a chunk of high-altitude territory located on the north western corner of the Union Territory of Ladakh.
- It is located strategically as it borders Pakistan, Afghanistan and China.
- The region was a part of the erstwhile princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, but has been under Pakistan's control since 4th November, 1947, following the invasion of Kashmir by tribal militias and the Pakistan army.
- Maharaja Hari Singh, the last Dogra ruler of J&K, had signed the Instrument of Accession with India on 26th October 1947.



Developments in status of Gilgit Baltistan

- Gilgit Baltistan has been under Pakistan's control since 4th November, 1947, following the invasion of Kashmir by tribal militias and the Pakistan army.
- India moved to the United Nations Security Council to raise the issue of Pakistan's invasion on 1st January 1948.
- The UN Security Council passed a resolution calling for Pakistan to withdraw from all of Jammu and Kashmir and then India had to reduce its forces to the minimum level following which a plebiscite would be held to ascertain people's wishes.
- However, no withdrawal was ever carried out and it remains a point of contention between two countries.
- The Gilgit-Baltistan region is at the centre of USD 65 billion China Pakistan Economic Corridor Infrastructure development plan.
- Until 2009, the region was simply called Northern Areas and got its present name only with the Gilgit-Baltistan (Empowerment and Self-Governance) Order passed by Pakistan in 2009, which replaced the Northern Areas Legislative Council with the Legislative Assembly.
- Gilgit-Baltistan is an autonomous region now and is not a part of the four provinces (namely Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Sindh) in Pakistan. But if the 2021 bill is passed by Pakistan, it will become the 5th province of the country.

Chinese role

- China has spent years building infrastructure projects in Gilgit-Baltistan, home to an estimated 1.3 million people, including a long stretch of the Karakoram Highway, a key component to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

India's View of 'Illegal occupation'

- India's Foreign Ministry spokesperson said that "Such attempts by Pakistan, intended to camouflage its illegal occupation, cannot hide the grave human rights violations, exploitation and denial of freedom for over seven decades to the people residing in these Pakistan-occupied territories."
- Two of the three wars the rival neighbours have fought since independence have been over Kashmir — home to shrinking Himalayan glaciers seen as vital lifelines to the water stressed countries.

Why does Pakistan want to make Gilgit-Baltistan a Province?

- Gilgit-Baltistan is the northernmost territory administered by Pakistan. It is Pakistan's only territorial frontier, and thus a land route, with China.
- The Gilgit-Baltistan region is at the centre of the USD 65 billion China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) Infrastructure development plan.
- The CPEC has made the region vital for both countries. The CPEC, which connects Gwadar Port in Pakistan's Balochistan with China's Xinjiang province, is the flagship project of China's ambitious multi-billion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
- Some experts on India-Pakistan relations also assert that Pakistan's decision might have come from India's reassertion of its claims after the 5th August, 2019 reorganisation of Jammu & Kashmir.

MHA SAYS STEEP DECLINE IN CROSS-BORDER FIRING IN J&K

Context:

According to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), there was a steep decline in cross-border firing by Pakistan in Jammu and Kashmir till June 2021 compared to the number of ceasefire violations reported in 2020.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (India's Neighbors, Foreign Policies and Agreements affecting India's Interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About MHA's statements on ceasefire violations
2. About 2021 agreements to observe 2003 ceasefire agreements
3. About the 2003 Ceasefire Agreements
4. Territorial Disputes between India and Pakistan

About MHA's statements on ceasefire violations

- In a written reply to questions from Lok Sabha members, the Ministry of Home Affairs said that only around 650 ceasefire violations were reported till June 2021. Previously, there were more than 2100 cases in 2018, almost 3500 cases in 2019, and over 5100 cases in 2020.
- Following scheduled talks between the Directors General of Military Operations of India and Pakistan over hotline, a joint statement was issued on February 2021, in which both India and Pakistan agreed to the strict observance of all agreements, understandings and ceasefire along the LoC and all other sectors.

- Several countries have issued statements welcoming the development as an important and positive step...government's consistent position has been that India desires normal neighbourly relations with Pakistan and is committed to addressing issues, if any, bilaterally and peacefully in an atmosphere free of terror, hostility and violence.
- In response to another query, the MHA informed the Lok Sabha that so far more than 5,000 km of the IB — including 2,000+ kms along the Pakistan border and 3,000+ kms along the Bangladesh border — had been covered by fence.

About 2021 agreements to observe 2003 ceasefire agreements

- India and Pakistan had agreed to observe the 2003 ceasefire agreements along the Line of Control (LoC) and all other sectors, in 2021.
- The 2021 joint statement issued by both India and Pakistan employed terms like the resolution of “core issues”, which indicated both coordination at a diplomatic level and high-level political approval.
- The 2021 agreements came in response to over 5000 instances of Cross Fire Violations (CFVs) along the Line of Control (LoC) and other areas in Jammu and Kashmir, resulting in 46 fatal casualties in 2020.

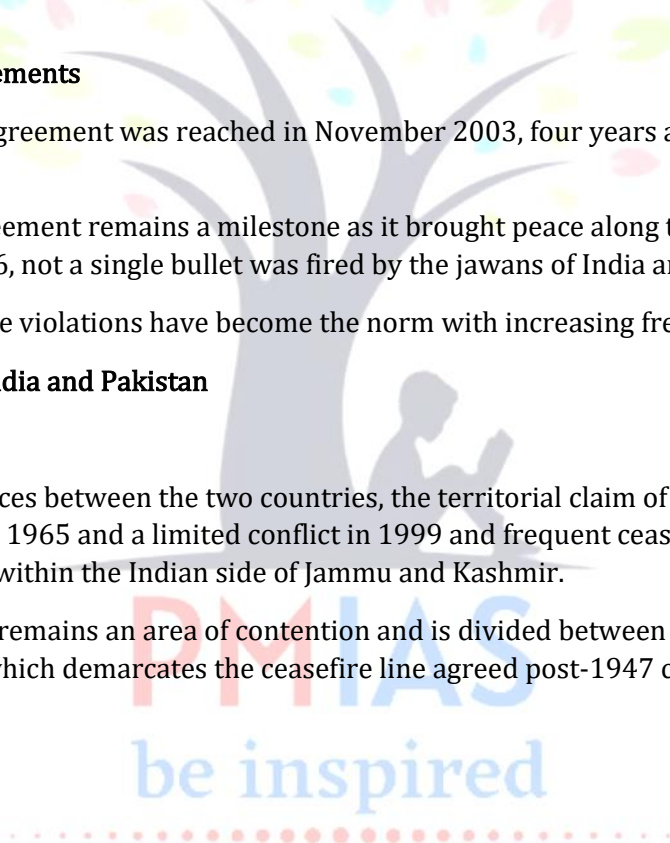
About the 2003 Ceasefire Agreements

- The original ceasefire agreement was reached in November 2003, four years after the Kargil War (1999).
- The 2003 ceasefire agreement remains a milestone as it brought peace along the LoC until 2006. Between 2003 and 2006, not a single bullet was fired by the jawans of India and Pakistan.
- But since 2006, ceasefire violations have become the norm with increasing frequency.

Territorial Disputes between India and Pakistan

Kashmir

- Due to political differences between the two countries, the territorial claim of Kashmir has been the subject of wars in 1947, 1965 and a limited conflict in 1999 and frequent ceasefire violations and promotion of rebellion within the Indian side of Jammu and Kashmir.
- The then princely state remains an area of contention and is divided between the two countries by the Line of Control (LoC), which demarcates the ceasefire line agreed post-1947 conflict.





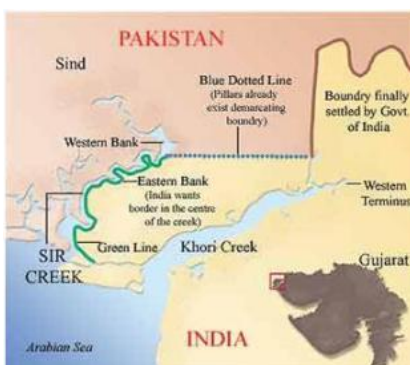
Siachen Glacier

- Siachen Glacier is located in Northern Ladakh in the Karakoram Range.
- It is the 5th largest glacier in Karakoram Range and the 2nd largest glacier in the world.
- Most of the Siachen Glacier is disputed between India and Pakistan.
- Before 1984, neither of the two countries had any permanent presence on the glacier.
- Under the Shimla Agreement of 1972, the Siachen was called a barren and useless.
- This Agreement also did not specify the boundary between India and Pakistan.
- When India got intelligence that Pakistan was going occupy Siachen Glacier, it launched Operation Meghdoot to reach the glacier first.
- Following the success of Operation Meghdoot, the Indian Army obtained the area at a higher altitude and Pakistan army getting a much lower altitude.
- Thus, India has a strategic advantage in this region.
- Following the 2003 armistice treaty between the two countries, firing and bombardment have ceased in this area, though both the sides have stationed their armies in the region. • • •



Sir Creek

- Sir Creek is a 96 km tidal estuary on the border of India and Pakistan. The creek, which opens up into the Arabian Sea, divides the Gujarat state of India from the Sindh province of Pakistan.
- Sir Creek Dispute: The basic cause of the Sir Creek dispute lies in the interpretation of the maritime boundary line between Kutch and Sindh. While the disputed area of Sir Creek involves only a few square miles of land, the land border demarcation has a direct impact on the maritime boundaries of both countries, involving a few hundred square miles of the ocean territory.
- Pakistan's Position: Pakistan claims the entire Sir Creek, with its eastern bank defined by a "green line" and represented on a 1914 map belongs to it. Accepting Pakistan's premise on the "green line" would mean loss of about 250 square miles of EEZ for India.
- India's Position: India says that the green line is an indicative line and felt the boundary should be defined by the "mid-channel" of the Creek as shown on a map dated 1925. India supports its stance by citing the Thalweg doctrine in international law. It states that river boundaries between two states may be, if the two states agree, divided by the mid- channel. Pakistan maintains that the doctrine is not applicable in this case as it most commonly applies to non-tidal rivers, and Sir Creek is a tidal estuary.



INDIA AND MAURITIUS ON AGALEGA ISLANDS

Context:

Recently, there was a report on the construction of an airstrip and two jetties to house an Indian military base on Agalega, located about 1,000 km north of the archipelago's main island.

Mauritius has denied a report that it has allowed India to build a military base on the remote island of Agalega, with a government official telling that no such agreement exists between the two nations.

Relevance:

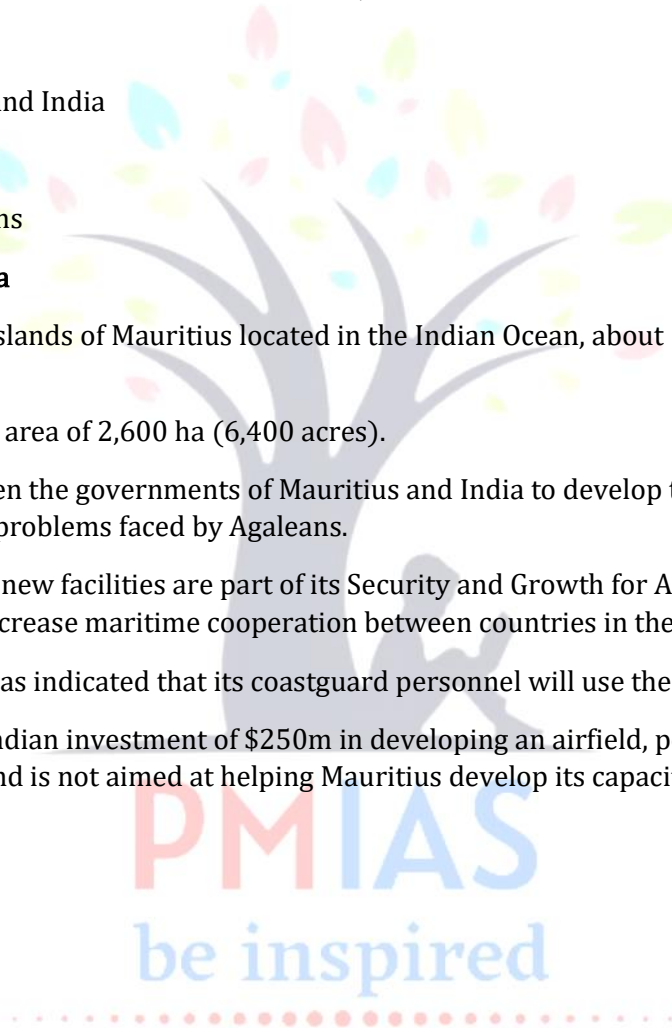
GS-II: International Relations (India's Neighbors, Foreign policies affecting India's Interests, Important political developments in foreign countries affecting India's interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About Agalega Islands and India
2. Significance of this area
3. India–Mauritius relations

About Agalega Islands and India

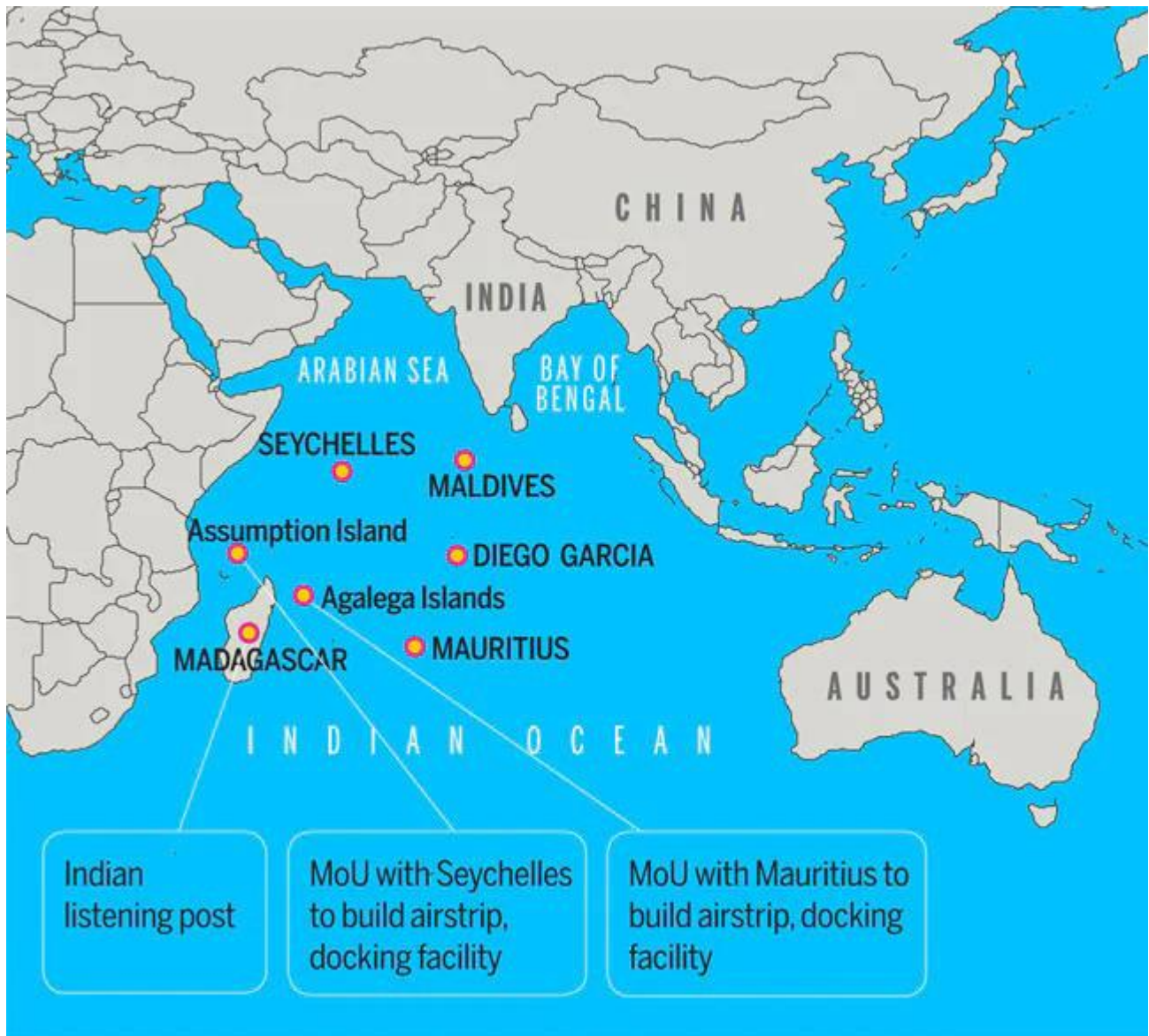
- Agaléga are two outer islands of Mauritius located in the Indian Ocean, about 1,000 kilometers north of Mauritius island.
- The islands have a total area of 2,600 ha (6,400 acres).
- There is an MoU between the governments of Mauritius and India to develop the Agaléga islands and resolve infrastructural problems faced by Agaleans.
- India asserts that these new facilities are part of its Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) policy, which aims to increase maritime cooperation between countries in the region.
- Mauritius, for its part, has indicated that its coastguard personnel will use the new facilities.
- But it is clear that the Indian investment of \$250m in developing an airfield, port, and communications hub on this remote island is not aimed at helping Mauritius develop its capacity to police its territorial waters.





Significance of this area

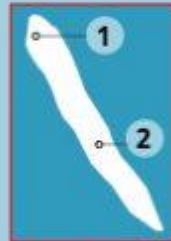
- The Agalega area is currently a blind spot for the Indian Navy and by building a military facility in it, New Delhi hopes to expand its maritime domain awareness.
- In times of conflict, knowing the location of enemy ships and submarines, without being detected in the process, creates a significant advantage.
- China's naval forays into this region are the true motivator for its expanding naval presence.
- In peacetime, effective maritime domain awareness helps establish international partnerships with like-minded militaries and also acts as a deterrent to both state and non-state adversaries, by signaling reach.



PMIAS
be inspired

Agaléga Mauritius

INDIAN
OCEAN



12kms long
1.5kms wide

Inhabited by 300
natives and now has
450 Indian workers

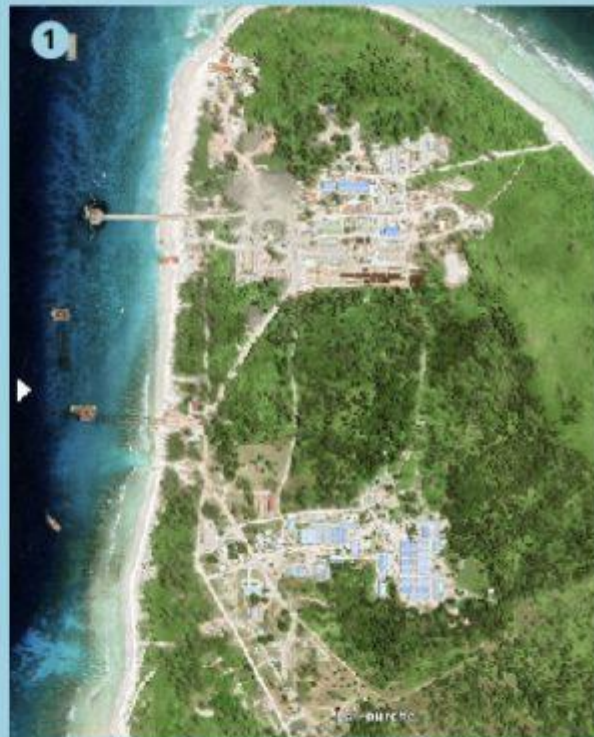
An erstwhile slave
plantation. Main town
is Vingt Cinq. The name
means 'twenty five'
in French, possible
reference to the
number of lashes slaves
received as punishment



Pictures show a 3,000m
runway capable of hosting the
Indian Navy's Boeing P-8I

₹650 crore already spent on
building the facilities

Manifestation of Modi's 2016
vision for the Indian Ocean,
articulated as Security and Growth
for all in the region (SAGAR)



A deal to build a new naval and air
facility on Seychelles' Assumption
Island fell through

Ethnic ties with Mauritius, including
a shared Hindu religion with many
Mauritians, helped India sign
the 2015 agreement

The base will cement India's
presence in the region and facilitate
its power projection aspirations

Source: lowyinstitute.org, Google Earth

India–Mauritius relations

- India–Mauritius relations date back to 1730, diplomatic relations were established in 1948, before Mauritius became independent state.
- The cultural affinities and long historical ties between the two nations have contributed to strong and cordial relations between the two nations.
- More than 68% of the Mauritian population are of Indian origin, most commonly known as Indo-Mauritians.
- India and Mauritius co-operate in combating piracy, which has emerged as a major threat in the Indian Ocean region and Mauritius supports India's stance against terrorism.
- From the 1820s, Indian workers started coming into Mauritius to work on sugar plantations.
- In the 1830s, when slavery was abolished by the British Parliament, large numbers of Indian workers began to be brought into Mauritius as indentured labourers.
- November 2nd is observed as 'Aapravasi Day' to mark the ship named 'Atlas' docking in Mauritius in 1834 carrying the first batch of Indian indentured labourers



INDIA, CHINA PULL BACK TROOPS FROM GOGRA

Context:

India and China have undertaken disengagement from Gogra area of Eastern Ladakh following an agreement at the 12th round of Corps Commander talks.

Relevance:

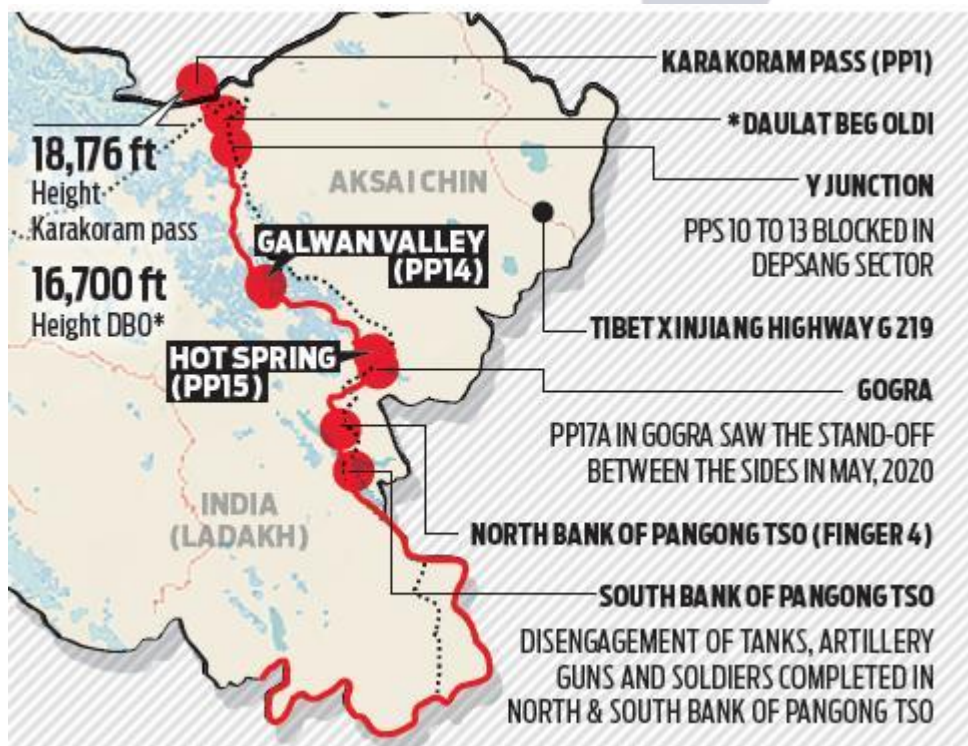
Dimensions of the Article:

1. About Current Disengagement between India and China
2. Understanding these locations and their importance

About Current Disengagement between India and China

- The agreement on Patrolling Point (PP) 17A (Gogra post) was reached but China is not inclined to move back from PP15 (Hot Springs area); it continues to insist that it is holding its own side of the Line of Actual Control (LAC).
- Both sides agreed to resolve these remaining issues in an expeditious manner in accordance with the existing agreements and protocols and maintain the momentum of dialogue and negotiations.
- They also agreed that in the interim they will continue their effective efforts in ensuring stability along the LAC in the Western sector and jointly maintain peace and tranquility.
- Along the LAC between India and China, Indian Army has been given certain locations that its troops have access to patrol the area under its control. These points are known as patrolling points, or PPs, and are decided by the China Study Group (CSG).
- Barring certain areas, like Depsang Plains, these patrolling points are on the LAC, and troops access these points to assert their control over the territory.

Understanding these locations and their importance



- Hot Springs is just north of the Chang Chenmo river and Gogra Post is east of the point where the river takes a hairpin bend coming southeast from Galwan Valley and turning southwest.
- The area is north of the Karakoram Range of mountains, which lies north of the Pangong Tso lake, and south east of Galwan Valley.

- The area lies close to Kongka Pass, one of the main passes, which, according to China, marks the boundary between India and China.
- India's claim of the international boundary lies significantly east, as it includes the entire Aksai Chin area as well.
- Hot Springs and Gogra Post are close to the boundary between two of the most historically disturbed provinces (Xinjiang and Tibet) of China.

BRITAIN IMPOSES SANCTIONS ON BELARUS

Context:

Britain imposed sanctions on Belarus's potash and petroleum product exports in an attempt to put pressure on President Alexander Lukashenko, who swiftly retorted that London should "choke on" the new measures.

Relevance:

Prelims, GS-II: International Relations, GS-I: Geography (Maps)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. The Story behind the sanctions on Belarus
2. About Belarus

The Story behind the sanctions on Belarus

- The President of Belarus Lukashenko took office in 1994 after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and he has been in power for 26 years, keeping much of the economy in state hands, and using censorship and police crackdowns against opponents. He is often described as Europe's "last dictator", he has tried to preserve elements of Soviet communism.
- In 2020, after Lukashenko was announced as the winner in elections, protests broke out in the capital, Minsk which was met with a violent security crackdown, in response to which the EU and the United States (US) imposed several rounds of financial sanctions against Belarus in 2020.
- In May 2021, Belarus forcibly diverted a passenger jet and scrambled a warplane to arrest an opposition journalist in an act denounced by Western powers as "state piracy" (an act of piracy where the state is involved).

About Belarus

- Belarus is a landlocked country in Eastern Europe, bordered by Russia to the east and northeast, Ukraine to the south, Poland to the west, and Lithuania and Latvia to the northwest.
- Minsk is the capital and largest city of Belarus.
- Belarus declared independence in 1991 and in 1994, Alexander Lukashenko was elected as Belarus's first president in the country's first and only free election post-independence, serving as president ever since.
- Lukashenko continued a number of Soviet-era policies, such as state ownership of large sections of the economy, and his government is widely considered to be authoritarian.
- Belarus is a developing country ranking very high in the Human Development Index.
- It has been a member of the United Nations since its founding and a member of the CIS, the CSTO, the EAEU, and the Non-Aligned Movement.

- It has shown no aspirations for joining the European Union but nevertheless maintains a bilateral relationship with the Union, and likewise participates in two EU projects: the Eastern Partnership and the Baku Initiative.



FEMBOSA – 2021 ANNUAL MEETING

Context:

Chief Election Commissioner of India and current Chairman of Forum of the Election Management Bodies of South-Asia (FEMBoSA) inaugurated the 11th Annual meeting of the FEMBoSA for the year 2021.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Foreign Policies affecting India's Interests, Important International Groupings, India and its neighbors)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. What is FEMBoSA?
2. Objectives and Activities of FEMBoSA
3. Key Points of the FEMBoSA inauguration 2021

What is FEMBoSA?

- Forum of the Election Management Bodies of South Asia (FEMBoSA) was established at the 3rd Conference of Heads of Election Management Bodies (EMBs) of SAARC Countries in 2012.
- The forum aims to increase mutual cooperation in respect to the common interests of the SAARC's EMBs.
- The Forum has eight Member Election Management Bodies from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.
- The Election Commission of India was the latest Chair of the Forum (now Bhutan).

Objectives and Activities of FEMBoSA

Objectives of FEMBoSA

- Promote contact among the Election Management Bodies of SAARC countries.
- Facilitate appropriate exchange of experience and expertise among members.
- Share experiences with a view to learning from each other
- Foster efficiency and effectiveness in conducting free, fair, transparent and participative election.

Significant activities under FEMBoSA

- Member organizations celebrate National Voter's Day in a calendar year in their respective countries.
- Initiative of establishing South Asia Institute for Democracy and Electoral Studies (SAIDES) in Nepal.
- In order to increase knowledge related to elections, take initiatives to include voter education in the school-level textbooks of their respective countries.
- Implementation of recommendations of South Asian Disabilities Organizations for the inclusion of disabled people in the electoral system and the creation of suitable election environment.

Key Points of the FEMBoSA inauguration 2021

- FEMBoSA meeting was held under the theme of 'Use of Technology in Elections'.
- During the meeting it was noted that, FEMBoSA represents a very large part of democratic world. it is an active regional cooperation association of Election Management Bodies.
- India highlighted the importance of technological advancements and its impact on election management. Technology is extensively used to make elections more participative, accessible and transparent.
- It was also highlighted that ECI looks forward to strengthen its interaction with FEMBoSA member EMBs in order to promote activities of Forum in accordance with its objectives.

INDIA'S LEADERSHIP IN UNSC MEET ON MARITIME SECURITY

Context:

The Indian Prime Minister chaired a debate on maritime security titled, 'Enhancing Maritime Security — A Case for International Cooperation', as a part of India's United Nations Security Council (UNSC) presidency.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Important International Institutions and Groupings, Foreign Policies affecting India's Interests)

Mains Questions:

1. To what extent has India's leadership in the UNSC debate on maritime security boosted its standing as a key player in the shared commons of the ocean waters? (10 marks)
2. What is the role of United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)? How can India play a part in furthering the prospects for a stable and enduring maritime environment? (15 marks)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Highlights of the UNSC debate on maritime security
2. What is Freedom of navigation
3. Importance of Freedom of Navigation
4. United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)
5. Views of other Countries on Maritime Security

Highlights of the UNSC debate on maritime security

- India, as the UNSC president for August 2021, noted the threats to maritime safety and security and called upon the members to consider implementing the 2000 UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.
- India emphasized on safeguarding the legitimate uses of the oceans and security of coastal communities, affirming that international law — reflected in the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), among other global instruments — provides the legal framework for combating these illicit activities.
- India also called on the member States to implement the International Ship and Port Facility Security Code and Chapter XI-2 of the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, and to work with the International Maritime Organization (IMO) to promote safe and secure shipping while ensuring freedom of navigation.

Other points highlighted by India

- Indian Prime Minister described the oceans as a common heritage for humankind and a lifeline for the future of the planet and urged the global community to develop a common framework to deal with contemporary challenges.
- The PM emphasised on India's ancient maritime traditions, pointing at: the Gujarati seaman who helped Vasco da Gama sail to the west coast of India from Zanzibar in the 15th century; spread of Buddhism and Hinduism to Southeast Asia by the maritime route; Kutch and Kathiawar as well as the Malabar coast enjoying ancient links to Africa, etc.
- India has put forth five basic principles for maritime security.
 - Free maritime trade sans barriers so as to establish legitimate trade.
 - Settlement of maritime disputes should be peaceful and on the basis of international law only.

- **Responsible maritime connectivity should be encouraged.**
- **Need to collectively combat maritime threats posed by non-state actors and natural calamities.**
- **Preserve the maritime environment and maritime resources.**
- The Prime Minister advocated the peaceful settlement of maritime disputes on the basis of international law – pointing to an example set by India with its acceptance of the award by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in 2014 which paved the way for India and Bangladesh to put aside their maritime dispute and forge even closer ties.
- The PM has called upon the global community to rally together to deal effectively with the ravages of cyclones, tsunami and maritime pollution.
- PM's remarks also underscored the importance of preserving the maritime environment and its resources.

What is Freedom of navigation

- Freedom of navigation (FON) is a principle of customary international law that ships flying the flag of any sovereign state shall not suffer interference from other states, apart from the exceptions provided for in international law.
- In the realm of international law, it has been defined as freedom of movement for vessels, freedom to enter ports and to make use of plant and docks, to load and unload goods and to transport goods and passengers. This right is now also codified in the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.
- Not all UN member states have ratified the convention, notably, the United States has signed, but not ratified the convention – However, United States enforces the practice.

Importance of Freedom of Navigation

- Freedom of navigation and unimpeded commerce are key to the spread of prosperity as critical supply chains depend on the concept of open seas.
- Disruption of sea lanes of communication will have global repercussions – examples for which are:
- The blockage in the Suez Canal earlier in 2021 interrupted the flow of trade worth billions of dollars.
- In 1956, great powers intervened militarily when Egypt nationalised this key waterway.
- In present times, a naval blockade at any choke-point in the Indo-Pacific could prove catastrophic.
- Considering these examples, it can be said that the neo-colonial concept of closed seas in the South China Sea could be a major impediment to the future of the global economy.
- India stands for openness and transparency in the execution of projects, based on local priorities, with in-built fiscal viability and environmental sustainability.
- The U.S., Japan and Australia are also promoting better standards for global infrastructure through the Blue Dot Network.

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

- United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is the international agreement defining the rights and responsibilities of nations with respect to their use of the world's oceans, establishing guidelines for businesses, the environment, and the management of marine natural resources.

- UNCLOS replaces the older 'freedom of the seas' concept, dating from the 17th century: national rights were limited to a specified belt of water extending from a nation's coastlines according to the 'cannon shot' rule.
- All waters beyond national boundaries were considered international waters: free to all nations, but belonging to none of them.
- While India ratified UNCLOS in 1995, the U.S. has failed to do it so far.

Views of other Countries on Maritime Security

1. **U.S.** – The U.S. highlighted that China has been building military bases on artificial islands in the South China Sea region and said that conflict in the South China Sea or in any ocean would have serious global consequences for security and for commerce. The US also referred to the unanimous and legally binding decision five years ago by the arbitral tribunal constituted under the UNCLOS which China firmly rejected as unlawful.
2. **China** – China held that with the joint efforts of China and ASEAN countries, the situation in the South China Sea remains generally stable. Referring indirectly to the Quad (US, India, Japan, Australia), a few countries are pursuing exclusive regional strategies in the Asia Pacific region, China warned that such moves can create and intensify maritime conflicts, undermine the sovereignty and security interests of relevant countries, and weaken regional peace and stability.
3. **Russia** – Russia did not mention the South China Sea or the Indo-Pacific, and articulated a much nuanced position which promotes strict adherence to key norms and principles of international law enshrined in the UN Charter.
4. **U.K.** – The UK has a vision for a free, open and secure Indo-Pacific.
5. **France** – France held that the maritime domain has emerged as a theatre for a new generation of challenges and urged greater cooperation among the members of the UNSC to deal with the issue.

INDIA ORGANIZES THE IBSA TOURISM MINISTER'S MEET

Context:

India organised the IBSA (India, Brazil and South Africa) Tourism Ministers' virtual meet.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Important International Groupings, Foreign policies affecting India's Interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About IBSA (India, Brazil and South Africa)
2. About the IBSA Tourism Ministers Meet
3. Extras: IBSA Fund

About IBSA (India, Brazil and South Africa)

- The IBSA (India, Brazil and South Africa) is a trilateral, developmental initiative between India, Brazil and South Africa to promote South-South cooperation and exchange.
- The grouping was formalized and named the IBSA Dialogue Forum when the Foreign Ministers of the three countries met in Brasilia (Brazil) on 6th June 2003 and issued the Brasilia Declaration.
- The idea of South-South Cooperation (SSC) is not new. Its genesis can be traced back to the decades of efforts by countries and groupings working together to ensure South-South solidarity such as Bandung

conference 1955, Non-Aligned Movement 1961, G77 grouping, UNCTAD, the Buenos Aires Plan of Action 1978, and the 2009 Nairobi declaration.

- India is the current IBSA Chair as of August 2021 and so far 5 IBSA Leadership Summits have been held.

About the IBSA Tourism Ministers Meet

- The IBSA Tourism Ministers Meeting recognized the importance of strengthening cooperation in tourism to overcome the impact of Covid 19 pandemic on the tourism sector
- The Ministers agreed to implement various tourism activities to be actioned by respective member countries.
- The significant aspect of the meeting was the adoption of the IBSA Tourism Ministers Joint Statement, an outcome document on cooperation and promotion for speedy recovery of travel and tourism.

Extras: IBSA Fund

- Development projects are executed with IBSA funding in fellow developing countries through the IBSA Fund (India, Brazil and South Africa Facility for Poverty and Hunger Alleviation).
- Established in 2004, IBSA Fund is managed by the United Nations (UN) Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC). Each IBSA member country is required to contribute \$1 million per annum to the fund.
- Over the years, the fund has contributed \$39 million and partnered in 19 countries from global South to implement 26 projects.
- Projects have been funded in countries such as Guinea Bissau, Sierra Leone, Cape Verde, Burundi, Cambodia, Haiti, Palestine, Vietnam and others.
- The fund has also been recognised for its good work in the field and has received UN South-South Partnership award 2006, UN MDG (Millennium Development Goals) award 2010, and the South-South and Triangular Cooperation Champions award in 2012.

TALIBAN HAS WON: EX-PRESIDENT OF AFGHANISTAN GHANI

Context:

Ex-Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said after fleeing the country that the Taliban had won, as the militants entered Kabul – nearly 20 years after they were ousted from power by a US-led invasion.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (India's Neighbors, Important Developments in International Politics affecting India's Interests, Foreign Policies and Agreements affecting India's Interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. **About Taliban's Victory in Afghanistan**
2. **Who are the Taliban?**
3. **What is the Taliban's ideology?**
4. **Impact of Taliban's Victory**

About Taliban's Victory in Afghanistan

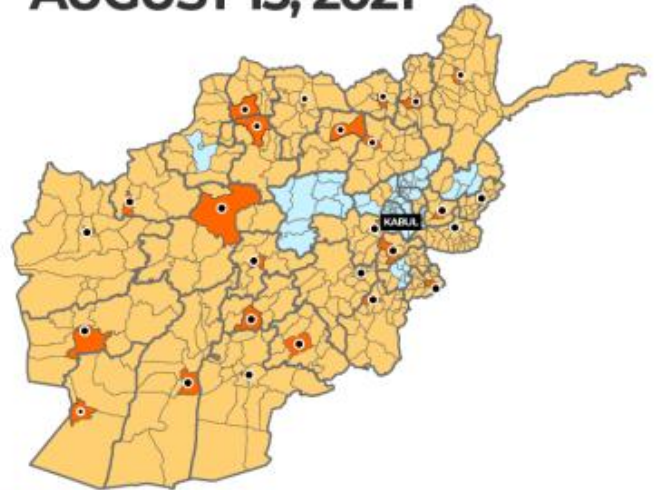
- President Ashraf Ghani left Afghanistan and has sought asylum in Tajikistan.
- This marks the end of a 20-year Western experiment aimed at remaking the country.

- Taliban said that it would announce the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan from the presidential palace.
- Afghanistan was called the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan under the Taliban government that was ousted by the U.S.-led forces after the 9/11 attacks.

AUGUST 6, 2021



AUGUST 15, 2021



AFGHANISTAN Mapping the advance of the Taliban

Who are the Taliban?

Origins

- The Taliban, which means “students” in the Pashto language, emerged in 1994 around the southern Afghan city of Kandahar. It was one of the factions fighting a civil war for control of the country following the withdrawal of the Soviet Union and subsequent collapse of the government.
- It originally drew members from so-called “mujahideen” fighters who, with support from the United States, repelled Soviet forces in the 1980s.
- Within the space of two years, the Taliban had gained sole control over most of the country, proclaiming an Islamic emirate in 1996 with a harsh interpretation of Islamic law. Other mujahideen groups retreated to the north of the country.

Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan

- The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan is an Islamic state governed by the Taliban that ruled the country from 1996 to 2001 (before its current victory on 15th August 2021).
- Between 1996 and 2001, it controlled approximately 90% of the country, whereas remaining regions in the northeast were held by the Northern Alliance, which maintained broad international recognition as a continuation of the Islamic State of Afghanistan.

- Only four countries, including neighbour Pakistan, recognised the Taliban government when it was in power.
- Following the 9-11 attacks on the twin towers in the U.S. in 2001 by the al Qaeda, US-backed forces in the north swept into Kabul in November under the cover of heavy US airstrikes. Because of this The Taliban melted away into remote areas, where it began a 20-year-long insurgency against the Afghan government and its Western allies.

What is the Taliban's ideology?

- During its five years in power, the Taliban enforced a strict version of sharia law. Women were predominantly barred from working or studying, and were confined to their homes unless accompanied by a male guardian.
- Public executions and floggings were common, Western films and books were banned, and cultural artefacts seen as blasphemous under Islam were destroyed. Opponents and Western countries accuse the Taliban of wanting to return to this style of governance in the areas it already controls – a claim the group denies.
- The Taliban said earlier this year it wanted a “genuine Islamic system” for Afghanistan that would make provisions for women's and minority rights, in line with cultural traditions and religious rules.

Impact of Taliban's Victory

- There are indications of a return to the harsh version of Islamic rule Afghans lived under from 1996 until 2001.
- The biggest losers in the transition would be Afghan women and youth who had political, civic, economic and human rights and opportunities, and media freedoms under the Afghan government.
- Afghans fear that the Taliban could reimpose the kind of brutal rule that almost eliminated women's rights.
- Fear is running high among the ethnic Hazara minority, Shia Muslims who were persecuted by the Taliban and made major gains in education and social status over the past two decades.
- Commercial flights were later suspended after sporadic gunfire erupted at Kabul International Airport.
- Evacuations continued on military flights.
- The immediate challenge is a massive humanitarian crisis on account of the hundreds of thousands of internally displaced who have left other war zones and taken shelter on pavements and parks in Kabul.
- Also, there is the panic and rush for passports and visas for those who fear for their lives from the Taliban or their sponsors.
- There have been reports of revenge killings and other brutal tactics in areas of the country the Taliban have seized in recent days