

MASTER CHECKUP

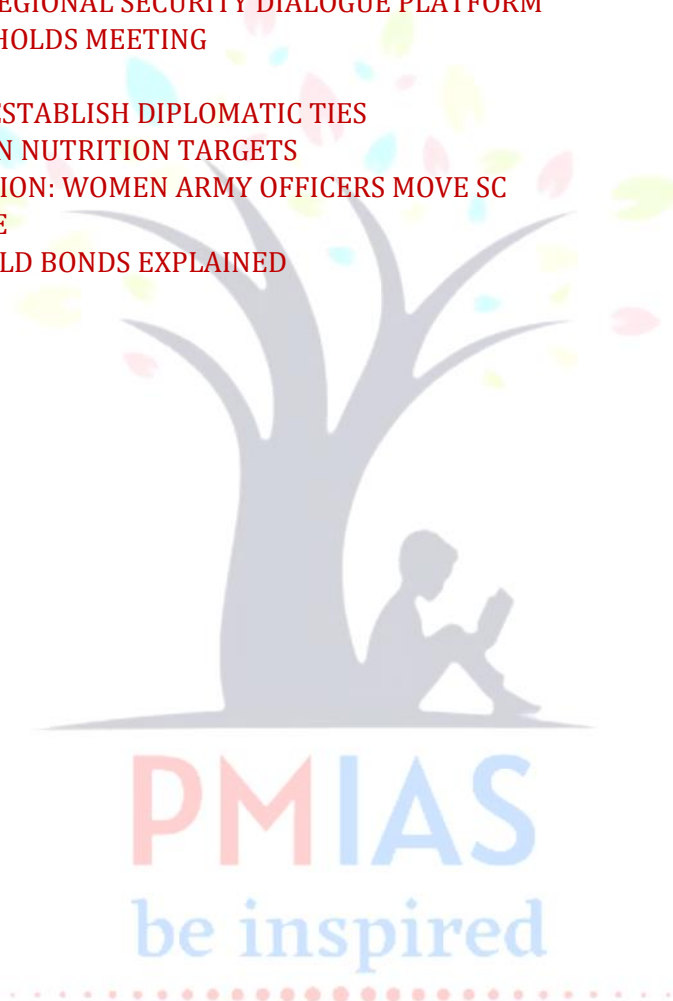
GS 2 BILATERAL RELATIONS

PART 1

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CHINA'S NEGATIVE YIELD BONDS EXPLAINED

Why in news?

- Recently, China sold negative-yield debt for the first time, and this saw a high demand from investors across Europe.
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What are negative-yield bonds?

- These are debt instruments that offer to pay the investor a maturity amounts lower than the purchase price of the bond.
- These are generally issued by central banks or governments, and investors pay interest to the borrower to keep their money with them.

Why do investors buy them?

- Negative-yield bonds attract investments during times of stress and uncertainty as investors look to protect their capital from significant erosion.
- At a time when the world is battling the Covid-19 pandemic and interest rates in developed markets across Europe are much lower, investors are looking for relatively better-yielding debt instruments to safeguard their interests.

Why is there a huge demand?

- The fact that the 10-year and 15-year bonds are offering positive returns is a big attraction at a time when interest rates in Europe have dropped significantly.
- As against minus —0.15% yield on the 5-year bond issued by China, the yields offered in safe European bonds are much lower, between -0.5% and —0.75%.
- Also, it is important to note that while the majority of the large economies are facing a contraction in their GDP for 2020-21, China is one country that is set to witness positive growth in these challenging times: its GDP expanded by 4.9% in the third quarter of 2020.
- While Europe, the US and other parts of the world are facing a second wave of Covid-19 cases, China has demonstrated that it has controlled the spread of the pandemic and is therefore seen as a more stable region.
- Many feel that European investors are also looking to increase their exposure in China, and hence there is a huge demand for these bonds.

What is the key factor driving this demand?

- It is the massive amount of liquidity injected by the global central banks after the pandemic began that has driven up prices of various assets including equities, debt and commodities.
- Banking industry sources said many investors could also be temporarily parking money in negative-yielding government debt for the purpose of hedging their risk portfolio in equities.
- In case the fresh wave of the Covid-19 pandemic leads to further lockdowns of economies, then there could be further negative pressure on interest rates, pushing yields down further, and leading to profits even for investors who put in money at the current juncture.

- Global central banks have injected an estimated more than \$10 trillion of liquidity through various instruments in the financial system — which is finding its way into various assets in the economy.
- There is an expectation that the new US government may impose fresh lockdowns in the economy as Covid cases are picking up in various US states and European countries, whereas China seems relatively safe now from that perspective.
- This is expected to lead to volatility in the financial markets in coming days, pushing up demand for safety of capital alongside flows into risk assets.

SENTINEL-6 SATELLITE

Why in news?

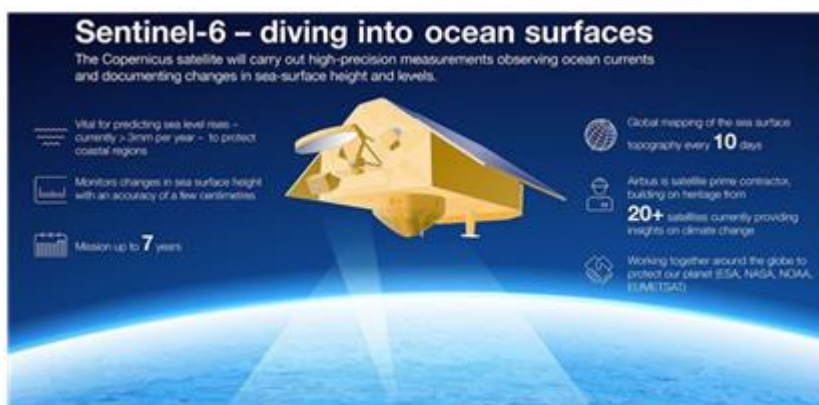
Recently, Copernicus Sentinel-6 Michael Freilich satellite was launched from the Vandenberg Air Force base in California aboard a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket.

Details

- Sentinel-6-Satellite is a part of the mission dedicated to measuring changes in the global sea level. The mission is called the Jason Continuity of Service (Jason-CS) mission.
- The Objective of the mission is to measure the height of the ocean, which is a key component in understanding how the Earth's climate is changing.
- It consists of two satellites, Sentinel-6 and the other, called Sentinel-6B, to be launched in 2025.

How does it work?

- The satellite will send pulses to the Earth's surface and measure how long they take to return to it, which will help in measuring the sea surface height. It will also measure water vapour along this path and find its position using GPS and ground-based lasers.
- As per NASA, this will help in monitoring critical changes in ocean currents and heat storage only from space, by measuring height of the sea surface.
- This will in turn help in foreseeing the effects of the changing oceans on the climate.



PERMANENT COMMISSION: WOMEN ARMY OFFICERS MOVE SC

Why in news?

Women Army officers moved the Supreme Court to debunk the defence establishment's announcement that 422 of 615 women officers screened have been found "fit" for a permanent commission.

Details

- Women Army Officers said the announcement regarding “fitness” for permanent commission was more optics than substance.
- The said that only less than 50% of the women officers have been actually granted permanent commission (PC).
- They stated that the actual number of women officers “granted” PC would come to about 277 – less than half of 615.
- Compared to this number, 90% male officers have been cleared for PC in the Army.
- Army set out arbitrary medical thresholds for them during the screening process for PC – which the Women Army Officers said, were criteria aimed to “eliminate women officers on arbitrary grounds”.

Supreme Court on Eligibility for Permanent Commission

- The Supreme Court dismissed the Union government’s submissions that women are physiologically weaker than men as a “sex stereotype”.
- The Supreme Court declared that Short Service Commission (SSC) women officers are eligible for permanent commission and command posts in the Army irrespective of their years of service
- The court dismissed the government’s stand that only women officers with less than 14 years of service ought to be considered for permanent commission, and those with over 20 years of service should be pensioned immediately.
- The court has done away with all discrimination on the basis of years of service for grant of PC in 10 streams of combat support arms and services, bringing them on a par with male officers.

Women in the Indian Defence Forces

Year wise induction details of women officers in the three armed-forces during the past three years and current year, given in a written reply is as follows:

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Indian Army	949	819	364	01
Indian Air Force	59	59	51	00
Indian Navy	57	38	54	18 (in progress)

% of women officers is more in Indian air force than army and navy.

NITI AAYOG REPORT ON NUTRITION TARGETS

Why in news?

- The National Nutrition Mission or the Poshan Abhiyaan — the world’s largest nutrition programme for children and mothers — must be stepped up in order to meet the targets set by the Centre to reduce stunting, wasting, and anaemia by 2022, warns a report by NITI Aayog with only a little over a year left to reach its goals.
- “Accelerating Progress on Nutrition In India: What Will It Take” is the third progress report on the National Nutrition Mission or the Poshan Abhiyaan by the NITI Aayog.

Highlights of the Report

- The third progress report (October 2019-April 2020) takes stock of the roll-out status on the ground and implementation challenges encountered at various levels through large scale datasets.

- The initial Reports I and II, focused majorly on the mission's preparedness and implementation by States and UTs, respectively.
- On stunting, India's targets are conservative as compared to the global target defined by the World Health Assembly (WHA), which is a prevalence rate of 5% of stunting as opposed to India's goal of reducing stunting levels to 13.3% by 2022.
- The target of reducing prevalence levels of anaemia among pregnant women from 50.3% in 2016 to 34.4% in 2022 and among adolescent girls from 52.9% in 2016 to 39.66%, is also considered to be conservative as compared to the WHA's target of halving prevalence levels.
- In the wake of the pandemic, experts warn that deepening poverty and hunger may delay achieving the goals defined under the Mission.

Way Forwards Suggested

1. To improve complementary feeding using both behaviour change interventions and complimentary food supplements in the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS).
2. To work towards investments in girls and women (education during childhood, reducing early marriage and early pregnancy, improving care during and after pregnancy) along with other social determinants.
3. To improve water, sanitation, handwashing with soap and hygienic disposal of children's stools with other effective interventions.
4. To include interventions that go beyond the treatment of severe acute malnutrition (SAM) and also address moderate wasting, have the potential to achieve larger declines in wasting.
5. To scale-up to reach facility-based treatment of SAM to all those needing in-patient care.
6. To urgently release a full strategy for prevention and integrated management of wasting nationally.
7. To scale-up scenario that focuses only on health sector interventions which will achieve modest improvements in anaemia among women of reproductive age.

Poshan Abhiyaan

- Poshan Abhiyaan (National Nutrition Mission) was launched in 2018 by the Prime Minister in Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan.
- It targets to reduce level of under-nutrition and other related problems by ensuring convergence of various nutrition related schemes
- It also targets stunting, under-nutrition, anaemia (among young children, women and adolescent girls) and low birth rate.
- It will monitor and review implementation of all such schemes and utilize existing structural arrangements of line ministries wherever available.
- Its large component involves gradual scaling-up of interventions supported by on-going World Bank assisted Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Systems Strengthening and Nutrition Improvement Project (ISSNIP) to all districts in the country by 2022.
- Its vision is to ensure attainment of malnutrition free India by 2022.

ISRAEL AND BHUTAN ESTABLISH DIPLOMATIC TIES

Why in news?

- Recently, Bhutan and Israel established formal ties with a formal ceremony in New Delhi where the Ambassadors of these countries to India exchanged agreements.
- Recently, in deals brokered by the United States, Israel has established full relations with the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco in the last two months, while Bhutan established ties with Germany, its first new formal relationship since 2013.

Details

- The accord between the majority-Jewish Israel and the majority-Buddhist Bhutan follows several years of secret talks with the aim of establishing an alliance, according to the statement from the Foreign Ministry.
- The two nations agreed to work closely on water management, agriculture, health care and other areas.
- Key areas of cooperation between the two countries would include economic, technological and agricultural development.
- The ties between the peoples through cultural exchanges and tourism would also be further enhanced.
- Israel has supported Bhutanese “human resource development since 1982, especially in the area of agriculture development that has benefited hundreds of Bhutanese youths, which highlighted the “cordial” relations maintained between the countries despite a lack of formal ties.

Israel

- Israel is a country in Western Asia, located on the southeastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea and the northern shore of the Red Sea.
- It has land borders with Lebanon to the north, Syria to the northeast, Jordan on the east, the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to the east and west, respectively, and Egypt to the southwest.
- Israel’s economic and technological center is Tel Aviv, while its seat of government and proclaimed capital is Jerusalem, although international recognition of the state’s sovereignty over Jerusalem is limited.
- In its Basic Laws, Israel defines itself as a Jewish and democratic state and the nation state of the Jewish people.
- The country is a liberal democracy with a parliamentary system, proportional representation, and universal suffrage.
- The prime minister is head of government and the Knesset is the legislature.
- Israel is a developed country and an OECD member.



Bhutan

- Bhutan is a landlocked country in the Eastern Himalayas in South Asia.
- It is bordered by the Tibet Autonomous Region of China to the north and India to the south.
- Bhutan is geopolitically in South Asia and is the region's second-least-populous nation after Maldives.
- Thimphu is its capital and the largest city, while Phuntsholing is its financial center.
- In South Asia, Bhutan ranks first in economic freedom, ease of doing business and peace and is the least corrupt country in the region as of 2016.
- Bhutan is also notable for pioneering the concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH).
- It continues to be a least developed country, but expects to graduate from this status by 2023.
- The government is a parliamentary democracy; the head of state is the King of Bhutan, known as the "Dragon King."
- Hydroelectricity accounts for most of its exports.



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INDUS WATER PANEL HOLDS MEETING

Context:

After a gap of more than two and half years Indian and Pakistani delegations began the 116th Meeting of the Permanent Indus Commission.

The positive backdrop of the talks between the two delegation has indicated that the interaction is likely supported by the reported back channel talks that are taking place between India and Pakistan.

Relevance:

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

Dimensions of the Article:

1. What is the Permanent Indus Commission?
2. About the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT)
3. Indus River Basin

What is the Permanent Indus Commission?

- The Permanent Indus Commission (PIC) is a bilateral commission consisting of officials from India and Pakistan, created to implement and manage the goals and objectives and outlines of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT).
- The PIC has experts who look into issues and disputes on the ground over the utilisation of the waters of six rivers of the Indus system.

About the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT)


- The Indus Waters Treaty is a water-distribution treaty between India and Pakistan, brokered by the World Bank, to use the water available in the Indus River and its tributaries.
- The Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) was signed in Karachi in 1960.
- The Treaty gives control over the waters of the three “eastern rivers” — the Beas, Ravi and Sutlej to India, while control over the waters of the three “western rivers” — the Indus, Chenab and Jhelum to Pakistan.
- India was allocated about 16% of the total water carried by the Indus system while Pakistan was allocated the remainder.
- The treaty allows India to use the Western River waters (the ones in Pakistan's control) for limited irrigation use and unlimited non-consumptive use for such applications as power generation, navigation, floating of property, fish culture, etc.
- It lays down detailed regulations for India in building projects over the western rivers.
- The preamble of the treaty recognises the rights and obligations of each country in the optimum use of water from the Indus system in a spirit of goodwill, friendship and cooperation.

The Indus Water Treaty

The 56-year-old Indus Water Treaty between India and Pakistan has been instrumental in the peaceful sharing the water of Indus and its tributaries

With the recent spurt of tensions between the two countries and PM Narendra Modi's statement that "blood and water cannot flow together" followed by India's decision to suspend meetings of Indus Water Commission, here is a look at the treaty and its ingredients:

Signed on: **September 19, 1960**
 Signatories: **Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Pakistan's President Ayub Khan**
 Brokered by: **The World Bank**



Features

- Rivers Beas, Ravi and Sutlej to be governed by India while Indus, Chenab and Jhelum by Pakistan
- India is allowed to use 20 per cent of Indus water for irrigation, power generation and transport purposes
- A permanent body called Indus Water Commission solves disputes arising over water sharing
- River Indus originates from China, but it is not a part of the treaty

Indus River Basin

- The Indus River (also called the Sindhū) is one of the longest rivers in Asia and the longest river of Pakistan.
- It flows through China (western Tibet), India (Ladakh) and Pakistan.
- Its estimated annual flow is estimated to be twice that of the Nile River making it one of the largest rivers in the world in terms of annual flow.
- The Zaskar river is its left bank tributary in Ladakh.
- In the plains, its left bank tributary is the Panjnad which itself has five major tributaries, namely, the Chenab, Jhelum, the Ravi, the Beas, and the Sutlej.
- Its principal right bank tributaries are the Shyok, the Gilgit, the Kabul, the Gomol, and the Kurram.



CHINA, RUSSIA: NEW REGIONAL SECURITY DIALOGUE PLATFORM

Context:

China and Russia have proposed setting up a new “regional security dialogue platform” to address security concerns of countries in the region, as their foreign ministers hit out at the United States for “forming small circles to seek bloc confrontation”.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (India and its Neighborhood, International Treaties, Policies and Agreements affecting India’s Interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. What transpired in the Russia China foreign ministers meet?

2. Significance of Russia-China ties and RIC to India
3. Russia-India-China Grouping (RIC)

What transpired in the Russia China foreign ministers meet?

- Russia and China proposed the establishment of a regional security dialogue platform to converge a new consensus on resolving the security concerns of countries in the region.
- China and Russia are already part of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) security grouping, which includes India.
- China and Russia have rejected U.S. calls for “a rules-based order” – a call endorsed by the Quad summit – and instead said “all countries should follow the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations” and “uphold true multilateralism, make international relations more democratic, and accept and promote peaceful coexistence and common development of countries with different social systems and development paths.”

Significance of Russia-China ties and RIC to India

- India is in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which is driven by Russia and China and includes four Central Asian countries.
- Pakistan’s membership of SCO and the potential admission of Iran and Afghanistan (as member states) heighten the significance of the SCO for India.
- Growing Chinese influence is testing the informal Russia-China understanding that Russia handles the politico-security issues in the region and China extends economic support.
- The ongoing India-Iran-Russia project for a sea/road/rail link from western India through Iran to Afghanistan and Central Asia, is an important initiative for achieving an effective Indian presence in Central Asia, alongside Russia and China.
- Access to Russia’s abundant natural resources can enhance our materials security — the importance of which has been highlighted by COVID-19.

Russia-India-China Grouping (RIC)

- Russia, India and China (RIC) is a strategic grouping that first took shape in the late 1990s under the leadership of Russia 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.

Trends during formation of RIC

- When the RIC dialogue commenced in the early 2000s, the three countries were positioning themselves for a transition from a unipolar to a multipolar world order.
- The RIC shared some non-West (as distinct from anti-West) perspectives on the global order, such as an emphasis on sovereignty and territorial integrity, impatience with homilies on social policies and opposition to regime change from abroad.

- The initial years of the RIC dialogue coincided with an upswing in India's relations with Russia and China.

INDIA ABSTAINS IN UNHRC VOTE ON SRI LANKA

Context:

India abstained from a crucial vote on Sri Lanka's rights record at the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Relevance:

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

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Background to the Resolution
2. About the UNHRC Resolution against Sri Lanka
3. Results of the UNHRC Voting

Background to the Resolution against Sri Lanka

- Sri Lanka is facing a new resolution calling on it to hold human rights abusers to account and deliver justice to victims of its 26-year civil war (1983-2009).
- The war was mainly a clash between the Sinhalese-dominated Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) insurgent group, the latter of which had hoped to establish a separate state for the Tamil minority.
- Sri Lankan forces and Tamil rebels were accused of atrocities during the war, which killed at least 1,00,000 people.

About the UNHRC Resolution against Sri Lanka

- The draft resolution is based on a report by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN Human Rights) – according to which the government of Sri Lanka had created parallel military task forces and commissions that encroach on civilian functions, and reversed important institutional checks and balances, threatening democratic gains, the independence of the judiciary and other key institutions.
- Sri Lanka abruptly withdrew in 2020 from an earlier UNHRC resolution (Resolution 30/1) on war crimes – under which it had committed, 5 years previously, to a time-bound investigation of war crimes that took place during the military campaign against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Results of the UNHRC Voting against Sri Lanka

- The resolution on 'Promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka' was, however, adopted after 22 states of the 47-member Council voted in its favour.
- Sri Lanka was quick to reject the UN move to collect and preserve evidence of war crimes in the country, committed by the armed forces and the LTTE.
- The statement made clear Sri Lanka's resistance to the process envisaged in the resolution to prosecute war criminals through an international evidence gathering and investigation mechanism.

- Sri Lanka also extended a “warm thank you” for the “solid support” shown by the 11 countries, including China, Pakistan, Russia and Bangladesh, that voted against the resolution, and in support of the Sri Lankan government.

India – Sri Lanka Relations

- India and Sri Lanka share a maritime border and India is the only neighbour of Sri Lanka, separated by the Palk Strait.
- Both nations occupy a strategic position in South Asia and have sought to build a common security umbrella in the Indian Ocean.
- Both India and Sri Lanka are republics within the Commonwealth of Nations.
- In recent years, the relationship has been marked by close contacts at all levels. Trade and investment have grown and there is cooperation in the fields of infrastructure development, education, culture and defence.
- In recent years, significant progress in implementation of developmental assistance projects has further cemented the bonds of friendship between the two countries.
- The nearly three-decade long armed conflict between the Sri Lankan forces and the LTTE came to an end in 2009. During the course of the conflict, India supported the right of the Sri Lankan Government to act against terrorist forces.
- India’s consistent position has been in favour of a negotiated political settlement, which is acceptable to all communities within the framework of a united Sri Lanka and is consistent with democracy, pluralism and respect for human rights.



History of India-Sri Lanka relations

India-Sri Lanka relations date back to over 2,500 years, with the Kingdoms in Sri Lanka engaging in continuous wars with occupying South Indian Kingdoms.

According to traditional Sri Lankan chronicles (such as the Dipavamsa), Buddhism was introduced into Sri Lanka in the 4th century BCE by Venerable Mahinda, the son of Indian Emperor Ashoka. Sri Lanka has the longest continuous history of Buddhism of any Buddhist nation.

Tamils in Sri Lanka, had established Hinduism and Tamil language links with South India.

Indian intervention in the Sri Lankan civil war

In the 1970s–1980s, private entities and elements in the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) and the state government of Tamil Nadu were believed to be encouraging the funding and training for the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, a separatist insurgent force.

In 1987, faced with growing anger amongst its own Tamils, and a flood of refugees, India intervened directly in the conflict for the first time.

After subsequent negotiations, India and Sri Lanka entered into an agreement (13th amendment.)

- The peace accord assigned a certain degree of regional autonomy in the Tamil areas with Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) controlling the regional council and called for the Tamil militant groups to lay down their arms.
- Further India was to send a peacekeeping force, named the IPKF to Sri Lanka to enforce the disarmament and to watch over the regional council.
- Most Tamil militant groups accepted this agreement, however, the LTTE rejected the accord because they opposed a candidate.
- The result was that the LTTE now found itself engaged in military conflict with the Indian Army.
- The government of India then decided that the IPKF should disarm the LTTE by force, and the Indian Army launched a number of assaults on the LTTE, including a month-long campaign dubbed Operation Pawan to wrest control of the Jaffna peninsula from the LTTE.
- The Indo-Sri Lankan Accord, which had been unpopular amongst Sri Lankans for giving India a major influence, now became a source of nationalist anger and resentment as the IPKF was drawn fully into the conflict.

Geopolitical Significance of Sri Lanka

- Sri Lanka's location in the Indian Ocean region as an island State has been of strategic geopolitical relevance to several major powers.
- Some examples that highlight Western interests in Sri Lanka's strategic location are the British Defence and External Affairs Agreement of 1948, and the Maritime Agreement with USSR of 1962.
- Even during the J.R Jayewardene (1978-1989) and Ranasinghe Premadasa (1989-1993) tenures, Sri Lanka was chosen to build the Voice of America transmitting station (suspected of being used for intelligence gathering purposes and electronic surveillance of the Indian Ocean).
- It was the massive Chinese involvement during the Rajapaksa tenure that garnered the deepest controversy in recent years.
- China is building state of the art gigantic modern ports all along the Indian Ocean to the south of it, in Gwadar (Pakistan), Chittagong (Bangladesh), Kyauk Phru (Myanmar) and Hambantota (Sri Lanka).
- China's string of pearl's strategy is aimed at encircling India to establish dominance in the Indian Ocean.

- Post 2015, Sri Lanka still relies heavily on China for Port city project and for continuation of Chinese funded infrastructure projects in Sri Lanka.
- Although the Hambantota harbour is reportedly making losses, it too has potential for development due to its strategic location.
- Sri Lanka has a list of highly strategic ports located among busiest sea lanes of communication.
- Sri Lanka's Colombo Port is the 25th busiest container port in the world and the natural deep-water harbor at Trincomalee is the fifth largest natural harbour in the world.
- Port city of Trincomalee was the main base for Eastern Fleet and British Royal Navy during the Second World War.
- Sri Lanka's location can thus serve both commercial and industrial purposes and be used as a military base.

REMOVE THE WEDGES IN INDIA-BANGLADESH TIES

Context:

March 2021 will mark the 50th year of India-Bangladesh diplomatic relations and also of the Liberation War.

Bangladesh became an independent nation in 1971 and India was the first country to recognize it as an independent and separate state.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (India's Neighbours, Bilateral Grouping/Agreement with India, International Policies and Treaties affecting India's interests), GS-I: History (Post Independent India)

Mains Questions:

To make the recent gains irreversible, both India and Bangladesh need to continue working on the three Cs — Cooperation, Collaboration, and Consolidation. Elaborate. (15 marks)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Trends in India-Bangladesh relations
2. India-Bangladesh border management
3. Trade relations between India and Bangladesh
4. Connectivity between India and Bangladesh
5. India-Bangladesh sharing Water-resources
6. Other Recent Developments in India-Bangladesh Relationship
7. Issues and Complications in India-Bangladesh relations
8. Way Forward

Trends in India-Bangladesh relations

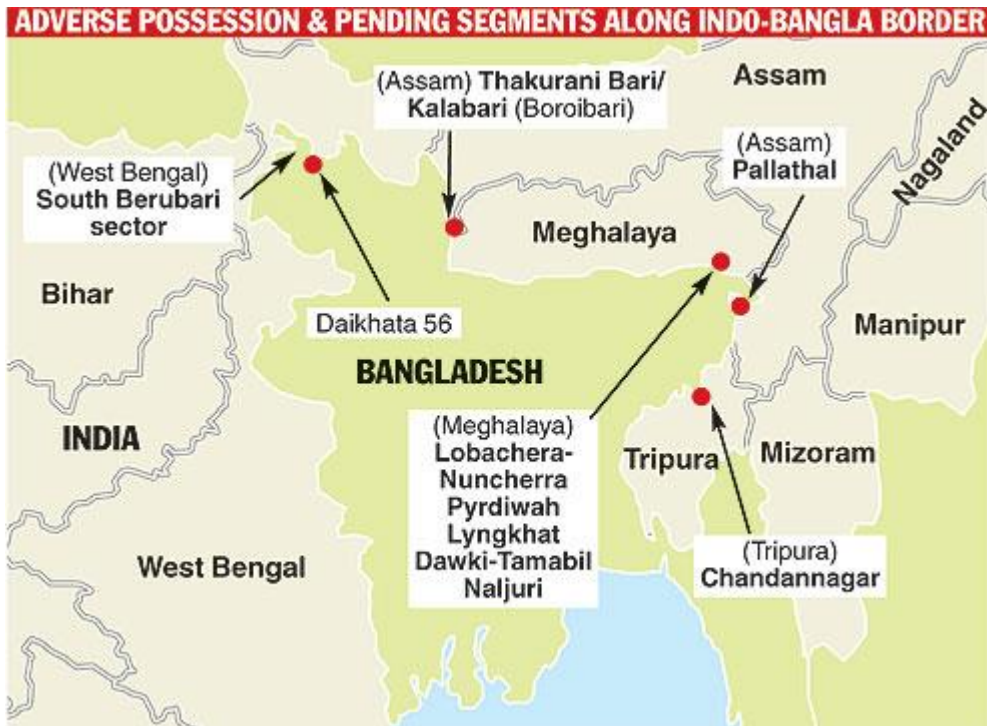
- The friendship between India and Bangladesh is historic, evolving over the last 50 years ever since the extension of India's political, diplomatic, military and humanitarian support during Bangladesh's Liberation War which resulted in Bangladesh's independence.

- Post-Independence, the India-Bangladesh relationship has oscillated with the cordial relationship being maintained until the assassination of Bangladesh's founding President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975.
- After the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family (except his daughters, of whom Sheikh Hasina is the current Prime Minister of Bangladesh), a period of military rule and the rise of General Ziaur Rahman followed.
- General Ziaur Rahman became the president and was assassinated as well in 1981, following which the India-Bangladesh Relationship became more cordial between 1982-1991 under the military-led government.
- Since Bangladesh's return to parliamentary democracy in 1991, relations have gone through highs and lows with the relations becoming friendlier in the last decade (2010-2020).



India-Bangladesh border management

- India and Bangladesh share more than 4000 kilometres of border, which is **the longest land boundary that India shares with any of its neighbours.**
- Bangladesh and India have achieved the rare feat of solving their border issues peacefully by ratifying the historic Land Boundary Agreement in 2015.
- Based on the Land Boundary Agreement signed in 1974, enclaves were swapped allowing inhabitants to choose their country of residence and become citizens of either India or Bangladesh in 2015. **[The 100th Constitutional Amendment Act in India ratified the land boundary agreement between India and Bangladesh].**
- The present Bangladesh government has made progress in uprooting anti-India insurgency elements from its borders, making the India-Bangladesh border one of the region's most peaceful, and allowing India to make a massive redeployment of resources to its more contentious borders elsewhere.



Trade relations between India and Bangladesh

- As of 2021, Bangladesh is India's biggest trading partner in South Asia.
- India has offered duty free access to multiple Bangladeshi products and trade and on the development front, cooperation has deepened, with India extending three lines of credit to Bangladesh in recent years amounting to \$8 billion for the construction of roads, railways, bridges, and ports.
- However, from 2011-2019, only 51% of the first \$800 million line of credit has been utilised whilst barely any amount from the next two lines of credit worth \$6.5 billion has been mobilised.
- Bangladeshis make up a large portion of tourists in India, outnumbering all tourists arriving from western Europe in 2017, with one in every five tourists being a Bangladeshi.
- Bangladesh accounts for more than 35% of India's international medical patients and contributes more than 50% of India's revenue from medical tourism.
- India has given access to Duty-Free and Quota Free Bangladeshi exports to India under the South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) since 2011.
- In the wake of the first-ever meeting of the India-Bangladesh Textile Industry Forum that was held in 2020, an MOU between the Ministry of Textiles (India) and Ministry of Textiles and Jute (Bangladesh) is yet to be agreed upon.

Connectivity between India and Bangladesh

- Connectivity between the two countries has greatly improved in the recent years.
- Direct **bus service** between Kolkata and Agartala through Bangladesh, Passenger and freight **railway services** running between the two countries, **Maitri Setu bridge** connecting Sabroom in India with Ramgarh in Bangladesh, upcoming new **Riverine Trade Route** connecting Sonamura in Tripura to Daudkandi in Bangladesh etc., are testaments to the increasing connectivity between the two countries.
- Bangladesh allows the shipment of goods from its Mongla and Chattogram seaports carried by road, rail, and water ways to Agartala, hence, allowing landlocked Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura to access open water routes through the **Chattogram and Mongla ports**.

- Newly restored railway link between Haldibari (India) and Chilahati (Bangladesh) and signing of the second addendum to the Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade (PIWTT) are also some of the most recent developments in the connectivity of Bangladesh with India.

India-Bangladesh sharing Water-resources

- An interim agreement for sharing the Teesta Water was discussed where Bangladesh reiterated the need for an early signing of the same.
- Interim Agreement on sharing of waters of six joint rivers, namely, Manu, Muhuri, Khowai, Gumti, Dharla and Dudhkumar was also discussed.
- Kushiya River is also a point of discussion where an MoU for monitoring the withdrawal of water from it is yet to be signed.



Other Recent Developments in India-Bangladesh Relationship

- On the account of the COVID-19 pandemic, India assured Bangladesh to make available vaccines for the country as and when produced in India, signifying India's 'Neighbourhood First Policy'.
- India organized events on 'Mujib Borsho' which is the birth centenary year of Bangladesh's founder president Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

- Framework of Understanding (FOU) on Cooperation in Hydrocarbon Sector; Protocol on Trans-boundary Elephant Conservation, MoU on Cooperation in the field of Agriculture and other agreements have also been signed between the two countries.

Issues and Complications in India-Bangladesh relations

- Despite the remarkable progress, the unresolved Teesta water sharing issue looms large.
- Border killings are yet to stop, as the year 2020 saw the highest number of border shootings by the Border Security Force.
- The proposal to implement the National Register of Citizens (NRC) across the whole of India also reflects poorly on India-Bangladesh relations as it is not comprehensible why people of all religions and ethnicities barring Muslims will be excluded from the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). It remains to be seen how India addresses the deportation of illegal Muslim immigrants, some of whom claim to have come from Bangladesh.
- Despite India's 'Neighbourhood First Policy', Sri Lanka, Nepal and the Maldives, once considered traditional Indian allies, are increasingly tilting towards China due to China's massive trade, infrastructural and defence investments in these countries.
- Bhutan also does not abide by Indian influence as evinced by its withdrawal from the BBIN (Bhutan-Bangladesh-India-Nepal) motor vehicles agreement.

Way Forward

- India and Bangladesh have to focus on investments, cross border energy cooperation, blue economy, cultural economy, environment and disaster management etc., in order to bolster the relationship between the all-weather friends.
- There should be efforts to resolve pending issues concerning sharing of waters, resolving continental shelf issues in the Bay of Bengal, bringing down border incidents to zero, and managing the media.
- Bangladesh has already raised concerns over roll out of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam, hence, there is a now an immense attention to be paid on the Implementation of the new CAA rules to identify genuine Indian citizens while identifying illegal Bangladeshis without causing any controversy.
- Currently, Bangladesh is an active partner of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that India has Not signed up to Bangladesh is also a major recipient of Chinese military inventory, therefore, there is also the need to counter China's influence in the relations.

JAPAN TO FUND A&N, METRO EXPANSION

Context:

In the first-ever official development assistance (ODA) project in Andaman & Nicobar (A&N), Japan has approved grant aid to improve the power supply in the A&N islands along with loans for executing four projects, including Delhi Metro's Phase 4 and Bengaluru Metro's Phase 2.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (International Agreements and treaties of Importance to India)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. India – Japan Relations
2. Highlights of Japan's Assistance to India

3. Importance of Andaman and Nicobar Islands

India – Japan Relations

- Exchange between Japan and India is said to have begun in the 6th century when Buddhism was introduced to Japan, which spread indirectly from India to Japan, via China and Korea.
- India and Japan, two of the largest and oldest democracies in Asia, having a high degree of congruence of political, economic and strategic interests, view each other as partners that have responsibility for, and are capable of, responding to global and regional challenges.
- Post Japan's defeat in World War-II, a relatively well-known result of the two nations was in 1949, when India sent the Tokyo Zoo two elephants to cheer the spirits of the defeated Japanese empire.
- Japan and India signed a peace treaty and established diplomatic relations in 1950s.
- The British occupiers of India and Japan were enemies during World War II, but political relations between the two nations have remained warm since India's independence.
- Japanese companies, such as Yamaha, Sony, Toyota, and Honda have manufacturing facilities in India, and with the growth of the Indian economy, India is a big market for Japanese firms.
- In 2006, India culminated in the signing of the "Joint Statement Towards Japan-India Strategic and Global Partnership".
- Japan has helped finance many infrastructure projects in India, most notably the Delhi Metro system.
- In 2016, India and Japan signed the "Agreement for Cooperation in Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy", a landmark civil nuclear agreement, under which Japan will supply nuclear reactors, fuel and technology to India. (India is the only non-signatory of NPT to receive an exemption from Japan.)
- India and Japan have shared interests in maintaining the security of sea-lanes in the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean, and in co-operation for fighting international crime, terrorism, piracy and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.
- The two nations have frequently held joint military exercises and co-operate on technology.

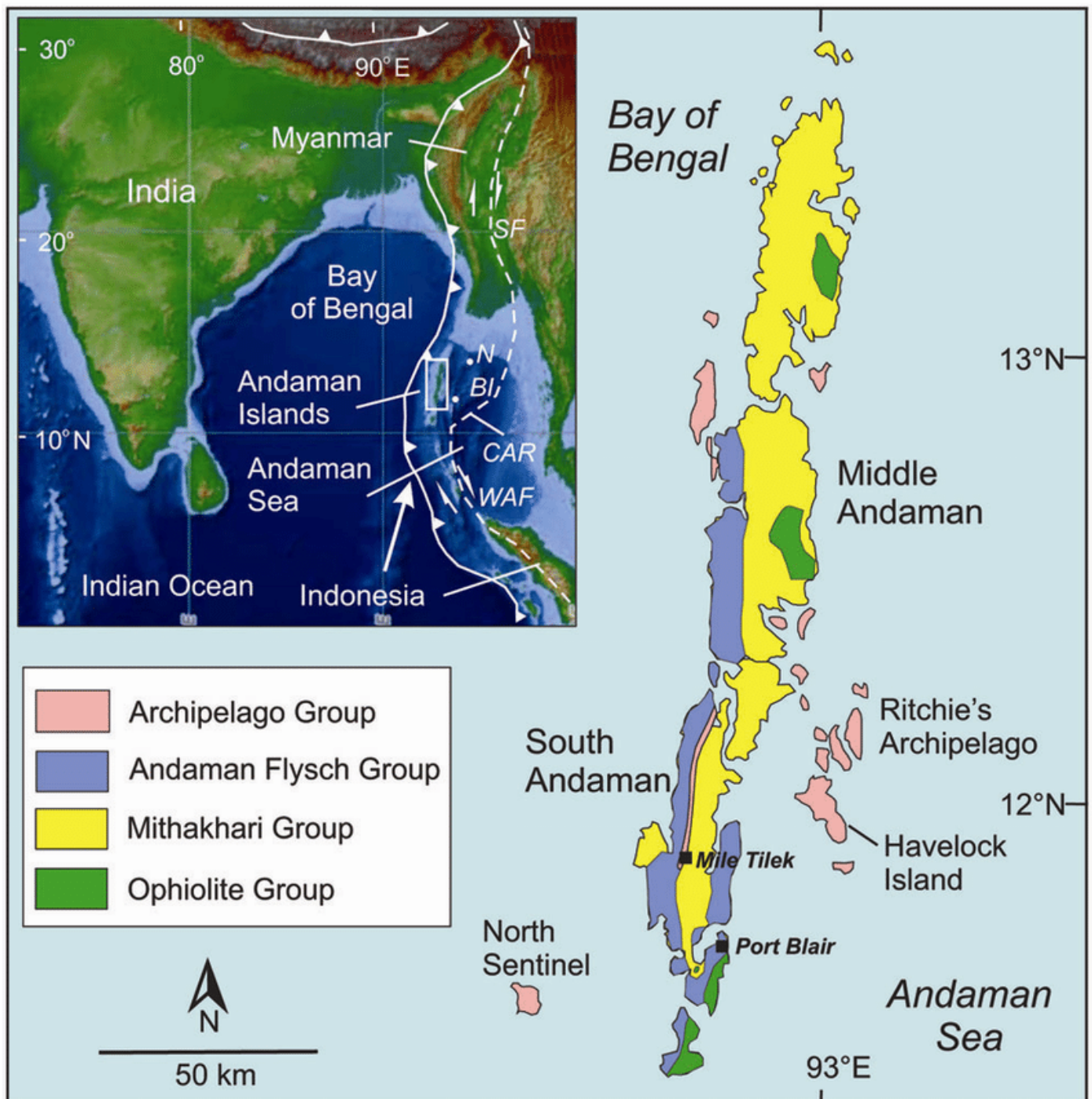
Highlights of Japan's Assistance to India

- This is the first-ever ODA project in the strategic islands of Andaman & Nicobar (apart from humanitarian emergency assistance) to improve the power supply in the islands, stressing the strategic geopolitical location of the islands for an open Indo-Pacific.
- The grant would be used to procure batteries as well as power system stabilisers to allow better utilisation of solar power generated in South Andaman.

Importance of Andaman and Nicobar Islands

- The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are a group of 572 islands at the juncture of the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea.
- The A&N Islands spans 450 nautical miles in a roughly north-south configuration adjacent to the western entrance to the Malacca Strait, which is itself a major Indian Ocean chokepoint and straddles some of the busiest trade routes in the world.
- Geopolitically, the A&N Islands connects South Asia with South-East Asia. While the northernmost point of the archipelago is only 22 nautical miles from Myanmar, the southernmost point, Indira Point, is a mere 90 nautical miles from Indonesia.

- The islands dominate the Bay of Bengal, the Six Degree and the Ten Degree Channels that more than sixty thousand commercial vessels traverse each year.
- The A&N islands also provide near 30% of its Exclusive Economic Zone even with just 0.2% of India's landmass.



CHINA & IRAN SIGN 25-YEAR 'STRATEGIC PACT'

Context:

China and Iran signed what was described as a 25-year “strategic cooperation pact”, during Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's on-going six-nation tour to West Asia.

Relevance:

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Lead up to the deal between Iran and China
2. Iran and China relations
3. Stakes for India in China-Iran relations

Lead up to the deal between Iran and China

- The agreement comes amid a major push from China to back Iran, which counts on Beijing as its largest trading partner, as it deals with the continuing weight of sanctions re-instated following then U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to withdrawal from the Iranian nuclear deal.
- Earlier this week, China and Russia called for the U.S. to "unconditionally return to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) as soon as possible and revoke the unilateral sanctions against Iran" as their Foreign Ministers met in China.
- The new deal is said to include "political, strategic and economic" components.

Iran and China relations

- In 2016, just as sanctions were eased, Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Tehran and proposed a long-term comprehensive, strategic partnership programme that would involve Chinese investment in Iranian infrastructure and assured supplies of Iranian oil and gas at concessional rates.
- China and Iran are close to sealing an ambitious deal on an economic and security partnership, a move that has caught the attention of policymakers in India and across the world.
- The deal will facilitate the infusion of about \$280 billion from Beijing, which wants to buy oil from cash-strapped Iran.
- China will also invest into Iran's transport and manufacturing infrastructure, thus giving it inroads into major sectors in Iran including banking, telecommunications, ports and railways.
- Iran is already a signatory of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and this is in line with China's "debt-trap diplomacy".
- The deal has come under criticism from Iran's political actors, including former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Stakes for India in China-Iran relations

- While India watches China with concern, what is alarming for India is that China is also concluding a security and military partnership with Iran.
- Chinese military partnership with Iran calls for "joint training and exercises, joint research and weapons development and intelligence sharing" to fight "the lopsided battle with terrorism, drug and human trafficking and cross-border crimes".
- Initial reports in Iran have suggested China will deploy 5,000 security personnel to protect its projects in Iran.
- With a growing Chinese presence in Iran, India is concerned about its strategic stakes around the Chabahar port project that it has been developing.
- The port is close to Gwadar port in Pakistan, which is being developed by China as part of its China-Pakistan Economic Corridor that links it to the Indian Ocean through BRI.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR AFGHANISTAN U.S. WITHDRAWING TROOPS?

Context:

- Recently, the USA President has envisaged a New Peace Initiative (Plan) to decide on the roadmap for peace in Afghanistan under which the possibility that the USA troops, currently deployed in Afghanistan, to remain in deployment there has been kept open.
- The U.S. could abide by the promise made in the U.S.-Taliban agreement signed in February 2020 to withdraw the last of the around 2,500 American marines stationed in Afghanistan, but The Current U.S. President Joe Biden has said it would be tough given the levels of violence there.

Relevance:

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

Mains Questions:

India's position has been to back an "Afghan-owned, Afghan-led, Afghan-controlled" peace process, backing the elected government. Discuss. What is India's involvement in the Afghan peace negotiations? (15 Marks)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. History of Afghan War
2. Causes that aggravated the Afghan problem
3. About the U.S. Deal with Taliban
4. New U.S. President Biden's New Peace Initiative (Plan)
5. India's Role in Peace Process Through "Unified Approach"
6. Relations Between India and Afghanistan
7. Conclusion of India's position in Afghan peace process
8. Significance Afghanistan with respect to India
 1. International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)
 2. Chabahar Port
 3. Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Pipeline (TAPI)

History of Afghan War

- 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).

Causes that aggravated the Afghan problem

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

About the U.S. Deal with Taliban

- The United States said it is committed to reducing the number of its troops to 2,500 from 13,000 by May 2021.
- The U.S. deal also spoke about working with allies to proportionally reduce the number of coalition forces in Afghanistan, if the Taliban were to adhere to its commitments.
- According to the agreement, a full withdrawal of all foreign forces would occur within 14 months of the deal getting signed if the Taliban holds up its end of the deal.

New U.S. President Biden's New Peace Initiative (Plan)

- The New Peace Initiative (Plan) has kept open the possibility that the USA troops, currently deployed in Afghanistan, might stay on for a longer time.
- The USA is pressing the Taliban to accept an immediate agreement to reduce violence for 90 days that will provide the space for the peace initiative.
- The USA will not be "dictating terms" to the Afghan parties, but facilitating an inclusive interim government, an agreement on the "foundational principles" for a new political order, and a "permanent and comprehensive ceasefire".
- The USA is also asking Turkey to convene a meeting of the government in Kabul (capital of Afghanistan) and the Taliban to finalise a peace settlement.
- The USA asked the United Nations to convene a meeting of the foreign ministers from China, Russia, Pakistan, Iran, India and the United States to develop a "unified approach" to peace in Afghanistan.

Charting U.S. withdrawal

March 10: Release of 5,000 Taliban and 1,000 non-Taliban prisoners

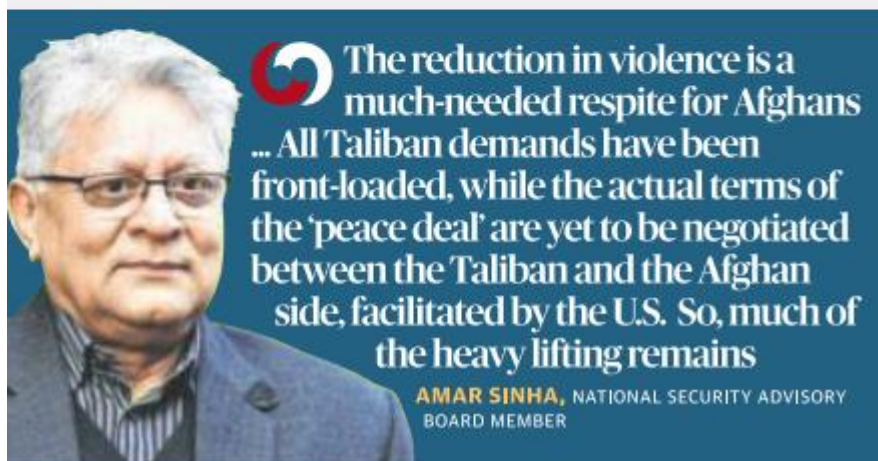
May 29: Removal of UN Security Council sanctions against Taliban fighters; release of all remaining prisoners

June 15: U.S. Coalition Forces reduce to 8,600,

withdraw from five military bases

August 27: Removal of U.S. sanctions against Taliban

April 29, 2021: Expected completion of the U.S.-Taliban agreement, full withdrawal of U.S. troops in five military bases



India's Role in Peace Process Through "Unified Approach"

- India is an important player in the peace process – it has also been acknowledged by the USA.
- India supports all efforts for peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan which are inclusive and Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled.
- India has invested heavily in infrastructure developments, training security forces and supplying them with necessary equipment.
- India has a major stake in the stability of Afghanistan since it has invested considerable resources in Afghanistan's development.
- India hopes to have a role in setting the terms especially concerning terrorism, violence, women's rights and democratic values.

Relations Between India and Afghanistan

- Relations between the people of Afghanistan and India traces 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 Durrani.
- India shares border with Pakistan and there is the Durand Line conflict between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

- The Republic of India was the only South Asian country to recognize the Soviet-backed Democratic Republic of Afghanistan in the 1980s, though relations were diminished during the 1990s Afghan civil war and the Taliban government.



Conclusion of India's Position in the Afghan peace process

- India's position has been to back an "Afghan-owned, Afghan-led, Afghan-controlled" peace process, backing the elected government in Kabul, and it has not yet held talks with the Taliban directly.
- As a result, its option remains to stand with the Ghani government and support the constitution that guarantees a democratic process and rights of women and minorities, over any plans the Taliban might have if they come to power.

- At the same time, India has not foreclosed the option of talking to the Taliban if it does join the government in Afghanistan, and in a first step, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar addressed the Doha inauguration of intra-Afghan talks last year.
- The government has not yet announced a special envoy on Afghanistan, who could be a part of the UN-led process for regional countries, but it has made it clear that it seeks to be an integral part of the process, as the outcomes will have a deep impact on India's security matrix as well.

Significance Afghanistan with respect to India

Afghanistan is a strategic investment for India, and India has made significant contributions to the rebuilding of the country.

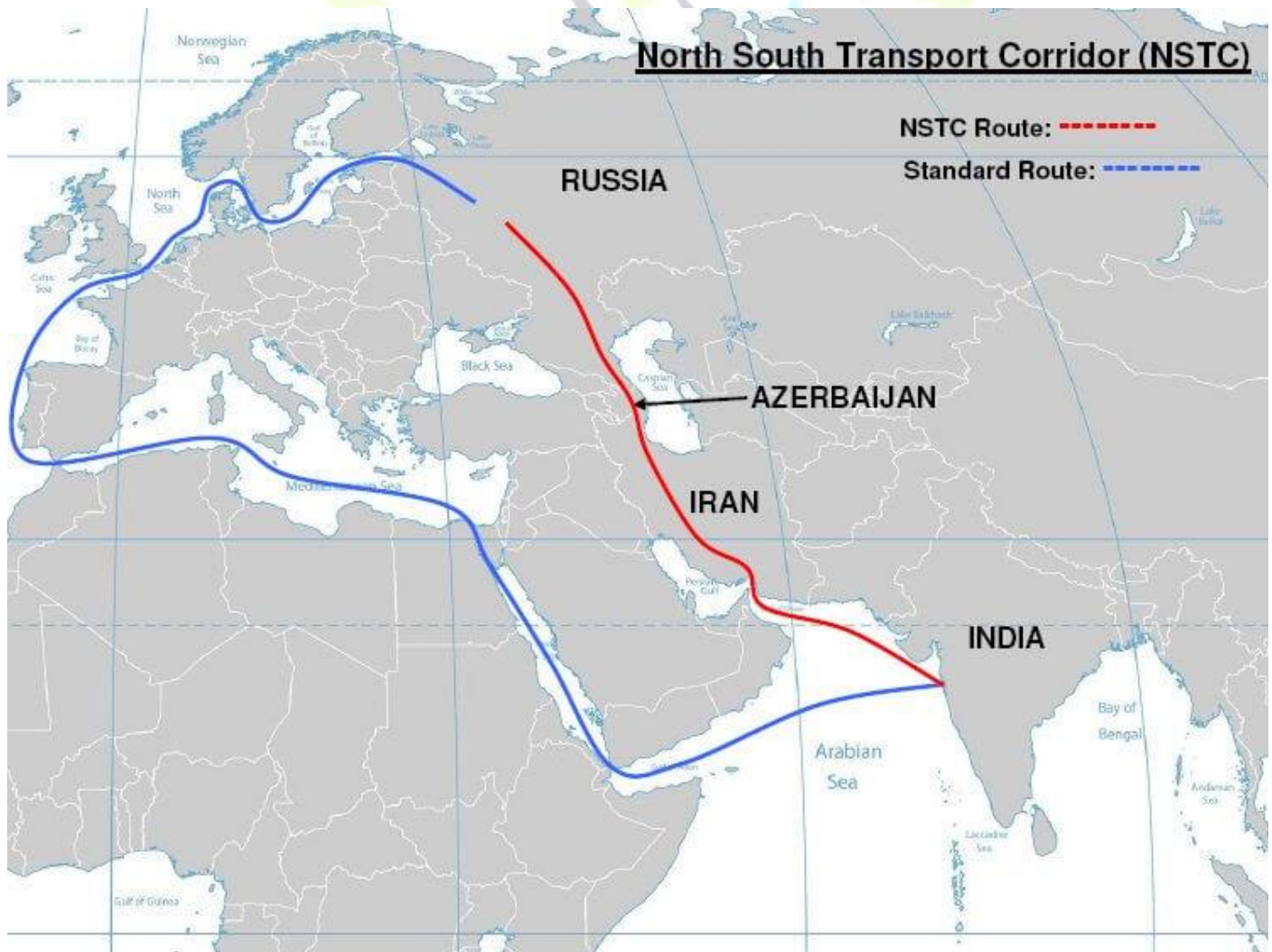
Indian is engaged with Afghanistan by following ways:

1. Developing social infrastructure as hospitals, schools;
 2. Public infrastructure such as Salma dam, and parliament building ;
 3. Humanitarian assistance such as medical missions;
 4. Training of military officer and soldiers;
 5. Military warfare such as military helicopters and repairing the old soviet era helicopters.
- Afghanistan is a gateway for The International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC) for India.
 - India's development of the Chabahar Port is of great strategic importance for the development of regional maritime transit traffic to Afghanistan and Central Asia
 - Afghanistan is also involved in The Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India Pipeline (TAPI) Project.
 - Afghanistan can help India to overcome/oppose China's The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI, or B&R), formerly known as One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative.
 - Afghanistan can help fulfil India's Oil demands.
 - 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.



International North–South Transport Corridor (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.



Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India Pipeline (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.



U.S. RIGHTS REPORT CURBS ON INDIAN MEDIA CURBS

Context:

In its 2020 Human Rights Report, the U.S. State Department said the harassment and detention of journalists critical of the (Indian) government in their reporting and on social media, has continued, although the government generally respected the freedom of expression.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (International reports and policies affecting India's interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About the Human Rights report by the U.S.
2. Importance of Free Media
3. Threats to Freedom of Press

About the Human Rights report by the U.S.

- The 2020 Human Rights Report is one of the reports submitted each year to the U.S. Congress containing a country-wise discussion of the state of human rights.
- The report says that the Indian government generally respected this right, although there were several instances in which the government, or actors considered close to the government, allegedly pressured or harassed media outlets critical of the government, including through online trolling.
- The document also cites reports by journalists and NGOs that local and national level government officials were, "involved in silencing or intimidating critical media outlets through physical harassment and attacks, pressuring owners, targeting sponsors, encouraging frivolous lawsuits, and in some areas blocking communication services."
- The government's user data requests in 2019 saw a 30+% increase from 2018 from Facebook, and 65+% increase from Google and Twitter.

Importance of Free Media

- Free Media promotes open discussion of ideas that allows individuals to fully participate in political life, making informed decisions and strengthening society as a result — especially in a large democracy such as India.
- A free exchange of ideas, free exchange of information and knowledge, debating and expression of different viewpoints is important for smooth functioning of democracy.
- As the free media by virtue of being the voice of masses, empowers them with the right to express opinions, it is critical in a democracy.
- With Free Media, people will be able to exercise their rights as questioning decisions of government. Such an environment can be created only when freedom of press is achieved.
- Hence, Media can be rightly considered as the fourth pillar of democracy, the other three being legislature, executive and judiciary.

Threats to Freedom of Press

- The hostility towards the media which is openly encouraged by political leaders poses a great threat to democracy.
- Government's pressure in the name of regulations, bombardment of fake news and over influence of social media is dangerous for the occupation. Corruption-paid news, advertorials and fake news are threats to free and unbiased media.
- Security of journalists is the biggest issue, killings and assaults on the Journalists covering sensitive issues are very common.
- Hate speech targeting journalists shared and amplified on social networks are targeted against journalists using social media.
- Corporate and political power has overwhelmed large sections of the media, both print and visual, which lead to vested interests and destroy freedom.

PAKISTAN ALLOWS IMPORT OF COTTON, SUGAR FROM INDIA

Context:

Partially reversing a 2018 decision to suspend all trade with India, Pakistan announced that it would allow the import of cotton and sugar from across the border.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (India and its neighborhood, Foreign Policies and conferences affecting India's interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Background to Pakistan's Trade Ban
2. India-Pakistan Trade Before Ban
3. Major Products Traded between India and Pakistan
4. Why did Pakistan remove the trade ban with India?
5. What is the impact of Pakistan's decision to remove trade ban?

Background to Pakistan's Trade Ban

- Pakistan's decision to suspend bilateral trade with India in August 2019 was a fallout of the constitutional changes in Jammu and Kashmir.
- However, an underlying reason for suspending trade was the 200% tariff imposed by India on Pakistani imports earlier that year after India revoked Pakistan's Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status in the aftermath of the Pulwama terrorist attack.
- India's exports to Pakistan dropped nearly 60% to USD 816.62 million, and its imports fell 97% to USD 13.97 million in 2019-20.

India-Pakistan Trade Before Ban

- Over the years, India has had a trade surplus with Pakistan, with much less imports than exports and trade has always been linked to politics.
- India's exports to Pakistan fell around 16% to USD 1.82 billion in 2016-17 as compared to 2015-16 after relations deteriorated in the aftermath of the Uri terror attack and the Indian Army's surgical strikes on militant launchpads in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir in 2016.
- Despite continuing tensions, trade between the two countries grew marginally in subsequent years.

Major Products Traded between India and Pakistan

- Pakistan was among India's top 50 trade partners in 2018-19, but was pushed out of the list in 2019-20.
- It had been anticipated that a trade ban between the countries would affect Pakistan more, since it relied heavily on India for key raw materials for its textiles and pharmaceuticals industries.
- In 2018-19, cotton and organic chemicals accounted for around half of Indian export to Pakistan.
- Other major items included plastic, tanning/dyeing extracts, and nuclear reactors, boilers, machinery, and mechanical appliances.
- After the ban, imports of many items fell drastically, while cotton imports stopped altogether.
- The only increase has been in pharmaceutical products. Pakistan has so far imported drug products and organic chemicals to ensure sufficient supplies of medicines during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- India's major imports from Pakistan in 2018-19 were mineral fuels and oils, edible fruits and nuts, salt, sulphur, stone and plastering materials, ores, slag and ash and raw hides and leather.

Why did Pakistan remove the trade ban with India?

- Pakistan decided to lift the ban on cotton imports as there is a shortage in raw material for Pakistan's textile sector, which has suffered due to low domestic yields of cotton.
- Cotton and sugar imports from countries like the USA and Brazil are costlier and take longer to arrive.
- The decision on sugar was dictated by high demand and high domestic prices.
- The decision to import from India is a measure to stabilize the market prices.

What is the impact of Pakistan's decision to remove trade ban?

- The decision by Pakistan to allow trade in the selected items will gradually lead to restoration of normalcy in India-Pakistan trade.
- This might be a good time for India to explore a reduction in its 200% import duties on products that its industries can benefit from.

- The move by Pakistan has raised hopes for further measures besides the granting of sports related visas by India after a gap of three years, scheduling a much-delayed meeting of the Indus Water Commissioners in Delhi, peace at the Line of Control (LoC) after more than 5,000 ceasefire violations, as well as the exchange of salutary messages between Indian and Pakistan Prime Ministers.

INDIA'S EAM TO ATTEND 'HEART OF ASIA' CONFERENCE

Context:

Indian External Affairs Minister shared India's perspectives on the peace process in the war-torn country in the 9th Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process (HoA-IP) ministerial conference held at Tajikistan.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (India and its neighborhood, Foreign Policies and conferences affecting India's interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process (HoA-IP)
2. Intra-Afghan Negotiations (IAN)
3. India's Stand:

About the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process (HoA-IP)

- The Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process (HoA-IP) was founded in November, 2011 in Istanbul, Turkey. India is a participating country.
- It provides a platform for sincere and results-oriented regional cooperation by placing Afghanistan at its center, in recognition of the fact that a secure and stable Afghanistan is vital to the prosperity of the Heart of Asia region.
- This platform was established to address the shared challenges and interests of Afghanistan and its neighbors and regional partners.
- The Heart of Asia comprises 15 participating countries, 17 supporting countries, and 12 supporting regional and international organizations.
- It provides a platform for sincere and results-oriented regional cooperation by placing Afghanistan at its center, in recognition of the fact that a secure and stable Afghanistan is vital to the prosperity of the Heart of Asia region.
- This platform was established to address the shared challenges and interests of Afghanistan and its neighbors and regional partners.
- The Heart of Asia comprises 15 participating countries, 17 supporting countries, and 12 supporting regional and international organizations.
- Since its inception the process has become a cardinal element in regional cooperation and has created a platform for Afghanistan's near and extended neighbors, international supporters and organizations to engage in constructive dialogue and to address the existing and emerging regional challenges through regional cooperation with Afghanistan at its core.

Intra-Afghan Negotiations (IAN)

- It refers to the talks between the Afghan government and Taliban insurgents with the goal of bringing an end to nearly two decades of a conflict that has laid waste to the country and killed tens of thousands of combatants and civilians.
- The participants of intra-Afghan negotiations will discuss the date and modalities of a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire, including agreement over the future political roadmap of Afghanistan.
- The negotiations will cover a variety of issues, including the rights of women, free speech, and changes to the country's constitution.
- The talks would also lay out the fate of tens of thousands of Taliban fighters as well as the heavily armed militias belonging to Afghanistan's warlords who have amassed wealth and power since the Taliban were ousted from power in 2001.

India's Stand:

- India believes any peace process must be Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled, has to respect the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of Afghanistan and preserve the progress made in the establishment of a democratic Islamic Republic in Afghanistan.
- The interests of minorities, women and vulnerable sections of society must be preserved and the issue of violence across the country and its neighbourhood has to be effectively addressed.

History of Afghan War

- 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).

Causes that aggravated the Afghan problem

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

About the U.S. Deal with Taliban

- The United States said it is committed to reducing the number of its troops to 2,500 from 13,000 by May 2021.
- The U.S. deal also spoke about working with allies to proportionally reduce the number of coalition forces in Afghanistan, if the Taliban were to adhere to its commitments.
- According to the agreement, a full withdrawal of all foreign forces would occur within 14 months of the deal getting signed if the Taliban holds up its end of the deal.

New U.S. President Biden's New Peace Initiative (Plan)

- The New Peace Initiative (Plan) has kept open the possibility that the USA troops, currently deployed in Afghanistan, might stay on for a longer time.

- The USA is pressing the Taliban to accept an immediate agreement to reduce violence for 90 days that will provide the space for the peace initiative.
- The USA will not be “dictating terms” to the Afghan parties, but facilitating an inclusive interim government, an agreement on the “foundational principles” for a new political order, and a “permanent and comprehensive ceasefire”.
- The USA is also asking Turkey to convene a meeting of the government in Kabul (capital of Afghanistan) and the Taliban to finalise a peace settlement.
- The USA asked the United Nations to convene a meeting of the foreign ministers from China, Russia, Pakistan, Iran, India and the United States to develop a “unified approach” to peace in Afghanistan.

Charting U.S. withdrawal

March 10: Release of 5,000 Taliban and 1,000 non-Taliban prisoners

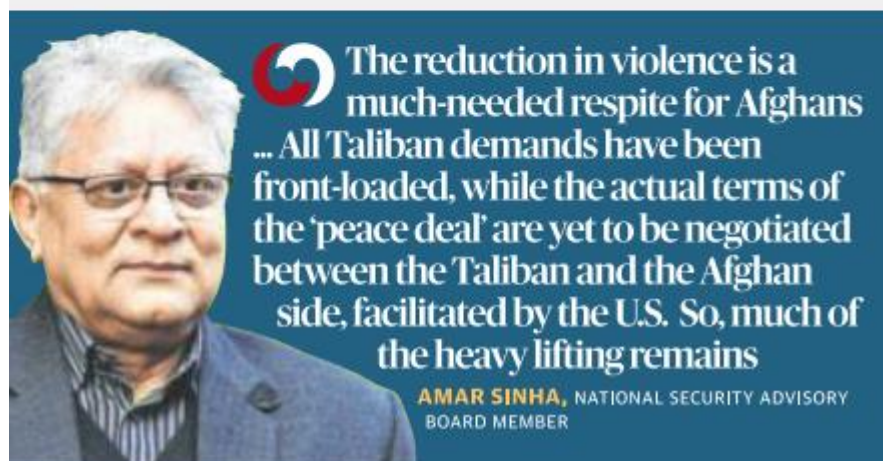
May 29: Removal of UN Security Council sanctions against Taliban fighters; release of all remaining prisoners

June 15: U.S. Coalition Forces reduce to 8,600,

withdraw from five military bases

August 27: Removal of U.S. sanctions against Taliban

April 29, 2021: Expected completion of the U.S.-Taliban agreement, full withdrawal of U.S. troops in five military bases



India's Role in Peace Process Through “Unified Approach”

- India is an important player in the peace process – it has also been acknowledged by the USA.
- India supports all efforts for peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan which are inclusive and Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled.
- India has invested heavily in infrastructure developments, training security forces and supplying them with necessary equipment.
- India has a major stake in the stability of Afghanistan since it has invested considerable resources in Afghanistan's development.
- India hopes to have a role in setting the terms especially concerning terrorism, violence, women's rights and democratic values.

Relations Between India and Afghanistan

- Relations between the people of Afghanistan and India traces 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 Durrani.
- India shares border with Pakistan and there is the Durand Line conflict between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

- The Republic of India was the only South Asian country to recognize the Soviet-backed Democratic Republic of Afghanistan in the 1980s, though relations were diminished during the 1990s Afghan civil war and the Taliban government.



Conclusion of India's Position in the Afghan peace process

- India's position has been to back an "Afghan-owned, Afghan-led, Afghan-controlled" peace process, backing the elected government in Kabul, and it has not yet held talks with the Taliban directly.
- As a result, its option remains to stand with the Ghani government and support the constitution that guarantees a democratic process and rights of women and minorities, over any plans the Taliban might have if they come to power.
- At the same time, India has not foreclosed the option of talking to the Taliban if it does join the government in Afghanistan, and in a first step, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar addressed the Doha inauguration of intra-Afghan talks last year.

- The government has not yet announced a special envoy on Afghanistan, who could be a part of the UN-led process for regional countries, but it has made it clear that it seeks to be an integral part of the process, as the outcomes will have a deep impact on India's security matrix as well.

Significance Afghanistan with respect to India

Afghanistan is a strategic investment for India, and India has made significant contributions to the rebuilding of the country.

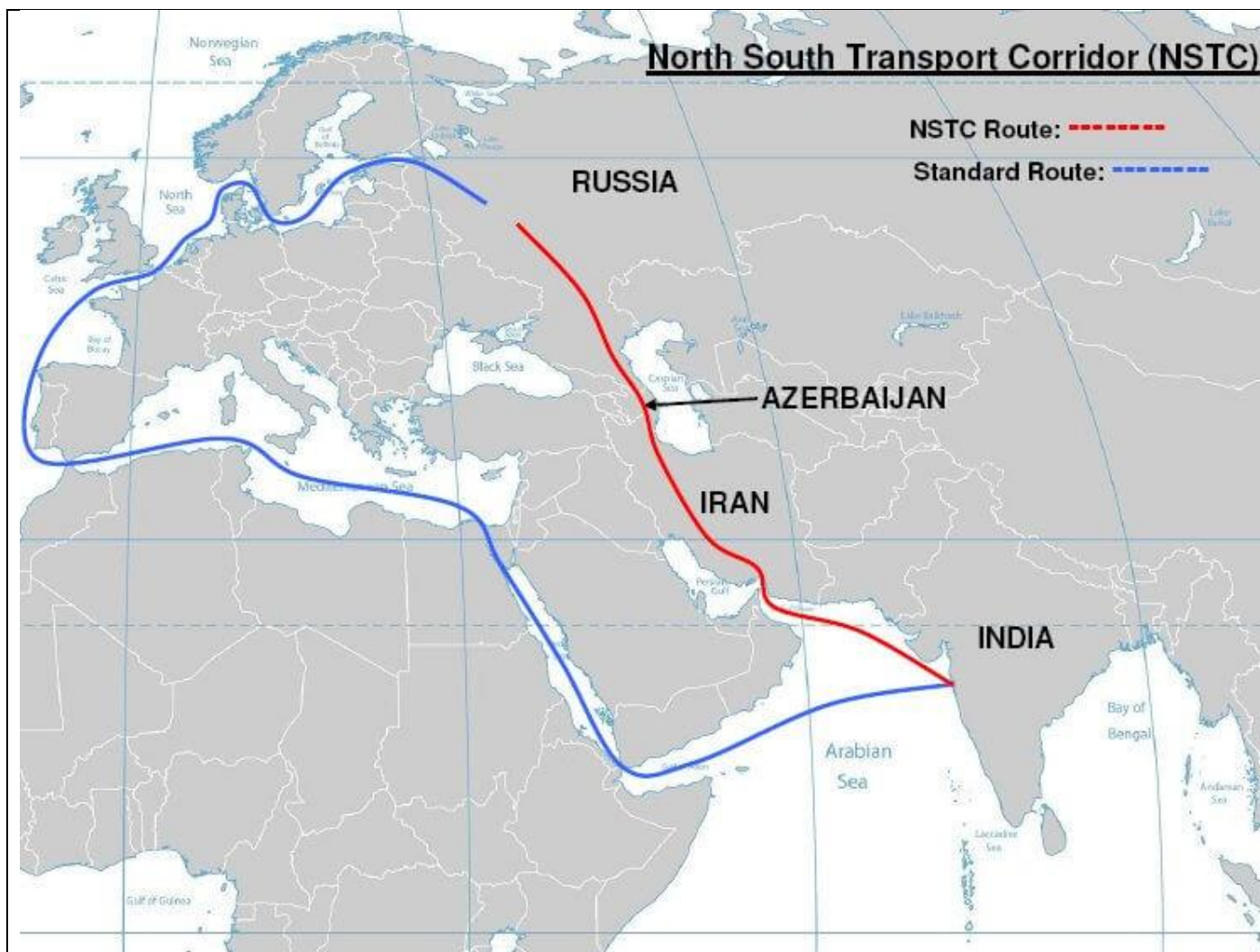
Indian is engaged with Afghanistan by following ways:

1. Developing social infrastructure as hospitals, schools;
 2. Public infrastructure such as Salma dam, and parliament building ;
 3. Humanitarian assistance such as medical missions;
 4. Training of military officer and soldiers;
 5. Military warfare such as military helicopters and repairing the old soviet era helicopters.
- Afghanistan is a gateway for The International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC) for India.
 - India's development of the Chabahar Port is of great strategic importance for the development of regional maritime transit traffic to Afghanistan and Central Asia
 - Afghanistan is also involved in The Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India Pipeline (TAPI) Project.
 - Afghanistan can help India to overcome/oppose China's The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI, or B&R), formerly known as One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative.
 - Afghanistan can help fulfil India's Oil demands.
 - 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.



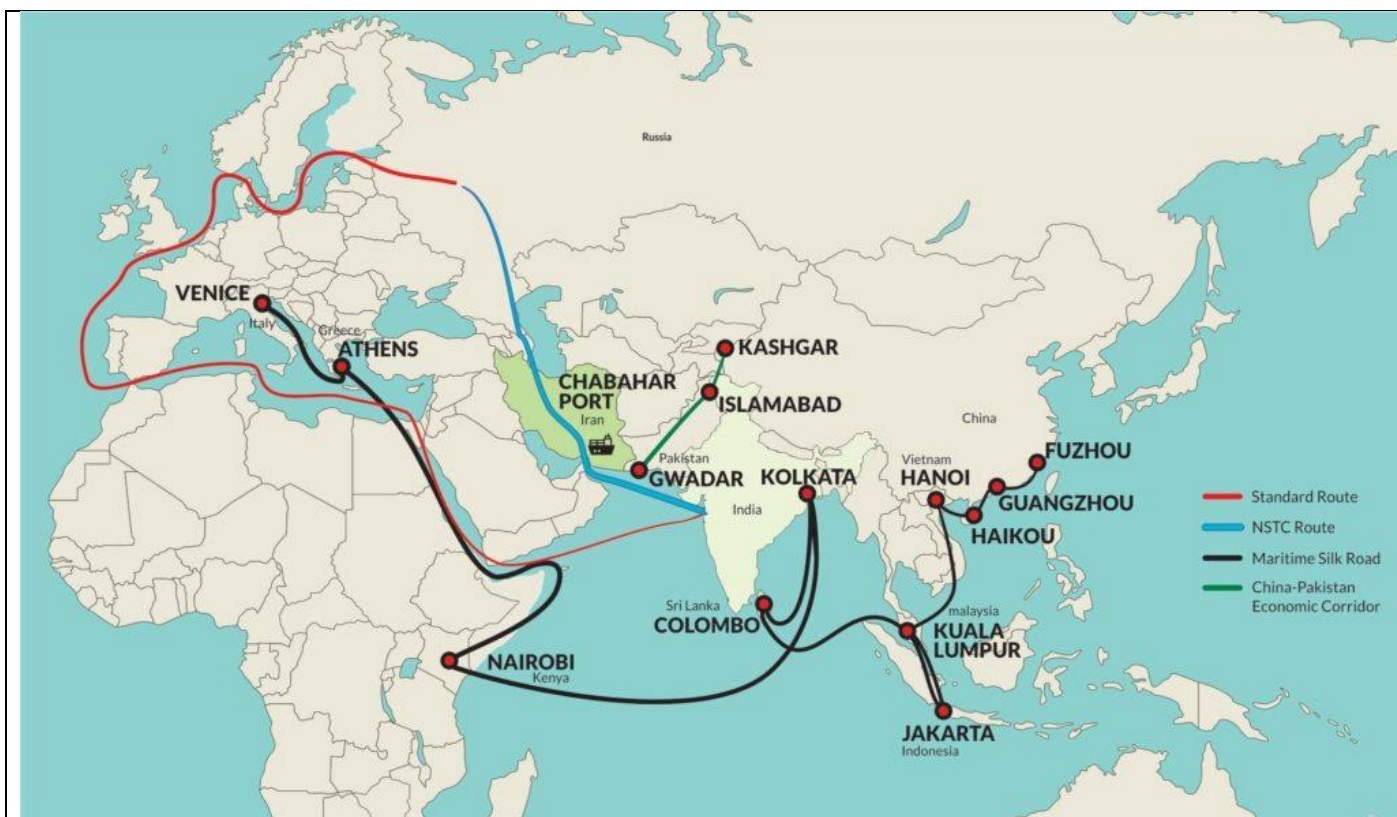
International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC)

- 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.



Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India Pipeline (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.



BIDEN ALLOWS H1-B VISA BAN TO EXPIRE

Context:

The White House has allowed a 2020 ban on H1-B skilled worker and certain other temporary visas to expire on March 31.

Relevance:

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

Dimensions of the Article:

1. What is H-1B Visa?
2. What is a Green Card?
3. Why was the ban on certain H1-B visas imposed in 2020?
4. Impact of the 2020 U.S. Ban on Visas
5. The Current decision taken by the U.S. administration and its impact

What is H-1B Visa?

- The H-1B is a United States visa under the Immigration and Nationality Act, and it is one of the most popular visas for foreigners visiting the US for business or trade purpose.
- It is a non-immigrant visa that allows U.S. companies to employ foreign workers in speciality occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise.
- Speciality occupations include specialized fields like IT, finance, accounting, architecture, engineering, mathematics, science, medicine, etc. which usually require a bachelor's degree or higher.
- US employers wishing to bring in staff for long-term assignment prefer H1B visa because its application is quicker than applying for a US Green Card.

What is a Green Card?

- A green card is a colloquial name for the identification card issued by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to permanent residents, who are legally allowed to live and work in the U.S. indefinitely. Green cards got their nickname because they were green in color from 1946 to 1964.
- In 2010 they became green again, but the nickname persisted during the intervening decades of blue, pink and yellow "green cards."
- The green card is a permanent resident ID issued to immigrants in the U.S.
- The green card lottery gives away up to 55,000 annual permanent visas to other countries.
- Permanent residents can be fined or jailed for not having their green card on their person.
- Green Cards must be renewed every 10 years.

Why was the ban on certain H1-B visas imposed in 2020?

- The ban was imposed by the Trump administration in June 2020 with the aim to prevent temporary workers across industries from entering the country and was later extended till March 31, 2021, citing the coronavirus pandemic.

- While the H1-B and other work visas have been criticised for allowing cheap labour in the US against the local workforce of the country, the visas have been useful to the country as a way of getting skilled and trained workers.
- Owing to this, tech industry leaders like Google CEO Sundar Pichai, Tesla CEO Elon Musk criticised Trump's move.

Impact of the 2020 U.S. Ban on Visas

- Indian IT companies are amongst the biggest beneficiaries of the US H-1B visa regime, and have since 1990s cornered a lion's share of the total number of visas issued each year.
- As of April 1, 2020, the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) said Indians had applied for 67 per cent of the total H-1B work visas for the current financial year.
- This could result in a significant impact on margins and worker wages of Indian IT companies which send thousands of low-cost employees to work on client sites in the US.

The Current decision taken by the U.S. administration and its impact

- As US President Joe Biden promised during the run-up to the 2021 elections, the administration allowed the Trump-era proclamation to expire.
- The White House did not make an official statement on the suspension's expiration.
- Visas for intra company transfers (L1), exchange visitors (J1), temporary non-agricultural workers (H-2B) and dependents of H1-B holders (H4) were also impacted by the expiring ban.
- The move is expected to help Indians as the major share of the H1-B visas are used by Indian professionals.
- The H1-B visas, which are approved for a period of three years, are a hiring pool for IT companies as it helps the companies keep their expenses in check.
- With the expiration of the order, those who were impacted by the travel ban will now be able to resume work in the US.
- The order will also allow US diplomatic missions, which are present in different countries, to issue fresh worker visas.
- It will thereby give permission to US-based IT companies to begin hiring foreign workers again.

INDIA PROTESTS AGAINST U.S. NAVAL EXERCISE SANS CONSENT

Context:

India said that it has protested the U.S. decision to conduct a patrol in the Indian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the western Indian Ocean, rejecting the U.S.'s claim that its domestic maritime law was in violation of international law.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Effect of Foreign Policies on India's Interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About the U.S. conducting FONOP and India's objection
2. United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)
3. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)

4. Freedom of navigation
5. US and Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPS)

About the U.S. conducting FONOP and India's objection

- Earlier, in a rare and unusual public statement, the U.S. Navy announced that its ship the USS John Paul Jones had carried out Freedom of Navigation Operation (FONOP) in the Indian EEZ, adding that its operations had “challenged” what the U.S. called India’s “excessive maritime claims.”
- Defending its actions, the U.S. said it was in compliance with the international law and that the U.S. Navy destroyer asserted navigational rights and freedoms in the vicinity of the Republic of the Maldives by conducting innocent passage through its territorial sea in normal operations within its exclusive economic zone without requesting prior permission.
- The incident is a rare falling out between the two partners in the Quadrilateral Grouping that had recently committed to upholding freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific together.
- The Government of India’s stated position on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is that the Convention “does not authorise other States to carry out in the EEZ and on the continental shelf, military exercises or manoeuvres, in particular those involving the use of weapons or explosives, without the consent of the coastal state.”

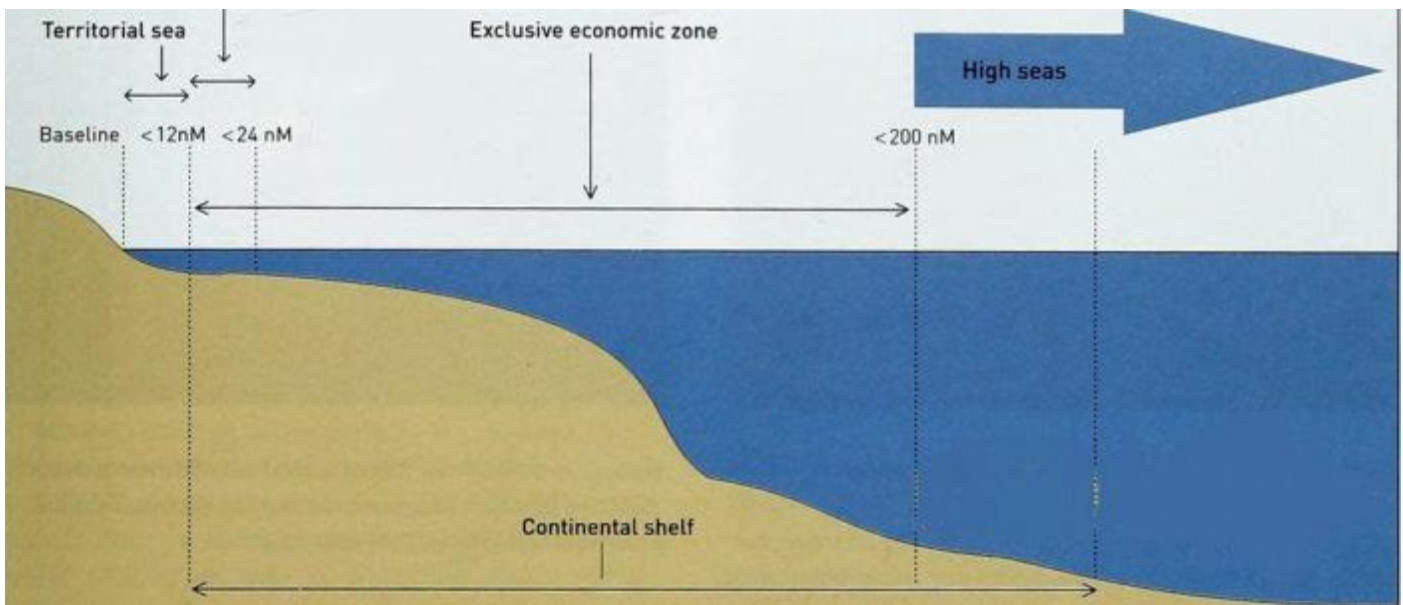
United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

- 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.

Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)

- The 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) defined the EEZ as a zone in the sea over which a sovereign nation has certain special rights with respect to the exploration and usage of marine resources, which includes the generation of energy from wind and water, and also oil and natural gas extraction.
- The EEZ is an area that is adjacent to and beyond the territorial sea.
- It can extend to a maximum of 200 nautical miles from the baseline. The baseline is normally measured is the low-water line along the coast as indicated on large-scale charts officially approved by the coastal state.
- The EEZ does not include the territorial sea and also does not include the continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles, however, it includes the contiguous zone.
- Within the EEZ, the country has rights over natural resources. The country has jurisdiction over some activities for the reasons of environmental protection, among others.
- It also has to respect the rights of other countries in the EEZ such as the freedom of navigation.

- The difference between territorial sea and the EEZ is that the former confers full sovereignty over the waters, whereas the latter is merely a “sovereign right” which refers to the coastal nation’s rights below the surface of the sea. The surface waters are international waters.



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.

US and Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPS)

- The US Department of Defense defines FONOPs as “operational challenges against excessive maritime claims” through which “the United States demonstrates its resistance to excessive maritime claims.”
- The United States has an institutionalized FONOPs program called the Freedom of Navigation Program, which undertakes many FONOPs around the world every year.
- U.S. armed forces have conducted FONOPs in areas claimed by other countries but considered by the U.S. to be international waters.

MINISTERIAL MEET OF THE BIMSTEC 2021

Context:

India’s External Affairs Minister expressed commitment about taking the Bay of Bengal community to “new heights” at the 17th ministerial meet of the BIMSTEC.

Relevance:

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

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About BIMSTEC
2. Highlights of India's views at 17th ministerial meet of BIMSTEC
3. BIMSTEC Free Trade Area Framework Agreement

About BIMSTEC

The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is an international organisation of seven nations of South Asia and Southeast Asia:

1. Bangladesh
2. Bhutan
3. India
4. Nepal
5. Sri Lanka
6. Myanmar (South-east Asia)
7. Thailand (South-east Asia)



- Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand are the member states dependent on the Bay of Bengal.
- Fourteen priority sectors of cooperation have been identified and several BIMSTEC centres have been established to focus on those sectors.
- The permanent secretariat of the BIMSTEC is in **Dhaka, Bangladesh**.

History of Formation

- In 1997, a new sub-regional grouping was formed in Bangkok under the name BIST-EC (Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, and Thailand Economic Cooperation).
- Following the inclusion of Myanmar on 22 December 1997 during a special Ministerial Meeting in Bangkok, the Group was renamed 'BIMST-EC' (Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation).
- In 2004, at the first Summit the grouping was renamed as BIMSTEC or the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation.

There are 14 main sectors of BIMSTEC along technological and economic cooperation among south Asian and southeast Asian countries along the coast of the Bay of Bengal.

1. Trade & Investment
2. Transport & Communication
3. Energy
4. Tourism
5. Technology
6. Fisheries
7. Agriculture
8. Public Health
9. Poverty Alleviation
10. Counter-Terrorism & Transnational Crime
11. Environment & Disaster Management
12. People-to-People Contact
13. Cultural Cooperation
14. Climate Change



The BIMSTEC uses the alphabetical order for the Chairmanship which has been taken in rotation commencing with Bangladesh (1997–1999).

Highlights of India's views at 17th ministerial meet of BIMSTEC

- Cohesion among the members has been difficult to achieve mainly because of the Rohingya refugee crisis which created bitterness between Myanmar and Bangladesh. This affected the working of the organisation to some extent as it could not develop a common charter.
- The text of the BIMSTEC Charter, which will provide common set of rules and goals, has been finalized and is set for its adoption at the fifth BIMSTEC summit.
- The summit avoided any reference to Myanmar's current crisis which has triggered an outflow of refugees to BIMSTEC members India and Thailand.
- After the 2017 exodus of the Rohingyas, the crisis is the second occasion where Myanmar's domestic developments have triggered displacement of citizens.
- It is understood that despite the crackdown India has chosen to maintain communication with the military junta in Myanmar because of diplomatic requirements.

- The meeting also approved the BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport Connectivity which will be taken up during the next summit of the organisation to be hosted by Sri Lanka.

BIMSTEC Free Trade Area Framework Agreement

- The BIMSTEC Free Trade Area Framework Agreement (BFTAFA) has been signed by all member nations to stimulate trade and investment in the parties, and attract outsiders to trade with and invest in the BIMSTEC countries at a higher level.
- The BIMSTEC Coastal Shipping Agreement draft was discussed on 1 December 2017 in New Delhi, to facilitate coastal shipping within 20 nautical miles of the coastline in the region to boost trade between the member countries.
- In 2019, the first ever BIMSTEC Conclave of Ports summit was held in Visakhapatnam, India, for providing a platform to strengthen maritime interaction, port-led connectivity initiatives and sharing best practices among member countries.

BIDEN GOVT. RESTORES AID TO PALESTINIANS

Context:

- The United States, in a significant reversal to the earlier policy, has announced the restoration of at least USD 235 million in financial assistance to the Palestinians.
- The financial aid includes USD 75 million economic help for the West Bank & Gaza, USD 10 million for 'peacebuilding' programmes of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and USD 150 million in humanitarian assistance to the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA).

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Effect of Foreign Policies & Politics of Countries on India's Interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Israel – Palestine Conflict
2. What is the Two-state solution?
3. India's stand in the Israel – Palestine conflict

Israel – Palestine Conflict

- The Israeli–Palestinian conflict is the ongoing struggle between Israelis and Palestinians that began in the mid-20th century.
- The origins to the conflict can be traced back to Jewish immigration and sectarian conflict in Mandatory Palestine between Jews and Arabs.
- Despite a long-term peace process and the general reconciliation of Israel with Egypt and Jordan, Israelis and Palestinians have failed to reach a final peace agreement.
- The key issues are mutual recognition and security, borders, water rights, control of Jerusalem, Israeli settlements, Palestinian freedom of movement, and Palestinian right of return.



What is the Two-state solution?

- The two-state solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict envisages an independent State of Palestine alongside the State of Israel, west of the Jordan River.
- The boundary between the two states is still subject to dispute and negotiation, with Palestinian and Arab leadership insisting on the “1967 borders”, which is not accepted by Israel.
- Many attempts have been made to broker a two-state solution, involving the creation of an independent Palestinian state alongside the State of Israel (after Israel’s establishment in 1948).
- In 2007, the majority of both Israelis and Palestinians, according to a number of polls, preferred the two-state solution over any other solution as a means of resolving the conflict.

India’s stand in the Israel – Palestine conflict

- Israel and the Palestinian Territories Countries that recognize Palestine as a state
- India has consistently voted in favour of those resolutions that promote the two-state solution with a Palestinian claim to East Jerusalem.
- Peace based on two-state solution is much needed in the face of international proposals that are in breach of these principles, and cannot be forged between Israel and a third country [U.S.], but can only come from Israel-Palestine talks, which India also supports.



INDIA-PAKISTAN: FORWARD THROUGH A BACKCHANNEL

Context:

More than a month after India-Pakistan border commanders agreed to strictly observe all agreements between the two countries, the absence of official acceptance of a backchannel seems far outweighed by indicators that there is, in fact, such a channel in place, approved by the Prime Ministers of both countries.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (India and its neighbourhood, Foreign Policies and conferences affecting India's interests)

Mains Questions:

What are the issues that mar the India-Pakistan relations? To what extent has the use of Backchannel communication helped in resolving disputes? (10 Marks)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Recent trends in India-Pakistan relations
2. Two major Sources of conflict between India and Pakistan
3. Territorial Disputes between India and Pakistan
4. Way Forward

Recent trends in India-Pakistan relations

- The 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.
- This joint statement was followed by the scheduling of the much-delayed Indus Water Treaty talks, the granting of sports visas, and the salutary messages between the Prime Ministers of the two countries.

- These events are in contrast to a particularly recriminatory period in India-Pakistan ties that followed the 2019 Pulwama attack, the Balakot strikes and capture of an Indian pilot thereafter, and the government's decision on Jammu and Kashmir.

The use of Backchannel

A look at the history of backchannels shows that they have operated in the worst of times, including wars, terror strikes and military action, and their existence were brought to light only years later.

For example, it was only when former ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence of Pakistan) chief reviled for his role in building the Taliban and arming Kashmiri militants, died that former RAW (Research and Analysis Wing of India) Chief wrote about their channel for peace talks that began in 1988.

Later, during the Kargil War, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee chose an unorthodox back-channel interlocutor, R.K. Mishra, journalist and founder of the Observer Research Foundation.

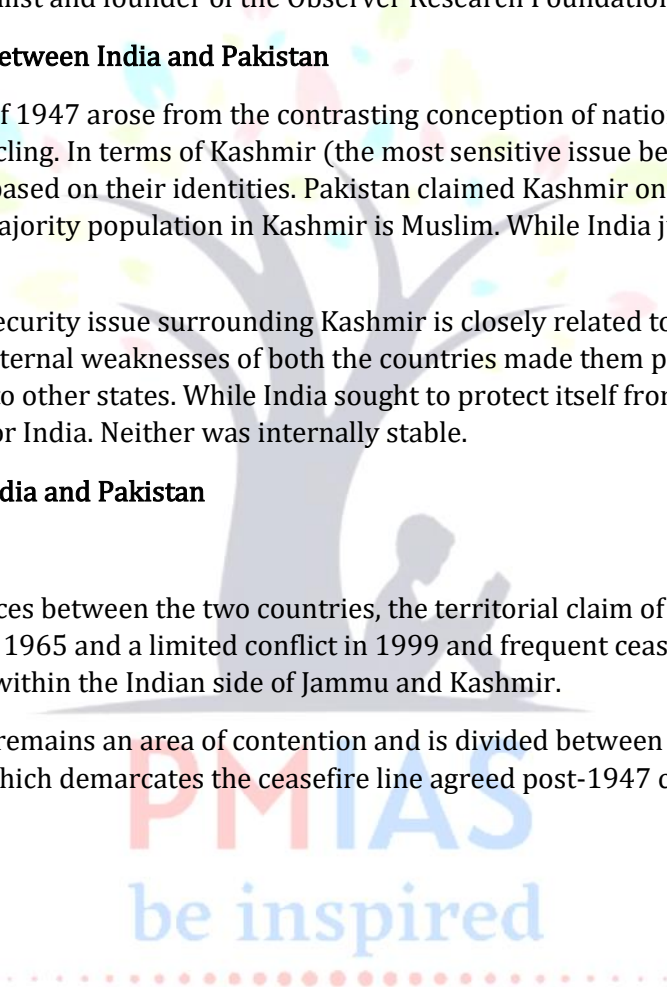
Two major Sources of conflict between India and Pakistan

1. **Identity:** The partition of 1947 arose from the contrasting conception of national identity to which both the nations continue to cling. In terms of Kashmir (the most sensitive issue between the two) both the states laid their claims based on their identities. Pakistan claimed Kashmir on the basis of being an Islamic state and that majority population in Kashmir is Muslim. While India justified its claim based on its secular identity.
2. **Political Systems:** The security issue surrounding Kashmir is closely related to the larger problem of 2 political systems. The internal weaknesses of both the countries made them prone to consolidate their identities with regards to other states. While India sought to protect itself from west (especially US), Pakistan did the same for India. Neither was internally stable.

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





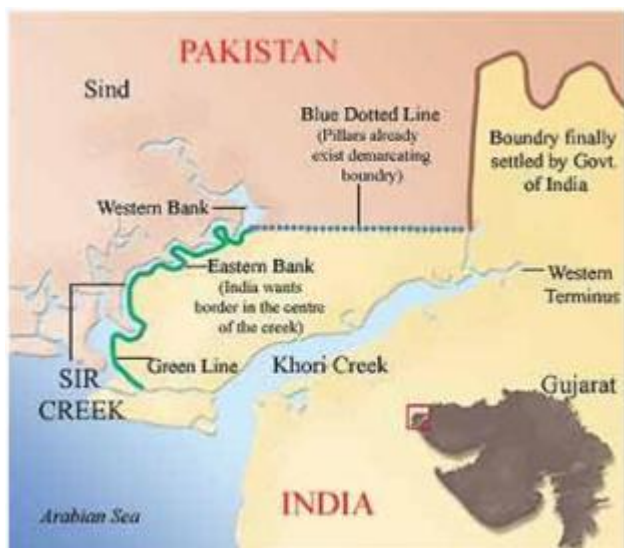
Siachen Glacier

- 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.
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- 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.
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- 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.
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Significance of Sir Creek:

1. Security importance: Sir Creek has been primarily viewed as a maritime, or a strategic issue. Over the year this region has become main route to smuggle drugs, arms and petroleum product to India.
2. Maritime boundary: The resolution of sir creek will help in determining the limits of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) and continental shelves.
3. Economic value: Much of the region is rich in oil and gas below the sea bed, and control over the creek would have a huge bearing on the energy potential of each nation.
4. The Sir Creek area is also a great fishing destination for hundreds of fishermen from both India and Pakistan.
5. Ecological value: The ecological significance of this region, and the growing concerns of climate threats, necessitate reconfiguring this dispute as a unique opportunity for transboundary cooperation.
6. Pakistan declared the western side of Sir Creek a Ramsar site back in 2002, but India has not yet done the same on its side of the disputed border.
7. Being a declared Ramsar site in its entirety, the Sir Creek area could grant residents on both sides better economic opportunities. It could help create joint eco-tourism opportunities.

Way Forward

- In order to strengthen the bilateral engagements between India and Pakistan need of the hour is to employ perfect balance of soft and hard power diplomacy coupled with International diplomacy.
- International Organizations can be used for building pressure over Pakistan for carrying out anti-terrorist activities like Pakistan's inclusion on the FATF Grey list makes it harder for its government to access international markets at a time when its economy is weakening.
- Initiation of bilateral dialogue between India and Pakistan based on the "UFA" agreement aimed at combating terrorism, freeing fishermen, meeting of military personnel, encouraging religious tourism will bring new dimensions to the diplomatic engagements.
- India's diplomatic engagement with other South Asian countries and Western powers like USA will help India in creating pressure over Pakistan, for curbing its funding to terrorist activities and bringing an end to the influence of non-state actors in its politics, as both countries being nuclear powers cannot afford to take route of militarised attack and war like situation.

CHINA EXTENDS \$500 MILLION LOAN TO LANKA

Context:

China signed a \$500 million loan agreement with Sri Lanka, in a move that Colombo hopes would boost its foreign reserves that are under severe strain since the pandemic struck last year.

Relevance:

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

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About recent extension of loan by China and Sri Lanka's Position
2. China's Debt-trap Diplomacy
3. Chinese presence in Sri Lanka
4. Recently in News: China's New Project in Sri Lanka

About recent extension of loan by China and Sri Lanka's Position

- The recent \$500 million loan agreement is the second instalment of the \$1 billion loan sought by Sri Lanka in 2020.
- The approval comes after Sri Lanka obtained a currency swap facility from China for \$1.5 billion.
- Meanwhile, the Beijing-based Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) also sanctioned Sri Lanka's request for a \$180 million loan earlier in 2020.
- Sri Lanka already owes more than \$ 5 billion to China from past loans.
- Sri Lanka is due to repay some \$ 4.5 billion of its outstanding debt in 2021 and the Sri Lankan government has said it is "exploring all options".

China's Debt-trap Diplomacy

- Research shows developing countries owe much larger debts to China than was earlier believe.
- They allege many loans to build infrastructure projects using Chinese contractors in strategically located developing nations are a form of debt-trap diplomacy.
- China is accused of extending excessive credit with the intention of extracting economic or political concessions when countries cannot honour their debts. This raises fears that China's credit to countries such as Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal could be a strategic disadvantage for India.

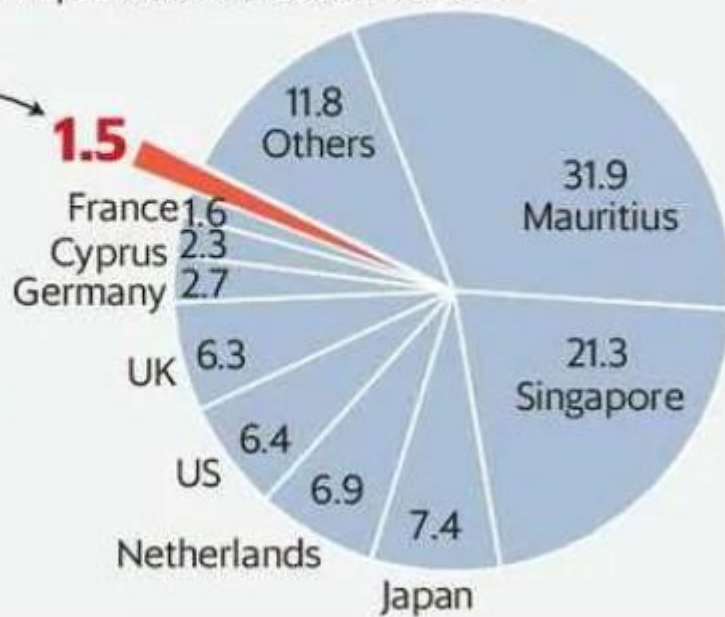
Chart 2

Investments from China account for a small share of India's total FDI inflows

FDI equity inflows from April 2000 to December 2019
(% share in total)

China
(including Hong Kong)**

**According to China's official records, cumulative outward direct investment to India was about \$8 billion as of December 2019, which accounts for 2.8% of India's total FDI inflow (after including Hong Kong).



Chinese presence in Sri Lanka

- Besides the huge financial help, there is the presence of Chinese officials and military officers in Sri Lanka along with Chinese workers.
- Over a period of 12 years (2005- 17), Beijing has poured over 15 billion dollars into projects in Sri Lanka.
- For India, this is a discomfoting situation and bad development as Indian foreign policy has heavily dependent on time-tested and historical links and now, over the period of time, there is a sense of thinking among Sri Lankans that India failed to see and respond to various demands and began to compare with the scale and speed of help Beijing is offering.

Chinese acquisition of Hambantota Port

- Over the years, Sri Lanka has been lost its financial strength. China's acquisition of the strategic Hambantota port from Sri Lanka has given it "control of a territory" is one such example.
- This port is just a few hundred miles off the shores of India, highlighting its "debt trap" the country is facing.
- Besides, Sri Lanka's failure has resulted in China strategic advantage over the position.
- It should be noted that Hambantota port would not work and "frequent lenders" like India had refused to provide loans or assistance for the port, developed during Sri Lanka's president Mahinda Rajapaksa's rule.

Recently in News: China's New Project in Sri Lanka

- In 2021, a Chinese company has won a contract to set up hybrid wind and solar energy projects on three Sri Lankan islands off the northern Jaffna peninsula 45 km from Rameswaram in Tamil Nadu.

- Asian Development Bank (ADB) is set to fund the project, which will come up on Delft, Nainativu and Analativu, three islands in the Palk Strait off Jaffna peninsula.
- India's concern is the project site's proximity to the Indian coastline.
- India had lodged a strong protest with the Sri Lankan government on the contract to the Chinese company.

MILITARY EXERCISE IN BANGLADESH ENDS

Context:

Multinational military exercise Shantir Ogrosena was under way in Bangladesh in April 2021.

Relevance:

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

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About Shantir Ogrosena
2. Trends in India-Bangladesh relations
3. Other Recent Developments in India-Bangladesh Relationship
4. Issues and Complications in India-Bangladesh relations

About Shantir Ogrosena

- Shantir Ogrosena is a military exercise in which India, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh participate.
- The exercise in 2021 was held with the theme of 'Robust Peace Keeping Operations'.
- Military observers from the US, UK, Turkey, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Singapore were also in attendance throughout the exercise.
- The aim of the exercise was to strengthen defence ties and enhance interoperability amongst neighbourhood countries to ensure effective peace keeping operations.
- The Armies of all participating nations shared their wide experiences and enhanced their situational awareness through robust information exchange platforms.

Trends in India-Bangladesh relations

- The friendship between India and Bangladesh is historic, evolving over the last 50 years ever since the extension of India's political, diplomatic, military and humanitarian support during Bangladesh's Liberation War which resulted in Bangladesh's independence.
- Post-Independence, the India-Bangladesh relationship has oscillated with the cordial relationship being maintained until the assassination of Bangladesh's founding President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975.
- After the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family (except his daughters, of whom Sheikh Hasina is the current Prime Minister of Bangladesh), a period of military rule and the rise of General Ziaur Rahman followed.
- General Ziaur Rahman became the president and was assassinated as well in 1981, following which the India-Bangladesh Relationship became more cordial between 1982-1991 under the military-led government.

- Since Bangladesh's return to parliamentary democracy in 1991, relations have gone through highs and lows with the relations becoming friendlier in the last decade (2010-2020).



Other Recent Developments in India-Bangladesh Relationship

- On the account of the COVID-19 pandemic, India assured Bangladesh to make available vaccines for the country as and when produced in India, signifying India's 'Neighbourhood First Policy'.
- India organized events on 'Mujib Borsho' which is the birth centenary year of Bangladesh's founder president Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.
- Framework of Understanding (FOU) on Cooperation in Hydrocarbon Sector; Protocol on Trans-boundary Elephant Conservation, MoU on Cooperation in the field of Agriculture and other agreements have also been signed between the two countries.

U.S. URGES G20 ON GLOBAL MINIMUM CORPORATE TAX

Context:

In a declaration of war on low-tax jurisdictions around the globe, US Treasury Secretary has urged G20 nations to move towards a global minimum corporate tax.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (International Groupings, Foreign policies affecting India's Interests) GS-III: Indian Economy (Taxation, External

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About the Global Minimum Corporate Tax Rate proposal
2. The necessity of the Global Minimum Corporate Tax according to U.S.
3. How did other countries react to the proposal?

About the Global Minimum Corporate Tax Rate proposal

- The US proposal envisages a 21% minimum corporate tax rate, coupled with cancelling exemptions on income from countries that do not legislate a minimum tax to discourage the shifting of multinational operations and profits overseas.

- The US views a Global Minimum Corporate Tax Rate as an attempt to reverse a “30-year race to the bottom” in which countries have resorted to slashing corporate tax rates to attract multinational corporations (MNCs).
- The proposal for a minimum corporate tax is 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 necessity of the Global Minimum Corporate Tax according to U.S.

- The proposal aims to somewhat offset any disadvantages that might arise from the proposed increase in the US corporate tax rate.
- The proposed increase to 28% from 21% would partially reverse the previous cut in tax rates on companies from 35% to 21% by way of a 2017 tax legislation.
- The increase in corporation tax comes at a time when the pandemic is costing governments across the world, and is also timed with the US’s push for a USD 2.3 trillion infrastructure upgrade proposal.
- A global compact on this issue, at the time of pandemic, will work well for the US government and for most other countries in western Europe, even as some low-tax European jurisdictions such as the Netherlands, Ireland and Luxembourg and some in the Caribbean rely largely on tax rate arbitrage to attract MNCs.
- The plan to peg a minimum tax on overseas corporate income seeks to potentially make it difficult for corporations to shift earnings offshore.
- However, a global minimum rate would essentially take away a tool that countries use to push policies that suit them. A lower tax rate is a tool they can use to alternatively push economic activity.

WHAT CORPORATE TAX ABUSE COSTS COUNTRIES			
Country	Tax lost to corporate tax abuse annually	Effective Tax Rate	Tax loss inflicted on other countries
Singapore	\$2,791,252,045	6.15%	\$12,221,060,747
Hong Kong	\$552,026,614	8.26%	\$16,331,010,356
China	\$3,732,400,492	18.97%	\$20,045,803,268
India	\$10,117,529,292	29.73%	\$0
BVI	\$1,079,398	0.07%	\$10,405,615,250
Cayman Is.	\$166,760	0.22%	\$22,819,899,267
Luxembourg	\$551,354,310	1.39%	\$9,283,427,114
Netherlands	\$935,184,630	5.42%	\$26,593,707,934
Ireland	\$199,121,037	7.76%	\$6,068,846,053
UK	\$10,269,722,405	9.72%	\$13,671,390,701
US	\$49,241,339,280	17.78%	\$0
Germany	\$24,394,593,521	22.92%	\$3,378,296,454

Source: The State of Tax Justice 2020 report

How did other countries react to the proposal?

- The European Commission backed the proposal, but the global minimum rate should be decided after discussions in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

- China is not likely to have a serious objection with the US call, but an area of concern for Beijing would be the impact of such a tax stipulation on Hong Kong, the seventh-largest tax haven in the world and the largest in Asia.
- The US proposal also has support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

INDIA'S SOUTH ASIAN OPPORTUNITY

Context:

The statement issued by the Director Generals of Military Operations of India and Pakistan, in February 2021, that they agree to strictly observe all agreements between the two countries, coincided with a statement made by Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan in Colombo that “our only dispute is Kashmir and it can only be resolved through dialogue.”

Such understanding shows the realisation that it is best to focus on resolving issues including poverty, malnutrition and young population, which would help to bring down the socio-economic problems in both India and Pakistan.

Relevance:

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

Mains Questions:

Peace with Pakistan is not just a bilateral matter, but is essential for India to transform South Asia. Discuss. (10 Marks)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Fallout of Bilateral relations
2. The Arguments for a United “South Asia”
3. Way Forward and Conclusion
4. Back to Basics: About SAARC

Fallout of Bilateral relations

- Cross border terrorism, Kashmir issue, changing political ideologies, poor economic integration and lack of connectivity.
- India-Pakistan enmity hurts the south Asian growth – seen in the case of dysfunctional SAARC platform since 2015 and also the Multilateral initiatives that have been muted because of bilateral tensions.

Recent trends in India-Pakistan relations

- The 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.
- This joint statement was followed by the scheduling of the much-delayed Indus Water Treaty talks, the granting of sports visas, and the salutary messages between the Prime Ministers of the two countries.
- These events are in contrast to a particularly recriminatory period in India-Pakistan ties that followed the 2019 Pulwama attack, the Balakot strikes and capture of an Indian pilot thereafter, and the government's decision on Jammu and Kashmir.

The use of Backchannel

A look at the history of backchannels shows that they have operated in the worst of times, including wars, terror strikes and military action, and their existence were brought to light only years later.

For example, it was only when former ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence of Pakistan) chief reviled for his role in building the Taliban and arming Kashmiri militants, died that former RAW (Research and Analysis Wing of India) Chief wrote about their channel for peace talks that began in 1988.

Later, during the Kargil War, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee chose an unorthodox back-channel interlocutor, R.K. Mishra, journalist and founder of the Observer Research Foundation.

Two major Sources of conflict between India and Pakistan

1. **Identity:** The partition of 1947 arose from the contrasting conception of national identity to which both the nations continue to cling. In terms of Kashmir (the most sensitive issue between the two) both the states laid their claims based on their identities. Pakistan claimed Kashmir on the basis of being an Islamic state and that majority population in Kashmir is Muslim. While India justified its claim based on its secular identity.
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Territorial Disputes between India and Pakistan

Kashmir

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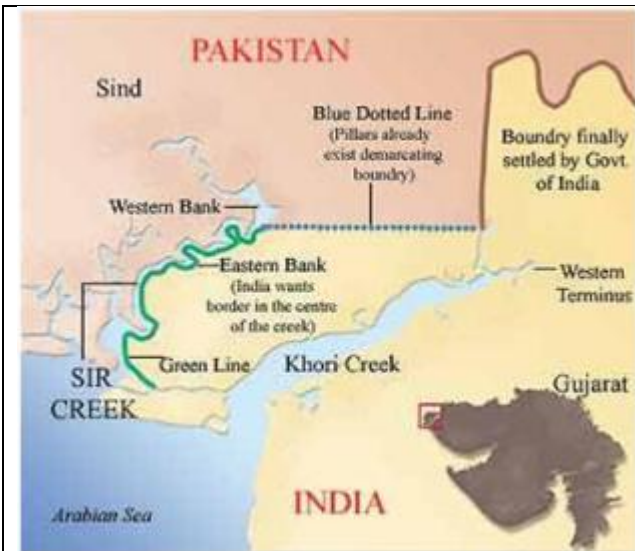
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The Arguments for a United "South Asia"

- World bank has argued that South Asia holds value potential. Integrated South Asia could benefit from Belt and road initiative and Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.
- India's share in total land area, population, and real GDP of South Asia in 2016 was 62%, 75%, and 83% respectively.

- The two other big countries in South Asia are Pakistan and Bangladesh with shares in regional GDP of only 7.6% and 5.6%, respectively.
- India can take the lead in transforming a grossly under-performing region like South Asia given its size and heft.
- An economically transformed and integrated South Asian region could advantageously link up with China's Belt and Road Initiative and even join the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, the world's largest trading bloc of 15 countries, accounting for 30% of its GDP, as a much-valued partner.

Way Forward

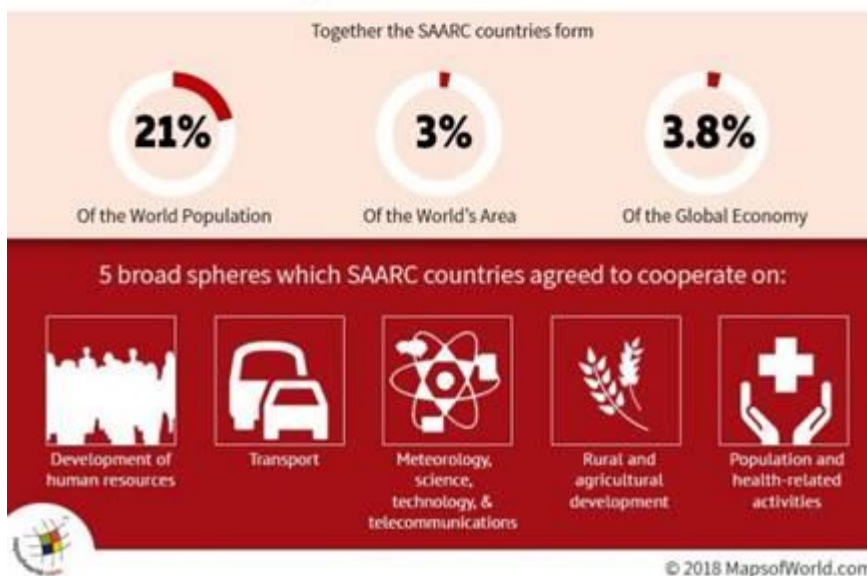
- Bilateral trade should be taken up openly without the political reasoning.
- Joint military exercises could boost relations.
- Ease of connectivity through air and land route.
- External or third-party interference should be avoided as much as possible.
- Briefing up the security at borders and sharing security intelligence would help fight the terrorist activities.

Conclusion

- This is the moment for India to think big and act big by ambitiously aiming to engineer a South Asian economic miracle, similar to China's rise in 1972.
- India needs to view a peace with Pakistan not as a bilateral matter, to be arrived at leisurely, if at all, but as essential and urgent, all the while viewing it as a chance of a lifetime, to dramatically transform South Asia for the better, no less.
- Recent ceasefire initiatives could help to restore South Asian identity of the India.

Back to Basics – About SAARC

- The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is the regional intergovernmental organization and geopolitical union of states in South Asia
- Its member states are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
- SAARC comprises 3% of the world's area, 21% of the world's population and 3.8% (US\$2.9 trillion) of the global economy, as of 2015.
- SAARC was founded in Dhaka on 8 December 1985.
- Its secretariat is based in Kathmandu, Nepal.
- The organization promotes development of economic and regional integration.
- It launched the South Asian Free Trade Area in 2006.
- SAARC maintains permanent diplomatic relations at the United Nations as an observer and has developed links with multilateral entities, including the European Union.



Political Issues in SAARC

- Lasting peace and prosperity in South Asia have been elusive because of the various ongoing conflicts in the region.
- Political dialogue is often conducted on the margins of SAARC meetings which have refrained from interfering in the internal matters of its member states.

- During the 12th and 13th SAARC summits, extreme emphasis was laid upon greater cooperation between the SAARC members to fight terrorism.
- The 19th SAARC summit scheduled to be held in Pakistan was called off as India, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Afghanistan decided to boycott it.
- It was for the first time that four countries boycotted a SAARC summit, leading to its cancellation.

India's issues with SAARC

1. SAARC's future hangs in thread as Pakistan's recalcitrance to act on terrorism has been a deal breaker.
2. Connectivity with Afghanistan has been hampered due to lack of Pakistan's cordial support.
3. Air freight corridor cannot be sustainable in long term and also it will be unable to achieve the full potential of Indo- Afghan trade potentials.
4. Chabahar port might fall prey to US-Iran escalations.
5. Regular meetings need to happen, if this group has to become a driver in global economic setup.

INDIA, RUSSIA DIVERGE ON INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGY

Context:

- Russian Ambassador to India said that India and Russia are "committed" to completing their contract for the S-400 missile system, due to be delivered to India at the end of 2021 and also that both countries oppose U.S. sanctions on the issue.
- The S-400 contract is on track for a delivery of the systems despite America's repeated threat that the \$2.5-billion deal could attract sanctions under its CAATSA law.

Relevance:

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

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About S-400 Triumph
2. Issues with Acquisition of S-400
3. About India's acquisition of S-400
4. About U.S. Objections
5. Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, CAATSA

About S-400 Triumph

- S-400 Triumph is one of the world's most advanced surface-to-air missile (SAM) systems designed by Russia.
- The system is a large complex of radars, control systems and different types of missiles, with the capability to simultaneously track numerous incoming objects in a radius of a few hundred kilometres.
- It can employ appropriate missile systems to launch the counter attack and to neutralise the objects with the potential of ensuring a high success rate.
- It is the most dangerous operationally deployed modern long-range SAM (MLR SAM) in the world, considered much ahead of the US-developed Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system (THAAD).

Issues with Acquisition of S-400

- The acquisition of S-400 by countries has taken centre stage in the American diplomacy regarding Russia.
- U.S. believes that S-400 could access sensitive U.S. military technologies in service with the potential buyers.
- Russia has also deployed at least two S-400 systems in Syria, which is of much concern to observers who fear the system could contribute to a global conflict breaking out in Syria.
- Among the countries under pressure from the U.S. to not buy this weapon are India and Turkey.
- NATO countries objected strongly to reports of Russia giving its systems to Iran and Syria.

About India's acquisition of S-400

- Russia had offered its highly advanced Air Defence System to India, which agreed to purchase five of the S-400 Air Defence Systems.
- Before India, Russia had only sold this system to China even though Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Belarus were eyeing it as well.
- This is the first time that Russia is providing a different system to India, a departure from its tradition of supplying only attacking weapons.
- India needs high end weapons for very valid reasons. It is the only country in the world that is flanked by two nuclear armed neighbours– Pakistan and China and has fought wars with both of these countries.
- India maintains close military relations with both United States and Russia.
- But over the years, Russia has been the largest supplier of military weapons to India.
- In 2012-2016, Russia (68%), US (14%) and Israel (7.2%) were the major arms suppliers to India.
- India is the second largest market for Russia's defence industry and Russia is the chief supplier of defence equipment to India.

RUSSIA		THE US	
India's biggest arms supplier for decades. Sales worth \$65 billion since early-1960s	MiG fighters & Sukhoi-30MKI jets to Kilo-class submarines, Talwar/Tabar-class frigates & aircraft carrier INS Vikramaditya	Overtook Russia in bagging Indian deals over last 3/4 years. Sales worth \$15 billion since 2007	C-17 Globemaster-III strategic airlifters, C-130J Super Hercules aircraft & P-8I maritime patrol planes to M-777 ultra-light howitzers, Apache attack & Chinook heavy-lift helicopters
FUTURE PROJECTS		FUTURE PROJECTS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Lease of 2nd nuclear-powered submarine (after first one, INS Chakra) for around \$1.5 billion ➤ Five S-400 Triumph air defence systems for around \$5.5 billion ➤ Four Grigorovich-class stealth frigates (2 to be built in India) for around \$4 billion ➤ Joint production of 200 Kamov-226T light utility helicopters (140 in India) for \$1 billion 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ US pushing F/A-18 "Super Hornet" or F-16 fighter production line in India to supply 110 jets for IAF for \$20 billion ➤ In contention for 57 multi-role fighters to operate from aircraft carriers ➤ Also for 111 armed naval light utility helicopters (Rs 21,738 crore) ➤ Also 24 multi-role helicopters with anti-sub warfare capabilities (Rs 12,000 crore). Another 123 such choppers later 	
 <p>INS Vikramaditya</p>		 <p>IAF C-17 Aircraft</p>	

About U.S. Objections

- United States has raised concerns of India purchasing S-400 system on two counts:
 - The official count is that US has a legal position where any country that is taking systems or military equipment from their adversaries, the US expects to put sanctions on that country.
 - The other count is that US is planning to put F 16 factories in India and sell drones to it.

Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, CAATSA

- The Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, CAATSA is a United States federal law that imposed sanctions on Iran, North Korea, and Russia.
- The Act empowers the US President to impose at least five of the 12 listed sanctions on persons engaged in a "significant transaction" with Russian defence and intelligence sectors.
- The State Department has notified 39 Russian entities including almost all major Russian defence manufacturing and export companies/entities.

India and CAATSA

- In 2018, India inked an agreement worth more than 5 billion \$ with Russia to procure four S-400 Triumf surface-to-air missile defence system, the most powerful missile defence system in the world ignoring the CAATSA act. The U.S. threatened India with sanctions over India's decision to buy the S-400 missile defense system from Russia.
- Two oil companies ordered crude oil from Iran for November ignoring CAATSA. The United States threatened India with sanctions over India's decision to buy oil from Iran.

NATO TO EXIT AFGHANISTAN ALONG WITH U.S.

Context:

Foreign troops under NATO command will withdraw from Afghanistan in coordination with a U.S. pull-out, after Germany said it would match American plans to leave after two decades of war.

Relevance:

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

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)
2. Important Points regarding NATO
3. India and NATO – Non-NATO Ally Status
4. About the coordinated withdrawal of troops

About North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)

- The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) is an international organisation for collective security by the United States, Canada, and several Western European nations to provide collective security against the Soviet Union in 1949, in support of the North Atlantic Treaty signed in Washington.
- NATO's Headquarters are located in Evere, Brussels, Belgium.
- Since its founding, the admission of new member states has increased the alliance from the original 12 countries to 30 member states with North Macedonia being the most recent member state to be added to NATO in March 2020.
- An additional 20 countries participate in NATO's Partnership for Peace program, with 15 other countries involved in institutionalized dialogue programs.



Important Points regarding NATO

- A key provision of the treaty, the so-called Article 5, states that if one member of the alliance is attacked in Europe or North America, it is to be considered an attack on all members. That effectively put Western Europe under the “nuclear umbrella” of the US.
- From a political perspective: NATO promotes democratic values and enables members to consult and cooperate on defence and security-related issues to solve problems, build trust and, in the long run, prevent conflict.
- The North Atlantic Council (NAC) is the body which has effective governance authority and powers of decision in NATO, consisting of member states’ permanent representatives or representatives at higher level (ministers of foreign affairs or defence, or heads of state or government).

- All 30 allies have an equal say, the Alliance's decisions must be unanimous and consensual, and its members must respect the basic values that underpin the Alliance, namely democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law.
- NATO has an integrated military command structure but very few forces or assets are exclusively its own. Most forces remain under full national command and control until member countries agree to undertake NATO-related tasks.

India and NATO – Non-NATO Ally Status

- Non-NATO Ally Status is a designation given by the United States government to close allies that have strategic working relationships with the US Armed Forces but are not members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).
- While the status does not automatically include a mutual defense pact with the United States, it still confers a variety of military and financial advantages that otherwise are not obtainable by non-NATO countries.
- The move brings India on par with North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies and countries such as Israel and South Korea for increasing defence cooperation.
- Increased cooperation between the United States and India in the areas of humanitarian assistance, counter-terrorism, counter-piracy and maritime security in the Indian Ocean.

About the coordinated withdrawal of troops

- Non-U.S. forces from mainly NATO countries, also from Australia, New Zealand and Georgia, outnumber the U.S. troops in Afghanistan, but still rely on U.S. air support, planning and leadership for their training mission.
- An integral part of NATO's current mission, Resolute Support, is to train and equip Afghan security forces fighting the Islamist Taliban, which was ousted from power by a U.S. invasion in late 2001 and has since waged an insurgency.
- With non-U.S. troop numbers reaching as high as 40,000 in 2008, Europe, Canada and Australia have moved in tandem with the U.S., also providing long-term funding to rebuild Afghanistan despite the resurgence of Taliban-led violence and endemic official corruption in the country.
- A key reason for a coordinated withdrawal is the fact that NATO relies on U.S. airlift capabilities and shipping to move valuable equipment back home out of landlocked Afghanistan.
- NATO also wants to avoid any hardware falling into the hands of militants, as happened after the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq.

BIMSTEC NEEDS TO REINVENT ITSELF

Context:

- The foreign ministers of BIMSTEC (the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) held their 17th meeting on April 1.
- While most multilateral groupings from G20 to ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation) held their deliberations at the highest political level in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, BIMSTEC leaders failed to do so.

Relevance:

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

Mains Questions:

In the context of BIMSTEC, how significant is the grouping and what are the several obstacles it has to overcome? (10 Marks)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About BIMSTEC
2. Significance of BIMSTEC
3. Challenges faced by BIMSTEC
4. Conclusion

About BIMSTEC

The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is an international organisation of seven nations of South Asia and Southeast Asia:

1. Bangladesh
2. Bhutan
3. India
4. Nepal
5. Sri Lanka
6. Myanmar (South-east Asia)
7. Thailand (South-east Asia)



- Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand are the member states dependent on the Bay of Bengal.
- Its members lie in the littoral and adjacent areas of the Bay of Bengal constituting a contiguous regional unity. BIMSTEC not only connects South and Southeast Asia, but also the ecologies of the Great Himalayas and the Bay of Bengal.

- Fourteen priority sectors of cooperation have been identified and several BIMSTEC centres have been established to focus on those sectors.
- The permanent secretariat of the BIMSTEC is in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

History of Formation

- In 1997, a new sub-regional grouping was formed in Bangkok under the name BIST-EC (Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, and Thailand Economic Cooperation).
- Following the inclusion of Myanmar on 22 December 1997 during a special Ministerial Meeting in Bangkok, the Group was renamed 'BIMST-EC' (Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation).
- In 2004, at the first Summit the grouping was renamed as BIMSTEC or the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation.

There are 14 main sectors of BIMSTEC along technological and economic cooperation among south Asian and southeast Asian countries along the coast of the Bay of Bengal.

1. Trade & Investment
2. Transport & Communication
3. Energy
4. Tourism
5. Technology
6. Fisheries
7. Agriculture
8. Public Health
9. Poverty Alleviation
10. Counter-Terrorism & Transnational Crime
11. Environment & Disaster Management
12. People-to-People Contact
13. Cultural Cooperation
14. Climate Change

The BIMSTEC uses the alphabetical order for the Chairmanship which has been taken in rotation commencing with Bangladesh (1997–1999).

Significance of BIMSTEC

- BIMSTEC acts as a platform for intra-regional cooperation between SAARC and ASEAN members.
- Around one-fourth of the world's traded goods cross the Bay of Bengal every year.

Important Connectivity Projects related to BIMSTEC

1. **Kaladan Multimodal Project** – links India and Myanmar.
2. **Asian Trilateral Highway** – connecting India and Thailand through Myanmar.

3. **Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) Motor Vehicles Agreement** – for seamless flow of passenger and cargo traffic.

Strategic Significance for India

Enables India to pursue three core policies:

1. **Neighbourhood First**- primacy to the country's immediate periphery;
 2. **Act East**- connect India with Southeast Asia; and
 3. **Economic development of India's North Eastern states**- by linking them to the Bay of Bengal region via Bangladesh and Myanmar.
- India has moved from Look East Policy to Act East Policy and Indo Pacific cooperation through its diaspora, culture and connectivity. This has led to India's goodwill in the region.
 - Allows India to counter China's creeping influence in countries around the Bay of Bengal due to the spread of its Belt and Road Initiative.
 - Physical connectivity with BIMSTEC would also help India integrate itself with ASEAN's Master Plan of Connectivity 2025.
 - A new platform for India to engage with its neighbours with South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) becoming dysfunctional because of differences between India and Pakistan.
 - BIMSTEC suddenly received special attention as New Delhi chose to treat it as a more practical instrument for regional cooperation over a faltering SAARC.

Challenges faced by BIMSTEC

- The goal now should be to overcome the obstacles leading to BIMSTEC's success:
- A strong BIMSTEC presupposes cordial and tension-free bilateral relations among all its member-states. This has not been the case, given the trajectory of India-Nepal, India-Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh-Myanmar ties in recent years. Bangladesh is facing one of the worst refugee crises of Rohingyas from Myanmar who are fleeing prosecution in the state of Rakhine in Myanmar. There is also a border conflict between Myanmar and Thailand.
- Uncertainties over SAARC hovers, complicating matters. Both Kathmandu and Colombo want the SAARC summit revived, even as they cooperate within BIMSTEC, with diluted zeal.
- China's decisive intrusion in the South-Southeast Asian space has cast dark shadows. A renowned Bangladeshi scholar argued at a recent conference that BIMSTEC would make progress if China is accepted as its principal interlocutor and partner. This perspective has hardly any takers in India and its friendly partners in the grouping.
- The military coup in Myanmar, brutal crackdown of protesters and continuation of popular resistance resulting in a protracted impasse have produced a new set of challenges. Despite them, the BIMSTEC foreign ministers could meet virtually — but will it be as easy for the summit to be held, with the much-maligned Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing in attendance at Colombo?
- BIMSTEC planned to hold summits every two years, ministerial meetings every year, but only four summits have taken place in 20 years up to 2018.
 - In fact, BIMSTEC received special attention as New Delhi chose to treat it as a more practical instrument for regional cooperation over a faltering SAARC.

- Most multilateral groupings from G20 to ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation) held their deliberations at the highest political level even in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, BIMSTEC leaders failed to do so.
- BIMSTEC FTA was negotiated in 2004, talks on it are yet to be concluded.
 - The BIMSTEC Free Trade Area Framework Agreement (BFTAFA) has been signed by all member nations to stimulate trade and investment in the parties, and attract outsiders to trade with and invest in the BIMSTEC countries at a higher level.
 - A January 2018 study by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry had suggested that BIMSTEC urgently needed a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement to be a real game changer.
 - Ideally it should cover trade in goods, services and investment; promote regulatory harmonisation; adopt policies that develop regional value chains; and eliminate non-tariff barriers.
- The formation of another sub-regional initiative, the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) Forum, with the proactive membership of China, has created more doubts about the exclusive potential of BIMSTEC.

Conclusion

As BIMSTEC readies itself to celebrate the silver jubilee of its formation in 2022, the grouping needs to reinvent itself and it should consider holding regular annual summits. Only then will its leaders convince the region about their strong commitment to the new vision they have for this unique platform linking South Asia and Southeast Asia.

IMPACT: AFTER US EXIT FROM AFGHANISTAN

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-Mohammed, 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.

IRAN STARTS ENRICHING URANIUM TO 60%

Context:

Iran began enriching uranium to 60%, its highest level ever, edging closer to weapons-grade levels to pressure talks in Vienna aimed at restoring its nuclear deal with world powers after an attack on its main atomic site.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Foreign Policy and Treaties that affect India's Interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About the current increase in enrichment by Iran
2. About Uranium Enrichment
3. About the 2015 Nuclear Deal

About the current increase in enrichment by Iran

- A top official said only a few grams an hour of uranium gas would be enriched up to 60 % purity — triple the level it once did but at a rate far slower than what Tehran could produce.

- International inspectors already said Iran planned to do so above-ground at its Natanz nuclear site, not deep within its underground halls hardened to withstand airstrikes.
- The move is likely to raise tensions even as Iran negotiates in Vienna over a way to allow the U.S. back into the agreement and lift the crushing economic sanctions it faces. However, its scope also provides Iran with a way to quickly de-escalate if it chose.
- While 60 % is higher than any level Iran previously enriched uranium, it is still lower than weapons-grade levels of 90 %.
- Iran had been enriching up to 20 % — even that was a short technical step to weapons grade. The deal limited Iran's enrichment to 3.67 %.
- Iran insists its nuclear program is peaceful, though the West and the IAEA say Tehran had an organized military nuclear program up until the end of 2003.
- Iran previously had said it could use uranium enriched up to 60 % for nuclear-powered ships. However, the Islamic Republic currently has no such ships in its navy.

About Uranium Enrichment

- Natural uranium consists of two different isotopes – nearly 99% U-238 and only around 0.7% of U-235.
- U-235 is a fissile material that can sustain a chain reaction in a nuclear reactor.
- Enrichment process increases the proportion of U-235 through the process of isotope separation (U-238 is separated from U-235).
- For nuclear weapons, enrichment is required upto 90% or more which is known as Highly Enriched Uranium/weapons-grade uranium.
- For nuclear reactors, enrichment is required upto 3-4% which is known as Low Enriched Uranium/reactor-grade uranium.
- Highly enriched uranium has a concentration of 20% or more and is used in research reactors.

About the 2015 Nuclear Deal

- In 2015, Iran with the P5+1 group of world powers – the USA, UK, France, China, Russia, and Germany agreed on a long-term deal on its nuclear programme.
- The deal was named as Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and in common parlance as Iran Nuclear Deal.
- Under the deal, Iran agreed to curb its nuclear activity in return for the lifting of sanctions and access to global trade.
- The agreement allowed Iran to accumulate small amounts of uranium for research but it banned the enrichment of uranium, which is used to make reactor fuel and nuclear weapons.
- Iran was also required to redesign a heavy-water reactor being built, whose spent fuel would contain plutonium suitable for a bomb and to allow international inspections.
- In May 2018, the USA abandoned the deal criticising it as flawed and reinstated and tightened its sanctions.
- Since sanctions were tightened, Iran has been steadily breaking some of its commitments to pressure the remaining signatories to find a way to provide sanctions relief.

Concerns

- Enrichment could shorten Iran's time it would take to develop a nuclear bomb.
- Previously the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) expressed serious concerns over Iran's blocking of inspections of two suspect locations of Uranium enrichment for more than four months.

THE ROOTS OF A DECENTRED INTERNATIONAL ORDER

Context:

- The primary geopolitical rivals – Russia and China may possibly provide the strategic and tactical counterbalance to the hegemony of America. The international order is under threat of the rising economic power of the BRICS nations, with China dominating in its economic and military capacity.
- It is apparent that the future of global politics requires a significant programmatic agenda in the hands of the rising powers that are aggressively building a parallel economic order envisaging new centres of hegemonic power.

Relevance:

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

Mains Questions:

In the post-pandemic period, developing economies should rise to meet the U.S.-led world order. Explain. Analyse the statement in the context of India US relations. (15 marks)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Present trends: Rising powers and an agenda
2. Dents to American supremacy
3. India US relations
4. Irritants in India-US Relationship:
5. Direction by China
6. Conclusion

Present trends: Rising powers and an agenda

- From the Renaissance period onwards, 14th-15th century Europe began its hegemonic ambitions through trade and commerce, taking almost 500 years to colonise and influence nations across the world.
- The tectonic shifts in the postcolonial era saw the interrogation of Eurocentrism and its biased accounts of the East.
- A meeting of Asian and African states – Bandung Conference of 1955 set the schema for the rise of Asia, politically and economically.
- The confrontational stance was therefore the expected corollary in third world struggles to create a parallel order.

Dents to American supremacy

- America will continue to play a prime role in international affairs though its image representing universal brotherhood has sharply declined under the Trump regime, particularly his foreign policy of threatening to withdraw from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and withdrawing from the Paris Agreement on climate change.

- Other threats such as terrorism, ethnic conflicts and the warning of annihilation owing to climate change necessarily demand joint international action where American “exceptionalism” becomes an incongruity and an aberration.
- The world is, as a result, witness to a more decentred and pluralistic global order, a rather compelling vision of the empowerment of liberal forces standing up for an international order incentivised by long-term structural shifts in the global economy, indicating the evolving nature of power and status in international politics.

India US relations

- **Economic relations:** The United States seeks an expanded trade relationship that is reciprocal and fair. A burgeoning trade relation can be witnessed through:
 - Energy exports: In 2018 India purchased 48.2 million barrels of U.S. crude oil, a significant increase from 9.6 million in 2017.
 - Service exchange: In immigration, Indians continue to dominate the high-skilled visa category, at times making up over 70 percent of H1-B visa holders.
- **International Cooperation:** India and the US cooperate closely at multilateral organizations, including the United Nations, G-20, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum, International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and World Trade Organization.
- **Strategic Convergences:** Balancing China’s rise in the international system, and more particularly in the Indo-Pacific region, is a clear strategic convergence between India and the United States.
 - India and the U.S. seem determined to counter China’s maritime expansion, which is seen as a threat to their trade routes in the Indian and Pacific Oceans.
 - Co-operation at Forums like QUAD (India, the United States, Japan and Australia), to secure the IndoPacific and countering Chinese accession in Asian geo politics.
- **Recognition of Indo-Pacific Realm:** The term “Indo-Pacific region” has now replaced the term “Asia Pacific region” in the American diplomatic lexicon.
 - The Trump administration has consistently described India as one of its major allies in the Indo Pacific region.
 - It renamed the former U.S. Pacific Command as Indo-Pacific Command, emphasizing the strategic linkage between the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

Irritants in India-US Relationship:

- India-Russia Relations: India’s decision to buy the Russian made S-400 Triumph missile defence system despite threats of American sanctions through the Countering America’s Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) is a case, where Washington’s priorities clash with India’s interests.
- The US wants India to move away from Russian equipment and platforms, as it feels this may expose its technology and information to Moscow.
- India is wary of Pakistan’s deep-rooted ties with Pentagon, and Washington’s dependence on Rawalpindi for access to Afghanistan as well as its exit strategy.
- Trade ties: Trade ties are also a source of tensions. India has been a huge beneficiary of the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) program of USA, which has been ended recently by the Trump administration.

Direction by China

- The current raging novel coronavirus pandemic has retarded economic development and sent many economies such as Brazil, India, Turkey and South Africa into a downward spiral. However, with China spearheading Asian regionalism, a serious challenge is possible but there is deep scepticism about China's self-enhancing economic and military greed reflecting its personal economic rise.
- China must strengthen the opposition to the West through the promotion of regional multilateral institutions. Its self-centred promotion of building its own stature through the recent concentration on principle of the Belt and Road Initiative and the Silk Road project has provoked an understandable clash with India and Japan.
- More than having individual partners or allies, China must embrace and give a push to multilateral affiliations in order to not further exacerbate regional tensions.

Shifting tides of Power

- Regional military activity can be seen in Russia's assertion of power in Georgia and Ukraine, Turkey in the east of the Mediterranean, India's disputes with Pakistan and China's infiltration into India as well as its rivalry within its periphery. History is a witness to nations beginning to flex their muscles once economic rise is assured and recognised across the world.
- China and India clearly have the age-old potential to lead as, historically, they have been pioneers of some of the oldest civilisations in the world.
- Economically China must spearhead the challenge to the established western world that has ingrained its superiority in the consciousness of the developing world for centuries. The fragmentation of global governance consequently can no longer be handled solely by America.
- Thus, a more nuanced understanding of power in the circumstance of the declining authority of the West has to be arrived at especially when China is still far from approaching U.S. power in just about any area, particularly in its economic or military strengths.
- However, China's growing power has compelled the current U.S. Secretary of State to encourage NATO members to join the U.S. in viewing China as an economic and security threat.
- Thus, a kind of dualism persists in the world order with no clear hegemony that can be bestowed on one single nation.
- Global power gradually extends across a wider range of countries, restoring contestation necessary for the smooth working of a balanced world order, thereby allowing multiple narratives to co-exist on the international level.
- This has implications for the functioning of a civilisation that is not controlled by the indomitable will of one.

Conclusion

- The emphasis, therefore, would be a move towards restructuring and advancement, as well as adopting an oppositional posture as a robust replacement of subservience to western hegemony.
- The challenges of the 21st century can be met head on through mutual sharing of knowledge and more ground-breaking inclusive treaties.
- It is feared that there could be a possibility of a multipolar world turning disordered and unstable, but it is up to the rising nations to attempt to overcome territorial aspirations and strike a forceful note of faith on cultural mediation, worldwide legitimacy, and the appeal of each society in terms of its democratic values.

JUNTA LEADER OR MYANMAR SHADOW GOVT. FOR ASEAN MEET

Context:

Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing is set to join a special ASEAN summit according to Thai Foreign Ministry.

Myanmar's shadow government urged Southeast Asian leaders to give it a seat at the table during crisis talks next week, and not to recognise the military regime that seized power in a February coup.

Relevance:

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

Dimensions of the Article:

1. The story so far: Situation of chaos in Myanmar
2. About the recent developments in the Myanmar Coup
3. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

The story so far: Situation of chaos in Myanmar

The story so far: Situation of chaos in Myanmar

- For most of its independent years, the country has been engrossed in rampant ethnic strife and its myriad ethnic groups have been involved in one of the world's longest-running ongoing civil wars.
- During this time, the United Nations and several other organisations have reported consistent and systematic human rights violations in the country.
- In 2011, the military junta was officially dissolved following a 2010 general election, and a nominally civilian government was installed.
- This, along with the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and political prisoners, had improved the country's human rights record and foreign relations and has led to the easing of trade and other economic sanctions.
- There is, however, continuing criticism of the government's treatment of ethnic minorities, its response to the ethnic insurgency, and religious clashes.
- In the 2015 election, Aung San Suu Kyi's party won a majority in both houses – however, the Burmese military remained a powerful force in politics.

About the recent developments in the Myanmar Coup

- The February Coup triggered a massive uprising, bringing hundreds of thousands of protesters to the streets to demand a return to democracy, while civil servants have boycotted work in a bid to shutter the junta's administration.
- The military has deployed lethal force to quell the anti-coup movement, killing more than 720 people.
- The international community has largely condemned the generals for use of force against unarmed civilians — imposing targeted sanctions against top military brass, their families and army-linked businesses.
- The military chief's invitation to the meeting of the 10-country Association of Southeast Asian Nations has drawn scorn from activists and former lawmakers who have urged foreign leaders not to formally recognise the junta.

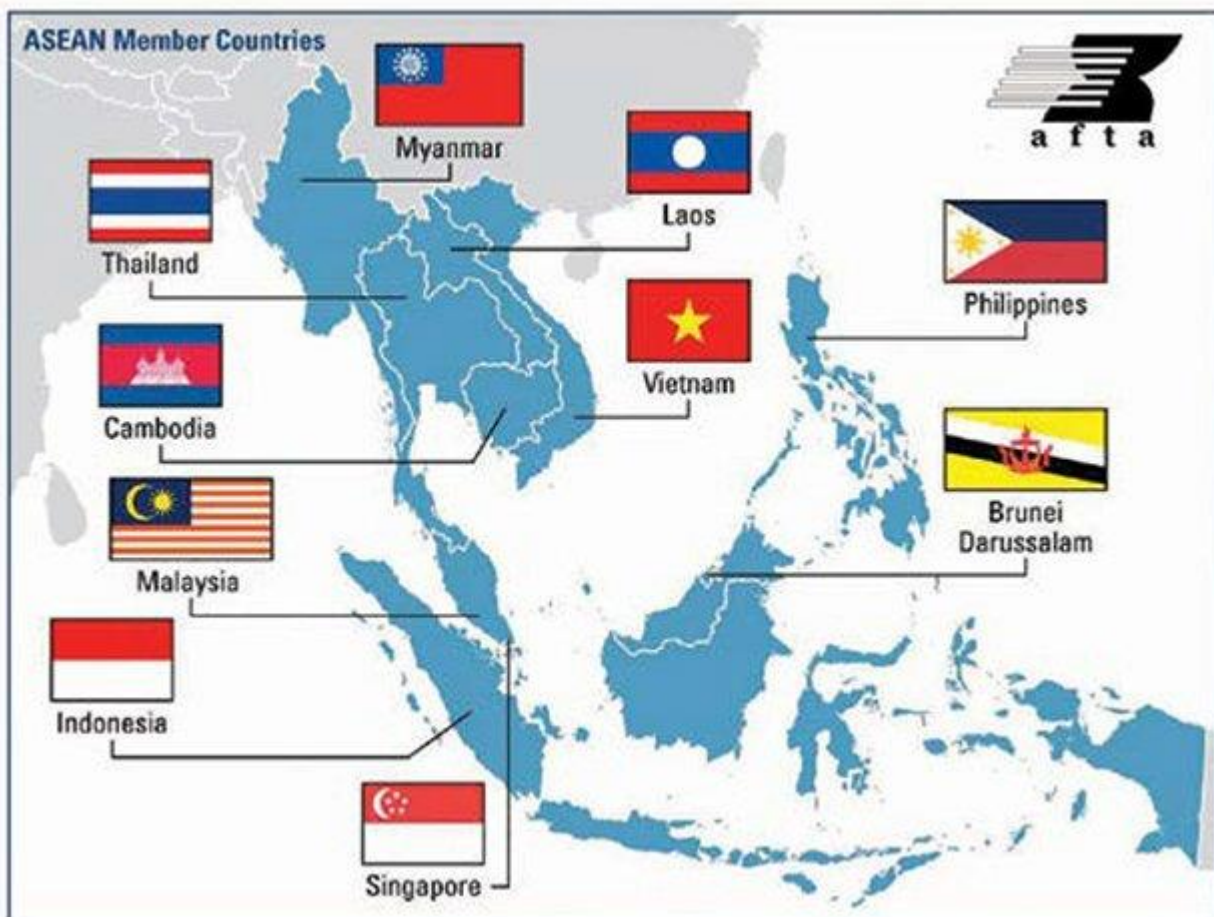
The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

- 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

1. Indonesia
2. Malaysia
3. Philippines
4. Singapore
5. Thailand
6. Brunei
7. Vietnam
8. Laos
9. Myanmar
10. Cambodia





ASEAN's Objectives:

1. To promote intergovernmental cooperation and facilitates economic, political, security, military, educational, and sociocultural integration among its members and other countries in Asia.
2. To maintain close and beneficial cooperation with existing international and regional organisations.
3. To promote regional peace and stability through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law and adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter.
4. To accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development for a prosperous and peaceful community of Southeast Asian Nations.

EUROPEAN COUNCIL ON EU'S INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGY

Context:

The Council of the European Union approved conclusions on a European Union strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific to “reinforce its strategic focus, presence and actions” in this region with the aim to contribute to “regional stability, security, prosperity and sustainable development,” at a time of “rising challenges and tensions in the region.”

Relevance:

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

Dimensions of the Article:

1. European Union (EU)
2. Council of the European Union
3. What is the Indo-Pacific Region?
4. Significance of Indo-Pacific for India

European Union (EU)

- 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

1. Ensure the free movement of people, goods, services and capital within the internal market;
2. Enact legislation in justice and home affairs;
3. 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.



Council of the European Union

- The Council of the European Union is one of three legislative bodies and together with the European Parliament serves to amend and approve the proposals of the European Commission, which holds legislative initiative.

- The Council of the European Union and the European Council are the only EU institutions that are explicitly intergovernmental, that is forums whose attendees express and represent the position of their member state's executive, be they ambassadors, ministers or heads of state/government.
- The Presidency of the Council rotates every six months among the governments of EU member states, with the relevant ministers of the respective country holding the Presidency at any given time ensuring the smooth running of the meetings and setting the daily agenda.
- Its decisions are made by qualified majority voting in most areas, unanimity in others, or just simple majority for procedural issues.

What is the Indo-Pacific Region?

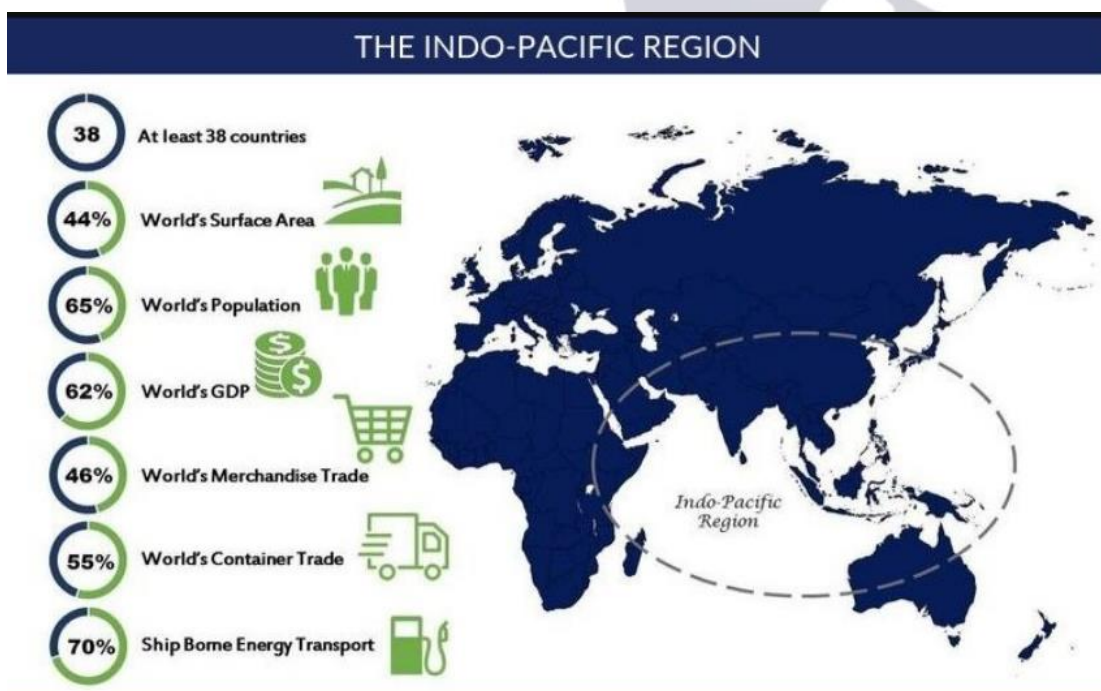
The "Indo-Pacific" idea was originally conceived in 2006- 07. The term 'IndoPacific' combines the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and the Western Pacific Region (WP) – inclusive of the contiguous seas off East Asia and Southeast Asia – into a singular regional construct.

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**
 1. Gives an extension to India's 'Act East Policy'
 2. Entry in multilateral groupings- such as Nuclear Supplier's Group and permanent seat in UN Security Council.
 3. 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
 4. 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
 1. Presence of natural resources- like oil and hydrocarbons in South China sea, which can help India diversify its import basket.
 2. Presence of high market potential for Indian exports such as engineering services, ICT services etc.
 3. Development of North Eastern States- that can become a gateway for India to integrate with this region.
 4. Integration of Blue Economy Aspirations- where, ocean ecosystems bring economic and social benefits that are efficient, equitable and sustainable for the entire region.

HOT SPRINGS AND GOGRA POST IN INDIA-CHINA BORDER

Context:

During the 11th round of discussions between the senior military commanders of India and China to resolve the over 11-month long standoff in eastern Ladakh – there are reports that China had refused to vacate two of the four original friction points -Hot Springs & Gogra Post.

Relevance:

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

Dimensions of the Article:

1. What are PP15 and 17A?
2. Where are Hot Springs & Gogra Post?
3. What is the importance of this region?

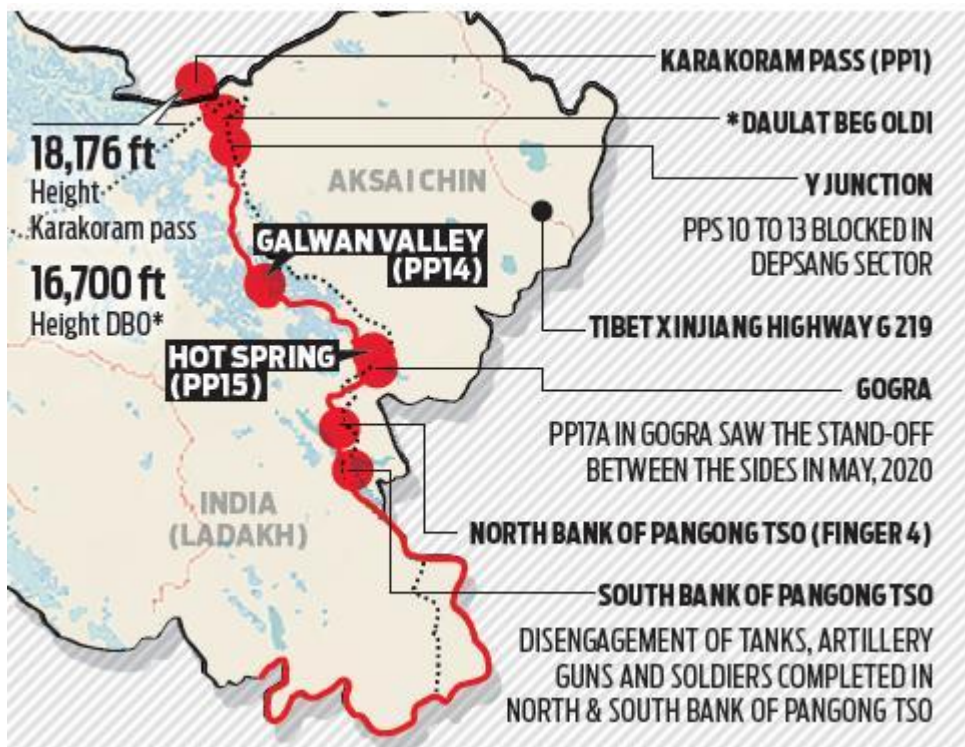
What are PP15 and 17A?

- Along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) between India and China, Indian Army has been given certain locations that its troops have to 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).
- CSG was set-up in 1976, when Indira Gandhi was the prime minister, and is the apex decision-making body on China.
- 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. It is an important exercise since the boundary between India and China is not yet officially demarcated.
- PP15 and PP17A are two of the 65 patrolling points in Ladakh along the LAC.

Where are Hot Springs & Gogra Post?

- Both of these are close to the Chang Chenmo river in the Galwan sub-sector of the LAC in eastern Ladakh. While Hot Springs is just north of the Chang Chenmo river, 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, which became a major flashpoint and a violent faceoff in June 2020 had left 20 Indian and at least four Chinese troops dead.

PM IAS
be inspired



What is the importance of this region?

- 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.
- Both PP15 and PP17A are in an area where India and China largely agree on the alignment of the LAC, which comes southeast from Galwan Valley, turns down at Kongka La and moves towards Ann Pass before reaching the north bank of Pangong Tso.
- China has a major post of the People's Liberation Army a few km east of Kongka La, while Indian posts lie southwest of it.

RAUL CASTRO RESIGNS AS CUBA'S LEADER

Context:

- Raul Castro resigned as head of Cuba's Communist Party, ending an era of formal leadership by himself and his brother Fidel Castro that began with the 1959 revolution.
- Cuba's Party congress chose Mr. Díaz-Canel to be its leader, adding that crucial post to the title of president he assumed in 2018. He replaces his mentor Raul Castro sealing a political dynasty that had held power since the 1959 revolution.

Relevance:

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

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Cuba's History

2. Cuba–India relations

Cuba's History

- From the 15th century, it was a colony of Spain until the Spanish–American War of 1898, when Cuba was occupied by the United States and gained nominal independence as a de facto United States protectorate in 1902.
- In 1940, Cuba attempted to strengthen its democratic system, but mounting political radicalization and social strife culminated in a coup and subsequent dictatorship under Fulgencio Batista in 1952.
- Open corruption and oppression under Batista's rule led to his ousting in January 1959 by the 26th of July Movement, which afterwards established communist rule under the leadership of Fidel Castro.
- Since 1965, the state has been governed by the Communist Party of Cuba.
- The country was a point of contention during the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States, and a nuclear war nearly broke out during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962.
- In 2019, a new Constitution was approved which officially recognizes the right to private property, while also reassuring the central government's authority over the regulation of production and land.

Cuba–India relations

- India was among the first nations to recognize Cuba following the 1959 Cuban revolution.
- India opened its embassy in Havana in 1960 itself symbolizing Indian solidarity with the Cuban revolution.
- India has always voted in favour of UN General Assembly resolutions calling for an end to the United States embargo against Cuba.
- Cuba has publicly expressed support for India's candidature for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council on numerous occasions.
- Both nations are also members of the Non-Aligned Movement.



Trade

- The main commodities exported from India to Cuba are pharmaceutical products, organic chemicals, plastic and rubber articles, machinery and mechanical appliances.
- The main commodities Cuba exports to India are tobacco products including cigars, raw hides and skins, and leather.

India's Support to Cuba

- India donated a 5 KW solar power plant to Cuba in 1995.
- In 2008, India wrote off a \$62 million loan and interest that it had provided to the Cuban government.
- India provided Cuba with \$2 million in cash in the aftermath of Hurricanes Gustav, Ike and Paloma in August–September 2008.
- Citizens of Cuba are eligible for scholarships under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations.

XI JINPING AT THE BOAO FORUM

Context:

China's President Xi Jinping said that global rules cannot be imposed "by one or a few countries" and attempts to "decouple" would not benefit any nation while speaking at the annual Boao Forum.

Relevance:

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

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About Boao Forum
2. Highlights of BFA Annual Conference 2021

About Boao Forum

- The Boao Forum for Asia (BFA) is an international not for profit organization which was jointly initiated by 26 member states in 2001, the members have now increased to 29.
- **India is also a member of the BFA.**
- Its annual conference is held in Boao, Hainan province of China on a regular basis.
- The establishment of BFA is modelled on the lines of the World Economic Forum which bases its annual meeting in Davos-Klosters, Switzerland. Thus earning the name of 'Davos of the East'.
- The founding purpose of BFA was to promote economic integration in Asia. Its mission now is to pool positive energy for the development of Asia and the world.
- The forum has not only played a unique role in pooling consensus and putting forward valuable "Boao proposals," but also engaged countries in addressing global issues and promoting world development and prosperity.
- Its five focal areas include technology innovation, health, education, culture and media in response to the new economy.



Highlights of BFA Annual Conference 2021

- The forum witnessed more than 2500 participants coming from more than 60 countries. This year's theme is 'A World in Change: Join Hands to Strengthen Global Governance and Advance Belt and Road Cooperation'.
- The main agenda is to strengthen mutual understanding in the post-pandemic era, create additional incentives for overall socio-economic growth and effective global governance.
- An annual report on Asian Economy was released on the occasion which highlighted the importance of Asian economies which have fared well despite the ongoing pandemic.
- In terms of purchasing power parity, Asia's share in the global economic aggregate in 2020 reached 47.3%, up 0.9 percentage points from 2019. It showed that the economic integration of all Asian economies is accelerating.

WORLD PRESS FREEDOM INDEX 2021: INDIA 142ND

Context:

The World Press Freedom Index 2021 placed India at 142nd rank yet again out of 180 nations, same as the ranking in 2020.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Important International Institutions and their reports), GS-II: Polity and Governance (Freedom of Speech)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. What is the World Press Freedom Index?

2. Highlights of the Report
3. Highlights of the report specific to India
4. Freedom of Press in India

What is the World Press Freedom Index?

- World Press Freedom Index is an index published each year by the international journalism (non-profit body), Reporters Without Borders [also called Reporters Sans Frontieres (RSF)].
- RSF is an independent NGO with consultative status with the United Nations, UNESCO, the Council of Europe and the International Organization of the Francophonie (OIF).
- The World Press Freedom Index ranks countries and regions according to the level of freedom available to journalists.
- It is NOT an indicator on the quality of journalism.
- The parameters used in the World Press Freedom Index include pluralism, media independence, media environment and self-censorship, legislative framework, transparency, and the quality of the infrastructure that supports the production of news and information.

Highlights of the Report

- Journalism is completely or partly blocked in 73% of the 180 countries.
- Only 12, i.e., 7% of the Indexed 180 countries can claim to offer a favorable environment for journalism.
- The Report has raised concern about the larger Asia-Pacific region as several nations in an attempt to curb freedom of press have in place draconian laws on 'sedition,' 'state secrets' and 'national security'.
- Norway is Ranked 1st for the fifth year in the row, followed by Finland and Denmark.
- China is ranked 177th and hence is just above the bottom 3 – Turkmenistan at 178, North Korea at 179 and Eritrea at the bottom.

Highlights of the report specific to India

- India was ranked 142 in the year 2020 as well, thus showing no improvement in the environment it provides to its journalists.
- India has fared poorly amongst its neighbours with Nepal at 106, Sri Lanka at 127 and Bhutan at 65. Pakistan is a close follower at 145th spot.
- India is among the countries classified "bad" for journalism and is termed as one of the most dangerous countries for journalists trying to do their jobs properly.
- The report has blamed an environment of intimidation created by the nationalist government for any critical journalist often brandishing them as anti-state or anti national.
- The situation is worrying in Kashmir, where incidents of harassment of reporters by police and paramilitaries have surfaced.

Reasons Behind India's Poor Performance

- Journalists are exposed to every kind of attack, including police violence against reporters, ambushes by political activists, and reprisals instigated by criminal groups or corrupt local officials.
- The journalists have often been subjected to coordinated hate campaigns on social networks. Such campaigns are particularly violent when the targets are women.

Freedom of Press in India

- Article 19, said to be the foundation of Democratic rule in India, guarantees freedom of speech and expression to Indian citizens only.
- These freedoms are not absolute and they can all be curtailed by imposing some reasonable restriction.
- Reasonable restrictions can be imposed (imposed only on the grounds mentioned in the constitution) only by authority of law and NOT by executive action alone.

Freedom of Speech and Expression actually covers:

1. Right to Information
2. Freedom of press
3. Right to privacy
4. Right to hoist the national flag
5. Right to demonstration or picketing, but not right to strike
6. Rights to Not Speak

Status of Freedom of Press

- Unlike several countries such as USA, there is no separate provision guaranteeing the freedom of press, but the Supreme Court in Sakaal paper vs. Union of India case, has held that the freedom of press is included in the “freedom of expression” under Article 19(1) (a).
- In Brij Bhushan case, SC clarified that there is no prior censorship on the media, i.e., no prior permission is needed.
- 44th amendment, 1976 introduced Article 361A that provides protection to a person publishing proceeding of the Parliament and State Legislatures.

In the Indian Express case, it was clarified that the Freedom of Press includes:

1. Right to Information
 2. Right to Publish
 3. Right to Circulate
- In 1997, the Prasar Bharti Act grants autonomy to Doordarshan and All India Radio (which means it can criticize the state policies and actions).
 - In 1966, Press Council of India was created to regulate the print media.
 - The National Commission to Review the Working of Constitution (NCRWC) recommended that Freedom of Press be explicitly granted and not be left implied in the Freedom of Speech.

‘COUNTRY OF PARTICULAR CONCERN’ – RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Context:

The US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has recommended for the second year in the row to put India on a list ('Countries of Particular Concern' or CPCs) for the worst violations of religious freedoms in 2020.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Effect of Policies & Politics of Countries on India's Interests, Important International Institutions and Reports), GS-II: Social Justice

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About the International Religious Freedom report
2. About the USCIRF
3. About the previous 2020 report
4. Latest Recommendations of USCIRF
5. Concerns regarding India raised in the 2021 report
6. Recommendations of the USCIRF in the 2021 report

About the International Religious Freedom report

- The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) releases International Religious Freedom report annually.
- The Report consists of country-wise chapters.
- This report includes policy recommendations to the U.S. government based on the report's evaluation of the facts and circumstances of religious freedom violations worldwide.

The Report's primary focus is on two groups of countries:

1. "Country of Particular Concern (CPC)" is a designation by the US Secretary of State of a nation engaged in severe violations of religious freedom under IRFA (International Religious Freedom Act of 1998).
2. A "Special Watch List" country is one that is deemed not to meet all of the CPC criteria but engages in or tolerates severe violations of religious freedom.

About the USCIRF

- The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) is a U.S. federal government commission created by the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) of 1998.
- USCIRF Commissioners are appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives.
- USCIRF's principal responsibilities are to review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State, and the Congress.
- In practice, the USCIRF has little teeth in implementation, but acts as a conscience-keeper for the two branches in the US government – the legislature and the executive.
- The USCIRF is mandated to "monitor the universal right to freedom of religion or belief abroad — however, NOT in the U.S.

About the previous 2020 report

- UCIRF downgraded India to the lowest ranking, “countries of particular concern” (CPC) in its 2020 report and it was the first time since 2004 that India has been placed in this category.
- The report, released in Washington by the federal government commission that functions as an advisory body, placed India alongside countries, including China, North Korea, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.
- The commission noted in its report, which included specific concerns about the Citizenship Amendment Act, the proposed National Register for Citizens, anti-conversion laws and the situation in Jammu and Kashmir.
- The national government used its strengthened parliamentary majority to institute national-level policies violating religious freedom across India, especially for Muslims.
- The panel said that the CPC designation was also recommended because “national and various State governments also allowed nationwide campaigns of harassment and violence against religious minorities to continue with impunity, and engaged in and tolerated hate speech and incitement to violence against them”.
- Under IRFA, the USCIRF called on the administration to “impose targeted sanctions on Indian government agencies and officials responsible for severe violations of religious freedom by freezing those individuals’ assets and/or barring their entry into the United States under human rights-related financial and visa authorities, citing specific religious freedom violations”.

Latest Recommendations of USCIRF

- Recommendations for the CPC list are Russia, Syria and Vietnam and India.
- Countries already on the CPCs list and recommended by USCIRF for re-designation are Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, Nigeria, North Korea, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.
- Afghanistan, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Indonesia, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Turkey and Uzbekistan are recommended for a ‘Special Watch List’, along with Cuba and Nicaragua, both of which were already on the list for 2019.
- The report also recommends seven non-state actors for redesignation as “entities of particular concern” (EPCs)—al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, the Houthis, Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), Jamaat Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), and the Taliban.

Concerns regarding India raised in the 2021 report

1. **Passage of the Religiously Discriminatory Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (CAA):** CAA fast-tracks citizenship for non-Muslim refugees from South Asian countries meeting certain other criteria.
2. **Delhi Riots:** The report mentions the attack that took place on religious minorities during Delhi riots by the religious majority population in February 2020.
3. **National Register of Citizens (NRC):** The consequences of exclusion – as exemplified by a large detention camp being built in Assam – are potentially devastating.
4. **Anti-Conversion Laws:** Despite India’s constitutional protections for religious freedom, approximately one-third of India’s 28 states limit or prohibit religious conversion to protect the dominant religion from perceived threats from religious minorities.
5. **Disinformation and Incitement of Violence:** Government officials and nonstate actors continued to use social media and other forms of communication to harass and spread hatred and disinformation against minority communities, including Muslims, Christians, and Dalits.

6. **Religious Freedom in Jammu and Kashmir:** In Muslim-majority Jammu and Kashmir, restrictions on freedom of movement and assembly negatively impacted religious freedom, including the observance of religious holy days and the ability to attend prayers.
7. **Closing Space for Civil Society:** Government officials used the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) and other statutes to detain advocates, media, and academics, including religious minorities.

Recommendations of the UCIRF in the 2021 report

- It has recommended the US administration to impose targeted sanctions on Indian individuals and entities for 'severe violations of religious freedom'.
- Condemn ongoing religious freedom violations and support religious organizations and human rights groups being targeted for their advocacy of religious freedom.
- The US administration should promote inter-faith dialogue and the rights of all communities at bilateral and multilateral forums "such as the ministerial of the Quadrilateral (the Quad).
- The US Congress should raise issues in the US-India bilateral space, such as by hosting hearings, writing letters and constituting Congressional delegations.

AUSTRALIA ENDS CHINESE DEALS ON NATIONAL INTEREST

Context:

Australia said that it cancelled two accords between Victoria State and China on the Belt and Road Initiative because they were out of line with the federal government's foreign policy, which sees a "free and open Indo-Pacific" as a key goal.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (India and its Neighborhood, International Treaties & Agreements affecting India's Interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Recent tussle between China and Australia
2. Recently in news: Australia suspended extradition treaty with Hong Kong
3. 5G Club plan to counter China

Recent tussle between China and Australia

- The Australian government said that the accords were cancelled because his federal government didn't want other levels of government to enter into agreements that are in conflict with Australia's foreign policy. Under a new process, States must consult with the Foreign Minister before signing agreements with other nations.
- A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman responded by urging Australia to abandon its "Cold War mentality and ideological bias" and "immediately correct its mistakes and change course".
- The Chinese Embassy earlier criticised the move by Foreign Minister Marise Payne to veto two agreements signed by Victoria State as "provocative", and said it would further damage ties.

Recently in news: Australia suspended extradition treaty with Hong Kong

- Australia suspended its extradition treaty with Hong Kong and extended visas for Hong Kong residents in response to China's imposition of a tough national security law on the semi-autonomous territory.

- Australia announced a range of visas that will be extended from two to five years and offers of pathways to permanent residency visas, although, it is not clear how many Hong Kongers are expected to get the extensions.
- The move comes after China bypassed Hong Kong's Legislative Council to impose the sweeping security legislation without public consultation.
- Critics view it as a further deterioration of freedoms promised to the former British colony.

5G Club plan to counter China

- India and Australia are sharing experiences on protecting critical infrastructure, including 5G networks, said a senior Australian High Commission official while talking of the huge increase in cybersecurity cooperation between the two countries, however, clarifying that Australia has no intention of banning Chinese apps like India has done.
- India and Australia have a close and ongoing dialogue and exchange a range of experiences, including what is being done regarding critical infrastructure and aspects, including our 5G network, and how to police the dark web.
- In August 2018, Australia had banned Chinese companies from offering 5G services, citing national security.
- India banned 59 Chinese apps citing national security and later banned 47 more Chinese apps.
- Britain said that it was pushing the U.S. to form a club of 10 nations that could develop its own 5G technology and reduce dependence on Huawei.
- Proposed D10 club of democratic partners includes G7 countries – UK, US, Italy, Germany, France, Japan and Canada – plus Australia, South Korea and India.
- It will aim to create alternative suppliers of 5G equipment and other technologies to avoid relying on China.
- It can be seen as a means to ensure that these new entrants belong to like-minded democratic regimes, thus alleviating any security concerns.
- This move will also allow more 5G equipment and technology providers to come up.
- It basically addresses the raised concerns regarding potential surveillance and breach of their national security by China using the state-run Huawei.

PROJECT DANTAK COMPLETES 60 YEARS IN BHUTAN

Context:

Project DANTAK is commemorating its Diamond Jubilee in Bhutan – Indian Ambassador to Bhutan laid a floral wreath at the DANTAK Memorial in Simtokha on April 24, 2021.

As DANTAK celebrates six decades in Bhutan, the project reaffirms its commitment to support the march of Bhutan towards realising the dreams of His Majesty Druk Gyalpo, the plans of the Royal Government of Bhutan and aspirations of the people of the kingdom.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (India and its Neighbourhood, India's investments in foreign countries)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About Project DANTAK

2. India – Bhutan relations

About Project DANTAK

- Project DANTAK is one of the oldest Projects of the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) established on 24th April 1961.
- It was a result of the visionary leadership of the third King of Bhutan and then Prime Minister of India Jawahar Lal Nehru.
- DANTAK was tasked to construct the pioneering motorable roads and over the years, the Project has completed approximately 1600 km of blacktopped roads and 120 km of tracks in Bhutan with 5000 meters of bridges over them.
- The medical and education facilities established by DANTAK in far flung areas were often the first in those locations.
- The food outlets along the road introduced the Bhutanese to Indian delicacies and developed a sweet tooth in them.

Notable projects executed by the project include:

1. Paro Airport,
2. Yonphula Airfield,
3. Thimphu – Trashigang Highway,
4. Telecommunication & Hydro Power Infrastructure,
5. Sherubtse College,
6. Kanglung and India House Estate.

India – Bhutan relations

- India and Bhutan have been sharing ties since 1910 when Bhutan became a protectorate of British India, allowing the British to “guide” its foreign affairs and defence.
- When India declared independence in 1947, Bhutan was among the first nations to recognise it.
- Since then, the relationship between the countries has become stronger, especially because Bhutan also has a historically tense relationship with China.
- India and Bhutan also share deep religio-cultural links. Guru Padmasambhava, a Buddhist saint played an influential role in spreading Buddhism and cementing traditional ties between people in both nations.
- The basis for bilateral relations between India and Bhutan was formed by the Indo-Bhutan Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1949.
- Bhutan shares border with four Indian States: Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, West Bengal and Sikkim.
- Nestled in the Himalayas, Bhutan serves as a buffer between India and China.
- Security of Bhutan’s present borders especially its western border is very important for India.
- Bhutan provides a market for Indian commodities and is a destination for Indian investment. Also, for India, Bhutan is a rich source of hydropower.

- About 60,000 Indian nationals live in Bhutan, employed mostly in the hydro-electric power construction and road industry.



About the Border Roads Organisation (BRO)

- The Border Roads Organisation (BRO) develops and maintains road networks in India's border areas and friendly neighboring countries.
- Currently, the organisation maintains operations in twenty-one states, one UT (Andaman and Nicobar Islands), and neighboring countries such as Afghanistan, Bhutan, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka.
- Presently, BRO is also involved in the construction of a tunnel at the Rohtang pass which is estimated to be ready by 2019.
- The BRO operates in 18 Projects namely: Arunank, Beacon, Brahmanak, Chetak, Deepak, Dantak, Himank, Hirak, Pushpak, Sampark, Setuk, Sewak, Shivalik, Swastik, Udayak, Vartak, Vijayak and Sela tunnel.
- The organisation's operations are spread across India, Bhutan, Myanmar, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan.
- The BRO was formed on 7 May 1960 to secure India's borders and develop infrastructure in remote areas of the north and north-east states of the country.
- The BRO consists of Border Roads Wing under the Ministry of Defense and the General Reserve Engineer Force (GREF). Officers are selected through the Indian Engineering Services (IES) Examination conducted by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC).

AID POURS IN FROM THE WORLD FOR INDIA

Context:

Around 15 countries including the US, Russia, France and the United Kingdom are rushing critical emergency use equipment to enable India counter the COVID-19's deadly second wave.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (India and its Neighbourhood, Foreign Policies affecting India's interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Assistance from the U.S.
2. Assistance from Other Countries

3. India's Vaccine Diplomacy Plan before the second wave

Assistance from the U.S.

- Out of the promised international assistance, a bulk is expected from the United States – which is likely to include emergency medical care units, oxygen-related supplies, vaccine-related items and therapeutics – following President Joe Biden's telephonic conversation with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- An important part of support from the United States will include raw materials required for production of the vaccines here.
- In that regard, US will approve supply of filters that are necessary in the production of Covishield vaccines.
- The U.S. is also expected to release at least 10 million doses of AstraZeneca vaccine after the authorities give a green signal for export to India.
- In addition, to vaccines and oxygen-related items, agencies of India and the U.S. will collaborate more closely in the coming months to defeat the virus. Under the Quad Vaccine Initiative, US Development Finance Corporation (DFC) is funding a substantial expansion of manufacturing capability for BioE, the vaccine manufacturer in India.

Assistance from Other Countries

- Assistance from the leading economies of the world is expected to reach in multiple phases with France this week sending eight large Oxygen Generating Plants and a large number of items like respirators and electric syringe pushers.
- The **French government** is on track to send 5 liquid oxygen containers.
- **Germany** will make an oxygen production plant available for the 3 months (May-July) along with 120 ventilators and protective equipment like KN95 masks.
- **Australia** too announced that it will send 500 ventilators, 1 million surgical masks, 500,000 P2 and N95 masks, and other protective items for the frontline health workers.
- 4 cryogenic oxygen containers were sourced from **Singapore**.
- **Saudi Arabia** has sent 80 MT of liquid oxygen which is currently en route via sea.
- **Thailand** and the **United Arab Emirates** have sent 4 and 6 cryogenic oxygen tanks and 800 oxygen concentrators were sent by **Hong Kong, China**.
- **Ireland** is on track to send 70 oxygen concentrators.

India's Vaccine Diplomacy Plan before the second wave

- Shipments of vaccines were sent by India to the Maldives, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar and the Seychelles.
- The only exception to India's regional vaccine diplomacy would be Pakistan, which has cleared the AstraZeneca vaccine for use, but has neither requested nor discussed any doses from India.
- By financing shipments from India's assistance programmes for cash-strapped neighbouring countries desperately needing such assistance, India shall earn the long-term goodwill of its immediate neighbours and across Indian ocean countries.

- Beyond India's immediate neighbours, South Korea, Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Morocco and South Africa have all shown inclinations to purchase vaccines from India which is estimated to be 60% of the global supply of inoculants.
- If India becomes the manufacturing hub to corona vaccines across the world, it shall give a boost to the GDP of India.

RUSSIA AND THE CZECH REPUBLIC TENSIONS

Context:

- In mirror moves, Russia and the Czech Republic have expelled diplomats from the other country over a story about a Russian plan to 'poison' Czech politicians in 2020.
- Prague (capital of Czech Republic) accused Russian embassy officials of being intelligence operatives, and said that it suspected them of being involved in a 2014 explosion at an arms depot that left two dead.

Relevance:

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

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Diplomatic tensions: Russia, Czech Republic, US and Baltic States
2. Czech accusations on Russian embassy officials (Not important)
3. Maps of the region:

Diplomatic tensions: Russia, Czech Republic, US and Baltic States

- The diplomatic escalation between Prague and Moscow now in 2020-21, is believed to be the most serious since 1989, when the Soviet domination of Eastern Europe ended.
- It also adds to the worsening of relations between the West and Russia, which are already being tested by Russia's military buildup on its western frontier as well as in Crimea, which it annexed from Ukraine in 2014.
- The US has also said that it stands with its NATO ally in its "firm response against Russia's subversive actions on Czech soil".
- The US too has adopted a tough posture against Moscow, and expelled 10 Russian diplomats after accusing the Kremlin of carrying out the "SolarWinds" hack and interfering in the 2020 election.
- Slovakia and the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania followed suit in solidarity by expelling diplomats as well.

Czech accusations on Russian embassy officials (Not important)

- Russia offered scathing criticism of the Czech Republic's decision, saying, "In their desire to please the United States against the background of recent US sanctions against Russia, Czech authorities in this respect even outdid their masters from across the pond".
- According to Czech intelligence, Russian operatives were involved in a 2014 blast near their border with Slovakia.
- Reports in Czech media claimed that munitions at the depot were destined for Ukraine to fight Russia-backed forces, or to forces against the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad, which Russia supports.

- Two persons linked with the blasts have been identified by the Czech Republic, and stand accused in the attempted poisoning of Sergei Skripal, a former Russian double agent.
- Russia has denied all accusations, calling them absurd.

Maps of the region:







INDIA, AUSTRALIA AND JAPAN PUSH SUPPLY CHAIN RESILIENCE

Context:

The Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI) was formally launched by the Trade Ministers of India, Japan and Australia – who are three members of the Quad grouping except the U.S.

Relevance:

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

Dimensions of the Article:

1. What is Supply Chain Resilience?
2. India, Japan and Australia's Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI)
3. India, Japan and Australia on supply chain disruptions and measures

What is Supply Chain Resilience?

- In the context of international trade, supply chain resilience is an approach that helps a country to ensure that it has diversified its supply risk across a clutch of supplying nations instead of being dependent on just one or a few.
- In unanticipated events -whether natural, such as volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, earthquakes or even a pandemic; or manmade, such as an armed conflict in a region — that disrupt supplies from a particular country or even intentional halts to trade, could adversely impact economic activity in the destination country.

India, Japan and Australia's Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI)

- India, Japan and Australia launched the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI) with the aim to create a virtuous cycle of enhancing supply chain resilience with a view to eventually attaining strong, sustainable, balanced and inclusive growth in the Indo-Pacific region.
- The SCRI was first proposed by Japan with the aim of reducing dependence on China amid a likelihood of rechurning of supply chains in the Indo-Pacific region amid the Covid-19 pandemic.
- SCRI will initially focus on sharing best practices on supply chain resilience and holding investment promotion events and buyer-seller matching events to provide opportunities for stakeholders to explore the possibility of diversification of their supply chains.
- Joint measures may include supporting the enhanced utilisation of digital technology and trade and investment diversification.
- Expansion of the SCRI may be considered based on consensus, if needed, in due course. The ministers have decided to convene at least once a year to provide guidance to the implementation and development of the SCRI.

Objectives of the SCRI

1. To attract foreign direct investment to turn the Indo-Pacific into an “economic powerhouse”.
2. To build a mutually complementary relationship among partner countries.
3. To work out a plan to build on the existential supply chain network. Japan and India, for example, have an India-Japan competitiveness partnership dealing with locating the Japanese companies in India.

India, Japan and Australia on supply chain disruptions and measures

- The three sides agreed the pandemic “revealed supply chain vulnerabilities globally and in the region” and “noted the importance of risk management and continuity plans in order to avoid supply chain disruptions”.
- Some of the joint measures they are considering include supporting the enhanced utilisation of digital technology and trade and investment diversification, which is seen as being aimed at reducing their reliance on China.
- The SCRI aims to create a virtuous cycle of enhancing supply chain resilience with a view to eventually attaining strong, sustainable, balanced and inclusive growth in the region.

China's response

China's Foreign Ministry described the move as 'unrealistic' – saying that the formation and development of global industrial and supply chains are determined by market forces and companies' choices. According to China artificial industrial 'transfer' is an unrealistic approach that goes against the economic laws.

EU PARLIAMENT APPROVES POST-BREXIT TRADE TREATY

Context:

European lawmakers have approved the final ratification of the post-Brexit trade deal between the European Union and the United Kingdom, nearly five years after Britain decided to leave the bloc.

Relevance:

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

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About the recent developments regarding Brexit
2. What is Brexit?
3. Reasons of growing relationship between India and EU
4. Impact of Brexit

About the recent developments regarding Brexit

- The EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) is a free trade agreement signed in December 2020, between the EU, the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom) and the United Kingdom (UK).
- The deal was ratified nearly five years after Britain decided to leave the European Union. It has already been ratified by the UK Parliament.

About the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) for Brexit

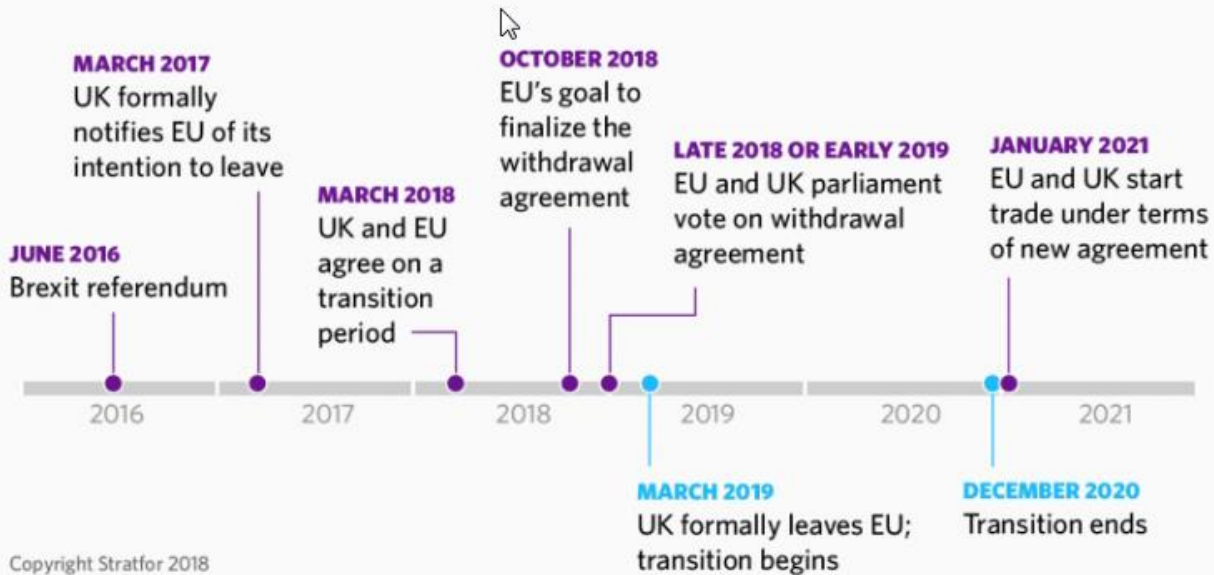
- This Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) deal was provisionally enacted in January 2020 in order to minimize trade disruptions between the EU and the UK.
- Provisional approval was set to expire on 30th April 2021, so the European Parliament's ratification ensures that the flow of trade between the 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.

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 possibility 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.



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

- The United Kingdom is an island nation in northwestern 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.

European Union (EU)

- 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

1. Ensure the free movement of people, goods, services and capital within the internal market;
2. Enact legislation in justice and home affairs;
3. 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.



Council of the European Union

- The Council of the European Union is one of three legislative bodies and together with the European Parliament serves to amend and approve the proposals of the European Commission, which holds legislative initiative.
- The Council of the European Union and the European Council are the only EU institutions that are explicitly intergovernmental, that is forums whose attendees express and represent the position of their member state's executive, be they ambassadors, ministers or heads of state/government.
- The Presidency of the Council rotates every six months among the governments of EU member states, with the relevant ministers of the respective country holding the Presidency at any given time ensuring the smooth running of the meetings and setting the daily agenda.
- Its decisions are made by qualified majority voting in most areas, unanimity in others, or just simple majority for procedural issues.

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.

THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION



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**
 1. Gives an extension to India's 'Act East Policy'
 2. Entry in multilateral groupings- such as Nuclear Supplier's Group and permanent seat in UN Security Council.
 3. 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
 4. 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
 1. Presence of natural resources– like oil and hydrocarbons in South China sea, which can help India diversify its import basket.
 2. Presence of high market potential for Indian exports such as engineering services, ICT services etc.
 3. Development of North Eastern States- that can become a gateway for India to integrate with this region.
 4. Integration of Blue Economy Aspirations– where, ocean ecosystems bring economic and social benefits that are efficient, equitable and sustainable for the entire region.

Reasons of growing relationship between India and EU

- **Changing Geopolitical developments:** As highlighted by EU strategy on India, released in 2018, EU sees EU-India relations in the context of broader geopolitical developments, primarily the rise of China. Impact of China in Europe and Asia (e.g. Belt and Road initiative) has pushed EU to change the nature of its partnerships in the region, particularly with India.
- **Convergence of interests in the Indian Ocean** as the Indian Ocean is the main conduit for global trade and energy flows. India, EU see each other as partners in securing the Indian Ocean by strengthening institutions, rule of law, and a regional security architecture.
- **Retreat of the U.S. from global leadership** and uncertainty of US policy under Trump has provided opportunities for EU- India cooperation and trilateral dialogues with countries in the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa.
- **Strategic rivalry between the US and China:** Both EU and India have a common interest in avoiding a bipolarized world and sustaining a rules-based multilateral trading system with the United Nations and the World Trade Organization at its core.
- **Green governance:** After the US exit from the Paris climate agreement, India and the EU stand to gain from a joint leadership on global governance matters such as climate change, clean energy or circular economy.
- **New emerging world order after COVID-19:** As EU seeks to move away from a global supply chain that is overly dependent on China, India can emerge as its most natural ally.

Impact of Brexit

On India:

1. **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.
2. **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.
3. **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.
4. **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.

5. **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

1. **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.
2. **Flight to safety:** Investors may start selling riskier assets such as stocks and seeking safety in government bonds.

FOREIGN SECRETARY ON MEDICAL SUPPORT & 'VACCINE MAITRI'

Context:

- India's Foreign Secretary said that Medical and oxygen-related support is being worked out from at least 40 countries that will send items to help India deal with the pandemic's second wave.
- India is unlikely to resume its Vaccine Maitri programme for the neighbourhood, including Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka, until at least July 2021, given the sudden crunch in the availability of vaccines amidst a surge in COVID-19 cases, and the government's plan for universal vaccination set to start on May 1.

Relevance:

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

Dimensions of the Article:

1. What is Vaccine Maitri?
2. About the support to India from Foreign Countries

What is Vaccine Maitri?

- India commenced its vaccine diplomacy (use of vaccines to increase a country's diplomatic relationship with other countries) with the name "Vaccine Maitri" under its Neighborhood First policy.
- Under Vaccine Maitri – India will supply Covid-19 vaccines which are Made in India to its neighboring and key partner countries under its Neighborhood First policy.
- Bhutan and Maldives were set to be the first to get the vaccines followed by Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar and Seychelles.
- Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Mauritius were also targeted for supplying vaccines following their necessary regulatory approvals.
- Pakistan was the only neighboring country which was not named to get the vaccine.

Earlier Diplomacy measures by India:

- India had earlier supplied Hydroxychloroquine, Remdesivir and Paracetamol tablets as well as diagnostic kits, ventilators, masks, gloves and other medical supplies to a large number of countries during the pandemic.
- Under the Partnerships for Accelerating Clinical Trials (PACT) programme, India has also provided training to several neighboring countries to enhance and strengthen their clinical capabilities. PACT

programme implemented by Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC) and Clinical Development Services Agency (CDSA) under the aegis of the National Biopharma Mission and Ind-CEPI Mission of DBT, had been launched for supporting COVID-19 vaccine development activities in partnering countries.

About the support to India from Foreign Countries

- The capacity-boosting supplies are expected to arrive in the coming days from **Egypt, Uzbekistan, Bangladesh**, apart from the big powers like **Russia, the U.S. and Saudi Arabia**.
- India has got commitment of assistance from **Europe, Gulf region** and even further parts of the world, **Australia, New Zealand** and countries like **Guyana** which are located geographically further away.
- Around over 550 oxygen generating plants being sourced from governments, community groups, corporates and private individuals are being brought.
- While the large-scale support from the big powers is being flown in, important assistance is on the way also from the developing countries.
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of **Bangladesh** has announced 10,000 anti-viral vials, 30,000 PPE kits, and several thousand zinc, calcium, vitamin C and other necessary tablets that will be sent to India in the coming days.
- From **Egypt**, Gilead Sciences has committed 4,50,000 doses of remdesivir to India.
- A special cargo for medical aid including 157 ventilators, 480 BiPAPs and other medical supplies arrived from the **UAE** recently as well.
- Three oxygen generation units will be sent from surplus stocks in Northern **Ireland**.

THE RISING SUN IN INDIA-JAPAN RELATIONS

Context:

The new Japanese Prime Minister's visit to the United States in April 2021 has set the agenda for the wider Indo-Pacific engagement of Tokyo and its evolving priorities.

Relevance:

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

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Overview of India – Japan Relations
2. Focus on China: Japan's visit to U.S.
3. What to expect in the Future with Japan's new Prime Minister?
4. Recently in news: Japan's first-ever assistance project Andaman & Nicobar (A&N)

Overview of India – Japan Relations

- Exchange between Japan and India is said to have begun in the 6th century when Buddhism was introduced to Japan, which spread indirectly from India to Japan, via China and Korea.
- India and Japan, two of the largest and oldest democracies in Asia, having a high degree of congruence of political, economic and strategic interests, view each other as partners that have responsibility for, and are capable of, responding to global and regional challenges.

- Post Japan's defeat in World War-II, a relatively well-known result of the two nations was in 1949, when India sent the Tokyo Zoo two elephants to cheer the spirits of the defeated Japanese empire.
- Japan and India signed a peace treaty and established diplomatic relations in 1950s.
- The British occupiers of India and Japan were enemies during World War II, but political relations between the two nations have remained warm since India's independence.
- Japanese companies, such as Yamaha, Sony, Toyota, and Honda have manufacturing facilities in India, and with the growth of the Indian economy, India is a big market for Japanese firms.
- In 2006, India culminated in the signing of the "Joint Statement Towards Japan-India Strategic and Global Partnership".
- Japan has helped finance many infrastructure projects in India, most notably the Delhi Metro system.
- In 2016, India and Japan signed the "Agreement for Cooperation in Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy", a landmark civil nuclear agreement, under which Japan will supply nuclear reactors, fuel and technology to India. (India is the only non-signatory of NPT to receive an exemption from Japan.)
- India and Japan have shared interests in maintaining the security of sea-lanes in the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean, and in co-operation for fighting international crime, terrorism, piracy and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.
- The two nations have frequently held joint military exercises and co-operate on technology.



Focus on China: Japan's visit to U.S.

- Tokyo and Washington drilled down to brass tacks on their joint security partnership given the need to address China's recent belligerence in territorial disputes in the South and East China Seas as well as in the Taiwan Strait.
- **Both U.S. and Japan affirmed the centrality of their treaty alliance, for long a source of stability in East Asia, and pledged to stand up to China in key regional flashpoints such as the disputed Senkaku Islands and Taiwan.**
- Reflecting the changed nature of conflict, both sides acknowledged the importance of extended deterrence vis-à-vis China through cooperation on cybersecurity and space technology.

- Discussions also touched upon Chinese ambitions to dominate the development of new age technologies such as 5G and quantum computing.
- Tokyo and Washington also rallied around the standard of shared values – repeatedly emphasising on vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific that respects the rule of law, freedom of navigation, democratic norms and the use of peaceful means to settle disputes.
- In the aftermath of the successful Quad Summit both parties expressed their continued support for the four-nation grouping of the United States, India, Australia and Japan.
- China's human rights violations in Xinjiang, its heavy-handed suppression of protests in Hong Kong and military aggression towards Taiwan came in for heavy criticism.

What to expect in the Future with Japan's new Prime Minister?

China and Indo-Pacific

- First, one can expect a continuation of the balancing security policy against China that began with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Shinzo Abe in 2014.
- In just a decade, New Delhi and Tokyo have expanded high-level ministerial and bureaucratic contacts, conducted joint military exercises and concluded military pacts such as the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) logistics agreement.
- One can also expect affirmation of New Delhi and Tokyo's support for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific and continued willingness to work with the Quad, which is fast emerging as a central pillar of the security strategies of both nations.

Technology partnership

- Second, the two powers will look to expand cooperation in sectors such as cybersecurity and emerging technologies. In the past New Delhi and Tokyo put together a digital research and innovation partnership that ran the gamut of technologies from AI and 5G to the Internet of Things and space research.
- However, there are concerns regarding the possibility of Japan bringing up the disagreements over India's insistence on data localisation and continued reluctance to accede to global cybersecurity agreements such as the Budapest Convention.

Economic ties and infrastructure development

- Third, economic ties and infrastructure development are likely to be top drawer items on the agendas of New Delhi and Tokyo.
- While Japan has poured in around \$34 billion in investments into the Indian economy over the course of the last two decades, Japan is only India's 12th largest trading partner, and trade volumes between the two stand at just a fifth of the value of India-China bilateral trade.
- India will be keen to secure continued infrastructure investments in the strategically vital connectivity projects currently under way in the Northeast and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Third country outlook

- Future meeting between India and Japan is expected to devote much attention to evolving a joint strategy towards key third countries and multilateral bodies.
- In years past, New Delhi and Tokyo have collaborated to build infrastructure in Iran and Africa, provide vital aid to Myanmar and Sri Lanka and hammer out a common Association of Southeast Asian Nations outreach policy in an attempt to counter China's growing influence in these corners of the globe.

Recently in news: Japan's first-ever official development assistance (ODA) project in Andaman & Nicobar (A&N)

- In the first-ever official development assistance (ODA) project in Andaman & Nicobar (A&N), Japan has approved grant aid to improve the power supply in the A&N islands along with loans for executing four projects, including Delhi Metro's Phase 4 and Bengaluru Metro's Phase 2.
- This is the first-ever ODA project in the strategic islands of Andaman & Nicobar (apart from humanitarian emergency assistance) to improve the power supply in the islands, stressing the strategic geopolitical location of the islands for an open Indo-Pacific.
- The grant would be used to procure batteries as well as power system stabilisers to allow better utilisation of solar power generated in South Andaman.

KYRGYZSTAN, TAJIKISTAN: CROSS-BORDER TENSIONS

Context:

A ceasefire on the border between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan was held following a day of intense fighting between the two ex-Soviet Central Asian neighbours that killed 39 people and wounded more than 175.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Important developments in foreign countries affecting India's interests) GS-I: Geography (Maps), Prelims

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About the recent tensions between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan
2. Maps
3. Significance of this region for India

About the recent tensions between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

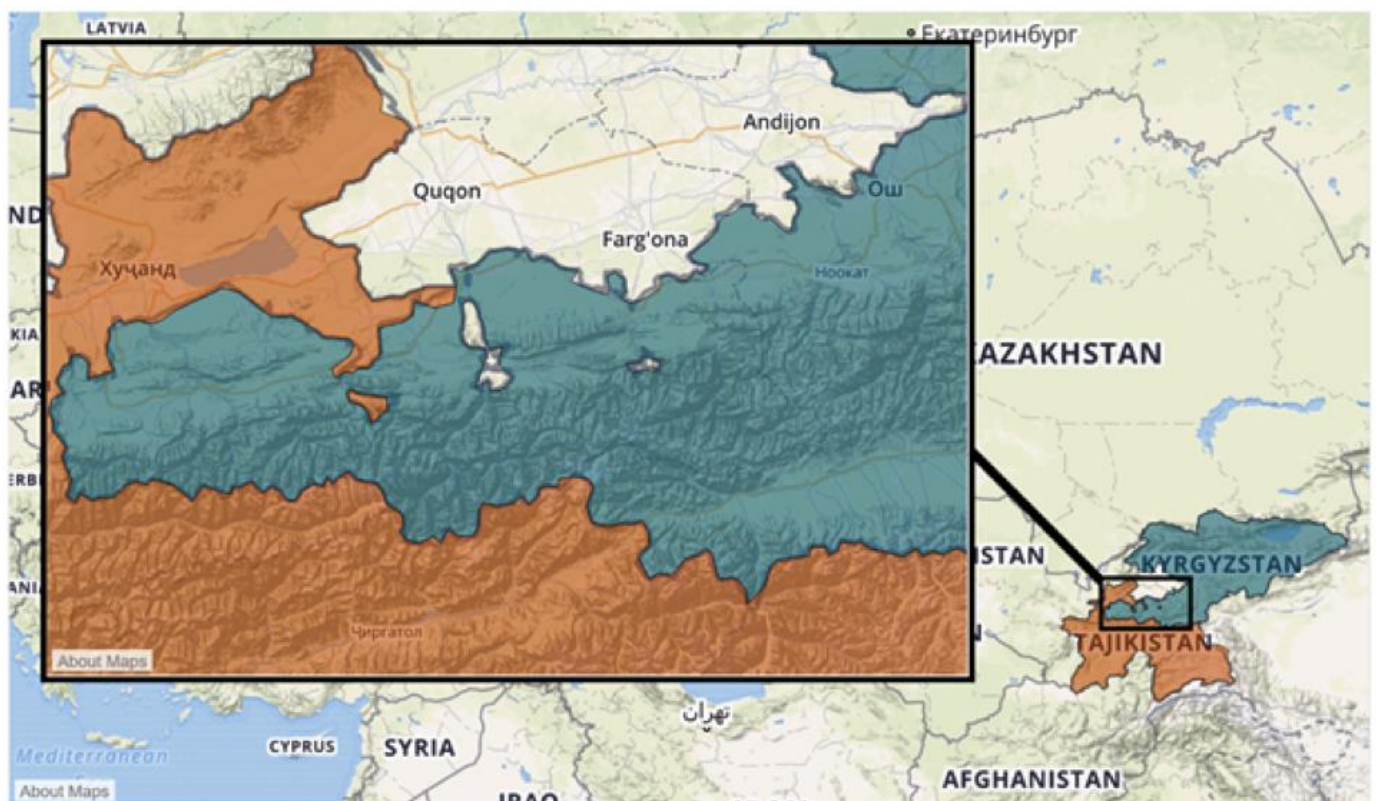
- Both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have claimed the area around the water supply facility in Kok-Tash, a dispute dating back decades to when they were both part of the Soviet Union.
- After the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) collapsed in late 1991 – Soviet mapmakers drew the dividing lines for Soviet republics which is now the current configuration of the Kyrgyz-Tajik border.
- The meandering boundary between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan is particularly tense as over a third of its 1,000-km length is disputed. Restrictions on access to land and water that communities regard as theirs have often led to deadly clashes in the past.
- Russia and European Union (EU) welcomed the ceasefire deal and emphasised the need for a lasting and peaceful solution.

Maps:

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan belong to the central asia region. Other countries of the region are Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.



The Kyrgyz - Tajik border



Significance of this 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.

MANIPUR HC: MYANMAR REFUGEES CAN APPROACH UNHCR

Context:

The High Court of Manipur allowed seven Myanmar nationals, who entered India secretly following the February military coup in Myanmar, to travel to New Delhi to seek protection from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Important International Institutions, Foreign Policies and Agreements)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
2. International Laws in relation with handling Refugees
3. About the Manipur HC order
4. How refugees are treated / have been treated in India?
5. What is the role of Indian Judiciary in protecting refugees?

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.

International Laws in relation with handling Refugees

- Even though the refugees are foreigners in the country of asylum, by virtue of the **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), 1966**, they could enjoy the same fundamental rights and freedoms as nationals.
- The **1951 Refugee Convention** asserts that a refugee should not be returned to a country where they face serious threats to their life or freedom, and the core principle of the convention is non-refoulement. (Refoulement means the forcible return of refugees or asylum seekers to a country where they are liable to be subjected to persecution.)

About the Manipur HC order

- Though India is not a party to the UN Refugee Conventions, the court observed that the country is a party to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966.
- The court said: The far-reaching and myriad protection afforded by Article 21 of our Constitution, as interpreted and adumbrated by our Supreme Court time and again, would indubitably encompass the right of non-refoulement. **[Non-refoulement is the principle under international law that a person fleeing from persecution from his own country should not be forced to return.]**

How refugees are treated / have been treated in India?

- India hosts over 2,00,000 refugees, victims of civil strife and war in Tibet, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Myanmar. Some refugees, the Tibetans who arrived between 1959 and 1962, were given adequate refuge in over 38 settlements, with all privileges provided to an Indian citizen excluding the right to vote).
- The Afghan refugees fleeing the civil war in the 1980s live in slums across Delhi with no legal status or formal documents to allow them to work or establish businesses in India.
- The **Foreigners Act (1946)** and the **Registration of Foreigners Act (1939)** currently govern the entry and exit of all refugees, treating them as foreigners without due consideration of their special circumstances.

What is the role of Indian Judiciary in protecting refugees?

- Refugees have been accorded constitutional protection by the judiciary (National Human Rights Commission vs State of Arunachal Pradesh, 1996).
- In addition, the Supreme Court has held that the right to equality (**Article 14**) and right to life and personal liberty (**Article 21**) extends to refugees.
- India remains the only significant democracy without legislation specifically for refugees. A well-defined asylum law would establish a formal refuge granting process with suitable exclusions (war criminals, serious offenders, etc.) kept.

G7 SEEKS COMMON FRONT ON CHINA

Context:

The Group of Seven wealthy democracies discussed how to form a common front towards an increasingly assertive China in the Foreign Ministers' first in-person talks in two years.

Relevance:

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

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Group of Seven (G7)
2. G7: First in-person talks Highlights

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 members



- 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: First in-person talks Highlights

- Backing U.S. President Joe Biden's calls for a deeper alliance of democracies, host Britain invited guests, including India, South Korea and Australia, for talks in central London.
- The G7 devoted its first session to China, whose growing military and economic clout, and willingness to exert its influence at home and abroad have increasingly unnerved Western democracies.
- Japan has historic tensions with China but has held off on joining Western nations with sanctions.
- Italy has been seen as one of the most Beijing-friendly nations in the West, in 2019 signing up for China's massive infrastructure-building Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) but Italy joined EU peers in summoning the Chinese Ambassador in a row triggered by concerns over treatment of the Uighurs.

INDIA RECEIVES COVID-19 AID FROM TAIWAN

Context:

India received assistance from Taiwan including oxygen concentrators and cylinders, with more batches of medical equipment set to follow from Taipei.

A first batch, consisting of 50 oxygen concentrators and 500 oxygen cylinders, landed in New Delhi on Sunday on a Boeing 747 of China Airlines, the government-owned airline of Taiwan.

Relevance:

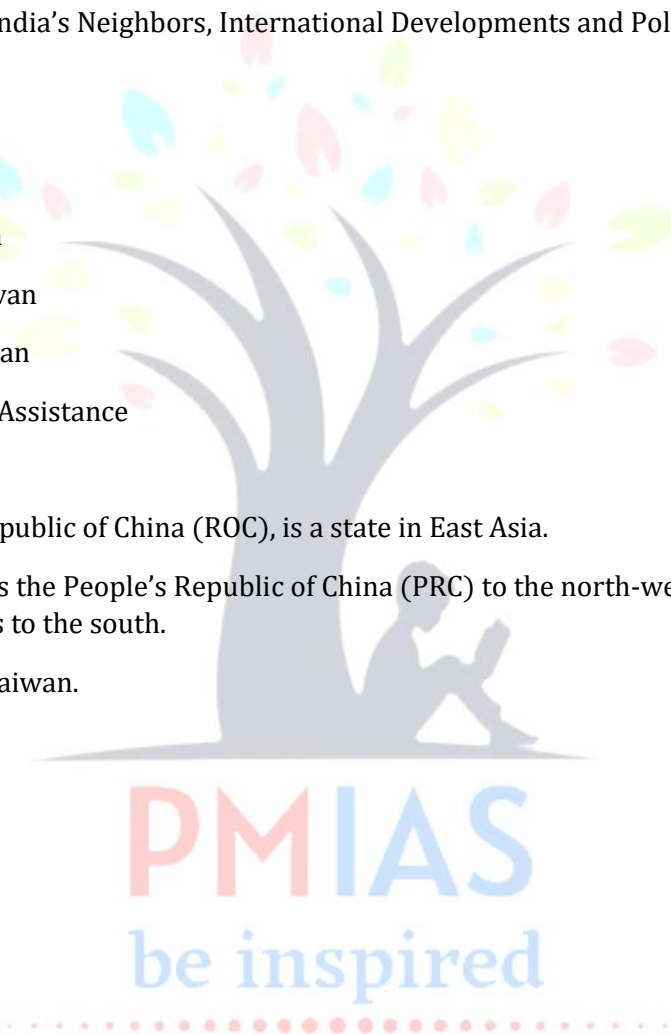
GS-II: International Relations (India's Neighbors, International Developments and Policies affecting India's Interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About Taiwan
2. India's Taiwan Dilemma
3. China's Position on Taiwan
4. India's Position on Taiwan
 - About Taiwan's Assistance

About Taiwan

- Taiwan, officially the Republic of China (ROC), is a state in East Asia.
- The island of Taiwan has the People's Republic of China (PRC) to the north-west, Japan to the north-east, and the Philippines to the south.
- Taipei is the capital of Taiwan.





India's Taiwan Dilemma

- The U.S. has, in the recent past, accused WHO of acting as a “PR agency” for China during the pandemic.
- A seven-nation virtual meeting of Foreign Ministers was convened by U.S. which appeared to be part of Washington's efforts to gain support for its move to effect changes at the WHO.
- U.S. Senate passed an act to regain observer status for Taiwan in the World Health Organization.
- India is likely to hold the post for the next three years. The timing of the appointment is crucial, given the worldwide debate on the role of the WHO during the pandemic, and criticism of the current WHO Director.

China's Position on Taiwan

- China has also stepped-up warnings on any attempt to include or support Taiwan's role at the WHA.
- China referred to the “One-China” principle as “a widely accepted universal consensus of the international community including the Indian government.”
- China asserts that there is only “One China” and that Taiwan is an inalienable part of it.
- China put forward a formula, known as “one country, two systems”, under which both Beijing and Taipei agree that Taiwan belongs to China, while the two still disagree on which entity is China's legitimate governing body.
- China also stated its right to use “non-peaceful means” against Taiwan if it tried to secede from China.

India's Position on Taiwan

- The MEA declined to comment on whether Taiwan was discussed during the meeting, or whether India has decided on supporting the US on its move to include Taiwan as a WHA participant.

- India recognises only the People's Republic of China (in mainland China) and not the Republic of China's claims of being the legitimate government of Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Macau – a conflict that emerged after the Chinese Civil War (1945–49).
- The United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, India, Pakistan and Japan have formally adopted the One China policy, under which the People's Republic of China is theoretically the sole legitimate government of China.
- India and Taiwan do not have formal diplomatic relations but since 1995, both sides have maintained representative offices in each other's capitals that function as de facto embassies. India has backed the "one-China policy".
- India finds it difficult to realise the full potential of its bilateral relationship with Taiwan. At present, about 15 countries worldwide continue to recognise Taiwan as an independent state. India is not among the sixteen countries.
- Taiwan is an important geographical entity in the Indo-Pacific region. India's vision of the Indo-Pacific is inclusive and it must encourage the participation of Taiwan and other like-minded countries.
- India is already a major focus country in Taiwan's New Southbound Policy, launched in 2016. Under this, Taiwan aims to increase its international profile by expanding political, economic, and people-to-people linkages.
- Taiwan's reputation as the world leader in semiconductor and electronics complements India's leadership in ITES (Information Technology-Enabled Services).

About Taiwan's Assistance

- The aid reflects the growing engagement between India and Taiwan, especially against the backdrop of the standoff with China on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and China's aggressive actions across the region, including repeated violations of Taiwan's airspace.
- India, meanwhile, has not yet accepted China's offers of aid and assistance and has preferred to source medical supplies from China on a commercial basis.

A COVID BLOT ON INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY CANVAS

Context:

- The second wave of COVID-19 and its agonising consequences, prompting the country to accept foreign aid after a gap of 17 years, is bound to have far-reaching strategic implications for India.
- As a direct consequence of the pandemic, India's claim to regional primacy and leadership will take a major hit, its 'leading power' aspirations will be dented, and accentuate its domestic political contestations.

Relevance:

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

Mains Questions:

To what extent will the raging pandemic affect India's claim to regional primacy and leadership? Discuss, throwing light on the direct and indirect consequences of the second wave of Covid-19 on India's foreign policy. (15 Marks)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Strategic Consequences of India's COVID-19 Crisis
2. Implications on foreign investments
3. Impact on Regional primacy
4. Losing Balance with the Quad
5. Strategic autonomy
6. Expectations of U.S. Relations
7. Conclusion

Strategic Consequences of India's COVID-19 Crisis

- As the magnitude of the second wave of India's coronavirus surge became increasingly clear to the world, various countries (around 40 nations) all around the globe pledged their commitments to send medical supplies, including oxygen, vaccine materials, and therapeutics to India, while seeking additional ways to address India's crisis.
- COVID-19 already inflicted a crushing blow to India's economy and India now faces this wave of the virus exhausted and depleted due to a devastating combination of new viral strains and inadequate public health preparations.
- For India, these challenges have coincided with its aspirations to play a leading role in global politics as a role shaper. Especially considering that it is now having to contend with the structural realities of a rising power in its vicinity (China), one that doesn't want to play by the rules set by others.
- China poses to India is, in many ways, a microcosm of the challenge the Chinese Communist Party's malevolent intent poses to the liberal order. As powers rise and fall, they inevitably produce consequences; some are structural about balancing and band-wagoning, while others are institutional and normative.

Implications on foreign investments

- COVID-19 has impacted varied industries alike resultantly restricting the feasibility of mergers and acquisitions including inbound foreign investments in India. The global and domestic economic disruption has caused delay (in several cases indefinitely) in completing bona fide transactions. The global supply chain fallout and restricted international borders have forced investors to take a relook at the valuation of the assets underlying the ongoing and future deals.
- As per a report released by CRISIL (Indian analytical company) in 2020 the private equity and venture capital investments have grown significantly over the past five years but have shown a downward trend since the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2020.
- The report states that monthly investments in March-June 2020, declined about 60-70% as compared to the monthly average of the last three years.

Impact on Regional primacy

- India's traditional primacy in the region was built on a mix of material aid, political influence and historical ties.
- The country's geopolitical decline is likely to begin in the neighbourhood itself, a strategic space which New Delhi has been forced to cede to Beijing over the past decade or so.

- Now, India's political influence is steadily declining, its ability to materially help the neighbourhood will shrink in the wake of Covid-19, and its historical ties alone may not maintain India's regional hegemony. The Second COVID wave has quickened the demise of India's regional primacy.
- As a result, South Asian states are likely to board the Chinese bandwagon, if they haven't already. COVID-19, therefore, comes at a time when India's standing in the region is already shrinking: the pandemic will unfortunately quicken the inevitable.

The China Factor

- China has been already pushing India in its strategic space (i.e., Indian subcontinent) due to its chequebook diplomacy. **[Chequebook diplomacy, is used to describe a foreign policy which openly uses economic aid and investment between countries to curry diplomatic favour.]**
- The second wave of Covid-19 has quickened this process, as India's ability to stand up to China stands vastly diminished today: in material power, in terms of balance of power considerations, and political will.

Losing Balance with the Quad

- Covid-19, will prevent any ambitious military spending or modernisation plans and limit the country's attention on global diplomacy and regional geopolitics.
- With reduced military spending and lesser diplomatic attention to regional geopolitics, India's ability to project power and contribute to the growth of the Quad will be uncertain.
- Covid-19 has led to a general economic distress, a fall in foreign direct investment and industrial production, and a rise in unemployment will also limit India's strategic ambitions. Post-Covid-19, Indian foreign policy is therefore likely to be a holding operation.
- **India is pivotal to the Indo-Pacific project, but with India's inability to take a lead role and China wooing smaller states in the region will eventually turn the balance of power in China's favour.**

Strategic autonomy

- The pandemic would, at the very least indirectly, impact India's policy of maintaining strategic autonomy- the strategic consequences of the pandemic are bound to shape and structure New Delhi's foreign policy choices as well as constrain India's foreign policy agency.
- It could, for instance, become more susceptible to external criticism for, after all, New Delhi cannot say 'yes' to just aid and 'no' to criticism.
- A post-COVID-19 New Delhi might find it harder to resist demands of a closer military relationship with the U.S.

Expectations of U.S. Relations

- A post-COVID-19 India might find it harder to resist demands of a closer military relationship with the U.S.
- With the rise of China and India's Covid-19-related troubles could prompt the US to normalise relations with China.
- Other potential impact of COVID-19's devastating return and the damage it has done would be that India might be forced to be more conciliatory towards China.

Conclusion

- Every crisis opens up the possibility for change and new thinking. As the diplomatic bandwidth for expansive foreign policy goals would be limited, in post-Covid-19, Indian foreign policy is unlikely to be business as usual. However, Covid-19 may have opened precisely such an opportunity to the world's least integrated region.
- Covid-19 will also open up new regional opportunities for cooperation especially under the ambit of SAARC, an initiative that already saw some small beginnings during the first wave of the pandemic.
- India might do well to get the region's collective focus on 'regional health multilateralism' to promote mutual assistance and joint action on health emergencies such as this.

INDIA AND EU RELAUNCH FTA TALKS

Context:

India and the European Union agreed to relaunch free trade negotiations by resuming talks that were suspended in 2013 for the Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA).

Relevance:

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

Dimensions of the Article:

1. European Union (EU)
2. About the recent developments in India and EU talks
3. Reasons of growing relationship between India and EU

European Union (EU)

- 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
 1. Ensure the free movement of people, goods, services and capital within the internal market;
 2. Enact legislation in justice and home affairs;
 3. 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 the recent developments in India and EU talks

- The EU-India leaders meeting also discussed Covid recovery plans and vaccine cooperation, adopted a Connectivity Partnership document outlining plans to cooperate on digital and infrastructure projects, and signed the contract for the second tranche of \$150 million from the EU for the Pune Metro rail project.
- However, India failed to secure the support of the European leaders for its proposal at the World Trade Organisation at the meeting for patent waivers for Covid vaccine, and government officials they hoped to see the EU continue to debate the issue.
- The US had recently changed its stand and now supports the idea of waiving intellectual property rights on vaccines for the duration of the pandemic, and India would therefore watch the “evolving EU position on this”. The support of a major bloc like the EU is crucial to passing the resolution at the WTO by consensus.
- The joint statement issued after the meeting said that India and the EU agreed to work towards a “balanced, ambitious, comprehensive and mutually beneficial trade agreement which would respond to the current challenges,” as well as launch negotiations for a “stand-alone” investment protection agreement and a separate agreement on “geographical indications” pertaining to intellectual property rights.
- The India-EU connectivity partnership signed committed the two sides to working together on digital, energy, transport, people to people connectivity that was “transparent, viable, inclusive, sustainable, comprehensive, with a rules-based approach”. The partnership is seen as a response to China’s Belt and Road Initiative, and comes as the EU’s negotiations with China on their Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) have run into trouble.

Reasons of growing relationship between India and EU

- Changing Geopolitical developments: As highlighted by EU strategy on India, released in 2018, EU sees EU-India relations in the context of broader geopolitical developments, primarily the rise of China.

Impact of China in Europe and Asia (e.g. Belt and Road initiative) has pushed EU to change the nature of its partnerships in the region, particularly with India.

- Convergence of interests in the Indian Ocean as the Indian Ocean is the main conduit for global trade and energy flows. India, EU see each other as partners in securing the Indian Ocean by strengthening institutions, rule of law, and a regional security architecture.
- Retreat of the U.S. from global leadership and uncertainty of US policy under Trump has provided opportunities for EU- India cooperation and trilateral dialogues with countries in the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa.
- Strategic rivalry between the US and China: Both EU and India have a common interest in avoiding a bipolarized world and sustaining a rules-based multilateral trading system with the United Nations and the World Trade Organization at its core.
- Green governance: After the US exit from the Paris climate agreement, India and the EU stand to gain from a joint leadership on global governance matters such as climate change, clean energy or circular economy.
- New emerging world order after COVID-19: As EU seeks to move away from a global supply chain that is overly dependent on China, India can emerge as its most natural ally.

SAUDI ANNOUNCES OVER 100 PROJECTS FOR PAKISTAN

Context:

Saudi Arabia has announced 118 humanitarian projects worth over \$123 million for cash-strapped Pakistan in food security, health, education and water during Prime Minister Imran Khan's two-day visit.

Relevance:

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

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Economic and Strategic Aspects of Saudi-Pakistan Relationship
2. 2015 Strains in the Relationship
3. India-Saudi Relations

Economic and Strategic Aspects of Saudi-Pakistan Relationship

- Pakistan has benefited enormously from Saudi Arabia – the Muslim world's wealthiest nation – through generous financial aid, the supply of oil on a deferred payment basis and aid during crises.
- For instance, the Saudis provided a grant of US\$10 million during the 2005 earthquake, \$170 million during the 2010/11 floods, and a \$1.5 billion grant when Pakistan faced an economic crisis in 2014.
- Besides, there are around two million Pakistani expatriates in Saudi Arabia, and they send back remittances worth over \$5 billion every year.
- Not only has Saudi Arabia helped Pakistan avoid major economic crises, it has also supported Pakistan's defence by providing logistic support and financial assistance. For instance, the Kingdom assured Islamabad that it would supply 50,000 barrels of crude oil per day on a deferred payment basis in case Pakistan's nuclear tests resulted in US and other European sanctions in 1998.
- Pakistan has been importing mainly oil from Saudi Arabia and exports rice, meat, meat products, spices and fruits, footwear and leather goods, and chemicals.

2015 Strains in the Relationship

- When, in 2015, Saudi Arabia asked Pakistan to join the coalition it was leading to undertake the ground offensive in Yemen against the Iran-backed Houthis, Islamabad refused and let it be known that it would prefer to stand “neutral” in the Iran-Saudi rivalry.
- The decision was taken keeping in mind the possible implications of joining the coalition on domestic politics and on bilateral relations with Iran.
- The Saudi-Iran conflict in West Asia has serious ramifications for Pakistan’s relationship with Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia sees Iranian involvement and growing salience in regional politics as a threat to its security.
- Pakistan, for its part, is worried about India’s improving relations with West Asian countries in general and Saudi Arabia in particular. While Pakistan wants to maintain a delicate balance between Saudi Arabia and Iran, the Saudis are not happy with this balancing game and want Pakistan to support them.

India-Saudi Relations

- The geostrategic position of Saudi Arabia makes it an important country for India, with trade and cultural links dating back thousands of years.
- There is a rational calculation regarding Saudi interest in expanding trade and investment in India and collaboration in the energy sector.
- Saudi Aramco is interested in partnering with the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company in developing an integrated refinery and petrochemicals complex at Ratnagiri in Maharashtra, a \$44 billion joint venture with Indian public sector involvement. Saudi Arabia is already one of the three largest suppliers of oil to India.
- That the two countries are moving beyond the traditional buyer-seller relationship is best exemplified by the joint venture for the \$44 billion worth Ratnagiri refinery and petrochemical project.
- The assumption that Saudi Arabia is tilted towards India is nothing more than an unrealistic hope.
- The Saudi Foreign Minister’s statement in Islamabad during MBS’s visit that Riyadh is committed to “de-escalating” tensions between India and Pakistan over Kashmir must not be read as an endorsement of the Indian stand but as an attempt to intervene in the dispute rather than accept its bilateral nature.
- Good relations with Riyadh and other West Asian capitals is essential for the welfare of the expatriate Indian community and their emergency evacuation should there be such a need. West Asia is also an important partner in the domains of counterterrorism and maritime security in the western Indian Ocean.
- Indians in Saudi Arabia are the second-largest providers of remittances to their home country. They are also an important aspect of our soft-power diplomacy in the region.

ISRAELI ARMED FORCES STORM JERUSALEM

Context:

Recently, Israeli armed forces stormed Al-Aqsa Mosque in the Haram esh-Sharif in Jerusalem, ahead of a march by Zionist nationalists commemorating Israel’s capture of the eastern half of the city in 1967. More than 300 Palestinians were injured in the raid.

Relevance:

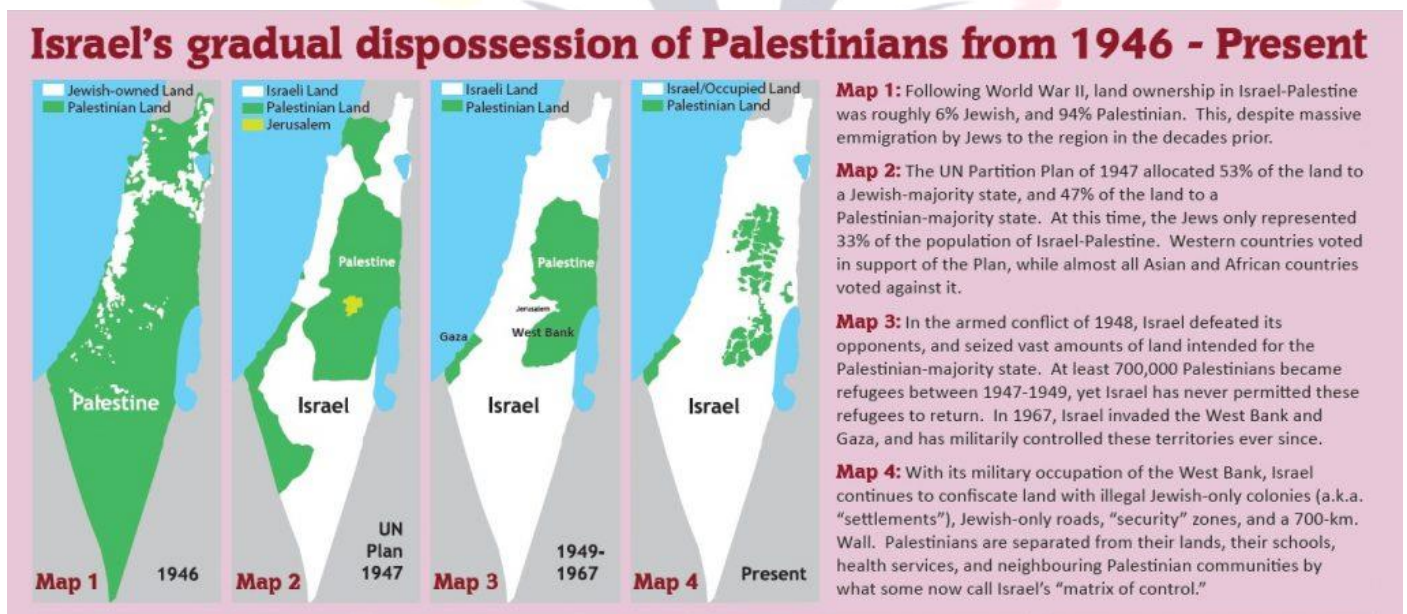
GS-II: International Relations (Important Developments in the International Stage)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About the Israel – Palestine Conflict
2. Understanding the Territory
3. What is behind the current escalation?
4. What is the Sheikh Jarrah dispute?
5. Why Jerusalem?

About the Israel – Palestine Conflict

- The Israeli–Palestinian conflict is the ongoing struggle between Israelis and Palestinians that began in the mid-20th century.
- The origins to the conflict can be traced back to Jewish immigration and sectarian conflict in Mandatory Palestine between Jews and Arabs.
- Despite a long-term peace process and the general reconciliation of Israel with Egypt and Jordan, Israelis and Palestinians have failed to reach a final peace agreement.
- The key issues are mutual recognition and security, borders, water rights, control of Jerusalem, Israeli settlements, Palestinian freedom of movement, and Palestinian right of return.



Understanding the Territory

- The West Bank is sandwiched between Israel and Jordan. One of its major cities is Ramallah, the de facto administrative capital of Palestine. Israel took control of it in the 1967 war and has over the years established settlements there.
- The Gaza Strip located between Israel and Egypt. Israel occupied the strip after 1967, but relinquished control of Gaza City and day-to-day administration in most of the territory during the Oslo peace process. In 2005, Israel unilaterally removed Jewish settlements from the territory, though it continues to control international access to it.



What is behind the current escalation?

- The Israeli authorities had given permission to the Jerusalem Day march, traditionally taken out by far-right Zionists through the Arab Quarter of the Old City.

- Tensions have been building up since mid-April 2021 when Israeli police set up barricades at the Damascus Gate outside the occupied Old City, preventing Palestinians from gathering there.
- Hamas issued an ultimatum to the Israeli troops to stand down from Al-Aqsa. By the evening, they launched rockets. Israeli strikes followed.

What is the Sheikh Jarrah dispute?

- Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were forced out of their homes when the State of Israel was created in historical Palestine in 1948 (the Palestinians call the events 'Nakba', or catastrophe). Some of those Palestinian families moved to Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem to settle there.
- In 1956, when East Jerusalem was ruled by Jordan, the Jordanian Ministry of Construction and Development and the U.N. Relief and Works Agency facilitated the construction of houses for these families in Sheikh Jarrah. But Israel would capture East Jerusalem from Jordan in 1967.
- By the early 1970s, Jewish agencies started demanding the families leave the land. Jewish committees claimed that the houses sat on land they purchased in 1885 (when Jews were migrating to historic Palestine that was part of the Ottoman Empire).
- Earlier, in 2021, the Central Court in East Jerusalem upheld a decision to evict four Palestinian families from their homes in Sheikh Jarrah in favor of Jewish settlers.

Why Jerusalem?

- Jerusalem has been at the centre of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. According to the original 1947 UN partition plan, Jerusalem was proposed to be an international city.
- But in the first Arab Israel war of 1948, the Israelis captured the western half of the city, and Jordan took the eastern part, including the Old City that houses Haram al-Sharif. Al-Aqsa Mosque, Islam's third holiest site, and the Dome of the Rock are situated within Haram esh-Sharif (Noble Sanctuary).
- Israel captured East Jerusalem from Jordan in the 1967 Six-Day War and annexed it later.
- Since its annexation, Israel has expanded settlements in East Jerusalem, which is now home for some 220,000 Jews. Jews born in East Jerusalem are Israeli citizens, while Palestinians in the city are given conditional residency permits.
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BANGLADESH REBUFFS CHINA ON QUAD WARNING

Context:

- China's ambassador in Dhaka said that it will not be a good idea for Bangladesh to participate in the Quad because it will substantially damage their bilateral relationship with China.
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Relevance:

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

Dimensions of the Article:

1. What is the Quad grouping?

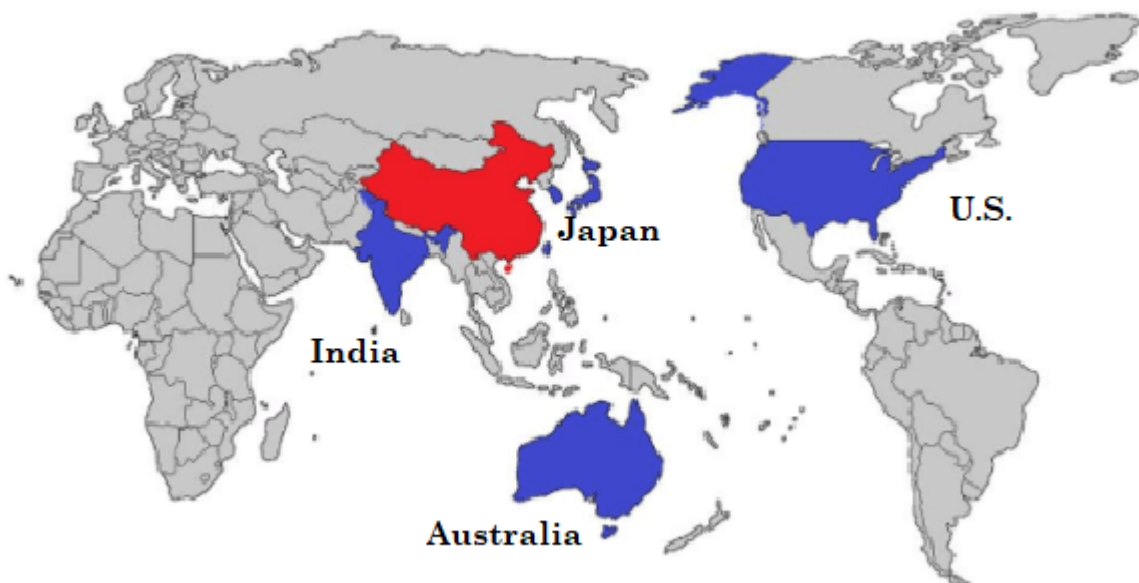
2. Significance of Quad

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What is the Quad grouping?

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- 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.
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- During World War I, some nationalists aligned with imperial Germany to set up the first Indian government-in-exile in Kabul.
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The "Quad" Counter to China



Significance of Quad

1. **Maritime security:** Indo pacific region is important for navigation and international trade e.g., Around 40 percent of world trade passes through Indo pacific region. The cooperation between Quad countries will enhance the security of Indo pacific region e.g., Malabar exercise.
2. It provides the **alternative of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)** because it is China-centric supply chains.

3. **The Resilient Supply Chain Initiative (RSCI)** proposed by India, Japan and Australia for building resilient supply chains in the Indo-Pacific. It will focus on key sectors such as semi-conductors, pharmaceuticals, automobiles and telecommunications.
4. It **provides a bigger space for USA**, which cautioned China against risking military adventurism across the Taiwan Strait that would have otherwise derailed its economic ascendance, and kept the peace on the Korean Peninsula for over six decades.
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IS INDIA'S PALESTINE POLICY EVOLVING?

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- The violence between Israel and Hamas has been intensifying for more than a week in May 2021, showing no signs of abating despite regular diplomatic efforts to bring about a ceasefire.
- At the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on 16th May 2021, India, a non-permanent member, **reaffirmed its support for Palestine, but stopped short of making any direct reference to the status of Jerusalem or the future Israel-Palestine borders.**
- **India reiterated its strong support for the just Palestinian cause and its unwavering commitment to the two-state solution.**

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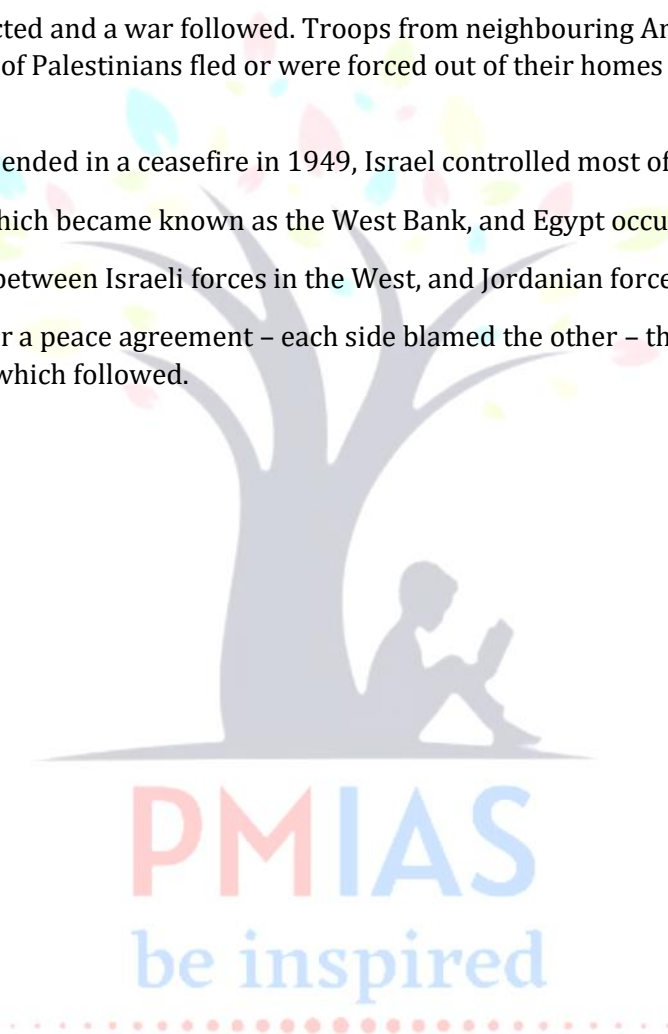
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Israel-Palestine conflict: A 100-year-old issue

- Britain took control of the area known as Palestine after the Ottoman Empire (ruler of that part of the Middle East) was defeated in WW1. The land was inhabited by a Jewish minority and Arab majority.
- Tensions between the two peoples grew when the international community gave Britain the task of establishing a “national home” in Palestine for Jewish people. For Jews, it was their ancestral home, but Palestinian Arabs also claimed the land and opposed the move.
- In 1948, unable to solve the problem, British rulers left and Jewish leaders declared the creation of the state of Israel.
- Many Palestinians objected and a war followed. Troops from neighbouring Arab countries invaded. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled or were forced out of their homes in what they call Al Nakba, or the “Catastrophe”.
- By the time the fighting ended in a ceasefire in 1949, Israel controlled most of the territory.
- Jordan occupied land which became known as the West Bank, and Egypt occupied Gaza.
- Jerusalem was divided between Israeli forces in the West, and Jordanian forces in the East.
- Because there was never a peace agreement – each side blamed the other – there were more wars and fighting in the decades which followed.



Israel's boundaries today

■ Palestinian civil control

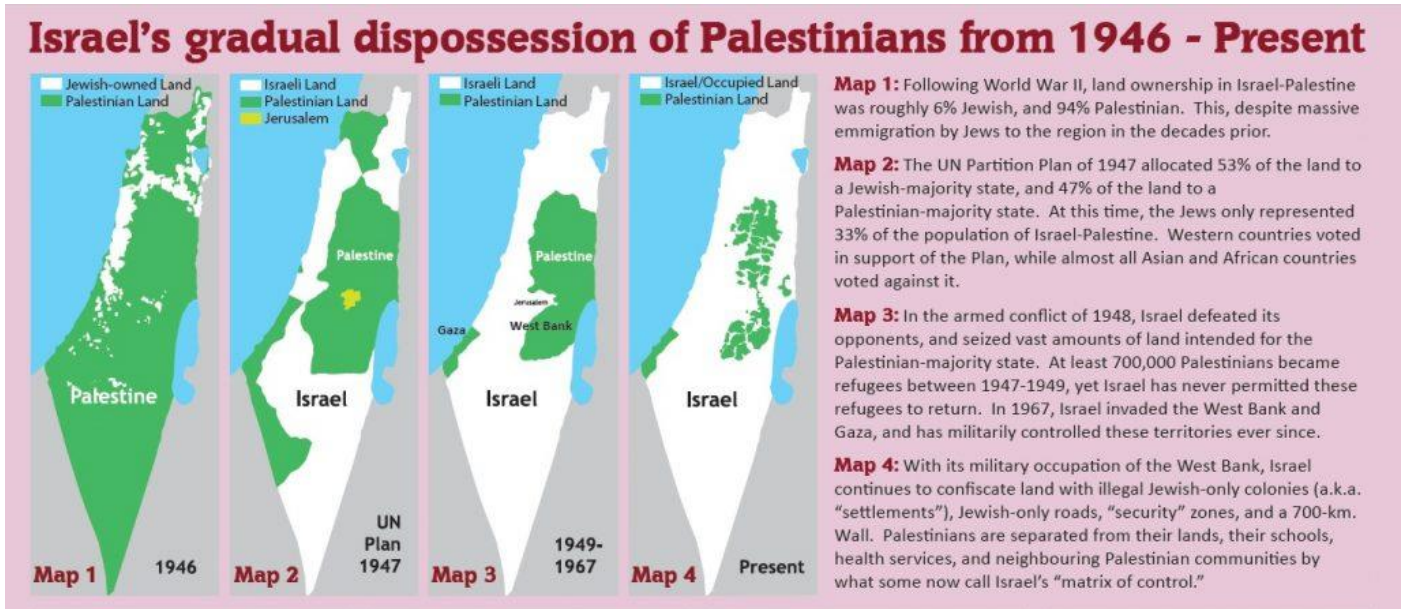
■ Built-up Palestinian area



After 1960s

- In another war in 1967, Israel occupied East Jerusalem and the West Bank, as well as most of the Syrian Golan Heights, and Gaza and the Egyptian Sinai peninsula.
- Most Palestinian refugees and their descendants live in Gaza and the West Bank, as well as in neighbouring Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.
- Neither they nor their descendants have been allowed by Israel to return to their homes – Israel says this would overwhelm the country and threaten its existence as a Jewish state.
- Israel still occupies the West Bank, and although it pulled out of Gaza the UN still regards that piece of land as part of occupied territory.

- Israel claims the whole of Jerusalem as its capital, while the Palestinians claim East Jerusalem as the capital of a future Palestinian state. The US is one of only a handful of countries to recognise Israel's claim to the whole of the city.
- In the past 50 years Israel has built settlements in these areas, where more than 600,000 Jews now live.
- Palestinians say these are illegal under international law and are obstacles to peace, but Israel denies this.



About the Israel – Palestine Conflict

- The Israeli–Palestinian conflict is the ongoing struggle between Israelis and Palestinians that began in the mid-20th century.
- The origins to the conflict can be traced back to Jewish immigration and sectarian conflict in Mandatory Palestine between Jews and Arabs.
- Despite a long-term peace process and the general reconciliation of Israel with Egypt and Jordan, Israelis and Palestinians have failed to reach a final peace agreement.
- The key issues are mutual recognition and security, borders, water rights, control of Jerusalem, Israeli settlements, Palestinian freedom of movement, and Palestinian right of return.

Understanding the Territory

- The West Bank is sandwiched between Israel and Jordan. One of its major cities is Ramallah, the de facto administrative capital of Palestine. Israel took control of it in the 1967 war and has over the years established settlements there.
- The Gaza Strip located between Israel and Egypt. Israel occupied the strip after 1967, but relinquished control of Gaza City and day-to-day administration in most of the territory during the Oslo peace process. In 2005, Israel unilaterally removed Jewish settlements from the territory, though it continues to control international access to it.



What is behind the current escalation?

- The Israeli authorities had given permission to the Jerusalem Day march, traditionally taken out by far-right Zionists through the Arab Quarter of the Old City.
- Tensions have been building up since mid-April 2021 when Israeli police set up barricades at the Damascus Gate outside the occupied Old City, preventing Palestinians from gathering there.
- Hamas issued an ultimatum to the Israeli troops to stand down from Al-Aqsa. By the evening, they launched rockets. Israeli strikes followed.

What is the Sheikh Jarrah dispute?

- Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were forced out of their homes when the State of Israel was created in historical Palestine in 1948 (the Palestinians call the events 'Nakba', or catastrophe). Some of those Palestinian families moved to Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem to settle there.
- In 1956, when East Jerusalem was ruled by Jordan, the Jordanian Ministry of Construction and Development and the U.N. Relief and Works Agency facilitated the construction of houses for these families in Sheikh Jarrah. But Israel would capture East Jerusalem from Jordan in 1967.
- By the early 1970s, Jewish agencies started demanding the families leave the land. Jewish committees claimed that the houses sat on land they purchased in 1885 (when Jews were migrating to historic Palestine that was part of the Ottoman Empire).
- Earlier, in 2021, the Central Court in East Jerusalem upheld a decision to evict four Palestinian families from their homes in Sheikh Jarrah in favor of Jewish settlers.

Why Jerusalem?

- Jerusalem has been at the centre of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. According to the original 1947 UN partition plan, Jerusalem was proposed to be an international city.
- But in the first Arab Israel war of 1948, the Israelis captured the western half of the city, and Jordan took the eastern part, including the Old City that houses Haram al-Sharif. Al-Aqsa Mosque, Islam's third holiest site, and the Dome of the Rock are situated within Haram esh-Sharif (Noble Sanctuary).
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What is the Two-state Solution?

- The two-state solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict envisages an independent State of Palestine alongside the State of Israel, west of the Jordan River.
- The boundary between the two states is still subject to dispute and negotiation, with Palestinian and Arab leadership insisting on the “1967 borders”, which is not accepted by Israel.
- Many attempts have been made to broker a two-state solution, involving the creation of an independent Palestinian state alongside the State of Israel (after Israel’s establishment in 1948).
- In 2007, the majority of both Israelis and Palestinians, according to a number of polls, preferred the two-state solution over any other solution as a means of resolving the conflict.

India’s stand in the Israel – Palestine conflict

- In the early 1920s and amidst the Khilafat struggle, Indian nationalists made common cause with the Arabs of Palestine and adopted a position that was unsympathetic to the Jewish aspirations for a national home in Palestine.
- Mahatma Gandhi’s 1938 statement said “Palestine belongs to the Arabs in the same sense that England belongs to the English and France to the French”.
- Prime Minister Narasimha Rao hosted Arafat in 1992 for the first time and signalled India’s intention of abandoning its four decades old policy of non-relations with Israel.
- India has consistently voted in favour of those resolutions that promote the two-state solution with a Palestinian claim to East Jerusalem.
- Peace based on two-state solution is much needed in the face of international proposals that are in breach of these principles, and cannot be forged between Israel and a third country [U.S.], but can only come from Israel-Palestine talks, which India also supports.

PMIAS
be inspired



India's Evolving position

- While refusing to toe the Israeli line on the conflict, India's comments also point to its evolving position on the larger Israel-Palestine issue.
- In the May 2021 UNSC meet: India called for the status quo relating to East Jerusalem, but the crucial point that's missing in India's statement is that East Jerusalem should be the capital of a future Palestinian state. Earlier, this used to be the mantra from India regarding the two-state solution.
- Therefore, India simply gave lip service to the two-state solution without mentioning that East Jerusalem is the core part of that two-state solution.
- Until 2017, India's position was that it supported "the Palestinian cause and called for a negotiated solution resulting in a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living within secure and recognised borders, side by side at peace with Israel". **India dropped the references to East Jerusalem and the borders in 2017.**

EVALUATE THE LADAKH CRISIS, KEEP CHINA AT BAY

Context:

After over a year, the stand-off between Indian and Chinese troops in eastern Ladakh shows no signs of resolution. Disengagement has stalled, China continues to reinforce its troops, and talks have been fruitless.

In a recent study published by the Lowy Institute — The crisis after the crisis: how Ladakh will shape India's competition with China — this writer has argued that the Ladakh crisis offers New Delhi three key lessons in managing the intensifying strategic competition with China.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (India's Neighbours, India-China relations and Border Issues)

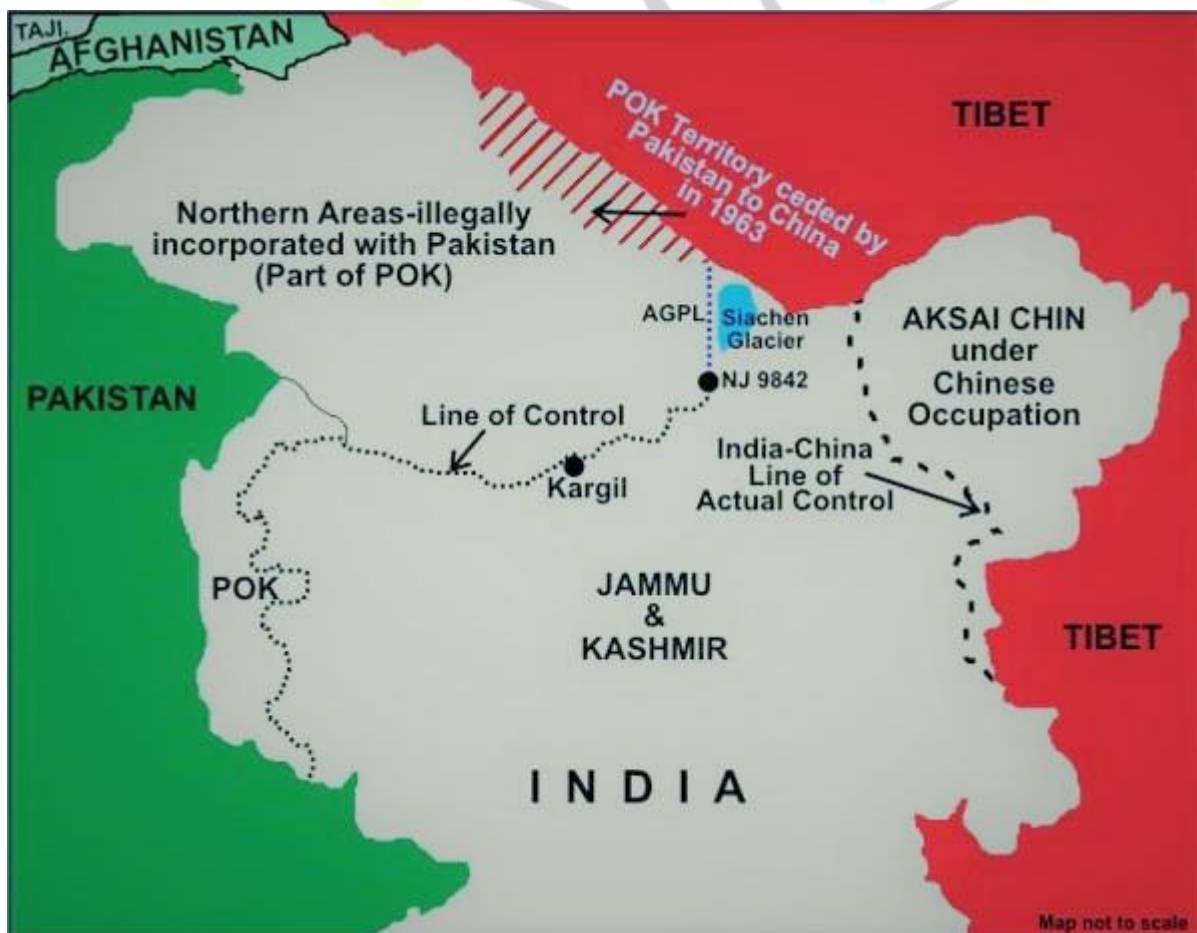
Dimensions of the Article:

1. Line of Actual Control
2. Background to the India-China Standoff: Story So far

3. Major Issues Associated with Disengagement Process
4. Three key lessons in the Lowy Institute study
5. Conclusion

Line of Actual Control

- The disputed boundary between India and China, also known as the Line of Actual Control (LAC), is divided into three sectors: western, middle and eastern.
- The countries disagree on the exact location of the LAC in various areas, so much so that India claims that the LAC is 3,488 km long while the Chinese believe it to be around 2,000 km long.
- The two armies try and dominate by patrol to the areas up to their respective perceptions of the LAC, often bringing them into conflict and leading to incidents such as those witnessed in Naku La in Sikkim earlier this month.
- The LAC mostly passes on the land, but Pangong Tso is a unique case where it passes through the water as well. The points in the water at which the Indian claim ends and Chinese claim begins are not agreed upon mutually.



Background to the India-China Standoff: Story So far

Face-to-face

A timeline of the ongoing standoff between India and China along the Line of Actual Control

May 5/6: Indian and Chinese troops scuffle at Pangong Tso in Ladakh, resulting in injuries in large numbers on both sides

May 9: Clashes erupt between troops at Naku La in north Sikkim

May 14: Army chief makes statement on clashes, says there was "aggressive behaviour" on both sides

May 18: China accuses India of "trespass", alleges "illegal" infra work on LAC

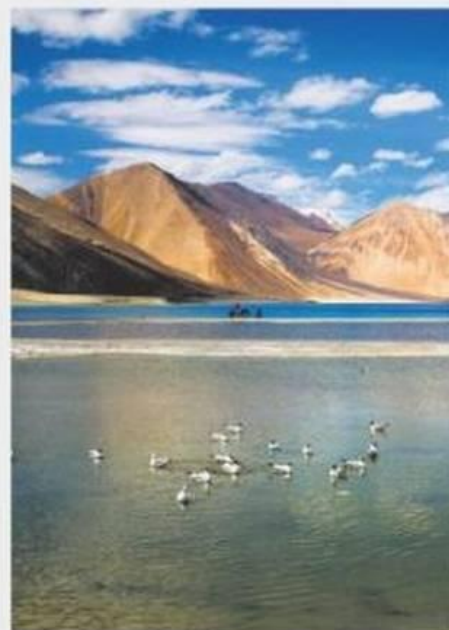
May 21: MEA says Chinese troops "hindering normal patrols"

May 27: China says situation "stable and controllable"

June 2: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh says Chinese troops present at LAC "in large numbers"

June 5: MEA Jt. Secy holds videoconference with Chinese MFA Director General

June 6: Military commanders talk on Chinese side of LAC



A file photo of the Pangong Tso area in Ladakh

- Tensions between the two sides have continued since May 2020, and serious skirmishes were reported between the Indian Army and PLA soldiers at several points of the Line of Actual Control in Ladakh and Sikkim.
- China is understood to have made significant incursions, and the Indian Army has also bolstered its positions.
- After a series of high-level talks between officials of the two countries, they decided to finally reach an agreement on disengagement at Pangong Lake, which has been at the heart of the recent LAC tensions.
- Both sides agreed to a withdrawal of frontline personnel, armored elements, and proposed the creation of a buffer zone that will put a temporary moratorium on patrolling in the disputed lake. China is also asking India to vacate the heights it occupied in an effective countermove in the Kailash Range.

Major Issues Associated with the Disengagement Process

- The current disengagement is limited to two places on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Ladakh viz. north bank of Pangong lake and Kailash range to the south of Pangong. However, there are three other sites of contention on the Ladakh border where the PLA had come in — Depsang, Gogra-Hot Springs and Demchok — and talks will be held to resolve these after the current phase of disengagement is completed.
- The Depsang plains due to their proximity to the Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldie road, the DBO airstrip, and the Karakoram Pass holds strategic importance for India when it comes to dealing with China. Moreover, the Daulat Beg Oldie road is critical for India's control over the Siachen glacier.
- Further, for the sake of disengagement at the north bank, China is asking India to withdraw from the important hills it acquired in the Kailash Range. Thus, it raises questions about the wisdom of giving up the only leverage India had against China in Ladakh.
- There are worries that the creation of proposed buffer zones would lie majorly on the Indian side of the LAC, thus converting a hitherto Indian-controlled territory into a neutral zone. At best, these buffer

zones can provide a temporary reprieve but are no alternative to the mutual delineation of the LAC and a final settlement of the Sino-Indian boundary.

Three key lessons in the Lowy Institute study

Revamping strategies

- The Indian military's standing doctrine calls for deterring adversaries with the threat of massive punitive retaliation for any aggression, capturing enemy territory as bargaining leverage in post-war talks.
- However, the study argues that this strategy is not effective as it did not deter China from launching unprecedented incursions in May 2020, and the threat lost credibility when retaliation never materialised.
- Therefore, the first lesson that the study speaks of is that: India should switch military strategies from the angle of punishment to prevention ("Prevention is better than cure") and deny such incursions before they happen.
- For example: the Indian military's occupation of the heights on the Kailash Range on its side of the LAC in late August 2020 denied that key terrain to the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA), and gave the Indian Army a stronger defensive position from which it could credibly defend a larger segment of its front line.
- A doctrinal focus on denial will give the Indian military greater capacity to thwart future land grabs across the LAC.
- By bolstering India's defensive position, rather than launching an escalatory response, such a strategy is also more likely than punishment to preserve crisis stability.
- Over time, improved denial capabilities may allow India to reduce the resource drain of the increased militarisation of the LAC.

Political costs

- The Chinese military's deployment to the LAC was also large and extremely expensive – China's defence budget is three to four times larger than India's, and its Western Theatre Command boasts over 200,000 soldiers.
- The second lesson that the study speaks of is that China would avoid fighting/pushing if the threats are political in nature. China's military actions do not seem to be deterred by material losses according to the study.
- India successfully raised the risks of the crisis for China through its threat of a political rupture, not military punishment.
- The political risk for China was that if there is an accidental escalation to conflict turning it into a war/war-like situation or if the escalation made India have permanent hostility towards China – then this would become additional burden as China was already facing the instability of its territorial disputes and pandemic response.
- China adjusted its position in the Ladakh crisis because it was responding to the cumulative effect of multiple pressure points — most of which were out of India's control. Therefore, **only coordinated or collective action is likely to be effective**. Even large powers such as India will struggle against China when fighting alone.

Indian Ocean Region is key

- In the India-China border, the region is difficult as the terrain as well as the climate is extreme; not to mention, the strength of the military force is also somewhat evenly matched. This means that both sides can have only minor, strategically modest gains at best.
- The third lesson that the study speaks of is that India should consider accepting more risk of losses on the LAC border while actually focussing on long-term leverage and influence in the Indian Ocean Region.
- From the perspective of long-term strategic competition, the future of the Indian Ocean Region is more consequential and more uncertain than the Himalayan frontier.
- India has traditionally been the dominant power in the Indian Ocean Region and stands to cede significant political influence and security if it fails to answer the dizzyingly rapid expansion of Chinese military power.
- The Ladakh crisis, by prompting an increased militarisation of the LAC, may prompt India to defer long-overdue military modernisation and maritime expansion into the Indian Ocean.
- India will have to make tough-minded strategic trade-offs, deliberately prioritising military modernisation and joint force projection over the ground-centric combat arms formations required to defend territory.

Conclusion

- Rebalancing India's strategic priorities will require the central government, through the Chief of Defence Staff, to issue firm strategic guidance to the military services. This response will be a test not only of the government's strategic sense and far-sightedness, but also of the ability of the national security apparatus to overcome entrenched bureaucratic and organisational-cultural biases.
- Thus far, India has suffered unequal strategic costs from the Ladakh crisis. Chinese troops continue to camp on previously Indian-controlled land. However, critical evaluation of crisis may help to actually brace India's long-term position against China.

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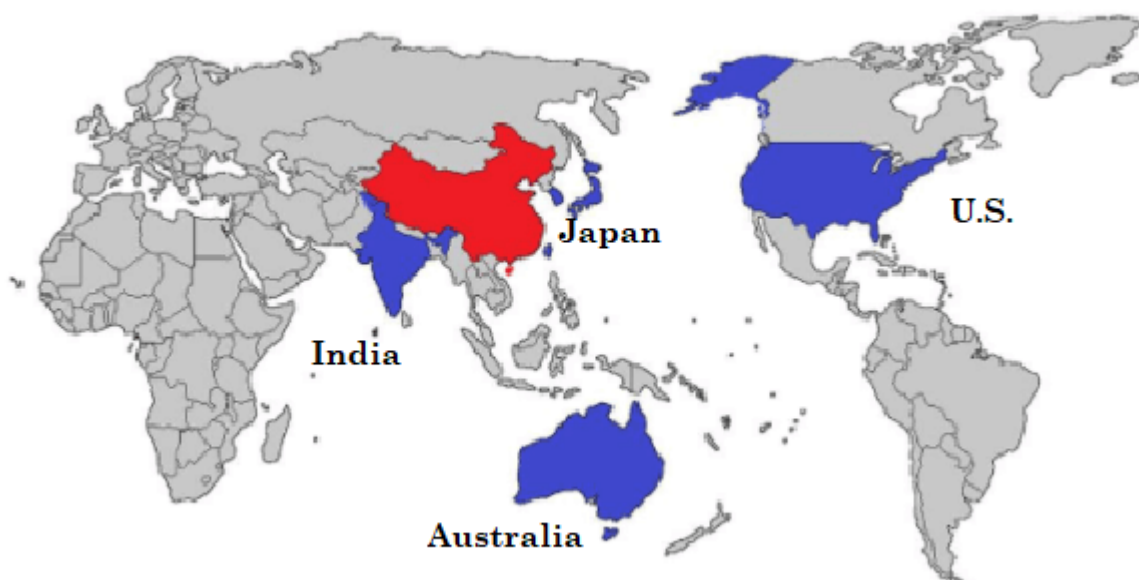
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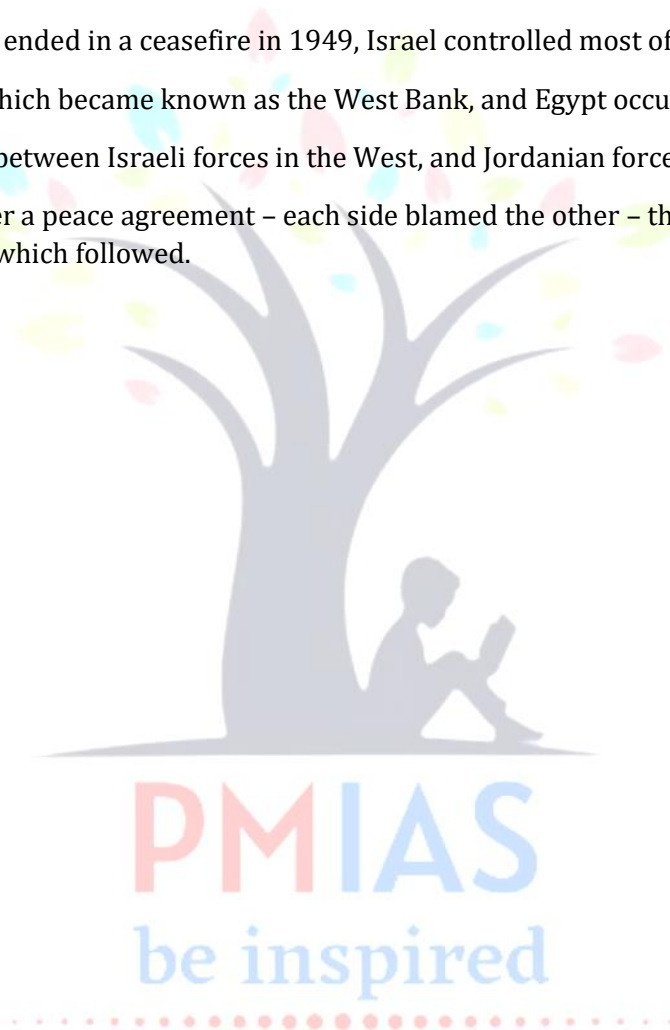
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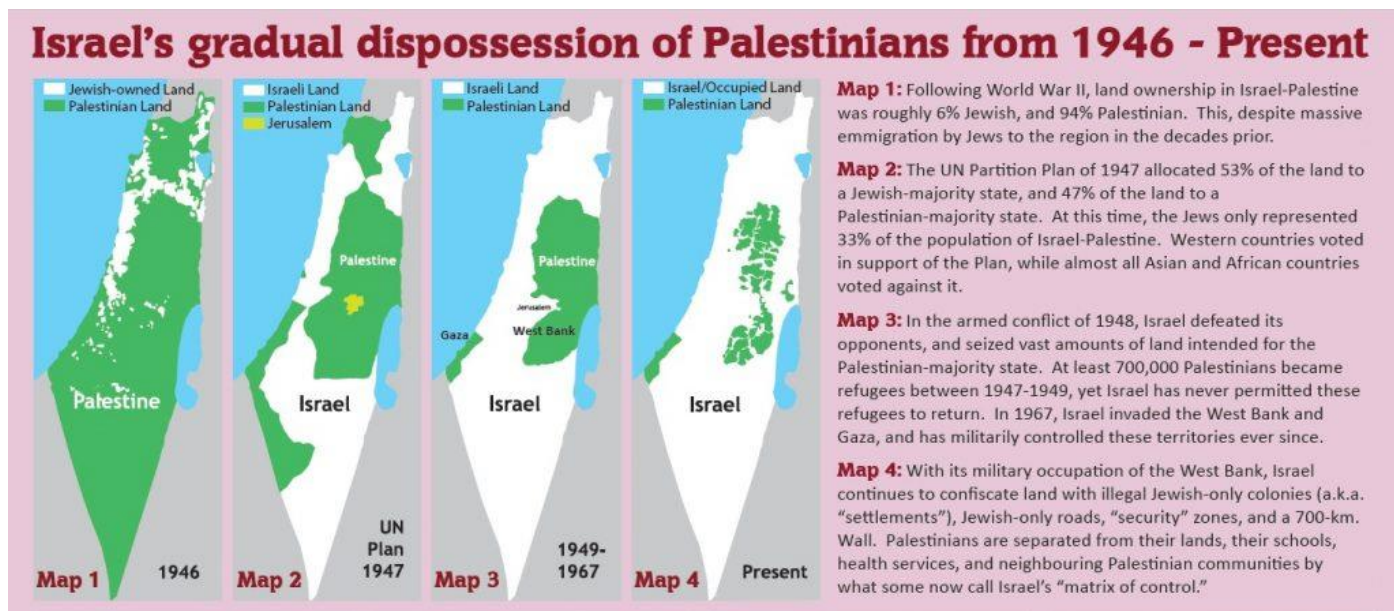


BBC

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[Click Here to read more about the understanding the territory of the region: West Bank, Gaza Strip and Jerusalem](#)

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- India has consistently voted in favour of those resolutions that promote the two-state solution with a Palestinian claim to East Jerusalem.

- Peace based on two-state solution is much needed in the face of international proposals that are in breach of these principles, and cannot be forged between Israel and a third country [U.S.], but can only come from Israel-Palestine talks, which India also supports.



India's Evolving position

- While refusing to toe the Israeli line on the conflict, India's comments also point to its evolving position on the larger Israel-Palestine issue.
- In the May 2021 UNSC meet: India called for the status quo relating to East Jerusalem, but the crucial point that's missing in India's statement is that East Jerusalem should be the capital of a future Palestinian state. Earlier, this used to be the mantra from India regarding the two-state solution.
- Therefore, India simply gave lip service to the two-state solution without mentioning that East Jerusalem is the core part of that two-state solution.
- Until 2017, India's position was that it supported "the Palestinian cause and called for a negotiated solution resulting in a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living within secure and recognised borders, side by side at peace with Israel". **India dropped the references to East Jerusalem and the borders in 2017.**

SRI LANKA'S CHINA-BACKED TAX HAVEN CLEARS FINAL HURDLE

Context:

A Chinese-funded tax-free enclave cleared the final legal hurdle in Sri Lanka as the Supreme Court in Colombo ruled it could go ahead with only minor tweaks.

Relevance:

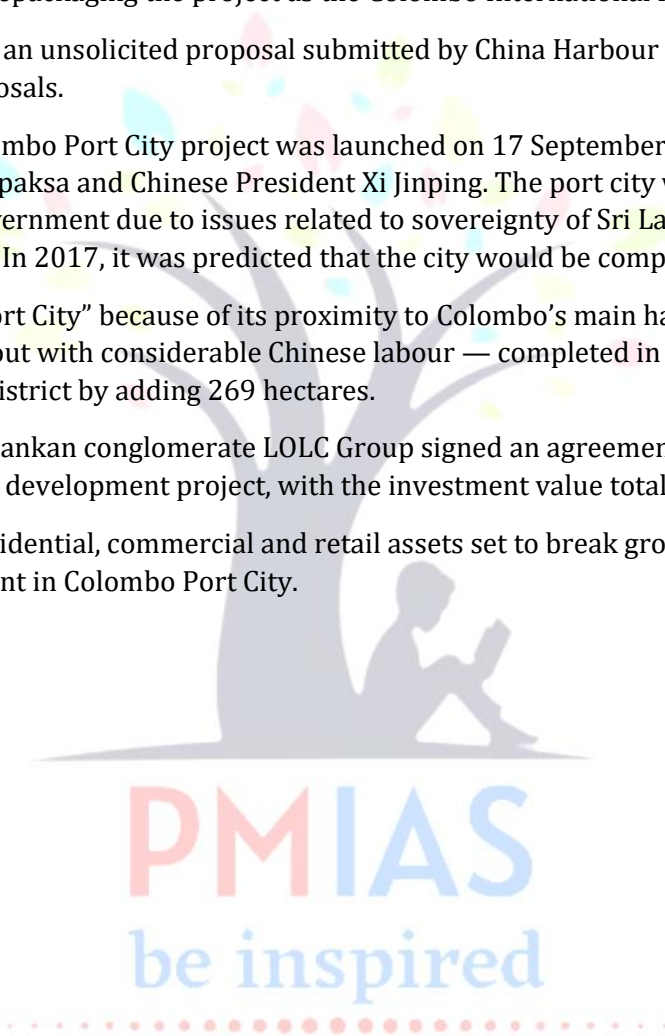
GS-II: International Relations (India's neighbors, Economic relations and Landmark agreements affecting India's Interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About the Colombo Port City
2. About Sri Lanka's recent decision regarding ECT at Colombo Port
3. Geopolitical Significance of Sri Lanka

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.





About Sri Lanka's recent decision regarding ECT at Colombo Port

- The Sri Lankan government offers the West Container Terminal (WCT) to India for possible investments, however, does not want any foreign involvement in the development of the East Container Terminal (ECT) at the Colombo Port.
- This decision comes amid mounting pressure from Port union workers against any foreign role or investment in the ECT project, where nearly 70% of the transshipment business is linked to India.
- Even though Sri Lankan government has announced the decision, there is a tripartite agreement on it between India, Sri Lanka and Japan, so any action upon the development would be considered unilateral.

India's role in development of ECT

- For New Delhi, the strategic ECT project in Colombo has been high on priority.
- The Adani Group – Government of India's nominee – was set to invest in the terminal which would not be "sold or leased" to any foreign entity.
- The Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA) was to hold 51 % stake in the operations, while India and Japan together would hold 49 %, as per the 2019 Memorandum of Cooperation (MOC).

About the New Offer for WCT at Colombo port

- The Rajapaksa government has offered India and Japan the WCT as an alternative, allowing higher stakes.

- In the WCT proposal, India and Japan will be accorded 85% stake – this is similar to the 85% stake given to China Merchants Port Holdings Company Limited in the nearby Colombo International Container Terminal (CICT).
- As opposed to the ECT, the WCT West Container Terminal, however, has to be built from scratch, requiring a much higher investment.
- Colombo's alternative offer also comes at a time when Sri Lanka is seeking support at the ongoing UN Human Right Council session, where a resolution on the country's rights record will soon be put to vote.

Geopolitical Significance of Sri Lanka

- Sri Lanka's location in the Indian Ocean region as an island State has been of strategic geopolitical relevance to several major powers.
- Some examples that highlight Western interests in Sri Lanka's strategic location are the British Defence and External Affairs Agreement of 1948, and the Maritime Agreement with USSR of 1962.
- Even during the J.R Jayewardene (1978-1989) and Ranasinghe Premadasa (1989-1993) tenures, Sri Lanka was chosen to build the Voice of America transmitting station (suspected of being used for intelligence gathering purposes and electronic surveillance of the Indian Ocean).
- It was the massive Chinese involvement during the Rajapaksa tenure that garnered the deepest controversy in recent years.
- China is building state of the art gigantic modern ports all along the Indian Ocean to the south of it, in Gwadar (Pakistan), Chittagong (Bangladesh), Kyauk Phru (Myanmar) and Hambantota (Sri Lanka).
- China's string of pearl's strategy is aimed at encircling India to establish dominance in the Indian Ocean.
- Post 2015, Sri Lanka still relies heavily on China for Port city project and for continuation of Chinese funded infrastructure projects in Sri Lanka.
- Although the Hambantota harbour is reportedly making losses, it too has potential for development due to its strategic location.
- Sri Lanka has a list of highly strategic ports located among busiest sea lanes of communication.
- Sri Lanka's Colombo Port is the 25th busiest container port in the world and the natural deep-water harbor at Trincomalee is the fifth largest natural harbour in the world.
- Port city of Trincomalee was the main base for Eastern Fleet and British Royal Navy during the Second World War.
- Sri Lanka's location can thus serve both commercial and industrial purposes and be used as a military base.



U.S. IN ARCTIC COUNCIL: AVOID MILITARIZATION OF THE ARCTIC

Context:

U.S. Secretary of State said that Washington wanted to avoid a military build-up in the Arctic after Russia defended its military activities in the strategic region, on the eve of an Arctic Council meeting of Foreign Ministers.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Important International Groupings)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About the Arctic
2. Arctic Council
3. Highlights of India's 'Arctic' policy
4. India in The Arctic

About the Arctic

- The Arctic is a polar region located at the northernmost part of Earth.
- The Arctic consists of the Arctic Ocean, adjacent seas, and parts of Alaska (United States), Canada, Finland, Greenland (Denmark), Iceland, Norway, Russia, and Sweden.
- Land within the Arctic region has seasonally varying snow and ice cover, with predominantly treeless permafrost (permanently frozen underground ice) containing tundra. Arctic seas contain seasonal sea ice in many places.



Importance of the Resources in the Arctic region

- The Arctic holds large quantities of minerals, including phosphate, bauxite, iron ore, copper, nickel, and diamond.
- The United States Geological Survey estimates that 22 percent of the world's oil and natural gas could be located beneath the Arctic.
- Large Arctic mines include Red Dog mine (zinc) in Alaska, Diavik Diamond Mine in Northwest Territories, Canada, and Sveagruva in Svalbard.

Arctic Council

- The Arctic Council is a high-level intergovernmental forum that addresses issues faced by the Arctic governments and the indigenous people of the Arctic.
- The Arctic Council is a forum for promoting cooperation, coordination, and interaction among the Arctic states, with the involvement of the Arctic Indigenous communities and other Arctic inhabitants on issues such as sustainable development and environmental protection.
- The Arctic Council has conducted studies on climate change, oil and gas, and Arctic shipping.

Member States and Observer States of the Arctic Council

- The eight countries with sovereignty over the lands within the Arctic Circle constitute the members of the council: Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States.
- Observer status is open to non-Arctic states approved by the Council at the Ministerial Meetings that occur once every two years.
- The Observer States are: Germany, Netherlands, Poland, United Kingdom, France, Spain, China, India, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Singapore and Switzerland.



ARCTIC COUNCIL MEMBERS AND OBSERVERS

Member States
Permanent Observers
Ad Hoc Observers

Highlights of India's 'Arctic' policy

- India expects the Goa-based National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research to lead scientific research and act as a nodal body to coordinate among various scientific bodies to promote domestic scientific research capacities.
- India aims to promote scientific research in the Arctic by expanding “earth sciences, biological sciences, geosciences, climate change and space related programmes, dove-tailed with Arctic imperatives in Indian Universities.”
- Other objectives of the policy include putting in place Arctic related programmes for mineral/oil and gas exploration in petroleum research institutes.
- India's Arctic policy also aims at encouraging tourism and hospitality sectors in building specialised capacities and awareness to engage with Arctic enterprises.

India in The Arctic

- India launched its first scientific expedition to the Arctic in 2007 and set up a research station 'Himadri' in the international Arctic research base at Ny-Ålesund in Spitsbergen, Svalbard, Norway.
- India has two other observatories in Kongsforden and Gruvebadet.
- India has sent 13 expeditions to the Arctic since 2007 and runs 23 active projects.

Himadri (research station)

- Himadri is India's first permanent Arctic research station located at Spitsbergen, Svalbard, Norway.
- It was set up during India's second Arctic expedition in 2008 by the Ministry of Earth Sciences.

- Himadri's functions include long term monitoring of the fjord (Kongsfjorden) dynamics, and atmospheric research.
- The primary goals of India's research include research on aerosol radiation, space weather, food-web dynamics, microbial communities, glaciers, sedimentology, and carbon recycling.

National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research

- The National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research, (NCPOR) formerly known as the National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research (NCAOR) is an Indian research and development institution, situated in Vasco da Gama, Goa.
- It is an autonomous Institution of the Department of Ocean Development (DOD), Ministry of Earth Sciences, which is responsible for administering the Indian Antarctic Programme and maintains the Indian government's Antarctic research stations, Bharati and Maitri.
- NCPOR complex is a home to a special low-temperature laboratory and is setting up a National Antarctic Data Centre and a Polar Museum.
- The NCPOR operates in different fields or tasks:
 1. storing ice core samples, from Antarctica and the Himalayas.
 2. operating the Himadri and IndARC Arctic research stations in Svalbard, Norway.
 3. managing the oceanic research vessel ORV Sagar Kanya, the flagship of India's fleet of oceanographic study vessels.

RUSSIA-UKRAINE: THE CZAR MUST SEEK PEACE

Context:

Recently, there was a stand-off between Russia and Ukraine capturing headlines in the international news media. This geopolitical situation appears to be complex due to the indirect involvement of its multiple stakeholders, including the United States, Turkey and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Important Foreign policies and developments)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About the Russia – Ukraine crisis
2. Sea of Azov Conflict
3. Who Controls Donbas?
4. Recent Developments
5. Conclusion: For a peaceful resolution

About the Russia – Ukraine crisis

- Despite being an independent country since 1991, as the former Soviet republic Ukraine has been perceived by Russia as being part of its sphere of influence.
- Ukraine was one of the republics within the USSR during the cold war days, and has remained a strong ally of Russia ever since, till 2013.

- While it was planning to sign an association agreement with the European Union in 2013, Russia sternly objected to it, leading to tensions.
- Russia subsequently annexed “Crimea” (Russian speaking province in Ukraine) by force and declared its sovereignty over it with people’s support.
- The Russo-Ukrainian War is an ongoing and protracted conflict between Russia and Ukraine that began in 2014, centred around the status of the Ukrainian regions of Crimea and Donbas.
- The resultant conflict has so far claimed about 10,000 lives and displaced millions with no lasting resolution in sight.
- Though the 2014-15 Minsk peace accords prohibited air strikes and heavy artillery firing, the dispute still prevails as a low-intensity combat.

Sea of Azov Conflict

- The Sea of Azov is a shallow body of water that Ukraine shares with Russia.
- Its only access to the open seas is through the Kerch Strait, which connects it to the Black Sea.
- After Crimea’s annexation in 2014, Russia gained control over both sides of the Kerch strait.
- In May 2018, Russia opened a 12-mile-long bridge over the Kerch Strait, which has also become the physical gateway to the Sea of Azov.
- To prevent the Ukrainian boats from passing under the bridge, Russia placed a cargo ship below it.
- In late September, two Ukrainian vessels had successfully travelled from the Black Sea to the Sea of Azov, exercising Ukraine’s maritime rights under international law.
- Recently, three more Ukrainian vessels attempted to make the same journey.
- But the Russian coast guard intercepted the Ukrainians saying that unlike the previous passage, the Ukrainian vessels had failed to request permission and ignored orders to stop.
- However, Ukraine insists that the patrol of the Kerch Strait was authorised under a bilateral agreement with Moscow.
- Thus, the naval skirmish over the Sea of Azov proves again the Russia’s irreversibility of its annexation of Crimea.



Who Controls Donbas?

- Pro-Russian separatist groups attacked pro-government troops in Donetsk and Luhansk (Donbas) regions in Feb. 2014. The two regions are densely populated by Russian-origin people.
- According to the Kyiv administration, the separatists received significant weapons and ammunition from Russia.
- The separatists claimed two so-called states, named Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic, through a so-called referendum on May 11, 2014.
- Russian military vehicles and heavy weapons entered Donbas from the Russian-Ukrainian border, where the Kyiv administration lost control. This situation, which Russia denied, was also included in the reports of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Recent Developments

- From the beginning of April 2021, Moscow has allegedly deployed thousands of troops as well as tanks and artillery near Ukraine's eastern border. It has also mobilised troops in the annexed Black Sea region of Crimea.
- This was enough to send a shock wave among the political elite in Ukraine, forcing them to appeal to the U.S. and NATO and ask for an intervention, if needed.
- In April 2021, NATO Secretary General invited Ukrainian Foreign Minister to the NATO headquarters for a meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Commission on the security situation in Ukraine.

- It was reaffirmed that NATO would continue to provide significant political and practical support to Ukraine.
- Besides powerful rhetoric from NATO, Ukraine seems to be desperate to receive more commitments and concrete actions.
- The Ukrainian President has also used the current tension as an opportunity to push for NATO membership, arguing that 'this is the only way to end the war in Donbas'.

Russia's moves

- Arguably, the cornerstone of the Russia-Ukraine conflict is insufficient communication, especially on the part of Russia. A deficit of explicit messages from Moscow creates room for misinterpretations and exaggerations on the part of Ukraine and its western supporters.
- From the Russian perspective, the current 'military build-up' can be viewed as another round of muscle flexing and an attempt to perpetuate the narrative of a powerful and capable Russia.

Conclusion: For a peaceful resolution

- All the stakeholders in the ongoing crisis should focus on establishing a constructive dialogue among themselves using clear and unambiguous language.
- The only way forward is to seek a peaceful resolution to the Russia-Ukraine conflict rather than exacerbating the reality and using quid pro quo tactics.
- Both countries do need support from the global community, but not in a military form. There is a need for a platform (similarly to the Minsk Agreements) that will facilitate negotiation, mutual consensus and possible compromises, as well as engagement with mediators.
- The long-term solution should be sought out in order to break the vicious cycle of animosity and misunderstanding.

RUSSIA IS HELPING BUILD NUCLEAR PLANTS IN CHINA

Context:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping hailed close ties between their countries as they launched via videoconference work on Russian-built nuclear power plants in China.
- They initiated work on pouring concrete into new units of the Tianwan and Xudabao nuclear power plants.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (India's neighbors, Foreign Policies and interventions affecting India's policies)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Columns of the China – Russia partnership
2. Advantage for China in trade
3. Significance of Russia-China ties and RIC to India
4. Russia-India-China Grouping (RIC)

Columns of the China – Russia partnership

- The three pillars on which the Sino-Russian partnership currently rests are a peaceful boundary, expanding trade and a shared distrust of American intentions.

- Western sanctions have tended to push the Russians closer to China.
- Falling oil prices and fears of new sanctions on Russian gas supplies (Nord Stream 2) are demolishing the core of Russian exports to Europe, thus compelling them to depend to an even greater degree on the Chinese.
- After the western sanctions, China-Russia trade has more than doubled to \$108 billion and China has surpassed Germany as the principal supplier of industrial plant and technology.
- Coordinated action in multilateral forums, increasingly sophisticated joint military exercises, and including activities with third countries such as Iran, reinforce western beliefs about it morphing into an alliance.

China's rise, Russia's unease

- Mr. Xi's talk of "rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation" has raised fears about Chinese revanchism.
- Add to this the Russian concerns over Chinese migration in the Russian Far East, and it would not be improper to surmise that policymakers in Moscow must be concerned about the possibility of China becoming a threat Russia's territorial integrity.

Advantage for China in trade

- As for the economic pillar, while Russia presently enjoys a nominal trade surplus, going beyond gross trade to value-added trade, China has a clear advantage going forward.
- Most of its exports to Russia are now at a higher technology level while the share of labour-intensive goods has declined.
- At the other end of the spectrum, Russian exports have continued to focus on raw materials, especially oil and gas.
- Despite Chinese promises, the investment relationship remains subdued except where it has suited China's core energy interests.
- Russia remains wary about allowing any dominating role for China in oil and gas.
- As for their shared dislike of Washington, each still hopes to repair ties and, therefore, neither trusts the other fully with respect to the third leg of the strategic triangle.

Significance of Russia-China ties and RIC to India

- India is in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which is driven by Russia and China and includes four Central Asian countries.
- Pakistan's membership of SCO and the potential admission of Iran and Afghanistan (as member states) heighten the significance of the SCO for India.
- Growing Chinese influence is testing the informal Russia-China understanding that Russia handles the politico-security issues in the region and China extends economic support.
- The ongoing India-Iran-Russia project for a sea/road/rail link from western India through Iran to Afghanistan and Central Asia, is an important initiative for achieving an effective Indian presence in Central Asia, alongside Russia and China.
- Access to Russia's abundant natural resources can enhance our materials security — the importance of which has been highlighted by COVID-19.

Russia-India-China Grouping (RIC)

- Russia-India-China (RIC) is a strategic grouping that first took shape in the late 1990s under the leadership of Russia 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.

CHINA PROTESTS AS U.S. WARSHIP TRANSITS TAIWAN STRAIT

Context:

- China accused the United States of threatening the peace and stability of the Taiwan Strait after a U.S. warship sailed through the sensitive waterway that separates Taiwan from its giant neighbour.
- The U.S. said that the ship’s transit through the Taiwan Strait demonstrates the U.S. commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific.
- Recently, India protested the U.S. decision to conduct a patrol in the Indian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the western Indian Ocean, rejecting the U.S.’s claim that its domestic maritime law was in violation of international law.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (India’s neighbors, Foreign Policies and interventions affecting India’s policies),
GS-I Geography

Dimensions of the Article:

1. United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)
2. The Precarious Triangle: China, Taiwan, and United States
3. Taiwan Strait
4. China’s Position on Taiwan

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.

US and Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPS)

- The US Department of Defense defines FONOPs as “operational challenges against excessive maritime claims” through which “the United States demonstrates its resistance to excessive maritime claims.”

- The United States has an institutionalized FONOPs program called the Freedom of Navigation Program, which undertakes many FONOPs around the world every year.
- U.S. armed forces have conducted FONOPs in areas claimed by other countries but considered by the U.S. to be international waters.

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.

The Precarious Triangle: China, Taiwan, and United States

- Taiwan continues to be used as a ploy in the political games between the world's two superpowers, with both sides turning up the heat in the Taiwan Strait.
- Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen's inauguration coincides with U.S. lobbying efforts to help Taiwan secure observer status at the World Health Organization (WHO)'s 73rd World Health Assembly, as well as increased pressure from Beijing to have more say in the self-ruling island's status
- Taiwan's actions of transparency and willingness to help and share information in the advent of the virus stand in stark contrast to claims from Beijing that its model for combating COVID-19 is superior. It remains to be seen if Beijing's attempts to keep Taiwan out of the international spotlight and recognition will succeed
- These developments are all the more relevant when viewed against the backdrop of U.S.-China competition plunging into an abyss.

Taiwan Strait

- The Taiwan Strait is a strait separating the island of Taiwan and continental Asia.
- The strait is currently part of the South China Sea and connects to the East China Sea to the north.
- The entire strait is on Asia's continental shelf and there are many islands in the strait.
- Historically both the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of China (ROC) on Taiwan espoused a One-China Policy that considered the strait part of the exclusive economic zone of a single "China".



China's Position on Taiwan

- China has also stepped-up warnings on any attempt to include or support Taiwan's role at the WHA.
- China referred to the "One-China" principle as "a widely accepted universal consensus of the international community including the Indian government."
- China asserts that there is only "One China" and that Taiwan is an inalienable part of it.
- China put forward a formula, known as "one country, two systems", under which both Beijing and Taipei agree that Taiwan belongs to China, while the two still disagree on which entity is China's legitimate governing body.
- China also stated its right to use "non-peaceful means" against Taiwan if it tried to secede from China.

CHINA COMPLETES STRATEGIC TIBET HIGHWAY

Context:

China has completed construction of a strategically significant highway through the world's deepest canyon in Tibet along the Brahmaputra river, enabling greater access to remote areas along the disputed border with Arunachal Pradesh in India.

Relevance:

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

Dimensions of the Article:

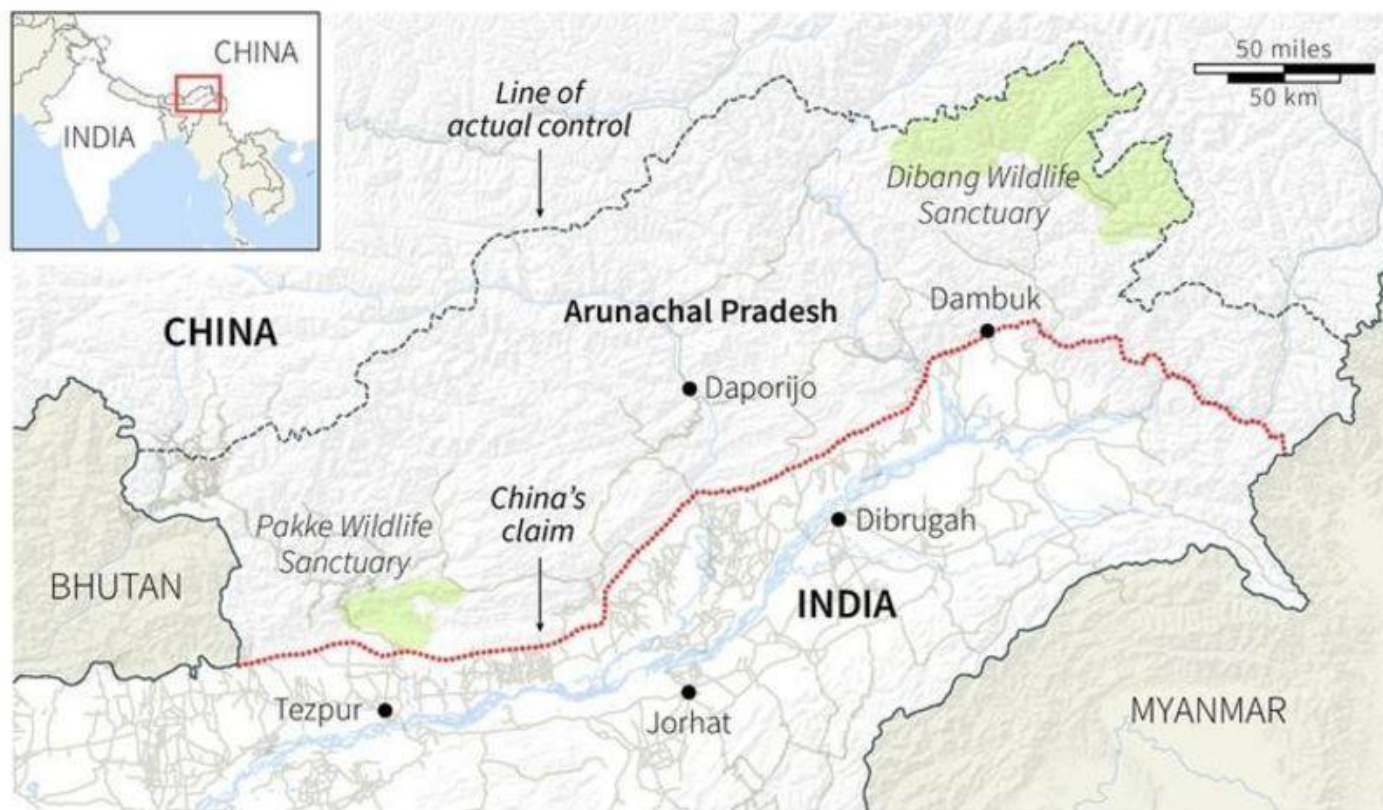
1. About the Chinese Highway near Arunachal Pradesh Border

2. China's push in Border Infrastructure and reasons
3. Concerns over Chinese transport-related infrastructure in Border
4. Steps Taken by India to counter Chinese infrastructure in Border
5. India's Border Area Development Programme (BADP)

About the Chinese Highway near Arunachal Pradesh Border

- The Highway passes through the Grand Canyon of the Yarlung Zangbo river, as the Brahmaputra is called in Tibet. This is the "second significant passageway" to Medog county that borders Arunachal, directly connecting the Pad township in Nyingchi to Baibung in Medog county.
- The construction, which began in 2014, is part of a wider infrastructure push in border areas in Tibet.
- Recently, China has also started working on a strategically important railway line which is its second major rail link to Tibet that will link Sichuan province with Nyingchi, after the first rail link – Qinghai-Tibet railway that opened in 2006.

India-China border



Source: Reuters

Staff, 12/09/2014

REUTERS

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.

Concerns over Chinese transport-related infrastructure in Border

- Infrastructure such as the Highway in Arunachal Pradesh border or the Qinghai-Tibet 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 – thanks to such roads and railway lines.
- The fragile ecological environment in the areas where such projects are undertaken by China, may have ecological concerns for India.

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.

ISRAEL-HAMAS REACH TRUCE AFTER 11 DAYS OF FIGHTING

Context:

A truce between Israel and Hamas took hold on 21 May 2021, after the worst violence in years, with U.S. President Joe Biden pledging to salvage the devastated Gaza Strip and the UN urging new Israeli-Palestinian dialogue.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Important Developments in the International Stage)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. What led to the ceasefire?
2. Did Israel achieve its goals?
3. What was Hamas's strategy?
4. What does the future hold?

[Click Here to read all about the Israel-Palestine conflict and India's stand on the Conflict](#)

[Click Here to read more about the understanding the territory of the region: West Bank, Gaza Strip and Jerusalem](#)

What led to the ceasefire?

- Israel's bombardment of Gaza and militant rocket attacks on Israeli towns ceased after 11 days under an agreement mediated by Egypt but with negotiations to maintain stability still to be held, it was unclear how long it would last.
- Unlike in 2014, when the last major fighting between Israel and Hamas occurred, the Israeli troops were wary of launching a ground invasion this time and this time, the focus of Israel's military campaign, which started on May 10, was on leaving maximum damage to Hamas's militant infrastructure through airstrikes.
- In the first 10 days of the fighting, Israel carried out more than 1,800 airstrikes on Gaza, according to the UN. But one issue with offensives that are heavily focused on air power is that they need a quicker exit strategy.
- Airstrikes will leave disproportionate civilian casualties. And disproportionate airstrikes, which was Israel's strategy, will have even greater damage, inviting international pressure.

- While Israel tried to sell the narrative that it's a victim of terror (which has buyers), the fact remains that Israel is the only sovereign power in this conflict, which continues the occupation of Palestinian territories in violation of UN Security Council resolutions, international laws and norms.
- So, when civilian casualties mounted in Gaza, even those countries that initially supported Israel's "right to defend itself" started calling for a ceasefire.

Did Israel achieve its goals?

- During the course of the attack, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said there were two ways to deal with Hamas — one, to conquer Hamas and the other to establish deterrence. The Prime Minister said his aim was "forceful deterrence", but conquering was "an open possibility".
- Israeli military leaders have claimed that they have killed more than 200 members of Hamas and Islamic Jihad. However, Gaza Health Ministry says more than 200 civilian Gazans were killed in Israeli strikes, including 66 children.
- Israel has also claimed that it has destroyed Hamas's elaborate tunnel network and military and intelligence infrastructure.

What was Hamas's strategy?

- As soon as the ceasefire was announced, Palestinians took to the streets "celebrating the resistance".
- Militarily, Hamas, despite the heavy losses it suffered, demonstrated its growing rocket fire capabilities as Hamas launched at least 4,000 rockets in 11 days.
- By launching barrages of rockets within minutes, it also managed to overwhelm Israel's Iron Dome defence system.

What does the future hold?

- In 2014, after the ceasefire was announced, Israel attempted to assassinate Hamas's shadowy military commander Mohammed Deif, but failed. It was followed by more rocket attacks.
- Ceasefires can be fragile and this time too, the truce is tenuous.
- Hamas says it accepted truce after Israel promised "to lift their hands off Sheikh Jarrah (where Palestinians face eviction from their houses) and Al-Aqsa Mosque. The Israeli side has denied any such promise and emphasised that the ceasefire was unconditional.
- The Supreme Court of Israel is supposed to give a final ruling on the eviction of Palestinians in the neighbourhood. If Israel goes ahead with the eviction process, there could be more protests and violence.
- Israeli leaders say there won't be lasting peace as long as Hamas has rockets. Hamas says there will be rockets as long as the occupation continues.

BRICS ASTRONOMY WORKING GROUP ON TELESCOPES

Context:

The BRICS Astronomy Working Group has recommended networking of telescopes in member countries and creating a regional data network.

Relevance:

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

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Highlights of the BRICS Astronomy Working Group (BAWG) Meeting
2. What is BRICS?

Highlights of the BRICS Astronomy Working Group (BAWG) Meeting

- Under the science, technology and innovation track of the BRICS 2021 calendar, India hosted the seventh meeting of BRICS Astronomy Working Group (BAWG) on online mode in May 2021. It witnessed participation from all five BRICS countries – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

Future directions

- The members of the working group indicated future directions of research in this area such as building a network of intelligent telescopes and data, study of transient astronomical phenomena in the universe, big data, artificial intelligence, machine learning applications to process the voluminous data generated by the enhanced multi-wavelength telescope observatory.
- The delegates deliberated on strategic and operational matters and recommended the networking of existing telescopes in BRICS countries and creating regional data network.
- They agreed to develop a flagship project in this area, according to a statement by the Department of Science and Technology (DST), Government of India. From the Indian side, the Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA), Pune, and the DST coordinated the meeting.

Enhance collaboration

- The BAWG, which provides a platform for BRICS member countries to collaborate in the field of astronomy, recommended that each country should present the scientific results of the work being carried out in their country.
- This will help seek funding support to realise the flagship project whenever funding opportunities were announced by BRICS funding agencies.
- The BAWG noted the importance of enhancing collaboration among astronomers from the BRICS countries.
- **India assumed the BRICS Presidency from January 2021.**

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%.



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

LITHUANIA QUILTS 'DIVISIVE' CHINA'S 17+1 GROUP

Context:

- Lithuania said that it was quitting China's 17+1 cooperation forum with central and eastern European states that includes other EU members, calling it "divisive".
- The Baltic country urged fellow EU members to pursue "a much more effective 27+1 approach and communication with China."
- Recently, Lithuania also took several steps that angered Beijing, including the blocking of Chinese investment and announcing it would open a trade office in Taiwan.

Relevance:

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

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries

2. Lithuania

Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries

- Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries (China-CEE/16+1) is an initiative by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs to promote business and investment relations between China and 16 countries of CEE (CEEC) – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia.
- The format was founded in 2012 in Warsaw to push for cooperation of the “17+1” (the 17 CEE countries and China).
- The China-CEE secretariat is in Beijing, with 17 “national coordinators” in each of the partner CEE countries.
- The format’s goals are to promote the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative and enhance cooperation in the fields of infrastructure, transportation and logistics, trade and investment”.

Lithuania

- Lithuania is a country in the Baltic region of Europe and it lies on the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea.
- Lithuania is a developed country, with a high-income advanced economy; ranking very high in the Human Development Index.
- It ranks favourably in terms of civil liberties, press freedom and internet freedom.
- However, Lithuania has experienced a gradual population decline since the 1990s, with social issues such as income inequality and high suicide rate remaining a problem.
- Lithuania is a member of the European Union, the Council of Europe, eurozone, the Nordic Investment Bank, Schengen Agreement, NATO and OECD. It participates in the Nordic-Baltic Eight (NB8) regional co-operation format.

PMIAS
be inspired



BELARUS FACES BACKLASH SANCTIONS OVER FORCED LANDING

Context:

Western powers prepared to pile sanctions on Belarus and cut off its aviation links after it scrambled a warplane to intercept an aircraft and arrest a dissident journalist, an act which one leader denounced as 'state piracy'.

The European Union (EU) imposed sanctions against Belarus, including banning its airlines from using the airspace and airports of the 27-nation bloc EU.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Important Developments in Foreign Countries), GS-I: Geography (Maps)

Dimensions of the Article:

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

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.



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).

OHCHR: ISRAELI STRIKES IN GAZA MAY BE WAR CRIMES

Context:

- The UN rights chief said that Israeli forces may have committed war crimes in the latest, 11-day war with the militant group Hamas that rules the Gaza Strip, while also pointing that Hamas’ indiscriminate rocketing during the conflict was also a clear violation of the rules of war.
- The remarks by Michelle Bachelet, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), came as the UN’s top human rights body opened a one-day special session to discuss the plight faced by Palestinians in the fighting.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (Important International Organizations, Important Conventions and International Laws)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
2. Objectives of OHCHR
3. What is a War Crime?
4. Geneva Conventions
5. What was said by the OHCHR regarding the recent Israel-Palestine war?

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

- The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, is commonly known as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) or the UN Human Rights Office.
- OHCHR is a department of the Secretariat of the United Nations that works to promote and protect the human rights that are guaranteed under international law and stipulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948.
- The office was established by the UN General Assembly on 20 December 1993 in the wake of the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights.
- The office is headed by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, who co-ordinates human rights activities throughout the UN System and acts as the secretariat of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland.

Objectives of OHCHR

The objectives of OHCHR are to:

1. Promote universal enjoyment of all human rights by giving practical effect to the will and resolve of the world community as expressed by the United Nations

2. Play the leading role on human rights issues and emphasize the importance of human rights at the international and national levels
3. Promote international cooperation for human rights
4. Stimulate and coordinate action for human rights throughout the United Nations system
5. Promote universal ratification and implementation of international standards
6. Assist in the development of new norms
7. Support human rights organs and treaty monitoring bodies
8. Respond to serious violations of human rights
9. Undertake preventive human rights action
10. Promote the establishment of national human rights infrastructures
11. Undertake human rights field activities and operations
12. Provide education, information advisory services and technical assistance in the field of human rights

What is a War Crime?

- War crimes are those violations of International Humanitarian Law (treaty or customary law) that incur individual criminal responsibility under International law.
- War crimes carry an individual liability i.e., the person who has committed a war crime cannot take the defence that he was following the orders of his seniors, one is supposed to not indulge in war crimes even on the orders of their superiors.
- War crimes include torture, rape, destroying property, intentional killing of civilians and prisoner of war, not providing necessary items for the survival of captured people, taking hostages, etc.

Geneva Conventions

- The Geneva Conventions (1949) and their Additional Protocols are international treaties that contain the most important rules limiting the barbarity of war.
- They protect people who do not take part in the fighting (civilians, medics, aid workers) and those who can no longer fight (wounded, sick and shipwrecked troops, prisoners of war).
- The first Geneva Convention protects wounded and sick soldiers on land during war.
- The second Geneva Convention protects wounded, sick and shipwrecked military personnel at sea during war.
- The third Geneva Convention applies to prisoners of war.
- The fourth Geneva Convention affords protection to civilians, including in occupied territory.
- Article 3, common to the four Geneva Conventions, covers situations of non-international armed conflicts. They include traditional civil wars, internal armed conflicts that spill over into other States or internal conflicts in which a third State or a multinational force intervenes alongside the government.
- Two Protocols of 1977: Additional to the four 1949 Geneva Conventions were adopted in 1977. They strengthen the protection of victims of international (Protocol I) and non-international (Protocol II) armed conflicts and place limits on the way wars are fought.

- In 2005, a third Additional Protocol was adopted creating an additional emblem, the Red Crystal, which has the same international status as the Red Cross and Red Crescent emblems.
- **The International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC)**, an international humanitarian organisation, has the mandate to monitor that signatories follow the rules in situations of conflict.

What was said by the OHCHR regarding the recent Israel-Palestine war?

- Air strikes in such densely populated areas resulted in a high level of civilian fatalities and injuries, as well as the widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure.
- Such strikes raise serious concerns of Israel's compliance with distinction and proportionality under international humanitarian law. Such attacks may constitute war crimes.
- Hamas "rockets are indiscriminate and fail to distinguish between military and civilian objects, and their use, thereby, constitutes a clear violation of international humanitarian law.
- Unless the root causes of the violence are addressed, it will certainly be a matter of time until the next round of violence commences with further pain and suffering for civilians on all sides.

INDIA IN TOUCH WITH DOMINICA ON CHOKSI'S REPATRIATION

Context:

- India is in contact with the government of Dominica regarding the possibility of repatriating diamondaire Mehul Choksi who is wanted for defrauding banks in India.
- However, Dominica announced that Mr. Choksi will be sent back to Antigua as the request for repatriation came from the Antiguan authorities.
- India has friendly ties with both Antigua and Dominica that are members of CARICOM, the regional group of Caribbean island nations.

Relevance:

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

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About Dominica
2. About Antigua
3. Caribbean Community (CARICOM)

About Dominica

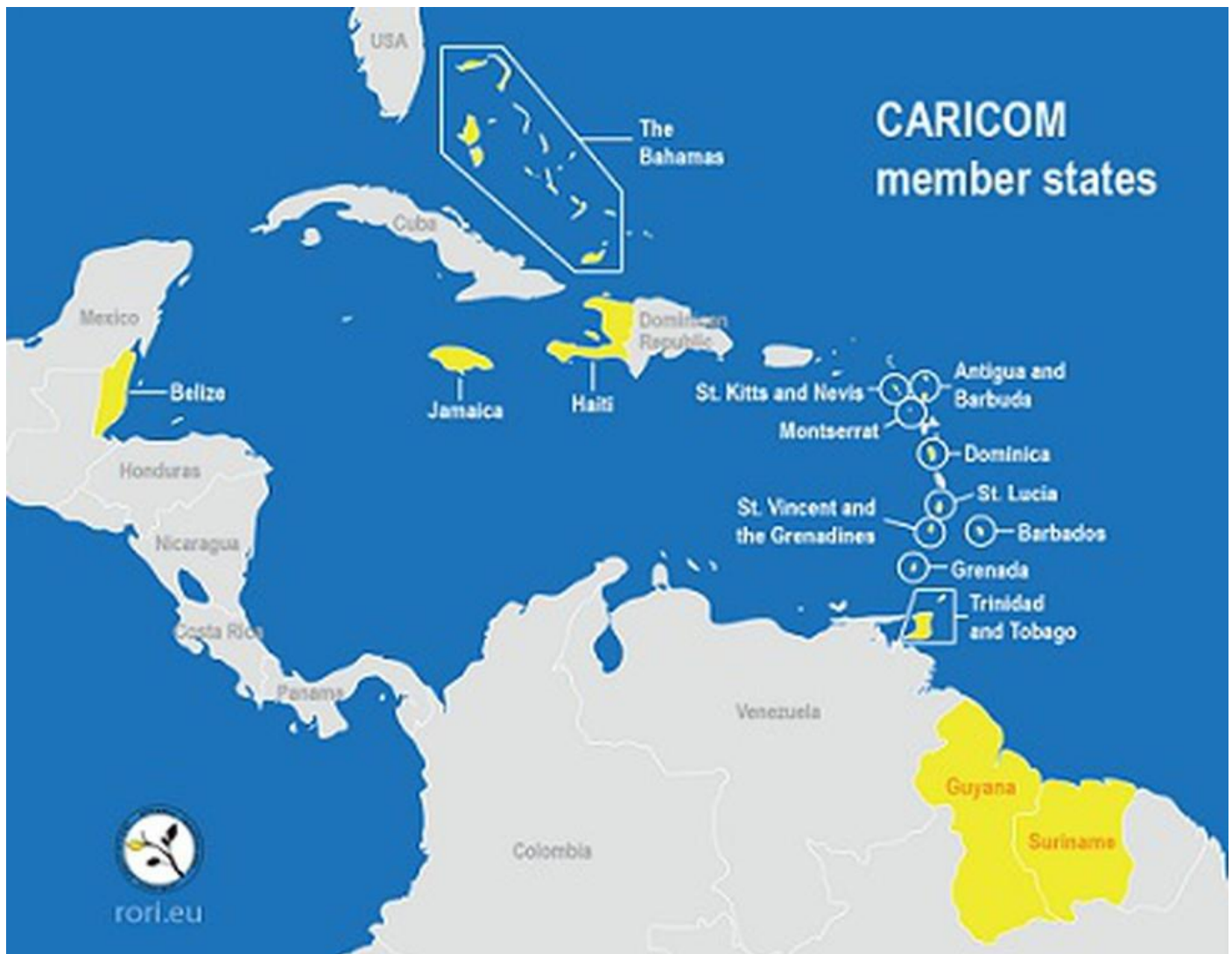
- Dominica (officially the Commonwealth of Dominica) is an island country in the Caribbean whose capital is Roseau.
- It is geographically situated as part of the Windward Islands chain in the Lesser Antilles archipelago in the Caribbean Sea.
- The island is located near Guadeloupe to the northwest and Martinique to the south-southeast.
- Dominica has been nicknamed the "Nature Isle of the Caribbean" for its natural environment.
- It is **the youngest island in the Lesser Antilles, and in fact it is still being formed by geothermal-volcanic activity, as evidenced by the world's second-largest hot spring, called Boiling Lake.**



Caribbean Community (CARICOM)

- The Caribbean Community (CARICOM or CC) is an organization, established in 1973, of fifteen states and dependencies throughout the Caribbean having primary objectives to promote economic integration and cooperation among its members, to ensure that the benefits of integration are equitably shared, and to coordinate foreign policy.
- Its major activities involve:

- Coordinating economic policies and development planning;
- Devising and instituting special projects for the less-developed countries within its jurisdiction;
- Operating as a regional single market for many of its members (Caricom Single Market); and
- Handling regional trade disputes.
- CARICOM was established by the English-speaking parts of the Caribbean, and currently includes all the independent anglophone island countries plus Belize, Guyana and Montserrat, as well as all other British Caribbean territories and Bermuda as associate members.
- Currently CARICOM has 15 full members, 5 associate members and 8 observers.



AS INDIA WATCHES, SRI LANKA SEEKS FDI AND CURRENCY SWAP

Context:

- Sri Lanka invited international investment into the Colombo Port City that it described as a “fully Sri Lankan project”, while official sources in New Delhi said they were “keeping a close eye” on the project and its “security implications”.

- Recently, Bangladesh cleared a USD 200 million currency swap facility for Sri Lanka, to help boost its economy.

Relevance:

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

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About the Currency Swap deal with Bangladesh
2. Sri Lanka's Approach to India
3. Sri Lanka's FDI invite

About the Currency Swap deal with Bangladesh

- Although currency swap between the two countries is an agreement or contract to exchange currencies with predetermined terms and conditions – it is different in the context of Bangladesh and Sri Lanka's latest deal. The present deal between the two countries 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.
- 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. For Sri Lanka, this 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.
- These swap operations carry no exchange rate or other market risks as transaction terms are set in advance.
- This may be the first time that Bangladesh is extending a helping hand to another country, so this is a landmark of sorts.
- Bangladesh has not been viewed so far as a provider of financial assistance to other countries. It has been among the most impoverished countries of the world, and still receives billions of dollars in financial aid.
- But over the last two decades, it has managed to elevate its economy itself majorly, and in 2020, was the fastest growing in South Asia. The country has managed to pull millions out of poverty. Its per capita income just overtook India's.

Sri Lanka's Approach to India

- 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.

Sri Lanka's FDI invite

- Addressing concerns around the recently passed legislation on laws governing the Colombo Port City, which critics fear might be a "Chinese enclave" in the Sri Lankan capital, a team of government Ministers said the China-backed \$1.4 billion-Port City, pitted as a financial hub, had the potential to create 83,000 jobs and bring in up to \$15 billion in investments.

- Constitutional experts and opposition legislators argue that the “financial hub”, coming up on reclaimed land adjoining Colombo’s seafront, would enjoy, besides a tax-free status, immunity from Sri Lankan law.
- It is said by ministers that Sri Lanka would pursue a “non-aligned” foreign policy, amid growing public criticism over the government’s “China-centric” policies.
- China has been among the top lenders to Sri Lanka, especially since the pandemic struck, offering a \$1 billion in loan and a nearly-\$ 1.5 billion currency swap facility.

