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News Analysis (13 Aug, 2021)

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UNSC Meet on Maritime Security

Why in News

Recently, the **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)** has adopted the **first-ever presidential statement** on maritime security.

- **India, as the UNSC president for August 2021**, noted the threats to maritime safety and security and called upon the members to consider implementing the **2000 UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime**.
- All the **permanent members of UNSC (US, China, Russia, UK and France)** attended the Meet.

Key Points

Statement on Maritime Security:

- Emphasized on safeguarding the legitimate uses of the oceans and security of coastal communities, affirming that international law — reflected in the **1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea**, among other global instruments — provides the legal framework for combating these illicit activities.
- Called on Member States to **implement the International Ship and Port Facility Security Code** and Chapter XI-2 of the **International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea**, and to **work with the International Maritime Organization (IMO)** to promote safe and secure shipping while ensuring freedom of navigation.
- Member States, by other terms, should also consider **ratifying, acceding to and implementing the 2000 United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime** and the Protocols thereto.

Note

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

- The '**Law of the Sea Treaty**', formally known as the United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS) was adopted in 1982 to establish jurisdictional limits over the ocean areas.
- The convention defines distance of 12 nautical miles from the baseline as Territorial Sea limit and a distance of 200 nautical miles distance as Exclusive Economic Zone limit.
- India became a signatory to the UNCLOS in 1982.

International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code

- The ISPS Code is a set of measures to enhance the security of ships and port facilities. It was developed in response to the perceived threats to ships and port facilities after the 9/11 attacks.
- **Chapter XI-2 of the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea** enshrines the ISPS Code.

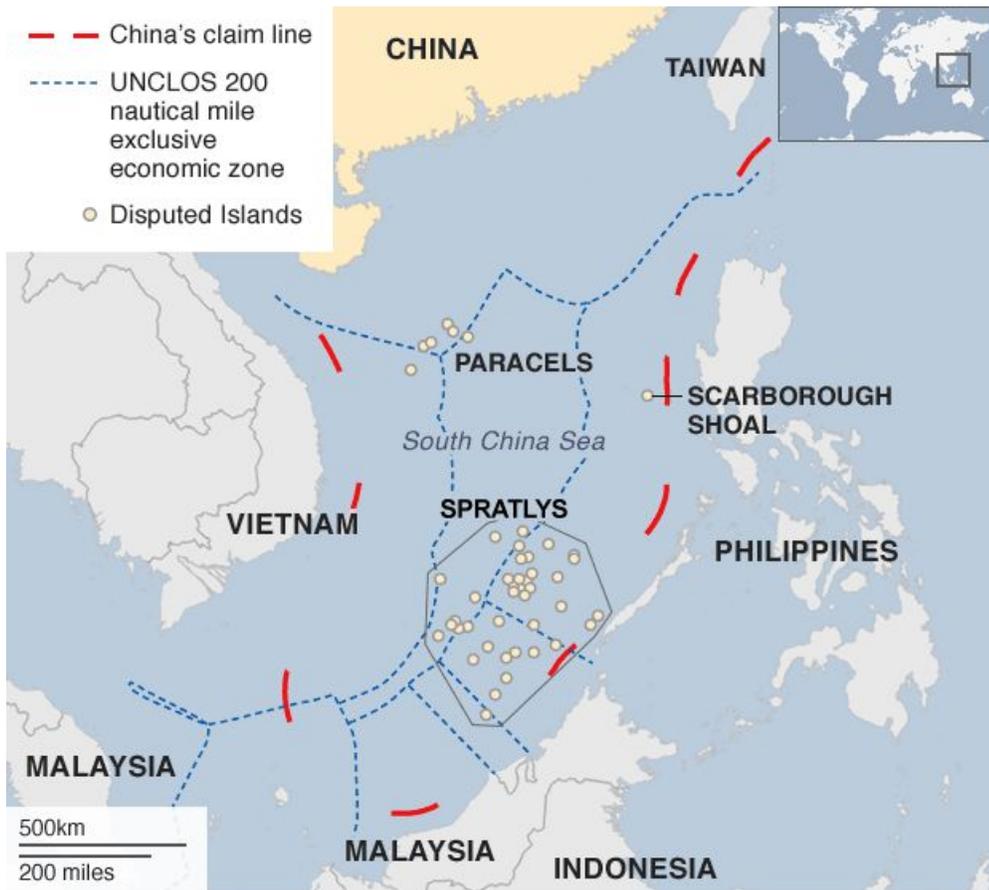
International Maritime Organization (IMO)

- IMO is a **specialized agency of the United Nations (UN)**. It is a **global standard-setting authority** with responsibility to improve the safety and security of international shipping and prevention of marine and atmospheric pollution by ships.
- India joined the IMO in 1959. The IMO currently **lists India as among the 10 states with the 'largest interest in international seaborne trade'**.

UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC)

- UNTOC is **also known as the Palermo Convention** since it was adopted in Palermo in Italy in 2000, entered into force in 2003. **India joined UNTOC** in 2002.
- The idea behind having an international convention against organized crime was that if crimes could cross borders, so must law enforcement.

- **India's Stand:** India has put forth **five basic basic principles** for maritime security.
 - **Free maritime trade** sans barriers so as to establish legitimate trade.
In this context, **SAGAR ('Security and Growth for all in the Region')** **vision** can be highlighted.
 - **Settlement of maritime disputes** should be peaceful and on the basis of international law only.
It was with this understanding, and maturity, that **India resolved its maritime boundary with its neighbour Bangladesh.**
 - **Responsible maritime connectivity** should be encouraged.
Making reference to **China's Belt and Road Initiative**, India held that, while creating structures for "maritime connectivity", countries should **keep "financial sustainability" and absorption capacity of the host countries.**
 - Need to **collectively combat maritime threats** posed by non-state actors and natural calamities.
Highlighting **India's role in the Indian Ocean has been that of a net security provider.**
 - **Preserve the maritime environment** and maritime resources.
Highlighting increasing **pollution from plastic waste and oil spills.**
- **US' Stand:**
 - **Conflict in the South China Sea** or in any ocean would have **serious global consequences for security and for commerce.**
 - It highlighted that **China has been building military bases on artificial islands** in the region also claimed by Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam.
 - The US also referred to the unanimous and legally binding decision five years ago by the **arbitral tribunal constituted under the UNCLOS which China firmly rejected as unlawful.**



- **China's Stand:**

- China held that with the joint efforts of China and **ASEAN countries**, the situation in the South China Sea remains generally stable.
- Referring indirectly to the **Quad** (US, India, Japan, Australia), a few countries are pursuing exclusive regional strategies in the **Asia Pacific region**.
This can create and intensify maritime conflicts, undermine the sovereignty and security interests of relevant countries, and weaken regional peace and stability.
- Further, China criticizes the US that it is not qualified to make irresponsible remarks on the issue of the South China Sea, **because the US itself has not joined the UNCLOS**.

- **Russia's Stand:**

- Russia **did not mention the South China Sea or the Indo-Pacific**, and articulated a much nuanced position.
- It promotes **strict adherence to** key norms and principles of international law enshrined in the UN Charter, such as respect for **sovereignty, non-intervention in the internal affairs** and settling disputes through dialogue.

- **UK's Stand:**
 - The UK has a vision for a **free, open and secure Indo-Pacific**.
 - In this context, the UK's recent **Integrated Review of Foreign, Security, Defence and Development policy** set out the importance it attaches to the Indo-Pacific.
- **France's Stand:**
 - It held that the **maritime domain has emerged as a theatre for a new generation of challenges** and urged greater cooperation among the members of the UNSC to deal with the issue.
 - Such as, **combating climate change** and its consequences on security, particularly in terms of natural disasters.

Source: IE

Sanctions Imposed Against Belarus

Why in News

The **UK, the US and Canada** have issued **fresh trade, financial and aviation sanctions on Belarus**, in a bid to increase pressure on the country's leader Alexander Lukashenko.



Key Points

- **Background:**

- **Europe's longest-serving ruler**, President of Belarus (**Lukashenko**) **took office in 1994** amid the chaos caused by the **collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991**.
- Often described as **Europe's "last dictator"**, he has tried to **preserve elements of Soviet communism**.

He has been in power for 26 years, keeping much of the economy in state hands, and using censorship and police crackdowns against opponents.

- In **2020**, after **Lukashenko was announced as the winner in elections**, protests broke out in the capital, Minsk which were met with a violent security crackdown.

There has been **widespread anger against the government** over a **stagnant economy** and doubts about the fairness of the election.

- **Sanctions' Targets:**

- The idea is to **focus on the regime and Lukashenko's associates** as precisely as possible and **discourage Western companies from doing business with Belarus**.
- The latest sanctions **restrict exports of surveillance and military technology** to Belarus.
- The sanctions partially **ban imports of potash fertilizer, petrol and petrol-based products** from Belarus.
- In the cases of the **EU, U.K. and Canada**, the **embargo also restricts financial trade** such as buying state debt and insuring or reinsuring state-related entities.
- The EU and US have **sanctioned Belarus' tobacco industry**, which contributes to the lucrative cigarette smuggling trade.

More than 90% of cigarettes smuggled into Lithuania came from Belarus in 2019.

- Western countries also **blacklisted some Belarusian citizens**.

- **Impacts:**

- **Targeting Belarus' potash sector** was a strategic move insofar as the country is the **second largest exporter of the fertilizer** behind Canada, covering 21% of the world's potash exports in 2019.

But, sanctions cover **only 15% of all potash exports** to the EU.

- Also, **Russia represents 49.2%** of all Belarusian trade and **Belarus can export its sanctioned goods across the Russian border** for re-export from there.
- The impact of restrictions on dual-use goods, monitoring and interception goods and technology, and goods used in cigarette manufacturing would be negligible.

- **Opportunity for Russia:**

Since, Russian President Putin has tense relations with Lukashenko, and the sanctions are an **opportunity for Russia to impose its own conditions** on Lukashenko's survival in control of a crumbling state, which Russia has financially supported for decades.

- **Belarus' Stand:**

Accused the U.K., US and Canada of ignoring the will of the Belarusian people and employing the "entire arsenal of 'cold war' methods" in pursuit of regime change.

Way Forward

- The **President of Belarus** should ensure the formation of a legitimate government that could address the country's vital problems.
- He has to **reach out to the Opposition** and **offer talks to find a peaceful settlement to the crisis.**

Source: IE

Issue of Illegal Migrants

Why in News

Recently, the **Ministry of Home Affairs** has informed in the **Lok Sabha** that according to some reports some Rohingya migrants are indulging in illegal activities.

The **response came on the queries about the current situation of Rohingya** living illegally in various parts of the country.

Rohingya

- The Rohingya people are a **stateless, Indo-Aryan ethnic group** who reside in **Rakhine State, Myanmar.**
- They are described by the United Nations (UN) as one of the **most persecuted minorities in the world.**
- The Rohingya refugee crisis is **caused by the Rohingya people** having long faced **violence and discrimination in Myanmar.**
- To escape discrimination and violence in Myanmar, minority **Rohingya Muslims have for decades fled from the Buddhist-majority country to neighboring Bangladesh** and other countries, **including India.**

Key Points

- **Issues & Concerns:**

- **Threat to National Security:**

- The **continuance of the illegal immigration of Rohingyas** into India and their continued stay in India is found to be having **serious national security ramifications** and **poses serious security threats**.

- **Clash of Interests:**

- It impacts the **interests of local populations** in the areas seeing large-scale influxes of illegal immigrants.

- **Political Instability:**

- It also increases the political instability when **leaders start mobilising the perception of the citizens of the country against the migrants** by the elites to grab political power.

- **Rise of Militancy:**

- The **persistent attacks against the Muslims** perceived as illegal migrants has given way to radicalisation.

- **Human trafficking:**

- In the recent decades, **trafficking of women and human smuggling** have become quite rampant across the borders.

- **Disturbance in Law and Order:**

- The rule of law and integrity of the country are undermined by the illegal migrants who are engaged in **illegal and anti-national activities**.

- **Steps Taken by Government:**

- Centre had **issued instructions** to the State governments and Union Territory administrations, advising them to **sensitise the law enforcement and intelligence agencies** to take appropriate steps for prompt identification of illegal migrants.

- **Consolidated instructions** to tackle the **issue of overstay and illegal migration** of foreign nationals have also been issued.

- **Existing Legal Framework:**
 - **The Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920:**
 - The act **empowered the government** to make rules **requiring persons entering India** to be in possession of passports.
 - It also **granted the government** the power to **remove from India** any person who entered **without a passport**.
 - **Foreigners Act, 1946:**
 - It replaced the **Foreigners Act, 1940** conferring wide powers to deal with all foreigners.
 - The act **empowered the government** to take such steps as are necessary **to prevent illegal migrants** including the use of force.
 - The concept of '**burden of proof**' lies with the **person, and not with the authorities** given by this act is still applicable in all States and Union Territories. This concept has been upheld by a **Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court**.
 - The act **empowered the government** to establish **tribunals** which would have powers **similar to those of a civil court**.
 - Recent amendments (2019) to the Foreigners (Tribunals) Order, 1964 **empowered even district magistrates in all States and Union Territories** to set up tribunals to decide whether a person staying illegally in India is a foreigner or not.
 - **The Registration of Foreigners Act, 1939:**
 - Registration under FRRO is a **mandatory requirement under** which **all foreign nationals (excluding overseas citizens of India)** visiting India on a **long term visa (more than 180 days)** are required to register themselves with a **Registration Officer within 14 days of arriving in India**.
 - **Pakistani nationals visiting India** are required to register **within 24 hours** of arrival **regardless of the duration of their stay**.
 - **The Citizenship Act, 1955:**
 - It provides for the **acquisition and determination of Indian citizenship**.
 - Moreover, the **Constitution has also provided citizenship rights** for **Overseas Citizens of India, Non-Resident Indians, and Persons of Indian Origin**.

Illegal Migrants Vs Refugee

- **Illegal Migrants:**

The **foreign nationals** who enter the country **without valid travel documents** are treated as **illegal migrants**.

- **Refugee:**
 - Under the **1951 UN Convention on the Status of Refugees** and the subsequent 1967 Protocol, the **word refugee pertains to** any person who is outside their country of origin and unable or unwilling to return owing to well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

India is not a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol thereon.
 - **Stateless persons may also be refugees in this sense**, where country of origin (citizenship) is understood as ‘**country of former habitual residence**’.

Way Forward

- In spite of **not being a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention** and its **1967 Protocol**, **India** has been one of the largest recipients of refugees in the world.
- However, if **India had domestic legislation regarding refugees**, it could have deterred any oppressive government in the neighborhood to persecute their population and make them flee to India.
- Further, the **absence of national refugee laws** has **blurred the distinction between refugees and economic migrants**, leading to the denial of any assistance to even genuine asylum seekers.
- After **India enacts its domestic refugee laws**, it should also **consider signing the 1951 Refugee Convention** and the **1967 Protocol** after recording its reservations.
- It would be still better if India took the **initiative to encourage other countries** in the **South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)** to develop a **SAARC convention or declaration on refugees** in which member states would agree to ratify the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol and record their reservations to various clauses.

Source: PIB

Sovereign Right to Taxation

Why in News

Recently, the Government of India introduced **The Taxation Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021** in the Lok Sabha which **seeks to withdraw tax demands made using a 2012 retrospective legislation** to tax the indirect transfer of Indian assets.

The government has stressed the need to establish its **sovereign right to taxation**.

Key Points

- **Sovereignty:**
 - Sovereignty, in political theory, **means the ultimate overseer, or authority, in the decision-making process** of the state and in the maintenance of order.
 - Derived from the Latin *superanus* through the French *souveraineté*, the term was **originally understood to mean the equivalent of supreme power**.
 - **Constitutional Sovereignty** implies that the constitution is sovereign and supreme.
- **Sovereign Right to Taxation in India:**

In India, **the Constitution gives the government the right to levy taxes on individuals and organisations**, but makes it clear that **no one has the right to levy or charge taxes except by the authority of law**.

Any tax being charged has to be backed by a law passed by the legislature or Parliament (**Article 265**).
- **Taxation in India:**
 - Tax is a **pecuniary burden laid upon individuals or property owners to support the government, a payment exacted by legislative authority**, and that a tax **is not a voluntary payment or donation, but an enforced contribution**, exacted pursuant to legislative authority.
 - Taxes in India come under a **three-tier system based on the Central, State and local governments**, and the **Seventh Schedule** of the Constitution puts separate heads of taxation under the **Union and State list**.
 - There is **no separate head under the Concurrent list**, meaning Union and the States have no concurrent power of taxation.
- **Limitation to States Sovereignty:**
 - The two most used **Bilateral Investment Treaties (BIT)** provisions to challenge a state's taxation measures are **expropriation** and the **fair and equitable treatment** provision.
 - The tax **should not be discriminatory** and it should **not be confiscatory**.

Way Forward

- India should **exercise its right to regulate while being mindful of its international law obligations**, acting in good faith and in a proportionate manner.
- **Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) tribunals do not interfere with such regulatory measures**. In sum, the debate never was whether India has a sovereign right to tax, but **whether this sovereign right is subject to certain limitations**. The answer is 'yes' because **under international law the sovereign right to tax is not absolute**.

Source: IE

Open Acreage Licensing Programme

Why in News

In an attempt to **boost domestic hydrocarbon production**, the petroleum and natural ministry launched the sixth bid round under the liberal **Open Acreage Licensing Programme (OALP)**.

Earlier, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) approved the **Policy framework on reforms** in the exploration and licensing sector for enhancing domestic exploration and production of oil and gas.

Key Points

- **About:**

- The **Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy (HELP)** replacing the erstwhile **New Exploration Licensing Policy (NELP)** was approved in March 2016 and the **Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP)** along with the **National Data Repository (NDR)** were launched in June 2017 as the key drivers to accelerate the **Exploration and Production (E&P) activities** in India.
- Under OALP, **companies are allowed** to carve out areas they want to explore oil and gas in.
- Companies can put in an **expression of interest (EOI)** for any area throughout the year but such **interests are accumulated thrice in a year**. The areas sought are then offered for bidding.
- This policy is **different from the past** where the government identified areas and offered them for bidding.

- **Need of the Policy:**

- India is **one of the fastest growing major economies** in the world and the **third largest consumer of petroleum products** after the US and China.
- India is heavily **dependent on import of crude oil** to meet its energy needs.
- **Net imports of crude** oil have increased from 111.50 metric tons during 2006-07 to 202.85 metric tons during 2015-16.

In this backdrop, **India has set a target** to reduce dependence on crude oil imports by **10% by 2022**.

- **Benefits:**

- **Increase in Exploration:**

The successful roll-out of the **HELP regime**, followed by **OALP Bid Rounds**, has led to an **increase in exploration acreages in India**.

- **Removing Red-Tapism:**

The OALP has helped in removing red-tapism and brought in a **quantum jump in the Exploration & Production sector**.

- **Concerns:**
 - **Fails to Attract Investors:**

The new policy has failed to **attract interest from major players in the sector.**
 - **Onerous obligations:**
 - The OALP provides for discretionary powers to the **Directorate General of Hydrocarbon (DGH)** to accept the area for which EOI has been submitted or alter/modify the area after due evaluation.

It oversees upstream oil and gas production.
 - However, the **basis for exercise** of such discretion is **not provided under the OALP.**

About HELP

- The Hydrocarbon Exploration & Licensing Policy (HELP), which adopts the **Revenue Sharing Contract model**, is a giant step towards improving the **'Ease of Doing Business'** in the Indian **Exploration and Production (E&P) sector.**
- It comes with attractive and liberal terms like reduced royalty rates, no Oil Cess, marketing and pricing freedom, round the year bidding, freedom to investors for carving out blocks of their interest, a single license to cover both conventional and unconventional hydrocarbon resources, exploration permission during the entire contract period, and an easy, transparent and swift bidding and awarding process.
- **Bid Round-IV onwards**, bidding rounds are being carried out under the further **liberalized policy terms**, which focused on production maximization with higher weightage to Committed Work Programme in Category I basin and no revenue share bids required for less explored Category II & III basins.
- Category-I basins have established reserves and fields that are already producing while Category-II basins are ones that have contingent resources pending commercial production. Category-III basins are ones that have prospective resources awaiting discovery.

Way Forward

- Government should consider **rationalising Taxation and Cess.**
- Also the **government should consult different stakeholders** to understand their concerns.
- **Private and Foreign Players** should be **incentivised** to bring in better technology.

Source: PIB

GSLV-F10 Failure: ISRO's EOS-03 Satellite Mission

Why in News

Recently, **Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)** suffered the loss of an **important earth observation satellite (EOS-03)** during launch when the **GSLV rocket** carrying it malfunctioned about five minutes from the lift-off.

Earth Observation Satellites

- Earth observation satellites are the satellites **equipped with remote sensing technology**. Earth observation is the gathering of information about Earth's physical, chemical and biological systems.
- Many earth observation satellites have been employed on **sun-synchronous orbit**.
- **Other earth observation satellites** launched by ISRO include RESOURCESAT- 2, 2A, CARTOSAT-1, 2, 2A, 2B, RISAT-1 and 2, OCEANSAT-2, Megha-Tropiques, SARAL and SCATSAT-1, INSAT-3DR, 3D, etc.

Key Points

- **About the EOS-03:**
 - It was **capable of imaging the entire country four to five times every day**.
 - It was riding on a **GSLV rocket (GSLV-F10)**, which has a **new payload carrier** designed to **significantly reduce aerodynamic drag** and thus carry larger payloads.
 - The rocket was supposed to **deposit the satellite in the geostationary transfer orbit**, from where the satellite's onboard propulsion system will **guide it to a geostationary orbit**, 36,000 km from earth's surface.
 - **Geostationary transfer orbit** is a circular orbit positioned approximately 35,900 km above Earth's equator and having a period of the same duration and direction as the rotation of the Earth.
 - An object in this orbit will appear **stationary relative to the rotating Earth**.
- **Significance:**
 - EOS-03, part of the **new generation of earth-observation satellites**, was meant to **provide almost real-time images** of large parts of the country.

The images could be used for monitoring natural disasters like **floods** and **cyclones**, water bodies, crops, vegetation and forest cover.
 - EOS-03 was being sent **ahead of EOS-02** which has been delayed by the **Covid-19 pandemic**.
 - EOS-02 was supposed to be launched **around March-April this year**, but now has been **rescheduled for September-October**.
 - EOS-02 was supposed to ride on **ISRO's new SSLV (Small Satellite Launch Vehicle) rocket**.
 - SSLVs will broaden **ISRO's current rocket range** that comprises **PSLVs and GSLVs**, and cater to the increasing demand for launching of small commercial satellites.

- **EOS-01:**

- In November 2020, ISRO had launched EOS-01, the first in the series of new earth observation satellites that bear a new generic naming system.

It was launched by **Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV)**, the third generation launch vehicle of India.

- It is intended for applications in **agriculture, forestry and disaster management support.**

Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV)

- GSLV is a space launch vehicle designed, developed, and operated by the ISRO to launch satellites and other space objects into **Geosynchronous Transfer Orbits.**

Geosynchronous satellites are launched into orbit in the same direction the Earth is spinning and can have any inclination.

- GSLV has the capability to put a **heavier payload in orbit** than the **Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV).**
- It is a **three-stage launcher** with strap-on motors.

Failure of the GSLV-F10

- **Reasons:**

- **Liquid fuel strap-on boosters** start the launch of the satellite by providing the extra thrust needed to lift the rocket off the ground.
- Then, follows a **solid fuel first stage** with **another liquid fuel stage** coming next. These two stages operated as expected.
- It was the **rocket's crucial third stage**, which uses an **indigenously-made Cryogenic Upper Stage (CUS)** which then **failed to ignite.**

The cryogenic stage is "technically a very complex system compared to solid or earth-storable liquid propellant stages due to its use of propellants at extremely low temperatures and the associated thermal and structural problems".

- **Impacts on the Future Missions:**

- This was the **second launch ISRO** had lined up for 2021, which had **suffered multiple delays** after being originally scheduled for March 2020.
Its successful mission was in February, which was **Brazil's earth observation satellite Amazonia-1** and 18 co-passenger satellites.
- The failure **breaks a series of 16 consecutive successful** launches by ISRO since 2017.
- Satellites had been planned for **2020-21**, including **OCEANSAT-3, GISAT-2, RISAT-2A**, etc. with these missions set to cost an estimated Rs 701.5 crore.
- Missions like **Gaganyaan and Chandrayaan-3** will be launched on GSLV Mk-III, a more advanced version of the GSLV rocket that is designed to carry much heavier payloads into space.
- It is a **big cause of worry for the NISAR mission**, a first-of-its-kind collaboration between NASA and ISRO for a joint earth-observation satellite.
NISAR, which will use two synthetic aperture radars (SAR) to monitor the entire Earth in a 12-day cycle, is the most important mission as yet involving the GSLV Mk-II rocket.

Source: IE

Oil Spills

Why in News

A new study has confirmed that **Stimulating Bacteria (Bioremediation)** with nutrients in the cold seawaters of the Canadian Arctic **can help decompose diesel and Other Petroleum Oil after Oil Spills**.

Earlier in 2020, the National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT), Chennai has developed an **Eco-Friendly Crude Oil Bioremediation** mechanism technology.

Key Points

- **Oil-Spill:**
 - An oil spill refers to **any uncontrolled release of crude oil, gasoline, fuels, or other oil by-products into the environment**.
 - Oil spills can **pollute land, air, or water**, though it is mostly used for oceanic oil spills.

- **Major Causes:**
 - Oil spills have become a major environmental problem, **chiefly as a result of intensified petroleum exploration and production** on continental shelves and the transport of large amounts of oils in vessels.
 - Oil spills that happen in **rivers, bays and the ocean most often are caused by accidents** involving tankers, barges, pipelines, refineries, drilling rigs and storage facilities, **but also occur from recreational boats and natural disasters.**
- **Environmental Impacts:**
 - **Threat to Indigenous people:**
Oil pollution poses health hazards for the **indigenous population who depend on seafood.**
 - **Harmful to aquatic life:**
Oil on ocean surfaces is harmful to many forms of aquatic life because it **prevents sufficient amounts of sunlight from penetrating the surface,** and it also reduces the level of dissolved oxygen.
 - **Hypothermia:**
Crude oil ruins the insulating and waterproofing properties of feathers and fur of birds, and thus oil-coated birds and **marine mammals may die from hypothermia (decrease in body temperature to below-normal levels).**
 - **Toxic:**
Moreover, **ingested oil can be toxic to affected animals,** and damage their habitat and reproductive rate.
 - **Threat to Mangroves:**
Saltwater marshes and **Mangroves** frequently suffer from oil spills.
- **Economic Impacts:**
 - **Tourism:**
If beaches and populated shorelines are fouled, **tourism and commerce may be severely affected.**
 - **Power Plants:**
The power plants and other utilities that **depend on drawing or discharging sea water are severely affected** by oil spills.
 - **Fishing:**
Major oil spills are frequently followed by the **immediate suspension of commercial fishing.**

- **Remedies:**
 - **Bioremediation:**
 - Bacteria **can be used to clean up oil spills in the ocean** through bioremediation. Specific bacteria can be used to **bioremediate specific contaminants, such as hydrocarbons, which are present in oil** and gasoline.
 - Using bacteria such as **Paraperlucidibaca, Cycloclasticus, Oleispira, Thalassolituus Zhongshania** and some others can help remove several classes of contaminants.
 - **Containment Booms:**

Floating barriers, called booms, are used to restrict the spread of oil and to allow for its recovery, removal, or dispersal.
 - **Skimmers:**

They are devices used for physically separating spilled oil from the water's surface.
 - **Sorbents:**

Various sorbents (e.g., straw, volcanic ash, and shavings of polyester-derived plastic) that absorb the oil from the water are used.
 - **Dispersing agents:**

These are **chemicals that contain surfactants, or compounds that act to break liquid substances** such as oil into small droplets. They accelerate its natural dispersion into the sea.
- **Related Laws in India:**
 - Presently, there is no law covering oil spill as such and its consequential environmental damage in India but India has “**the National Oil Spill Disaster Contingency Plan of 1996 (NOS-DCP)**” to handle such situations.
 - The document was issued by the Ministry of Defense in 1996; **it was last updated in March 2006.**
 - It gives the **Indian Coast Guard** the mandate to coordinate with state departments, ministries, port authorities and environmental agencies to assist in oil spill cleaning operations.
 - In 2015 India ratified the International Convention on **Civil Liability for Bunker Oil Pollution Damage, 2001** (Bunker Convention). Convention ensures adequate, prompt and effective compensation for damage caused by oil spills. It was administered by the **International Maritime Organization (IMO)**.

Source: DTE

World Elephant Day

Why in News

On the occasion of **World Elephant Day** (12th August) the Union Environment Minister made public the **population estimation protocol** to be adopted in the **all-India elephant and tiger population estimation in 2022**.

World Elephant Day was launched in 2012 to **bring attention to the urgent plight of Asian and African elephants**.

Key Points

- **Current Data on Elephants in India:**

According to the last count in 2017, there were **29,964 elephants in India**. Which is a slight increase from 2012's mean of **29,576 elephants**.

- **Asian Elephants:**

- **About:**

- There are three subspecies of Asian elephant which are the Indian, Sumatran and Sri Lankan.
- The **Indian subspecies has the widest range** and accounts for the majority of the remaining elephants on the continent.
- **Global Population:** Estimated 20,000 to 40,000.

- **African Elephants:**

- **About:**

- There are **two subspecies** of African elephants, **the Savanna (or bush) elephant and the Forest elephant**.
- **Global Population:** Around 4,00,000.
- Earlier in July 2020, **Botswana (Africa) witnessed the death of hundreds of elephants.**

- **Protection Status:**

- **IUCN Red List Status:**

- **African Savanna Elephant:** Endangered.
- **African Forest Elephant:** Critically Endangered

- **CITES:** Appendix II

- **Concerns:**

- Escalation of poaching.
- Habitat loss.
- **Human-elephant conflict.**
- Mistreatment in captivity.
- Abuse due to elephant tourism.
- Rampant mining, Corridor destruction.

- **Steps Taken for Conservation:**

- Plans and programmes to **arrest their poachers and killers.**
- Declaration and **establishment of various elephant reserves** across the states. For example, Mysuru and Dandeli elephant reserves in Karnataka.
- **Cleaning areas from lantana and eupatorium (invasive species)** as they prevent the growth of grass for elephants to feed on.
- Barricades to **prevent man-elephant conflicts.**
- Measures for establishment of a cell to study **forest fire** prevention.
- **Gaj Yatra** which is a **nationwide awareness campaign** to celebrate elephants and highlight the necessity of securing elephant corridors.
- The **Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE) programme**, launched in 2003, is an international collaboration that tracks trends in information related to the illegal killing of elephants from across Africa and Asia, to monitor effectiveness of field conservation efforts.
- **Project Elephant:** It is a **centrally sponsored scheme** and was launched in February 1992 for the **protection of elephants**, their habitats and corridors.
The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change provides **financial and technical support to major elephant range** states in the country through the project.
- Even **mahouts** (people who work with, ride and tend an elephant) and their families play an important part in the welfare of elephants.
- Recently, the **Supreme Court (SC)** upheld the 2011 order of the Madras High Court (HC) on the Nilgiris elephant corridor, affirming the **right of passage** of the animals and the closure of resorts in the area.

Source: TH

Forum of the Election Management Bodies of South Asia (FEMBoSA)

Why in News

Recently, the **Election Commission of India** inaugurated the **11th Annual meeting of the Forum of the Election Management Bodies of South Asia (FEMBoSA)** for the year 2021.

Key Points

- **About the Meeting:**

- **Hosted By:** Election Commission of Bhutan.
- **Chairmanship:** The **Election Commission of India handed over the chairmanship** of FEMBoSA role **to the Election Commission of Bhutan for 2021-22.**
- **Thimphu Resolution:** A resolution was unanimously adopted by the FEMBoSA members **to extend the tenure of chairmanship to two years** during the current pandemic situation.

Before this, the tenure of the chairmanship was one year.

- **Theme of Meeting:** 'Use of Technology in Elections'.
- **Digitization of Election:** The technology is extensively used to make elections more **participative, accessible** and **transparent.**

It has become more important during the **Covid 19** situation as it is helping in minimizing person-to-person contact.

- **About FEMBoSA:**

- **Establishment:**

The forum was established at the **3rd Conference of Heads of Election Management Bodies (EMBs) of SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) Countries in 2012.**

SAARC comprises eight member States: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

- **Aim:**

To increase mutual cooperation in respect to the common interests of the SAARC's EMBs.

- **Significance:**

- FEMBoSA represents **a very large part of the democratic world** and it is an active regional cooperation association of EMBs.
- Its logo with golden pearls **stands for the eternal values of transparency, impartiality, democracy and cooperation.**

Election Commission of India (ECI)

- The **ECI** is an **autonomous constitutional authority responsible for administering Union and State election processes in India.**
- The body administers elections to the **Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, and State Legislative Assemblies in India,** and the **offices of the President and Vice President** in the country.
- The Election Commission was established in accordance with the **Constitution on 25th January 1950.**

- **Constitutional Provisions:**

- Part XV of the Indian constitution deals with elections, and establishes a commission for these matters.
- **Article 324 to 329 of the constitution** deals with powers, function, tenure, eligibility, etc of the commission and the members.
Article 324 provides for **appointment of a Election commission** to superintend, direct and control the elections.

- **Structure :**

- Originally the commission had only one election commissioner but after the **Election Commissioner Amendment Act 1989**, it has been made a multi-member body.
- The commission presently consists of one **Chief Election Commissioner (CEC)** and two **Election Commissioners (ECs)**.
- The secretariat of the **commission is located in New Delhi**.

Source: PIB

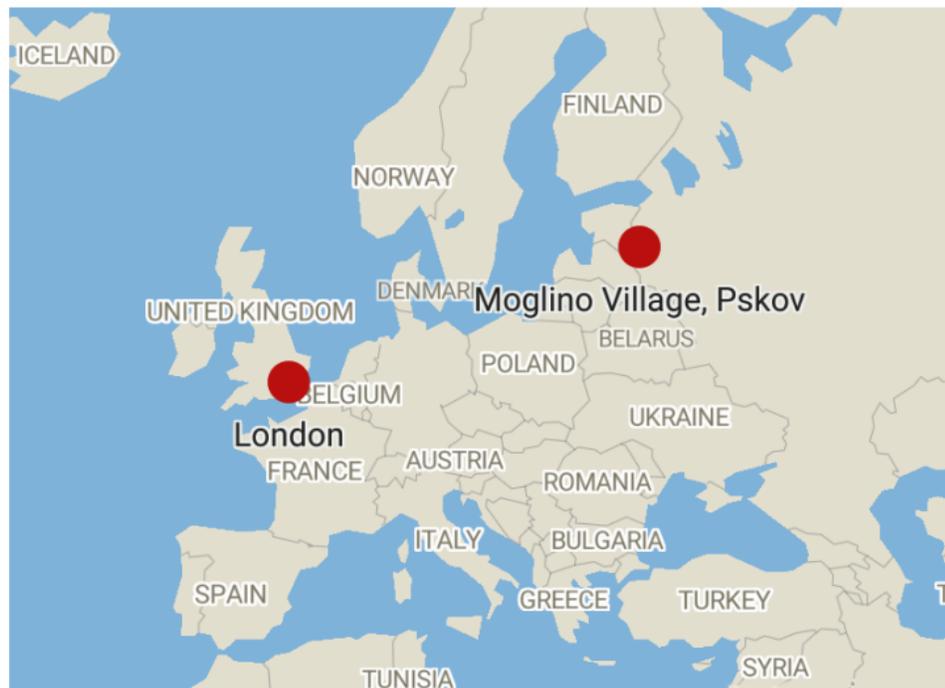
Olympian Bat

Why in News

Recently, a bat amazed the scientists by **flying a distance of more than 2,000 km from London to the Pskov region in northwestern Russia**. The bat is dubbed as the “**Olympian bat**” and has generated keen interest in **climate scientists**.

The 'Olympian' bat's journey

The bat flew a distance of 2,018 km from London, UK to the Pskov region in northwestern Russia.



Key Points

- The bat belongs to the **Nathusius' pipistrelle species of bats**.
- The journey is significant because it is the **longest one undertaken by a bat from Britain across Europe**.
- Bats belonging to the Nathusius' pipistrelle species **typically weigh less than 10 grams**.
 - They are known to **migrate from summer breeding grounds in northeastern Europe to warmer areas of the continent** where they **hibernate** in trees in buildings.
- The 'Olympian' bat's record is topped by **another bat from the same species that flew from Latvia to Spain in 2019** covering a distance of 2,224 km.
- For climate scientists, the journey is a window into **studying bat migration and its connection with climate change**.
- **Increased variation in climatic extremes** raises the **possibility of bats emerging from hibernation early** or at a greater frequency.
 - That would not only put hibernating bats at risk from depleted energy stores, but could also affect the birth and survival of pups.
- Thus, Nathusius' pipistrelle's range expansion is **linked to climate change** and **future changes in climate** will further impact this species.

- The **Bat Conservation Trust** launched a project called the **National Nathusius' Pipistrelle Project** in 2014.
 - The project aims to **improve understanding of the ecology, current status and conservation threats** for Nathusius' pipistrelles in Great Britain.
 - One of the goals of this project is to **determine the migratory origins of this species of bats** since they might help in understanding its links to climate change.
 - There is already some evidence of **birds migrating early because of a warming planet**.
- **IUCN status** of Nathusius' pipistrelle species of bats: **Least concern**.

Hibernation

- It is an **inactive state resembling deep sleep** in which certain animals **living in cold climates pass the winter**.
- In hibernation, the **body temperature is lowered and breathing and heart rates slow down**.
- It protects the animal from cold and **reduces the need for food** during the season when food is scarce.
- Normally, **Polar bears, Rodents, and Bats** are some animals that show hibernation.
- Recently, a new research in **zebrafish** has demonstrated how **induced hibernation (torpor)** may protect humans from the elements of space, especially radiation, during space flight.

Source: IE
