



News Analysis (11 Nov, 2020)

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Armenia Azerbaijan Peace Deal

Why in News

Recently, **Russia has brokered a new peace deal between Armenia and Azerbaijan**. Both countries have been in a **military conflict** over the **disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh** in the South Caucasus.

Key Points

- **Nagorno-Karabakh Region:**



- The region extends across **western Asia and Eastern Europe**.
- It has been **part of Azerbaijan territory** since the Soviet era and is being internationally recognised so but most of the region is **controlled by Armenian separatists** who have declared it a republic called the “**Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast**”.

While the **Armenian government does not recognise Nagorno-Karabakh as independent**, it **supports the region** politically and militarily.

- **Conflict and Ceasefire:**

- When the **Soviet Union began to collapse** (with the end of the **Cold War**) in the late 1980s, **Armenia's regional parliament voted for the region's transfer to Armenia** but the **Soviet authorities turned down** the demand.
- Clashes and the violence lasted till **1994**, when **Russia brokered a ceasefire**, by which time ethnic Armenians had taken control of the region.
- In **2016**, the region saw a **Four-Day War** before Russia mediated peace.
- The **Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group**, chaired by France, Russia and the USA, has also tried to get the two countries to reach a peace agreement for several years.
 - **OSCE is the world's largest security-oriented intergovernmental organisation.** Its mandate includes issues such as arms control, promotion of human rights, freedom of the press, and fair elections.
 - **OSCE Minsk Group** was created in **1992** by the **Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE)** to encourage a peaceful, negotiated resolution to the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh.
- In **October 2020**, both countries **agreed to a Russia brokered ceasefire** agreement, however, it also proved to be **unsuccessful**.

- **Reason for the Conflict:**

- Decades-old **Ethnic tensions** have a crucial role in the dispute. While the **Azeris claim** that the disputed **region was under their control in known history**, **Armenians maintain** that Karabakh was a **part of the Armenian kingdom**.
- Currently, the disputed region consists of a **majority Armenian Christian population**, even though it is **internationally recognised as a part of Muslim-majority Azerbaijan**.

- **New Peace Deal:**

- Both sides will now maintain positions in the areas that they currently hold, which will mean a **significant gain for Azerbaijan** as it has **reclaimed over 15-20% of its lost territory** during the recent conflict.
- All **military operations are suspended** and **Russian peacekeepers will be deployed for a period of five years**, along the line of contact in Nagorno-Karabakh and along the **Lachin corridor** which links the Karabakh capital, Stepanakert, to Armenia.
- **Refugees and internally displaced persons will return** to the region and the adjacent territories and the two sides will also **exchange prisoners** of wars and bodies.
- A **new corridor will be opened** from Nakhchivan to Azerbaijan, which will be **under Russian control**.
- **Reactions: Armenian people are against** the deal and have protested while **Azerbaijan is pleased** with the deal and considered it of “historic importance”.

- **Russia’s Role:**

- Russia has always taken a **balanced position** on the matter and has traditionally **good relations with both countries**. It **supplies arms to both** countries.
- Russia has a **military base in Armenia** and both are **members** of the **Moscow-led Collective Security Treaty Organisation**.
The treaty envisages Russia's military support if Armenia is attacked.
However, it does not include Nagorno-Karabakh or the other Azerbaijani regions around it seized by Armenian forces.
- At the same time, **Russia also has strong ties to Azerbaijan**, which is being **openly backed by Turkey**, a **North Atlantic Treaty Organisation** (NATO) member.

Source: IE

SCO Summit

Why in news

The 20th Summit of the **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)** Council of Heads of State was held **recently** via **Video Conferencing**.

The Meeting was **chaired** by **Russian President** Mr. Vladimir Putin.

Key points

- **Significance of SCO Meet:** 20th Summit of SCO Heads of State is important as it brought **President Xi Jinping of China and Mr. Modi together** in the virtual format even as **both sides are caught in the high tension confrontation in Eastern Ladakh** along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

This was the **first SCO Summit** held in **Virtual Format** and the **third meeting** that India participated after becoming a **full member in 2017**.

- **The Republic of Tajikistan assumed chairmanship** of SCO for 2021-22.
- India has proposed to set up a **Special Working Group** on Innovation and Startups and a **Sub Group on Traditional Medicine** within SCO.
- The Prime Minister of India indirectly referred chinese infrastructure projects in **Pakistan Occupied Kashmir** and **India China standoff at line of actual control** and urged members of the SCO to respect “**territorial integrity**” and “**sovereignty**” of each other.
- **Connectivity:** PM highlighted India's role in **supporting infrastructure and connectivity development** projects in the SCO region. **Examples:**
 - **Chabahar port**,
 - 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**.
- **Responsible Global Governance:** Bringing changes in **global governance** will be the focus of India as a non-permanent member of the **United Nation (UN) Security Council**. From 2021 India will take part in the UN Security Council as a **non-permanent member**.
- **Reformed Multilateralism:** In the context of the fallout of the **pandemic** and the **economic downturn**, India sought support of the **SCO members** in attaining a reformed multilateralism.
- **Organised Crime:** India highlighted the challenges posed by the **smuggling of illegal weapons, drugs and money laundering**.
- **Strengthening Cultural Heritage:** The **National Museum of India** will hold an exhibition on **the Buddhist heritage of the SCO countries** and India will host a **food festival** reflecting the **culinary traditions of the SCO region**.

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

- SCO is a permanent intergovernmental international organisation.
- It's a Eurasian **political, economic and military** organisation aiming to maintain peace, security and stability in the region.
- It was **created in 2001**.
- The SCO Charter was signed in 2002, and entered into force in 2003.
- The SCO's **official languages are Russian and Chinese**.

- SCO has **two Permanent Bodies**
 - **SCO Secretariat in Beijing**, and
 - Executive Committee of the **Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) in Tashkent**.
- The Chairmanship of SCO is by rotation for a year by Member States.

Genesis

- Prior to the creation of SCO in 2001, Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan were members of the **Shanghai Five**.
- **Shanghai Five (1996)** emerged from a series of border demarcation and demilitarization talks which the four former Soviet republics held with China to ensure stability along the borders.
- Following the accession of Uzbekistan to the organisation in 2001, the Shanghai Five was renamed the SCO.
- **India and Pakistan became members in 2017.**

Way Forward

The SCO must be used as a platform to **deepen solidarity** and **mutual trust** and **resolve disputes and differences through dialogue and consultations**. It will help in **de-escalating tensions** between India and its neighbouring countries China and Pakistan.

Source:TH

Panna Biosphere Reserve

Why in News

Recently, the **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization** (UNESCO) has included the Panna Biosphere Reserve (PBR) in its **World Network of Biosphere Reserves** (WNBR).

- The PBR is the **third in Madhya Pradesh** to be included in the list after **Pachmarhi and Amarkantak**.
- Along with PBR, the **Fuvahmulah and Addu Atoll in the Maldives** has also been included in the WNBR.

Key Points

- **About:**

- Established in **1981**, PBR is located in the **Panna and Chhatarpur districts of Madhya Pradesh** with an area of around 540 km. sq.
- It is situated in the **Vindhya mountain range** in the northern part of Madhya Pradesh.
- **Ken River** (one of the least polluted tributaries of the Yamuna River) flows through the reserve and the **Ken-Betwa river interlinking project** will also be located in it.
- The region is also famous for **Panna diamond mining**.

- **Conservation and Recognition:**

- **1994:** The **Panna National Park** got the status of **Project Tiger Reserve** as **India's 22nd tiger reserve**.
- **2011:** It was **notified as a Biosphere Reserve** by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC).
- **2018:** By 2018, it witnessed a **remarkable turnaround in tiger population** by increasing their numbers remarkably from zero estimated a decade ago.

Madhya Pradesh has the **highest number of tigers** in the country followed by **Karnataka and Uttarakhand**.

- **2020:** UNESCO included it in the **Man and Biosphere Programme** (MAB).

Biosphere Reserves

- **Biosphere Reserves** (BRs) are representative parts of natural and cultural landscapes extending over large areas of terrestrial or coastal/marine ecosystems or a combination thereof and representative examples of biogeographic zones/provinces.
- The idea of the biosphere reserve was initiated by **UNESCO in 1974 under the MAB** with the **objective** of obtaining international cooperation for the **conservation of the biospheres**.
- The **first biosphere reserve of the world** was established in **1979** and since then the network has increased to **more than 600 in 119 countries** across the world.
- A scheme called **Biosphere Reserve** has been **implemented by the Government of India since 1986**.

Under it, financial assistance is given in a **90:10 ratio to the North Eastern Region States and three Himalayan states** and in the ratio of **60:40 to other states** for maintenance, improvement and development.

- The **State Governments** prepare the **Management Action Plan** which is approved and monitored by the Central MAB Committee.

- India has a **total of 18 Biosphere Reserves** and with the inclusion of PBR, the number of **internationally designated WNBR has become 12**.
 - In **2000**, the **Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve became the 1st BR from India** to be included in the WNBR.
 - In **2018**, the **Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve became the 11th BR** to be included in the list.

Man and Biosphere Programme

- **Launched by the UNESCO in 1971**, it is an **intergovernmental scientific programme** that **aims** to establish a scientific basis for the improvement of relationships between people and their environments.
- **Every year UNESCO designates new Biosphere reserves and removes others** to promote the **conservation of biodiversity and resolve man-animal conflict** at that site and enable sustainable use of natural resources.
- MAB combines the natural and social sciences, economics and education to improve human livelihoods and the equitable sharing of benefits, and to safeguard natural and managed ecosystems, thus **promoting innovative approaches to economic development that are socially and culturally appropriate, and environmentally sustainable**.

Source: HT

Annual Meeting of IBA

Why in News

Recently, the **Indian Banks' Association (IBA)** has held its **73rd annual general meeting** virtually. In the meeting, the Finance Minister of India **suggested the banks to bring new reforms and implement the existing ones** in a timely manner.

- IBA is an **association of Indian banks and financial institutions**, formed on **26th September 1946** and is based in **Mumbai**.
- **EASE (Enhanced Access and Service Excellence) Reforms Agenda**, launched in **January 2018**, was commissioned through IBA.

Key Points

- **On Linking Aadhar:**
 - **Aadhaar-seeded bank accounts** are needed to reach people by **Direct Benefit Transfer** (DBT).
 - Banks should **link every account with the customer's Aadhaar number by 31st March 2021** in order to **stop the duplication of accounts** as well as **verify the unverified** accounts.
- **On Widening Financial Inclusion:**
 - Even though there are 42 crore **Jan Dhan** bank accounts in India, there is a **need to widen financial inclusion** by adding more people.
 - Banks should **promote RuPay cards** over others now that the card network has become global and also make sure that all Indian customers have it.
 - RuPay is the first-of-its-kind **domestic Debit and Credit Card payment network** of India.
 - It was launched by the **National Payments Corporation of India** (NPCI), an umbrella organisation for operating retail payment and settlement systems in the country.
- **On Digitisation:**
 - **Unified Payments Interface** (UPI) should be a common parlance word in all the banks.

UPI is a **single platform that merges various banking services and features** under one umbrella, established by the NPCI together with the **Reserve Bank of India** (RBI) and IBA.
 - **Non-digital payments should be discouraged** in order to give impetus to the **Digital India Initiative**.
- **On Amalgamation of Banks:**
 - There is a **need for more large banks** that can finance large projects and for that **more amalgamation** as big as State bank of India (SBI) are needed.

Amalgamation should not just remain as an exercise to bring two or three banks together, it should now **become an organic mechanism to grow, and to grow to such scales that the new demands from the industry, economy, and businesses can all be met up** in a changing world.
 - Large banks are also needed as much as the **smaller finance companies, smaller banks, and Non-Banking Financial Companies** (NBFCs).
 - While India has only about 500-600 banks, including the regional rural ones, the USA has around 26,000 banks with a fourth of India's population.
 - There is **only one Indian bank (SBI) in the top 100 globally**, against 18 in China.

- **On Lending:**

Banks must not shy away from lending, especially when the economy is facing major challenges and as **lending is their principal business** and they must lend after undertaking prudent risk management rather than avoid lending altogether.

Source: TH

National Education Day

Why in News

The Union Minister of Education **virtually** inaugurated the **National Education Day** programme organised by IIT Bombay.

Key Notes

- **National Education Day**

- It has been observed every year on **11th November**, since 2008 to commemorate the **birth anniversary of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad**.
- **Maulana Abul Kalam Azad :**
 - He was the **first Union Education Minister** of India.
 - He was a freedom fighter, scholar and eminent educationist.
 - He was a key architect of Independent India who was responsible for setting up apex education bodies like **All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE)** and **University Grants Commission (UGC)**.
 - He was posthumously awarded **Bharat Ratna**, India's highest civilian award in 1992.

- **About the Event**

In the event India's commitment to establish India as a **global hub of education and to ensure high quality of education** was reiterated through **Study in India, Stay in India** and **Internationalization of Education**.

- **Study in India, Stay in India** is an extension of the **Study in India programme**, a flagship project of the Government of India, launched in collaboration with the **Ministry of Education, Ministry of External Affairs, Ministry of Home Affairs, and Ministry of Commerce and Industry in April 2018**.

Study in india programme objectives:

- To improve the soft power of India with focus on the neighbouring countries and use it as a tool in diplomacy.
 - To boost the number of inbound International students in India.
 - To double India's market share of global education exports from less than 1 percent to 2 percent.
 - Increase in contribution of international students in the form of direct spends, indirect spends, spillover effects.
 - Improvement in overall quality of higher education.
 - Increase in global ranking of India as an educational destination.
 - To reduce the export – Import imbalance in the number of International students.
 - Growth of India's global market share of International students.
- India is **cooperating and coordinating with the leading universities of the world**. This has been incorporated in **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** by inviting top 100 World Universities to set up campuses in India.

Education In India

- **Constitutional Provisions:**

- Part IV of Indian Constitution, **Article 45 and Article 39 (f)** of Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP), has a provision for **state-funded as well as equitable and accessible education**.
- The **42nd Amendment** to the Constitution in 1976 moved education from the State to **the Concurrent List**.

The education policies by the Central government provides a broad direction and state governments are expected to follow it. However, it is **not mandatory**, for instance Tamil Nadu does not follow the three-language formula prescribed by the first education policy in 1968.

- The **86th Amendment in 2002** made education an enforceable right under **Article 21-A**.

- **Related Laws:**

Right To Education (RTE) Act, 2009 aims to provide primary education to all children **aged 6 to 14 years** and enforces education as a Fundamental Right.

It also mandates **25% reservation** for disadvantaged sections of the society where disadvantaged groups

- **Government Initiatives:**

Way Forward

- Programmes like **Study in India** and the **New Education Policy** aim to facilitate an **inclusive, global and high quality education**, which takes into consideration field experiences, empirical research, stakeholder feedback, as well as lessons learned from best practices.
- If **implemented in its true vision**, they will bring India at par with the leading countries of the world and establish India as a **global hub of education**.

Source: PIB

National Water Awards

Why in News

The **Department of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation of the Ministry of Jal Shakti**, is organising the **2nd National Water Awards** (NWAs) for the year 2019.

Key Points

- **National Water Awards:**
 - The awards are organised by the **Department of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation, Ministry of Jal Shakti.**
 - The NWAs were launched in **2007** for the first time along with the **Ground Water Augmentation Awards** and the winners in different categories are given a **citation, trophy and cash prize.**
 - These focus on the good work and efforts made by individuals and organisations across the country, and the government's vision for the path to '**Jal Samridh Bharat**'.
 - **Objectives:**
 - To **motivate** individuals/organisations who are doing commendable work in the field of **water resources conservation and management.**
 - To **create awareness** among the people about the importance of water and encourage them to adopt the best water usage practices.
 - **Opportunities Provided: Start-ups, leading organisations and people** can **engage, deliberate and strengthen existing partnerships** on issues concerning water conservation and management activities.
- **Need for Water Conservation and Management:**
 - Depletion of water resources due to **overuse and decline in water supplies due to climate change** is pushing India closer to the tipping point of water scarcity.
 - Apart from these, several government policies especially pertaining to agriculture resulted in **over-exploitation of water.** These factors make India a water-stressed economy. In this context there is a need for **water resource conservation and management.**

Initiatives by the Government

- **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act:**
 - The huge workforce employed under the MGNREGA has **enabled the government to introduce water conservation** as a project under the Act.
 - The government **aims to improve groundwater harvesting, build water conservation and storage mechanisms** through MGNREGA.
- **Jal Kranti Abhiyan:**
 - Under it, the government is making active efforts to **revolutionise villages and cities through block-level water conservation schemes.**
 - For example, the **Jal Gram Scheme** under the Jal Kranti Abhiyan is aimed at **developing two model villages** in water-starved areas to lead the other villages towards water conservation and preservation.

- **National Water Mission:**
It was launched with the objective of **conservation of water, minimising wastage and ensuring more equitable distribution** both across and within states through integrated water resources development and management.
- **NITI Aayog's Composite Water Management Index:**
With the objective of achieving effective utilization of water, **NITI Aayog** has developed the Composite Water Management Index.
- **Jal Shakti Ministry and Jal Jeevan Mission:**
The efforts like the **formation of Jal Shakti Ministry** (to tackle water issues holistically) and the goal to provide **piped water to all rural households by 2024**, under the Jal Jeevan mission, are steps in the right direction.
- **Atal Bhujal Yojana:**
 - It is a **central sector scheme worth Rs.6,000** crore for sustainable management of groundwater with community participation.
 - It envisages people's participation through the formation of 'Water User Associations', water budgeting, preparation and implementation of Gram-panchayat-wise water security plans, etc.
- **Jal Shakti Abhiyan:**
It was launched in **July 2019** as a **campaign for water conservation and water security** in the country.

Way Forward

- People tend to neglect the importance of water conservation because in most places it is **free of cost or charged nominally**, so it is important for them to realise its importance and be aware of its degrading status.
- Initiatives like **National Water Awards, along with the other government initiatives** will help **to create that awareness** and motivate them to adopt the best water usage practices which will help India in becoming '**Jal Samridh Bharat**'.

Source: PIB

Thirty Meter Telescope Project

Why in News

The design of **back-end instruments** and other aspects of the **Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT)** project being installed at **Maunakea in Hawaii** has been developed by close collaboration between the **2020 Physics Nobel Laureate Prof. Andrea Ghez** and **Indian astronomers**.

Key Point

- The Thirty-meter telescope (TMT) project is an international partnership between the **USA, Canada, Japan, China, and India.**
- It will allow deeper exploration into space and **observe cosmic objects** with unprecedented sensitivity.

- **Other Global Projects with Indian Collaboration:**
 - **The Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO) Project**
 - The Indian scientists contributed in several aspects such as **designing algorithms for analysis of signals from gravitational waves**, estimating energy and power radiated from black holes etc.
 - Now **LIGO-India** is a planned advanced gravitational-wave observatory to be located in India as part of the worldwide network.
 - **CERN Project**
 - India became a **full Associate Member** of world's largest particle **Physics laboratory CERN** in 2017, thereby **getting full access** to data generated there.
 - The contribution of Indian scientists there is mainly in building the **Large Hadron Collider (LHC)** and construction of two significant CERN experiments, **CMS and ALICE**.
 - **Facility for Antiproton and Ion Research (FAIR)**
 - FAIR is coming up at **Darmstadt, Germany** for **studying the building blocks of matter and the evolution of the Universe**.
 - FAIR is a sophisticated **accelerator complex** that will **use the high energy and ion beams to mimic the condition inside the core** of the stars and early phase of the universe.
 - The role of Indian scientists would be to build **NUSTAR** (Nuclear Structure, Astrophysics and Reactions), **CBM** (Compressed Baryonic Matter) and **PANDA** (Antiproton Annihilation at Darmstadt).
 - **Square Kilometre Array (SKA)**
 - India has joined **nine other countries** to build the **world's largest and most sophisticated radio telescope** called Square Kilometre Array (SKA).
 - The **core of the telescope will be based in Karoo desert in South Africa**. Since the **total detection area** of the receiver dishes would exceed **1 square kilometer**, it is called Square Kilometre Array.
 - **International-Thermonuclear-Experimental-Reactor (ITER)**
 - The International-Thermonuclear-Experimental-Reactor (ITER) is focused around **creating an environment mimicking the Sun** in laboratory conditions using **nuclear fusion**.
 - India's scientists and institutions such as **Institute for Plasma Research, Ahmedabad** are playing an important role in this.

Source: PIB
