



Drishti IAS Presents...

PT **SPRINT** 2023

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

(March 2022 – March 2023)



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India, France, UAE Trilateral Initiative

Why in News?

Recently, **India, France, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)** have agreed to form a partnership to **work together in the fields of nuclear and solar energy**, as well as in tackling **climate change** and preserving **biodiversity**.

- The idea of this partnership was first discussed at a meeting in New York during the **United Nations General Assembly** in **September 2022**.

What Are the Major Highlights of the Trilateral Initiative?

- This trilateral initiative will serve as a **forum to promote the design and execution of cooperation projects in the fields of energy**, with a focus on **solar and nuclear energy**, as well as in the **fight against climate change** and the protection of biodiversity, particularly in the **Indian Ocean region**.
- The three countries have also agreed to work together in defence, countering infectious diseases, and promoting cooperation in global health organisations such as the **World Health Organization, Gavi-the Vaccine Alliance, the Global Fund, and Unitaid**.
- Further, the three countries will attempt to identify tangible cooperation on implementing the **"One Health" approach**, and support the development of local capacities in **biomedical innovation and production within developing countries**.
- The three countries also agreed to expand their cooperation through initiatives such as the **Mangrove Alliance for Climate** led by the UAE and the **Indo-Pacific Parks Partnership** led by India and France.

What are the Other Areas of Cooperation between India and France?

- **Defence Cooperation:**
 - The three services of both countries have regular defence exercises; viz.
 - **Exercise Shakti (Army)**
 - **Exercise Varuna (Navy)**
 - **Exercise Garuda (Air Force)**
 - India entered into a contract with a **French firm to build six Scorpene submarines** in India's

Malegaon dockyards through a technology-transfer arrangement in 2005.

- Also, India and France had signed the **inter-government agreement in 2016**, under which France agreed to provide **36 Rafale fighter jets at a cost of around 60,000 crore rupees** to India.
- **Other Initiatives:**
 - India and France are in joint efforts to limit climate change and develop the **International Solar Alliance**.
 - France has agreed to be part of **India's Venus mission, scheduled for 2025**.
 - Also, ISRO's Venus instrument, **VIRAL (Venus Infrared Atmospheric Gases Linker)** has been co-developed by **French and Russian agencies**.

What are the Other Areas of Cooperation between India and UAE?

- **Collaboration:** They both are the members of **I2U2 Grouping**.
- **Economic Partnership:** In 2022 India & UAE signed a **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)** with an aim of taking bilateral trade to USD 100 billion within 5 years.
 - Also, India and UAE are discussing ways to **boost non-oil commerce in rupees** that will **promote internationalisation of rupees**.
 - UAE is the **second largest export destination of India (after the US)** with an amount of over US\$ 28 billion for the year 2021-22.
 - For the UAE, India is the **second largest trading partner for the year 2021** with an amount of around **USD 45 billion (non-oil trade)**.
- **Defence Cooperation:** With the **spread of radicalism in the Gulf and South Asia**, India looks to enhance **security cooperation with the UAE** to counter terrorist threats and combat radicalization.
 - **'Desert Eagle II'**, is a joint **air combat exercise**, between **air forces of India and UAE**.

India-Kenya Ties

Why in News?

India recently handed over **100 nautical charts to Kenya**, the result of a collaborative survey between the navies of both countries of the coastal area near the **Lamu Archipelago**.

Note:



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- From India, the survey was conducted by the **Indian Navy's National Hydrography Office**.

What are the Key Points Related to Kenya?

- Kenya is located in East Africa. Its terrain rises from a **low coastal plain on the Indian Ocean** to mountains and plateaus at its centre.
- Kenya's location between the **Indian Ocean and Lake Victoria** means that people from all over **Africa and the Middle East** have travelled and traded across it for centuries.
 - This has created a **diverse culture with many ethnic groups and languages**.
- Scientists think **Northern Kenya and Tanzania** may have been the **original birthplace of humans**.
 - The bones of one of the **earliest human ancestors** ever found were discovered in **Kenya's Turkana Basin**.
- **Lake Turkana, the world's largest desert lake**, is part of the Omo-Turkana basin, which stretches into four countries: **Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan and Uganda**.
 - **UN-Habitat** maintains its **headquarters at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, Kenya**.

How are India's Relations with Kenya?

- **India and Kenya** have historical linkages rooted in the **well-documented trade in spices**.
 - In addition to being **India's maritime neighbour**, it is also a significant stakeholder in **determining the geopolitics of the Western Indian Ocean**.
- India has a long-established connection with the **African Union** of which **Kenya is an active member**.
 - The Kenyan government in 2017, recognized the **Indian descent as the 44th tribe in the country**.
- Also, till date, a **total of 14 Kenyan personnel** has undergone courses at the **National Institute of Hydrography, Goa** under the **Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) scheme**.

What is the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme?

- ITEC is the **leading capacity building platform of the Ministry Of External Affairs, Government of India**.
- Instituted in 1964, ITEC is **one of the oldest institutionalised arrangements** for international capacity building having trained more than 200,000 officials from 160+ countries in both the civilian and in the defence sector.

- EC offers nearly **10,000 fully-funded in-person** training opportunities through nearly **400 courses** offered at **100+ eminent institutes** in India each year.

Multilateral Security Dialogue on Afghanistan

Why in News?

Recently, the **National Security Advisor(NSG)** addressed a **Multilateral Security Dialogue on Afghanistan in Moscow**.

- The discussion revolved around issues related to **Afghanistan**, including security and humanitarian challenges and was attended by **representatives from various countries including Russia, China, and Iran**.

What are Key Highlights of the Dialogue?

- NSG emphasized that **no country should be allowed to use Afghan territory for exporting terrorism** and that India will always support the people of Afghanistan in their time of need.
- NSG also spoke about the **importance of UN Security Council resolution 2593** that calls for **denying sanctuary to terror outfits in the region**.

How is India's Relations with Afghanistan?

- **Political Relations:**
 - India has been a strong supporter of Afghan democracy and has consistently advocated for a stable, peaceful, and prosperous Afghanistan.
 - **But India is still yet to recognize the Taliban regime in Afghanistan** and has been advocating for the formation of an **inclusive government in Kabul**.
 - Also, India re-established its diplomatic presence in Kabul in June 2022.
- **Humanitarian Assistance:**
 - India has been providing **humanitarian aid to Afghanistan**, including **40,000 metric tonnes of wheat, 60 tonnes of medicines, 5,00,000 Covid vaccines**, winter clothing, and 28 tonnes of disaster relief.
 - India has also granted scholarships to **2,260 Afghan students**, including 300 girls, over the past two years.

Note:



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➤ Economic Relations:

- India has undertaken more than **400 key infrastructure projects** in all **34 Afghan provinces** and has signed strategic agreements to enhance trade and bilateral relations.
 - From 2002 to 2021, India spent **USD 4 billion** in development assistance in Afghanistan, building **high-visibility projects** such as highways, hospitals, the parliament building, rural schools, and electricity transmission lines.

➤ Connectivity:

- India has been working towards building **regional connectivity** with Afghanistan by **developing the Chabahar port** and providing access to markets in the region.

India-Mongolia Relations

Why in News?

Recently, the 11th meeting of the India-Mongolia **Joint Working Group** was held in India.

- While acknowledging the growing ties between both the countries, they expressed satisfaction at the ongoing defense cooperation despite the limitations imposed by **Covid-19 pandemic**.

How have been the India-Mongolia Relations?

➤ Historical Relations:

- India and Mongolia have interacted through **Buddhism** throughout history.
- Mongolia regards India as its “third” neighbor along with US, Japan, and Germany and a “spiritual neighbour”.

➤ Diplomatic Relations:

- India **established diplomatic relations with Mongolia in 1955** and it was the first country outside the Soviet bloc to open diplomatic relations with Mongolia.
- The **Indian Resident Mission in Ulaanbaatar** was opened in 1971.
- This relationship was upgraded to “strategic partnership” in 2015 when the Indian Prime Minister visited Mongolia and declared it as an essential component of ‘**Act East Policy**’.

➤ International Cooperation:

- Mongolia has publicly reiterated its support for India’s membership to the permanent seat of the expanded **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)**.
- India has played an important role in getting **Mongolia membership to key international forums**, including the **United Nations (UN)**, despite strong opposition from China and Taiwan.
- India also championed the inclusion of **Mongolia in the Non-Aligned Movement**.
 - In a reciprocal gesture, Mongolia co-sponsored a 1972 UN resolution with India and Bhutan for the recognition of the newly liberated Bangladesh.

➤ Economic Cooperation:

- In 2022, an **India-built oil refinery at the cost of more than USD 1 billion** and with a capacity of 1.5 million metric tonnes was opened near **Sainshand in southern Dornogovi province of Mongolia**.
 - This refinery will take care of 75 % of Mongolia’s oil refining needs.
- India - Mongolia bilateral trade was USD 35.3 million in 2020, down from USD 38.3 million in 2019.

➤ Cultural Cooperation:

- The **India-Mongolian Agreement on Cultural Cooperation, signed in 1961**, has governed the Cultural Exchange Programme (CEP) between the two countries.
- The Agreement envisages co-operation in the fields of education by way of scholarships, exchange of experts, participation in conferences, etc.

➤ Defence Cooperation:

- Joint defence exercises code-named **Nomadic Elephant**.
- India is also **an active participant** in an annual week-long joint training exercise called the **Khaan Quest, hosted by Mongolia**.

➤ Cooperation over Environmental Issues:

- Part of the **Bishkek Declaration (snow leopard)**.

Paris Club

Why in News?

The **Paris Club**, an informal group of creditor nations, will provide financial assurances to the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** on Sri Lanka’s debt.

Note:



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- Sri Lanka needs **assurance from the Paris Club** and other creditors in order to receive a **USD 2.9 billion** bailout package from the IMF, following an **economic crisis** in 2022.

What is the Paris Club?

- **About:**
 - The **Paris Club** is a group of **mostly western creditor countries** that grew from a **1956** meeting in which **Argentina agreed to meet its public creditors in Paris**.
 - It describes itself as a forum where official creditors meet **to solve payment difficulties faced by debtor countries**.
 - Their objective is to **find sustainable debt-relief solutions** for countries that are **unable to repay their bilateral loans**.
- **Members:**
 - **The members are:** Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Russia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States.
 - All 22 are members of the group called **Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)**.
- **Involved in Debt Agreements:**
 - According to its official website, Paris Club has reached **478 agreements with 102 different debtor countries**.
 - Since 1956, the debt treated in the framework of **Paris Club agreements** amounts to **USD 614 billion**.
- **Recent Developments:**
 - The Paris group countries dominated bilateral lending in the last century, but their **importance has receded over the last two decades** or so with the emergence of **China as the world's biggest bilateral lender**.
 - In Sri Lanka's case, for instance, **India, China, and Japan** are the largest bilateral creditors.
 - Sri Lanka's debt to China is **52% of its bilateral debt, 19.5% to Japan, and 12% to India**.

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

Why in News?

Pakistan inaugurated a USD 2.7 billion nuclear reactor under **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)**, providing some relief as the nation grapples with an energy crisis.

- This is a 1,100 megawatts capacity power plant, which will generate some of the nation's cheapest electricity.

What is the Background

- Pakistan experienced **nationwide power outages recently due to a breakdown in its national grid**.
- The country has **struggled with blackouts for years and is facing surging energy costs, low foreign-exchange reserves**, and pressure on its government budget.
- Pakistan is in talks with the **International Monetary Fund** for a bailout in exchange for increased energy tariffs. The country's foreign-exchange reserves fell to the lowest in nine years, as high fossil fuel costs put pressure on the government's budget.

What is CPEC?

- CPEC is a **3,000-km long route of infrastructure projects connecting China's northwest Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region and the Gwadar Port** in the western province of Balochistan in Pakistan.
- It is a bilateral project **between Pakistan and China**, intended to promote connectivity across Pakistan with a network of highways, railways, and pipelines accompanied by energy, industrial, and other infrastructure development projects.
- It will pave the way for **China to access the Middle East and Africa from Gwadar Port**, enabling China to access the Indian Ocean and in return China will support development projects in Pakistan to overcome the latter's energy crises and stabilising its faltering economy.
- CPEC is a part of the **Belt and Road Initiative**.
 - The BRI, launched in 2013, aims to link Southeast Asia, Central Asia, the Gulf region, Africa and Europe with a network of land and sea routes.

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What are the Challenges of CPEC for Pakistan and China?

➤ Pakistan:

- **Regional Imbalances:** CPEC is focused on certain areas and provinces in Pakistan, leading to concerns about **regional imbalances** in development and investment.
- **Debt Trap:** Pakistan's debt levels have become a concern **due to the large scale of projects financed by loans from China** and the ability to repay these loans. **China is now Pakistan's largest creditor**, with Pakistan owing 27.4% of its total external debt to China in 2021, according to the IMF.
- **Environmental Impacts:** The large-scale infrastructure projects that make up **CPEC could have negative environmental impacts**, including deforestation, loss of biodiversity, and air and water pollution.
- **Social Implications:** The development of the project has led to concerns about the displacement of local communities and the loss of their traditional livelihoods, as well as the **impact of increased migration and population pressures** in the region.
- **Sovereignty Concerns:** Some have raised concerns about China's increasing influence in Pakistan and the potential for the project to **compromise the country's sovereignty and independence**.

➤ China:

- **Security Concerns:** The security of Chinese workers and the stability of the region pose a major challenge for the success of CPEC.
- **Political Opposition:** There has been opposition from certain political parties and groups who are concerned about the perceived lack of transparency and the potential long-term implications of the project on Pakistan's sovereignty.

What are CPEC's Implications for India?

➤ India's Sovereignty:

- India has continuously opposed the project since it passes through the **Pakistan-occupied Kashmir territory of Gilgit-Baltistan** – a claim opposed by Pakistan.
- The corridor is also perceived to be **an alternative economic road link for the Kashmir Valley** lying on the Indian side of the border.

- If CPEC proves a success, will further consolidate the region's perception as internationally recognised Pakistani territory, **diminishing India's claim over the 73,000 sq km piece of land** which is home to more than 1.8 million people.

➤ Chinese Control Over Trade Via Sea:

- Major US ports on the East Coast depend on the **Panama Canal** to trade with China.
- Once CPEC becomes fully functional, China will be in a position to offer a **'shorter and more economical' trade route** to most North and Latin American enterprises, giving China the power to dictate the terms by which the international movement of goods will take place between the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans.

➤ Chinese String of Pearls:

- With an existing presence in Chittagong port (Bangladesh), Hambantota port (Sri Lanka), Port Sudan (Sudan), Maldives, Somalia and Seychelles, **a control of Gwadar port establishes complete dominance of the Indian ocean by the Communist nation**.

➤ Stronger BRI and Chinese Dominance in Trade Leadership:

- China's BRI project that focuses on the trade connectivity between China and the rest of Eurasia through a network of ports, roads and railways has been often seen as **China's plan to dominate the region politically**. CPEC is one giant step in the same direction.

3rd ASEAN Digital Ministers Meeting

Why in News?

The 3rd ASEAN Digital Ministers (ADGMIN) meeting was held recently .

- The theme of the meeting was **"Synergy Towards a Sustainable Digital Future"**.

What are the Major Highlights of the Meeting?

- The meeting focused on **enhancing the relationship between India and ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations)** in the area of **Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)** .

Note:



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- India emphasised its reforms to promote fair competition, and **increase broadband and telecom connectivity**.
- The **significance of digital transformation** was also highlighted as a means of creating an **inclusive and equitable society**, promoting sustainable development, and empowering citizens through digital means.
- **India-ASEAN Digital Work Plan 2023** was approved, which includes initiatives for **capacity building and knowledge sharing** in areas such as **Artificial Intelligence in Cybersecurity, IoT and AI in Next Generation Smart Cities**, and the **role of ICTs in implementing digital health and security**.

How is India's Relations with ASEAN?

- **About:**
 - India and ASEAN have a long-standing and multi-faceted relationship that encompasses **political, economic, cultural, and security dimensions**.
- **Evolution of Bilateral Relations:**
 - **India-ASEAN bilateral relationship** started evolving since India introduced '**Look East Policy**' in **1990s**.
 - This initiative was further transformed to '**Act East Policy**' in **2014** mainly to develop **economic and strategic relations** with the nations of Southeast Asian countries.
 - In **1992**, India emerged as a **Sectoral Partner of ASEAN** followed by **Dialogue Partner** in **1996** and a **Summit-level Partner** in **2002**.
 - In **2009**, The **ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA)** was signed and entered into force on **1 January 2010**.
 - **Also**, India has a **Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA)** with various countries of the ASEAN region (**Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand**) which has resulted in concessional trade and a rise in investments.
 - In **2015**, India also set up a **separate Mission to ASEAN** and the **East Asia Summit in Jakarta in 2015** to strengthen engagement with ASEAN countries.
 - In **2022**, the **ASEAN India Friendship Year** was observed to commemorate the **30-year milestone of the establishment of dialogue relations** between ASEAN and India, leading to the elevation of their **Strategic Partnership to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP)**.

➤ Other Areas of Engagement:

- **Financial Assistance:**
 - **India offers financial support to ASEAN countries** through various channels such as the **ASEAN-India Cooperation Fund**, the **ASEAN-India Science and Technology Development Fund**, and the **ASEAN-India Green Fund**.
- **Connectivity:**
 - India has been implementing several connectivity initiatives, such as the **India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway** and the **Kaladan Multimodal Project**.
 - Additionally, India is working towards establishing a **Maritime Transportation Agreement with ASEAN** and has plans for a railway connection between **New Delhi, India and Hanoi, Vietnam**.

Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy

Why in News?

Recently, India-Canada Foreign minister's Bilateral meeting as '**India-Canada strategic Dialogue**' took place ahead of **G20** Foreign ministers' meeting in **March in New Delhi**.

- India welcomed the announcement of **Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy** given the **shared vision of a free, open and inclusive Indo pacific**.

What are the Highlights of the Meeting?

- The Ministers discussed strengthening the economic partnership, advancing security cooperation, facilitating migration and mobility, and growing our strong people-to-people ties.
- Canadian FM termed **India as a critical partner** for Canada in the Indo- Pacific. In return, Canada can be a **reliable supplier of critical minerals**, a strong **partner in the green transition** and a **major investor**.

What is the Significance of the Meeting?

- Candian FM's visit is expected to **pave the way for a continued reset** in India-Canada ties after a freeze between 2020-2022.
 - Freeze was over a **number of issues** including **attacks on Indian-origin people and establishments by Khalistani groups in Canada**, **Canadian comments**

Note:

over India's farmer protests and India's cancellation of diplomatic talks in response.

- In 2022, New Delhi objected to Canada permitting a **Khalistani secessionist "referendum"** and hit back with an advisory against travel in Canada that warned against hate crimes.
- Apart from encouraging investment from Canadian funds, both the countries look forward to the '**Early Progress Trade Agreement (EPTA)**' as a first step towards '**Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)**'.
- The issue of **Khalistani activities** in Canada, which has contributed to the strained relationship between Canada and India, was **not addressed in any official statements**.
- As India's economy grows, its **strategic importance** will only increase, providing a greater opportunity for Canada and India to strengthen their relationship.
- Both countries share a **suspicion of China** and are **seeking to expand trade ties, improve supply chain resilience, and encourage greater exchange of people** between their countries.

What is Canada's Indo Pacific Policy?

- **About:**
 - Canada released a new Indo-Pacific strategy, **focusing on four regions: China, India, the North Pacific (Japan and Korea), and ASEAN**.
 - The **Indo-Pacific region is home to the largest diaspora in Canada**, with 1 in 5 Canadians having family ties to the region and **60% of Canada's international students**.
 - The strategy contains **strong words on China's challenge to the international rules-based order** and human rights, while expressing a **positive view of India's shared tradition of democracy and pluralism**.
 - However, Canada also acknowledges its dependence on China as its main export destination and recognizes the **need for cooperation with China** on issues such as climate change and health.
- **Funding:**
 - Canada's strategy includes a **funding commitment of \$1.7 billion** over five years, including **infrastructure projects, enhanced military presence, and expanded participation in regional military exercises**.

➤ Objectives:

- Promote peace, resilience and security.
- Expand trade, investment and supply chain resilience.
- Invest in and connect people.
- Build a sustainable and green future.
- Be an active and engaged partner to the Indo-Pacific.

How are India-Canada Relations?

➤ Political:

- India and Canada share **commonalities in Parliamentary structure and procedures**. After the general election in October 2019, Mr Raj Saini, MP from the House of Common has been appointed as the Chair of the Canada-India Parliamentary Association.
- In India, **Canada is represented by the High Commission of Canada in New Delhi**.
- India is represented in Canada by a **High Commission in Ottawa** and by consulates in Toronto and Vancouver.

➤ Economic:

- Bilateral trade between India and Canada stands at **USD 6.4 billion in 2020**. In 2021, **India was Canada's 14th largest export market, and 13th largest trading partner overall**.
- More than 400 Canadian companies have a presence in India, and more than 1,000 companies are actively pursuing business in the Indian market.
- Indian companies in Canada **are active in the field such as Information Technology, software, steel, natural resources and banking sectors**.
- **India's exports to Canada** include pharma, iron and steel, chemicals, gem and jewelry, nuclear reactors and boilers.
- Canada has **one of the world's largest resources of uranium, natural gas, oil, coal, minerals and advanced technologies in hydropower, mining, renewable energy and nuclear energy**.

➤ Science and Technology:

- **Primary focus has been on promoting Industrial R&D (Research and Development)** and development of **new IP (Intellectual property) processes, prototypes or products**.
- Department of Biotechnology under IC-IMPACTS program implements joint research projects in health care, agri-biotech and waste management.

Note:



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- IC-IMPACTS (the India-Canada Centre for Innovative Multidisciplinary Partnerships to Accelerate Community Transformation and Sustainability) is the first, and only, **Canada-India Research Centre of Excellence**.
- Department of Earth Science and Polar Canada have started a **programme for exchange of knowledge and scientific research on Cold Climate (Arctic) Studies**.
- **Space:**
 - **ISRO and Canadian Space Agency (CSA) have signed MOUs** in the field of exploration and utilization of outer space.
 - **-ANTRIX**, the Commercial arm of **ISRO**, has launched several nanosatellites from Canada.
 - ISRO in its 100th Satellite **PSLV launched in 2018**, also flew Canadian first LEO (Low earth Orbit) satellite, from Indian spaceport Sriharikota.
- **Security and Defence:**
 - India and Canada **collaborate closely in international fora particularly through the UN, Commonwealth and G-20**.
 - A Statement of Intent (Sol) on Cooperation between DRDO and **Canada's Defence Research and Development Council has been signed in 2015**.
 - The security cooperation was further enhanced with the **Framework for Cooperation between India and Canada on Countering Terrorism in 2018**.
 - There is **substantial engagement on counter terrorism issues** particularly through the framework of the Joint Working Group (JWG) on Counter Terrorism.

Japan's Reaching Out to the Global South

Why in News?

Japan has taken the initiative to raise the Global South to the top of the **G7 agenda**.

- Japan is hosting G7 summit 2023 at Hiroshima. With India wanting to make the voice of the Global South heard at this year's **G20 summit**, there is much **new room for global political collaboration between Delhi and Tokyo**.

What is Global South?

- The term '**Global South**' began by loosely referring to **those countries that were left out of the industrialisation era** and had a conflict of ideology with the capitalist and communist countries, **accentuated by the Cold War**.
 - It includes countries that are **mostly in Asia, Africa and South America**.
 - Moreover, Global North is defined essentially by an economic division between the rich and poor countries.
 - Global North' refers loosely to countries like the US, Canada, Europe, Russia, Australia and New Zealand.
- '**Global South**' is significant because of its **large population, rich cultures, and abundant natural resources**.
- Understanding the Global South is important for addressing global issues such as **poverty, inequality, and climate change**.

What are the Concerns of the Global South?

- **Poverty and Inequality:**
 - Many countries in the Global South struggle with extreme poverty, which can **manifest in a range of issues such as malnutrition**, lack of access to education, and inadequate healthcare.
 - The Global South is often marked by significant inequalities, both within countries and between countries. For example, there may be significant **disparities in wealth and access to resources between urban and rural areas**, or between different ethnic or socioeconomic groups.
- **Environmental Challenges:**
 - Many countries in the Global South are **particularly vulnerable to environmental challenges** such as climate change, deforestation, and pollution. These issues can have a significant impact on the health and well-being of local communities.
- **Political Instability:**
 - Political instability is one of the major issues in some countries in the Global South, with challenges **ranging from coups and civil wars** to corruption and weak governance.
- **Lack of Infrastructure, Education and Health:**

Note:

- Many countries struggle to provide **access to quality education for their populations**, which can limit economic opportunities and perpetuate poverty and inequality.
- Health issues are also a major concern, where **access to quality healthcare may be limited or non-existent**. This can lead to a range of health issues, including infectious diseases, malnutrition, and chronic conditions.

Why Does Japan Want to Reach Out to the Global South?

- **Japan Fears Ukraine-Like Implications:**
 - Japan has transformed its foreign and security policies, since it fears similar **Ukraine-Like Implications**.
 - The **Ukraine war**, coming on top of the long-standing threats from North Korea and mounting security challenges from China, has pushed **Japan towards sweeping reform of Japan's defence policy**.
- **Diplomacy and Defense:**
 - Japan thinks that the war in Ukraine has made it recognise the **essential relationship between diplomacy and defence**.
 - Diplomacy needs to be backed by defence capabilities and reinforcing defence capabilities will also lead to persuasiveness in carrying out our diplomatic efforts.
- **Acknowledging Negligence from West:**
 - The West has neglected political engagement with the Global South in recent decades.
 - In the Cold War, the West competed fiercely with Russia for strategic influence across the Global South.
 - After the collapse of the **Soviet Union**, the G7 simply took the **Global South for granted and was more interested in lecturing** rather than talking to the leaders of the Global South.
 - This, in turn, left **much room for China and Russia to play** in the developing world.

Russia Suspends New START

Why in News?

Recently, Russia has announced to suspend its participation in the **New START**, the last remaining major military agreement with the United States.

What is the New START?

- **Background:**
 - The name START comes from the original "**Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty**", known as START-I, which was signed between the US and the erstwhile **USSR** in 1991, and came into force in 1994.
 - START-I, which capped the numbers of nuclear warheads and intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) that each side could deploy at 6,000 and 1,600 respectively, lapsed in 2009, and was replaced first by the SORT, also known as the Treaty of Moscow), and then by the **New START treaty**.
- **New START:**
 - The New START, the "Treaty between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms", entered into force on 5th February 2011, and placed **new verifiable limits on intercontinental-range** nuclear weapons.
 - The two countries had to meet the treaty's central limits on strategic offensive arms by February 2018, and to then stay within those limits for the period the treaty remained in force. The US and Russia Federation subsequently **agreed to extend the treaty through February 2026**.

India-Germany Cooperation on Innovation

Why in News?

Recently, the Indian Prime Minister met with the German-Chancellor and agreed on a **Vision Statement** to enhance cooperation on innovation and technology.

- It is considered to be **the most comprehensive economic document** signed between the two major economies to date.

What is the Vision Document all About?

- It focuses on **deepening ties between industry and spurring cooperation on development** of advanced technologies like **Artificial Intelligence and 6G**.
- This Cooperation aims at benefiting humanity and is firmly guided by their shared **democratic values and respect for universal human rights**.

Note:



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- **India and Germany** share a long history of cooperation in science and technology, research and innovation, institutionalized under the framework of the Inter-Governmental Agreement on 'Cooperation in Scientific Research and Technological Development' signed in May 1974.

What are the Key Highlights of the Meeting?

- **Green and Sustainable Development Partnership:**
- Both leaders discussed progress on the **Green and Sustainable Development Partnership (GSDP)**, which India and Germany had launched during the Indian PM's visit to Berlin for the 6th IGC (Inter-Governmental Consultations).
- The GSDP is an umbrella partnership that provides political guidance and steer to robust ties in climate action and **SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals)**.
- Under this, **Germany will also place €10 billion** in new and additional commitments under their development cooperation portfolio in India.
- **Green Hydrogen:**
 - Both countries agreed to cooperate on **Green Hydrogen**.
- The Indo-German Green Hydrogen Task Force was constituted in September 2022 and an Action Plan is close to finalization.
- **Triangular Development Cooperation:**
 - During the sixth IGC, India and Germany agreed to work on development projects in third countries.
 - The four projects, announced in May 2022, are now in **different stages of implementation**:
 - **Cameroon:** Potato Seed Production through Rooted Apical Cuttings (RAC) Technology.
 - **Malawi:** Agri Business Incubator Models for Women in Agriculture & Food Systems
 - **Ghana:** Developing Bamboo-Based Enterprises for Sustainable Livelihood and Income Generation in Ghana
 - **Peru:** Development of a geospatial portal prototype for planning, monitoring, and evaluation of the Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion of Peru (MIDIS) interventions and social programs.
- **Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative:**
 - Germany has come on board the **Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)**.

Submarines:

- The two countries discussed on the proposed deal for Germany to build jointly with India six conventional submarines for the Indian Navy.

The Indian Diaspora

Why in News?

Recently, the Prime Minister **inaugurated the 17th Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas convention** in Madhya Pradesh on the occasion of Pravasi Bhartiya Diwas (PBD).

- Over the years, the convention, which began in 2003, **has grown in size and scope, particularly since 2015, when the yearly convention became a biennial affair.**

What is Diaspora?

Origin:

- The term diaspora **traces its roots to the Greek diaspeiro, which means dispersion.** The **Indian diaspora** has grown manifold since the first batch of Indians **were taken to counties in the eastern pacific and the Caribbean islands under the 'Girmitiya' arrangement** as indentured labourers.

Classifications:

- **Non-Resident Indians (NRI):** NRIs are Indians who are residents of foreign countries. A person is considered NRI if:
 - She/he is **not in India for 182 days or more** during the financial year Or;
 - If he/she is **in India for less than 365 days** during the 4 years preceding that year and less than 60 days in that year.
- **Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs):** PIO refers to a foreign citizen (except a national of Pakistan, Afghanistan Bangladesh, China, Iran, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Nepal) who:
 - At any time held an Indian passport, or who or either of their parents/ grandparents/great grandparents **was born and permanently resided in India** as defined in the **Government of India Act, 1935** or who is a spouse of a citizen of India or a PIO.
 - The PIO category **was abolished in 2015 and merged with the OCI category.**

Note:



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- **Overseas Citizens of India (OCIs):** A separate category of OCI was **carved out in 2005**. An OCI card was given to a foreign national:
 - Who was eligible to be a citizen of India on January 26, 1950
 - Was a citizen of India on or at any time after January 26, 1950 or belonged to a territory that became part of India after August 15, 1947.
 - Minor children of such individuals, **except those who were a citizen of Pakistan or Bangladesh**, were also eligible for OCI cards.
- According to the **World Migration Report 2022**, **India has the largest emigrant population in the world in 2020**, making it the top origin country globally, followed by Mexico, Russian and China.
- The data shared by the government in Parliament in 2022 showed that the **geographical spread of the Indian diaspora is vast. The countries with over 10 lakh overseas Indians include:**
- United States of America, the United Kingdom, United Arab Emirates, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Myanmar, Malaysia, Kuwait and Canada.
- **Remittances:**
 - According to the **World Bank Migration and Development Brief, released in 2022**, for the **first time a single country, India, is on track to receive more than USD 100 billion in yearly remittances.**
 - The World Migration Report notes that India, China, Mexico, the Philippines and Egypt are (in descending order) **among the top five remittance recipient countries.**

India-US Trade Policy Forum

Why in News?

Recently, the Union Minister of Commerce and Industry of India and the US Trade Representative Ambassador co-chaired the **13th Ministerial-level meeting of India – US Trade Policy Forum (TPF)** in Washington D.C.

What is the India-US TPF?

- **About:**
 - The India-US TPF aims to activate its working groups in the fields of **agriculture, non-agriculture goods, services, investment, and intellectual property**

to meet frequently and address issues of mutual concern in a mutually beneficial manner.

- The idea is to **deliver tangible benefits to both countries by resolving outstanding market access issues.**
- **Highlights of the Meeting:**
 - While the two sides appreciated the **rise in bilateral trade in goods and services (which reached ~160 billion USD in 2021)**, they also recognised that for economies of their size, **significant potential still remains unfulfilled.**
 - The US welcomed India's participation in the **Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF).**
 - Both the countries have **like-minded views about the efficiency of IPEF for continued growth**, peace, and prosperity in the **Indo-Pacific region.**
 - The Ministers welcomed the finalization of the **Turtle Excluder Device (TED)** design with the technical support of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).
 - The TED will help in minimizing the **impact of fishing on sea-turtle populations.**
 - A **new TPF Working Group on Resilient Trade** was **launched** to help the officials deepen bilateral dialogue on a range of issues. Till the next TPF Ministerial meeting, it will focus on:
 - **Trade facilitation**
 - Promotion of **labour rights** and **workforce development**
 - **Circular economy**; role of trade in environment protection

How are India's Trade Ties with the US?

- India-US bilateral partnership today encompasses a whole host of issues including the response to **Covid-19**, economic recovery post-pandemic, the **climate crisis** and **sustainable development**, critical and emerging technologies, **supply chain resilience**, education, the **diaspora**, and **defence and security.**
- The **US is India's largest trading partner** and most important export market. It is **one of the few countries with which India has a trade surplus.** In 2021-22, India had a **trade surplus of USD 32.8 billion** with the US.
- Although India and the US have quite contradictory responses towards the **Russia-Ukraine crisis**, the two have underscored their commitment to continue to build on the momentum of recent years and **not lose sight of the larger strategic picture.**

Note:



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India and Maldives

Why in News?

Recently, India and Maldives have signed **pacts on development projects in Maldives**.

- Both the Maldives and Sri Lanka are **India's key maritime neighbours in the Indian Ocean Region** and occupy a special place in the Prime Minister's vision of '**SAGAR**' (**Security and Growth for All in the Region**) and '**Neighbourhood First**'.

What is the Pact?

- **Grant Assistance:**
 - It includes grant assistance of **100 million Rufiyaa (currency of Maldives)** for the **High Impact Community Development Project (HICDP)** scheme.
 - A number of socio-economic development projects are planned to be implemented throughout the country under this funding.
- **Sports Complex and Academic Collaboration:**
 - It also included the development of a sports complex in Gahdhoo, and academic collaboration between Maldives National University and Cochin University of Science and Technology.

How has India's Relations with Maldives been?

- **Security Partnership:**
 - Defence cooperation extends to the areas of Joint Exercises - "**Ekuverin**", "**Dosti**", "**Ekatha**" and "**Operation Shield**" (begun in 2021).
 - India provides the largest number of **training opportunities for Maldivian National Defence Force (MNDF)**, meeting around 70% of their defence training requirements.
- **Rehabilitation Centre:**
 - Signing of an USD 80-million contract for the **Addu reclamation and shore protection project**.
 - A drug detoxification and rehabilitation centre in Addu built with Indian assistance.
 - The centre is one of 20 high impact community development projects being implemented by India in areas such as **healthcare, education, fisheries, tourism, sports** and culture.
- **Economic Cooperation:**

- Tourism is the mainstay of Maldivian economy. The country is now a major tourist destination for some Indians and a job destination for others.
- In August 2021, **Afcons, an Indian company, signed a contract for the largest-ever infrastructure project** in Maldives which is the **Greater Male Connectivity Project (GMCP)**.
- India is **Maldives 2nd largest trading partner** – rising up from its 4th position in 2018. In 2021, bilateral trade registered a growth of 31% over the previous year – overcoming the pandemic-related challenges.
- A Bilateral USD Currency Swap Agreement between RBI and Maldives Monetary Authority was signed on 22 July 2019.

Infrastructure Projects:

- Hanimaadhoo International Airport Development project under an **Indian credit line will add a brand-new terminal to cater to 1.3 million** passengers a year.
- In 2022, the National College for Policing and Law Enforcement (NCPLE) was inaugurated by India's External Affairs Minister.
- NCPL is the largest grant **project executed by India in Maldives**.

India Sri Lanka Relations

Why in News?

India sent written **financing assurances to the International Monetary Fund (IMF)**, becoming the **first bilateral creditor of the island nation** to officially support its crucial debt restructure programme after last year's economic meltdown.

- A bilateral agreement between India and Sri Lanka on raising the limit of the **High Impact Community Development Project (HICDP)** was also signed during the India's External Affairs Minister's Visit.

What is the Significance of India's Financing Assurance?

- The **International Monetary Fund's provisional USD 2.9 billion package** to Sri Lanka will be cleared only after **Sri Lanka's official creditors** — **China, Japan and India** — have provided **adequate financing assurances**.

Note:



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- The decision of financing assurance was also a reassertion of **India's belief in the principle of "neighborhood first"**, and not leaving a partner to fend for themselves.

How are India's Relations with Sri Lanka?

➤ About:

- **India and Sri Lanka are two South Asian nations** situated in the Indian Ocean region. Geographically, Sri Lanka is located just off the southern coast of India, separated by the **Palk Strait**.
 - This proximity has played a significant role in shaping the relationship between the two countries.
- **The Indian Ocean is a strategically important waterway** for trade and military operations, and **Sri Lanka's location at the crossroads** of major shipping lanes makes it a critical point of control for India.

➤ Relations:

- **Historical Ties:** India and Sri Lanka have a long history of **cultural, religious, and trade ties** dating back to ancient times.
 - There are strong **cultural ties between the two countries, with many Sri Lankans tracing their heritage to India**. **Buddhism**, which originated in India, is also an important religion in Sri Lanka.
- **Economic ties:** India is **Sri Lanka's third largest export destination**, after the US and UK. More than **60% of Sri Lanka's exports enjoy the benefits of the India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement**. India is also a major investor in Sri Lanka.
 - **Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)** from India amounted to around **USD 1.7 billion** over the years from 2005 to 2019.
- **Defence:** India and Sri Lanka conduct joint Military (**Mitra Shakti**) and Naval exercise (**SLINEX**).

➤ Issues in India-Sri Lanka Relations:

- **Killing of Fishermen:** Killing of Indian fishermen by the **Sri Lankan Navy is a lingering issue** between these two nations.
 - In 2019 and 2020, a total of **284 Indian fishermen were arrested and a total of 53 Indian boats were confiscated by the Sri Lankan authorities**.
- **Influence of China:** **China's rapidly growing economic footprint** (and political clout as a corollary) in Sri Lanka is straining India-Sri Lanka relations.

- China is already the largest investor in Sri Lanka, accounting for 23.6% of the total **Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)** during 2010-2019 as against 10.4% from India.

- **13th Amendment of the Sri Lankan Constitution:** It envisages devolution of necessary powers to the provincial councils to address the just demand of the **Tamil people for equality, justice, peace, and respect within a united Sri Lanka**.
- India supports its implementation but the Sri Lankan government is yet to **"fully implement" the 13th Amendment**.

India-Oman Strategic Dialogue

Why in News?

Recently, the **8th India-Oman strategic dialogue** was held in India, where both countries have underlined the need to work collectively to fight the challenge of terrorism, terrorist propaganda, abuse of cyberspace and misuse of new and emerging technologies.

- They agreed to hold the next round of the strategic dialogue in Oman in 2024.

What are the Highlights of the Dialogue?

- Both sides highlighted the high priority accorded by the leadership of both countries to further enhance **their strategic ties based on trust and mutual respect**.
- Discussions were held on a wide range of issues of **mutual interest, including bilateral strategic and security cooperation, defence and regional security**.
- Both sides reiterated the **importance of preserving Maritime Safety and Security** in the region.
- Both sides reiterated the importance of the **strategic dialogue as an important mechanism of bilateral cooperation between India and Oman**.

What are the Key Points of India-Oman Relationship?

➤ Background:

- The two countries across the **Arabian Sea are linked by geography, history and culture and enjoy warm and cordial relations**, which are attributed to historical maritime trade linkages.

Note:



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- The Sultanate of Oman is a strategic partner of India in the Gulf and an important interlocutor at the **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)**, **Arab League** and **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)** fora.
- **Gandhi Peace Prize** 2019 was conferred on Late HM Sultan Qaboos in recognition of his leadership in strengthening the ties between **India & Oman** and his efforts to promote peace in the **Gulf region**.

➤ **Defence Relations:**

- **Joint Military Cooperation Committee (JMCC):**
 - The JMCC is the highest forum of engagement between India and Oman in the field of defence.
 - The JMCC is expected to meet annually, but could not be organised since 2018 when the meeting of the 9th JMCC was held in Oman.
- **Military Exercises:**
 - **Army exercise:** Al Najah
 - **Air Force exercise:** **Eastern Bridge**
 - **Naval Exercise:** Naseem Al Bahr

➤ **Economic & Commercial Relations:**

- Institutional mechanisms like **Joint Commission Meeting (JCM)** and **Joint Business Council (JBC)** oversee economic cooperation between India and Oman.
- India is among **Oman's top trading partners**.
 - India is the **2nd largest market for Oman's crude oil exports** for the year 2022 after China.
 - India is also the 4th largest market for **Oman's non-oil exports for the year 2022 after UAE**, US and Saudi Arabia and 2nd largest source of its import after UAE.
- Indian companies have invested in Oman in sectors like iron and steel, cement, fertilisers, textile etc.
- **India-Oman Joint Investment Fund (OIJIF)**, a JV between State Bank of India and State General Reserve Fund (SGRF) of Oman, a special purpose vehicle to invest in India, has been operational.

➤ **Indian Community in Oman:**

- There are about 6.2 lakh Indians in Oman, of which about 4.8 lakh are workers and professionals. There are Indian families living in Oman for more than 150-200 years.

India-Egypt Relations

Why in News?

Recently, on the occasion of the **74th Republic Day**, the **President of Egypt was invited as the chief guest at the parade**, this is the first time that an Egyptian President has been accorded this honour.

- **A military contingent from Egypt also participated in the parade.**

Note: An invitation to be **Chief Guest is an important honour that is very high on symbolism**. New Delhi's choice of Chief Guest every year is **dictated by a number of reasons — strategic and diplomatic, business interest, and geopolitics**.

What is the Status of the India-Egypt Relationship?

➤ **History:**

- The history of contact between India and Egypt, two of the world's oldest civilisations, **can be traced back to at least the time of Emperor Ashoka**.
 - Ashoka's edicts refer to his relations with Egypt under Ptolemy-II.
- In modern times, **Mahatma Gandhi and the Egyptian revolutionary Saad Zaghloul shared the common goal of independence from British colonial rule**.
 - The joint announcement of establishment of diplomatic relations at Ambassadorial level was made on 18 August 1947.
- India and Egypt **signed a friendship treaty in 1955**. In 1961, India and Egypt along with Yugoslavia, Indonesia and Ghana **established the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)**.
- In 2016, the **joint statement between India and Egypt** identified political-security cooperation, economic engagement and scientific collaboration, and cultural and people-people ties **as the basis of a new partnership for a new era**.

➤ **Recent Scenario:**

- During this year's meeting, both India and Egypt **agreed to elevate the bilateral relationship to a "strategic partnership"**.
 - The strategic partnership will have **broadly four elements:** political, defence, and security;

Note:

economic engagement; scientific and academic collaboration; cultural and people-to-people contacts.

- India and Egypt signed a **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** for three years to facilitate content exchange, capacity building, and co-productions **between Prasar Bharati and the National Media Authority of Egypt**.
 - Under the pact, **both broadcasters will exchange their programmes of different genres** like sports, news, culture, entertainment on bilateral basis.
- **A Partner within the OIC:**
 - India **views Egypt as a moderate Islamic voice among Muslim-majority countries, and as a partner within the Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC)**.
- **Terrorism & Defence:**
 - During this Republic Day meeting, India and Egypt **expressed concerns about the spread of terrorism** around the world as it is the most serious security threat to humanity. Consequently, **the two countries agreed that concerted action is necessary to end cross-border terrorism**.
 - The two countries are **looking at deepening defence and security cooperation**. Moreover, the two **Air Forces collaborated on the development of fighter aircraft in the 1960s**, and Indian pilots trained their Egyptian counterparts from the 1960s until the mid-1980s.
 - Both the **Indian Air Force (IAF)** and Egyptian air force fly the **French Rafale fighter jets**.
 - In 2022, a **pact was signed between the two countries** that have decided to also participate in exercises and cooperate in training.
 - The first joint special forces exercise between the **Indian Army and the Egyptian Army, "Exercise Cyclone-I"** has been underway since 14 January 2023 in Jaisalmer, Rajasthan.
- **Cultural Relations:**
 - The **Maulana Azad Centre for Indian Culture (MACIC)** was established in Cairo in 1992. The centre has been promoting cultural cooperation between the two countries.
 - **Geo-Strategic Concerns:**
 - China's bilateral trade with Egypt is currently at USD 15 billion, **double that of India's USD 7.26 billion in 2021-22**. During the past eight years, the

President of Egypt has **traveled to China seven times to lure Chinese investments**.

- Egypt, the most populous country in West Asia, **occupies a crucial geo-strategic location** — 12% of global trade passes through the Suez Canal and **is a key player in the region**.
- It is a **major market for India and can act as a gateway to both Europe and Africa**. However, it also has bilateral trade pacts with important West Asian and African nations **which is a cause of concern for India**.

China Builds New Dam in Tibet

Why in News?

China is constructing a new dam on the **Mabja Zangbo river** in Tibet, close to the tri-junction of India, Nepal and Tibet, raising concerns since China has ramped up creation of military and dual use infrastructure and in the eastern and western sectors of the **LAC (Line of Actual Control)**.

What is the Background?

- The development comes in the wake of China unveiling plans in 2021 to build a massive dam on the lower reaches of **Yarlung Zangbo** to generate up to 70 GW of power, three times that of the **country's Three Gorges dam, which is the world's largest hydropower plant in terms of installed capacity**.
- The **Brahmaputra, known as Yarlung Tsangpo** in China, is a 2,880 km long transborder river that originates in the Mansarovar lake and flows 1,700 km within Tibet, 920 km in Arunachal Pradesh and Assam and 260 km in Bangladesh. It accounts for nearly 30% of freshwater resources and 40% of India's hydropower potential.

What is the Location of The Dam?

- The new dam is located around 16 km north of the tri-junction and is opposite the Kalapani area of Uttarakhand.
- The dam is on the Mabja Zangbo river, a **tributary of the Ganga**.
- Construction activity on the dam has been observed on the **northern side of the river in Burang county, Tibet since May 2021**.

Note:



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- The Mabja Zangbo River flows into **Nepal's Ghaghara or the Karnali River** before it joins the **Ganga River** in India.

What are the Concerns?

- **Dominance over Water:**
 - China is building an embankment type **dam** with a reservoir, which raises **concerns regarding China's future control on water** in the region.
- **Likelihood of Military Establishment:**
 - In addition to using water as leverage, the possibility of a military establishment by China near the **tri-junction cannot be ruled out as the country had developed the same in the Yarlung Zangbo river near Arunachal Pradesh.**
- **Water Scarcity:**
 - China can use this dam to not only divert but also **store water which could lead to a scarcity in the regions dependent on the Mabja Zangbo river** and also lead to lower water levels in rivers such as the **Ghaghara and the Karnali in Nepal.**
- **Reinforce Chinese Claims over disputed region:**
 - Dams close to the border could be used by China to **strengthen its claim on the disputed areas in the region.**

How is China aiming at acquiring Hydro Hegemony?

- China has built a large number of dams and **dikes to control the flow of rivers on the Indus, Brahmaputra and Mekong.**
- With the occupation of Tibet, **China has acquired the starting points for rivers that flow into 18 countries.**
- China has built **several thousand dams, which can cause floods by suddenly releasing water or create droughts** by turning off the tap, thus devastating the river's ecosystem and disrupting normal human life.
- China plans to have four dams on the Brahmaputra River **which would affect the river's flows, India had lodged a complaint with China.**
- China refused to share **hydrographic data with India while it did so with Bangladesh**, which resulted in huge destruction because of floods in Assam subsequently for which India was not prepared.
- China has already built eleven huge dams on the Mekong River, which worries the **South-East-Asian countries.**

Indus Waters Treaty

Why in News?

India has issued a notice to Pakistan seeking a review and modification of the **Indus Waters Treaty (IWT)** citing Pakistan's "intransigence" in resolving disputes over the **Kishanganga and Ratle (on Chenab River) hydropower projects**, both in Jammu and Kashmir.

- The notice was sent after the "contravention of the graded mechanism of dispute settlement envisaged by Article IX of the IWT."

What is the History of the Dispute over the Hydel Projects?

- In 2015, Pakistan asked that a **Neutral Expert should be appointed** to examine its technical objections to the Kishanganga and Ratle HEPs. But the following year, Pakistan unilaterally retracted this request, and proposed that a Court of Arbitration should adjudicate on its objections.
- In August 2016, Pakistan had approached the World Bank seeking the **constitution of a Court of Arbitration** under the relevant dispute redressal provisions of the Treaty.
- Instead of responding to Pakistan's request for a Court of Arbitration, **India moved a separate application asking for the appointment of a Neutral Expert.**
 - India had argued that Pakistan's request for a Court of Arbitration **violated the graded mechanism of dispute resolution in the Treaty.**
- In March 2022, the World Bank decided to resume the process of **appointing a Neutral Expert and a Chairman for the Court of Arbitration.**

What is the Indus Waters Treaty?

- **About:**
 - India and Pakistan signed the IWT in September, 1960 after nine years of negotiations, **with the World Bank being a signatory** to the pact.
 - The treaty sets out a **mechanism for cooperation and information exchange between the two sides** on the use of the water of the Indus River and its five tributaries **Sutlej, Beas, Ravi, Jhelum, and Chenab.**
- **Key Provisions:**

Note:

○ Water Sharing:

- The treaty prescribed **how water from the six rivers of the Indus River System would be shared between India and Pakistan.**
- It allocated the three western rivers—Indus, Chenab and Jhelum—to Pakistan for unrestricted use, barring certain non-consumptive, agricultural and domestic uses by India and the three Eastern rivers—Ravi, Beas and Sutlej—were allocated to India for unrestricted usage.
 - This means that 80% of the share of water went to Pakistan, while leaving the rest 20% of water for use by India.

○ Permanent Indus Commission:

- It also required both the countries to establish a Permanent Indus Commission constituted by permanent commissioners on both sides.
- According to the provisions **of the IWT**, the Permanent Indus Commission is required to meet at least once a year.

○ Rights over Rivers:

- While Pakistan has rights over the waters of Jhelum, Chenab and Indus, Annexure C of the IWT allows India certain agricultural uses, while Annexure D allows **it to build 'run of the river' hydropower projects**, meaning projects not requiring live storage of water.

○ Dispute Resolution Mechanism:

- The IWT provides a three-step dispute resolution mechanism under **Article IX of the Indus Waters Treaty**, under which “questions” on both sides **can be resolved at the Permanent Commission**, or can also be taken up at the inter-government level.
- In case of unresolved questions or “differences” between the countries on water-sharing, such as technical differences, either side can approach the **World Bank to appoint a Neutral Expert (NE)** to come to a decision.
 - And eventually, if either party is not satisfied with the NE's decision or in case of “disputes” in the interpretation and extent of the treaty, matters can be referred to a **Court of Arbitration**.

What is Kishanganga Hydroelectric Project?

- The Kishanganga project is located **5 km north of Bandipore in Jammu and Kashmir, India.**
- It is a run-of-the-river project that includes a **37 m tall concrete-face rock-fill dam.**
- **It requires to divert water from the Kishanganga River** through a tunnel to a power plant in the Jhelum River basin.
- It will have an installed capacity of 330 MW.
- The construction of this hydroelectric project began in 2007.
- Pakistan objected to the project arguing that it will **affect the flow of the Kishanganga River (called the Neelum River in Pakistan).**
- In 2013, The Hague's Permanent Court of Arbitration (CoA) ruled that India could **divert all the water with certain conditions.**

NSA Meet with Central Asia

Why in News?

The **National Security Advisor (NSA)** of India, for the first time, hosted a special meeting with his counterparts from Central Asian countries - **Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.**

- Earlier in January 2022, the Prime Minister of India hosted the **first India-Central Asia Summit** in virtual format.

What are the Key

Highlights about the Meetings of NSAs?

- **30th Anniversary:** This was the **first time that NSAs of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan were in Delhi** for a high-level security meeting.
 - The meeting **coincides with the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties** between India and the Central Asian countries.
- **Afghanistan the Centre of Talks:** The focus was mainly on the security **situation in Afghanistan** and the **threat of terrorism originating from the country** under the Taliban.
- **Deliberations over Chabahar:** The NSAs supported India's proposal to include **Chabahar port** within

Note:



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the framework of the INSTC (**International North-South Transport Corridor**) connecting Iran to Russia via Central Asia.

- **Other Deliberations:** Deliberations over the need for **collective and coordinated action** against the “misuse of **new and emerging technologies**, arms and drugs trafficking, **abuse of cyber space** to spread **disinformation** and **unmanned aerial systems**”.
- **Institutionalisation of Mechanism:** During the summit, the leaders **agreed to institutionalise the Summit mechanism** by deciding to **hold it biannually**.
 - An **India-Central Asia Secretariat in New Delhi** would be set up to support the new mechanism.

How are India's Relations with Central Asia?

- **Historic Ties:** Central Asia is undoubtedly a **zone of India's civilisational influence**; the **Ferghana Valley** was India's crossing-point of the **Great Silk Road**.
 - **Buddhism** also found inroads in several **Central Asian cities** in the form of Stupas and Monasteries.
 - **Men of prominence** such as **Amir Khusrau, Dehlawi, Al-Biruni** etc. having Central Asian roots came and made their name in India.
- **Diplomatic Ties:** India considers the Central Asian countries as the “**heart of Asia**” and they are also members of the **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)**.
 - Central Asian countries are “**aware**” of **Pakistan's support to cross-border terrorism** and its links to various terror groups.
- **Like-Mindedness in Combatting Terrorism:** India and the Central Asian nations have **similarities in approach in countering terrorism** and the threat of radicalisation.
 - The latest meeting called for the early adoption of the **UN Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism**, which India had first proposed in 1996, but has been held up for decades, **primarily over differences on the definition of terrorism**.
- **India's Role in Afghanistan Situation:** India and the Central Asian countries have shared concerns over terrorism emanating from Afghanistan and its implications for regional security. **India has been a strong proponent for re-establishing peace in Afghanistan.**

- In November 2021, India had hosted a **regional dialogue on the situation in Afghanistan**, which was attended by NSAs of Russia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

- **Stand on Chabahar Port:** India has registered significant progress recently through **renovation of Chabahar port**. It is also a member of the **Ashgabat Agreement**.
- The port played an important role during the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan by delivering humanitarian goods to the Afghan people by international organisations.
- Prior to the fall of Kabul to the Taliban, India delivered 100,000 tonnes of wheat and medicines to Afghanistan via the port's **Shahid Beheshti terminal developed by India**.

Wassenaar Arrangement

Why in News?

Recently, on 26th annual plenary of the **Wassenaar Arrangement in Vienna**, Ireland handed over the chairmanship to India and India will officially assume the chairmanship from 1st January, 2023.

What is Wassenaar Arrangement?

- **About:**
 - The Wassenaar Arrangement is a voluntary export control regime. The Arrangement, **formally established in July 1996**, has 42 members who exchange information on transfers of conventional weapons and dual-use goods and technologies.
- **Dual-use** refers to the ability of a **good or technology to be used for multiple purposes** - usually peaceful and military.
 - Wassenaar Arrangement's **Secretariat is in Vienna, Austria**.
- **Members:**
 - It has 42 member states **comprising mostly NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and EU states**.
 - Participating States are required to report their arms transfers and transfers/denials of certain dual-use goods and technologies to destinations outside the Arrangement on a six-monthly basis.
 - India became a **member of the Arrangement in 2017**.

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- **Objectives:**
 - The group works by **regularly exchanging information in respect of technology**, both conventional and nuclear-capable, that is sold to, or denied to countries outside the grouping.
 - This is done through **maintenance and updating of detailed lists of chemicals**, technologies, processes and products that are considered militarily significant.
 - It aims at **controlling the movement of technology, material or components to countries or entities which undermine international security** and stability.
- **Wassenaar Arrangement Plenary:** It is the decision-making body of the Arrangement.
 - It is composed of **representatives of all Participating States** and normally meets once a year, usually in December.
 - The position of **Plenary Chair is subject to annual rotation** among Participating States.
 - In 2018 the Plenary Chair was held by the United Kingdom, and in 2019 the Chair is held by Greece.
 - All Plenary decisions are taken by consensus.
 - WA's control lists.

India as Voice of Global South

Why in News?

As India assumed the **G20 Presidency**, the External Affairs Minister of India iterated the country's **role as the "voice of the Global South"**, that is otherwise **under-represented in global forums**.

What is Global North and Global South?

- **'Global North'** refers loosely to countries like the **US, Canada, Europe, Russia, Australia and New Zealand**, while **'Global South'** includes **countries in Asia, Africa and South America**.
 - This classification is more accurate as the **countries share similarities in terms of wealth, indicators of education and healthcare, etc.**
- Some of the **South countries like India and China have emerged economically**, in the last few decades.
 - The progress achieved by many Asian countries is also **seen as challenging the idea that the North is the ideal**.

What were the Earlier Used Classification Systems?

- **First World, Second World and Third World Countries:**
 - First, Second and Third Worlds countries refer to countries **associated with the Cold war-era alliances of the US, the USSR, and non-aligned countries**, respectively.
- **World Systems Approach:**
 - It emphasises an interconnected perspective of looking at world politics. There are **three major zones of production: core, peripheral and semi-peripheral**.
 - The **core zones** reap profits, being the owners of cutting-edge technologies – countries like **the US or Japan**.
 - **Peripheral zones**, on the other hand, engage in less sophisticated production that is more **labour-intensive**.
 - **Semi-peripheral zone** is in the middle including countries like **India and Brazil**.
- **Eastern and Western Countries:**
 - **Western** countries generally **signify greater levels of economic development and prosperity** among their people, and **Eastern** countries considered as **being in the process of that transition**.

What Led to the Emergence of Global North and South?

- **Non-Feasibility of Earlier Classification:**
 - In the **post-Cold War world, the First World/Third World classification was no longer feasible**, because when the **Communist USSR disintegrated** in 1991, most countries had **no choice but to ally at some level with the capitalist US**, the only remaining global superpower.
 - The East/West binary was also seen as often perpetuating stereotypical thinking about African and Asian countries.
 - Categorising incredibly diverse countries into a monolith was felt to be too simplistic.
- **Commonalities in Global South Countries:**
 - Most of the Global South countries **share a history of colonisation**. The region has mostly **remained under-represented in international forums** such as their **exclusion from the permanent membership of the UNSC**.

Note:



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- This exclusion is seen as something that contributes towards the slower growth of global south.

What are the Initiatives for South-South Cooperation?

- **Global:**
 - **Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) Forum**
 - **India, Brazil and South Africa (IBSA) Forum**
 - **International Day for South-South Cooperation:**
 - Originally observed on December 19, the date for the **United Nations Day for South-South Cooperation** was moved to September 12 in 2011.
 - It commemorates the date when the **United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)** adopted a plan of action in 1978 to promote and implement technical cooperation among developing countries.
- **Indian:**
 - **Proposal on TRIPS Waiver:**
 - Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) waiver, **first proposed by the India and South Africa in 2020**, would involve a temporary global **easing of intellectual property rights (IPRs)** on COVID-19 vaccines and treatments to enable them to be produced on a far larger scale, to support global health and a way out of the pandemic. agreement on Covid-19 vaccines, drugs, therapeutics, and related technologies.
 - **Vaccine Maitri Campaign:**
 - In 2021, India began its historic campaign called the **"Vaccine Maitri" initiative** which is in accordance with the **'Neighbourhood First' Policy**.

Indian and Chinese Troops Clash in Arunachal Pradesh

Why in News?

Recently, India and China troops clashed along the Yangste river in Tawang sector in Arunachal Pradesh.

- This was the **first such incident involving the Indian soldiers and Chinese PLA troops** since the **Galwan Valley incident** in 2020.

- Both sides patrol areas up to their claim lines and this has been a trend since 2006.

What is the Background?

- According to the India Army, there are certain areas along the **Line of Actual Control (LAC)** in the **Tawang Sector** that are areas of differing perception.
 - The LAC is divided into western (Ladakh), middle (Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand), Sikkim, and eastern (Arunachal Pradesh) sectors.
- The incident came days after China expressed objection to **Operation Yudhabhyas**, an India-US joint military exercise at Auli in the Uttarakhand hills, claiming it was a violation of **1993 and 1996 border agreements**.

What is the Importance of Arunachal Pradesh from an Indian/Chinese Perspective?

- **Strategic Significance:**
 - Arunachal Pradesh, known as the **Northeast Frontier Agency (NEFA) until 1972**, is the largest state in the northeast and shares international borders with Tibet to the north and northwest, Bhutan towards the west and Myanmar to the east.
 - The state is like a **protective shield to the northeast**.
 - However, China claims Arunachal Pradesh as a part of southern Tibet.
 - And while **China may lay claim to the entire state, its main interest lies in the district of Tawang**, which is in the north-western region of Arunachal and borders Bhutan and Tibet.
- **Bhutan Factor:**
 - Taking control of Arunachal would mean that **Bhutan would have Chinese neighbours on both its western and eastern borders** if Beijing gained control.
 - On the western side of Bhutan, China has already begun building motorable roads linking strategic points.
- **Waterpower:**
 - Since, **China has control over India's water supply to the northeastern region**. It has constructed several dams and can use water as a geo-strategic weapon against India by causing flooding or drought in the region.
 - The **Tsangpo river**, which originates in Tibet, flows into India and is called **Siang in Arunachal Pradesh** before it becomes the Brahmaputra.

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- In 2000, a dam breach in Tibet caused floods that wreaked havoc in northeast India claiming 30 lives and leaving more than 100 missing.

Why is China Interested in the Tawang Sector?

- **Strategic Importance:**
 - China's interest in Tawang could be for tactical reasons as it provides a strategic entry into India's northeastern region.
 - Tawang is a critical point in the corridor between Tibet and Brahmaputra Valley.
- **Tawang Monastery:**
 - Tawang, which also borders Bhutan, hosts the **Galden Namgye Lhatse**, the world's second-largest monastery of Tibetan Buddhism, the largest being the Potala Palace in Lhasa.
 - The monastery was founded by **Merag Lodroe Gyamtso in the year 1680-81 to honour the wishes of the fifth Dalai Lama.**
 - China claims that the monastery is evidence that the district once belonged to Tibet. They cite historical ties between the Tawang monastery and the Lhasa monastery in Tibet to support their claim over Arunachal.
- **Cultural Connections and China's Anxieties:**
 - Tawang is an important center of Tibetan Buddhism and there are some tribes in the upper Arunachal region which have cultural connections to the people of Tibet.
 - The **Monpa tribal population practices Tibetan Buddhism** and are also found in some areas of Tibet.
 - According to some experts, China fears that the presence of these ethnic groups in Arunachal could at some stage give rise to a pro-democracy Tibetan movement against Beijing.
- **Political Significance:**
 - When the Dalai Lama escaped Tibet in 1959 amid China crackdown, he entered India through Tawang and stayed in the Tawang monastery for some time.

Presidency of India at the UNSC

Why in News?

On 1st December, India assumed the monthly rotating presidency of the **UN Security Council (UNSC)** for the

second time in its two-year tenure as an elected member of the Council in 2021-22.

- India had earlier assumed UNSC presidency in August 2021.

What are the Events ahead under India's Presidency?

- **Reformed Multilateralism:**
 - India will hold a "high-level open debate" on "**Maintenance of International Peace and Security: New Orientation for Reformed Multilateralism (NORMS)**" at the Security Council.
 - The **NORMS envisages reforms in the current multilateral architecture**, with the UN at its centre, to make it more representative and fit for purpose.
- **Counter-Terrorism:**
 - The other signature event planned is the high-level briefing on the theme "**Threats to International Peace and Security Caused by Terrorist Acts: Global Approach to Counter Terrorism — Challenges and Way Forward**".
 - This briefing intends to underscore the necessity of collective and coordinated efforts to combat the menace of terrorism.

What is UNSC?

- **About:**
 - The **Security Council was established by the UN Charter in 1945**. It is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations.
 - The other 5 organs of the United Nations are— the General Assembly (UNGA), the Trusteeship Council, the Economic and Social Council, the International Court of Justice, and the Secretariat.
 - The UNSC, with a mandate to maintain international peace and security, is the centrepiece of global multilateralism.
 - The **Secretary-General** is appointed by the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the **Security Council**.
 - The UNSC and UNGA jointly elect judges to the **International Court of Justice**.
- **Composition:**
 - The UNSC is composed of **15 members**: 5 permanent and 10 non-permanent.

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- Five permanent members: China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States.
- Ten non-permanent members: Elected for two-year terms by the General Assembly.
 - Five from African and Asian States,
 - One from Eastern European States,
 - Two from Latin American States,
 - Two from Western European and other States.
- **India's Membership:**
 - India has served seven times in the UN Security Council as a non-permanent member and in January 2021, India entered the UNSC for the eighth time.
 - India has been **advocating a permanent seat in UNSC**.
- **Voting Powers:**
 - Each member of the Security Council has one vote. Decisions of the Security Council on matters are made by an affirmative vote of nine members including the concurring votes of the permanent members.
 - A "No" vote from one of the five permanent members blocks the passage of the resolution.
- **Responsibilities:**
 - The **UNSC brokers peace by helping parties reach an agreement** through mediation, appointing special envoys, dispatching a UN Mission or requesting the UN Secretary-General to settle the dispute.
 - It can also **vote to extend, amend or end mission mandates**.
 - The Security Council oversees the work of UN peace operations through periodic reports from the Secretary-General and council sessions. It alone can make decisions regarding these operations, which Member States are obligated to enforce.

India Germany Relations

Why in News?

Recently, the **External Affairs Minister of India** met with the **Foreign Minister of Germany** in New Delhi.

- Germany's minister's visit coincided with the launch of an **"oil price cap"** plan by the **G7** and **European Union** countries to withdraw shipping and insurance services to countries that buy Russian oil above the price of USD 60 a barrel.

What are the Key Highlights of the Meeting?

- India and Germany signed a **Comprehensive Partnership on Migration and Mobility** meant to **ease travel for research, study and work** for people in both countries.
 - It would be the **"basis for a more contemporary partnership"** to relations.
- The two sides **held talks on bilateral issues**, including Germany's assistance to India on **renewable energy** and energy transitions, as well as international issues such as their IndoPacific strategy, and spoke about China, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

What is the Oil Price Cap by the G7?

- **About:**
 - It is a plan by the **G7 with the European Union and Australia** to **impose the price cap on Russian crude oil** shipments, pegged at **USD 60 to a barrel for now**.
 - The price cap is essentially **aimed at preventing firms in signatory nations from extending shipping, insurance, brokering and other services to Russian crude oil shipments** that are sold at any value above the designated per-barrel price i.e., USD 60 per barrel.
 - Since it came into effect on 5th December 2022, the cap will only apply to shipments that are "loaded" onto vessels after the date and not apply to shipments in transit.
- **India's Stand:**
 - Despite the **United States-led sanctions on Russia** post its **invasion of Ukraine**, India has decided to not just continue with, but also **double its trade with Moscow in the "near foreseeable future"**.
 - India's consumption of Russian oil was just one-sixth of European consumption and should not be compared unfavourably, defending the government's decision to increase its intake of Russian oil since the war in Ukraine.

How has the India Germany Relations been?

- **India-German Ties:**
 - The bilateral relations between India and Germany are founded on **common democratic principles**. India was amongst the **first countries to establish diplomatic ties with the Federal Republic of Germany** after the **Second World War**.

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- Germany cooperates with India to the tune of **1.3 billion Euros a year in development projects**, 90% of which serves the purpose of fighting **climate change**, saving natural resources as well as **promoting clean and green energy**.
 - Germany has also been supporting the construction of **a huge solar plant in Maharashtra** with a capacity of 125 Megawatt which generates annual CO₂ savings of 155,000 tons.
- After the appointment of new Chancellor of Germany in December 2021, India and Germany agreed that as major democracies and strategic partners, they will **step up their cooperation to tackle common challenges**, with climate change on top of the agenda.
- **Economic Cooperation - A Challenge:**
 - There is a problem of the **lack of a separate bilateral investment treaty** between the two countries. Germany has a **Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA)** with India via EU, it does not have the competence to negotiate it separately.
 - Also, Germany is particularly sceptical about India's trade liberalization measures, it bats for more liberal labour regulations.
- **Indo-Pacific Region - Significance:**
 - **The Indo-Pacific**, with India as its centrepiece, looms large in **Germany's and the European Union's foreign policy**.
 - The Indo-Pacific region is **home to around 65%** of the global population and **20 of the world's 33 megacities**.
 - The region accounts for 62% of global **Gross Domestic Product (GDP)** and 46% of the world's merchandise trade.
 - It is also the source of more than **half of all global carbon emissions** which makes the region's countries key partners in tackling global challenges such as climate change and sustainable energy production and consumption.
- **Germany and Indo-Pacific:**
 - Germany is determined to contribute to **buttressing the rules-based international order**.
 - Within the **German Indo-Pacific guidelines**, India is mentioned for the enhancement of engagement and fulfilment of objectives. India should now be an important node while discussing issues relating to international security.

- India is a maritime powerhouse and a strong advocate for free and inclusive trade — and, therefore, a primary partner for Germany (eventually the EU) on this mission.

SAARC Currency Swap Framework

Why in News?

Recently, the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** has signed an agreement to extend up to a USD 200 million currency swap facility to Maldives Monetary Authority (MMA) under the SAARC Currency Swap Framework.

What is the Currency Swap Arrangement?

- The word **swap means exchange**. A currency swap between two countries is **an agreement or contract to exchange currencies** with predetermined terms and conditions.
- In the present context, the **facility is to provide swap support as an alternative source of funding for short-term foreign exchange** liquidity requirements.
 - In 2020, the RBI **signed a currency swap agreement for extending up to a USD 400 million to Sri Lanka**.
- 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 the Balance of Payments (BOP) crisis** till longer arrangements can be made.
- These swap operations **carry no exchange rate or other market risks as transaction terms are set in advance**.
 - Exchange rate risk, also known as **currency risk**, is the financial risk arising from fluctuations in the value of a base currency against a foreign currency in which a company or individual has assets or obligations.

What is the RBI's Framework for Swap Facilities for SAARC?

- The **SAARC currency swap facility** came into operation on **15th November, 2012**.
- The RBI can offer a swap arrangement **within the overall corpus of USD 2 billion**.

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- The swap draws can be made in **US dollar, euro or Indian rupee**. The framework provides certain concessions for swap draws in Indian rupee.
- The facility will be **available to all SAARC member countries**, subject to their signing the bilateral swap agreements.

What is South Asian

Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)?

- **Establishment:** SAARC was established with the signing of the SAARC Charter in Dhaka (Bangladesh) on 8th December 1985.
- **Member States:** Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
- **Secretariat:** Kathmandu (Nepal)
- **Objective:** To promote the welfare of the people of South Asia and to improve their quality of life, and accelerate economic growth, among other things.

17th Asia Pacific Regional Meeting

Why in News?

Recently, the **17th Asia Pacific Regional Meeting (APRM)** of the **International Labour Organization (ILO)** was held in Singapore.

What are the Key Highlights of the Meeting?

- It brings together **representatives of governments, employers' and workers' organizations from Asia, the Pacific and the Arab states**.
- The **four key thematic areas** of the 17th APRM included:
 - **Integrated policy agenda for a human-centred recovery** that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient
 - **Institutional framework to support transitions** towards formality and decent work
 - Strong foundations for **social and employment protection and resilience**
 - **Revitalizing productivity growth and skills** for more and better jobs
- The meeting concluded with the launch of '**Singapore Statement**'.
- The statement **represents a shared vision of the region's priorities for national action among the ILO constituents** and with ILO support in the coming years.

- The statement highlights the **need to ratify ILO fundamental conventions and further strengthen the capacities of government**, employer and worker representatives to carry out effective social dialogue.
- It calls for action to **close gender gaps and encourages ILO member countries to consider the ratification** and effective implementation of related international labour standards, accelerate the transition from the informal to formal economy as well as strengthen governance frameworks to protect the rights of migrant workers.
 - The Statement furthermore confirms the commitment of governments and social partners across the regions to engage in consultations towards the development of a **Global Social Justice Coalition**.
 - It also calls for a just transition that helps build **environmentally sustainable economies and societies** in the face of climate change.

What is the International Labour Organization?

- Established in 1919 by the **Treaty of Versailles** as an affiliated agency of the League of Nations.
- ILO is the **only tripartite U.N. agency** with government, employer, and worker representatives.
- It brings together governments, employers and workers of **187 member States**, to set labour standards, develop policies and devise programmes promoting decent work for all women and men.
- **Headquarters:** Geneva, Switzerland.
- **Reports:**
 - Global Wage Report
 - World Employment and Social Outlook
 - World Social Protection Report
 - Social Dialogue Report

Foreign Policy of India

Why in News?

On the geopolitical and diplomatic stage, 2022 was a difficult year, especially following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

How did India handle the Ukraine Crisis?

- **Following Non-Alignment Policy:**

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- The war in Ukraine saw the government spell out its **version of “non-alignment”**, as it sought to keep a balance in the growing polarisation between the U.S. and the **European Union** on one side, and Russia on the other.
- On one side the Indian **Prime Minister made his discomfort with the war clear directly to Russian President Vladimir Putin with the words “This era is not for war”** and on the other hand **refused to accept western sanctions, growing military and oil trade with Russia**, and seeking **rupee-based payment mechanisms** to facilitate them.
- **Refusing to Vote on the Resolution:**
 - Most significantly, in more than a dozen resolutions at the **United Nation Security Council (UNSC)**, **United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)**, **International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)**, **Human Rights Commission**, and other multilateral platforms seeking to censure Russia for the invasion and humanitarian crisis, **India chose to abstain**.

The Indian Foreign Policy said that India’s policy was guided by its national interests, telling those who expected India to take sides, “Tough luck if our policies do not meet your expectations”.

What were the Other Highlights in Foreign Policy in 2022?

- **Returning to Free Trade Agreements (FTAs):**
 - In 2022, **India returned to FTAs**, after a break of several years when India had called for a review of all **FTAs**, scrapped all Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs) and walked out of the 15-nation Asian **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)**.
 - In 2022, **India signed trade agreements with the UAE and Australia**, and hopes to progress on talks with the EU, **Gulf Cooperation Council** and Canada for others.
- **Joining US led IPEF:**
 - India also joined the **U.S.-led Indo-Pacific Economic Forum (IPEF)**, although it later decided to stay out of trade talks.

What about Ties with Neighbours?

- **Sri Lanka:**
 - India’s foreign policy was marked by **economic assistance to Sri Lanka in the midst of its collapse**.

- **Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal:**
 - Foreign policy of India is marked by **regional trade and energy agreements with Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal** that could see a South Asian energy grid emerge.
- **Central Asian countries:**
 - India has also strengthened ties with **Central Asian countries** on connectivity.
 - India has restarted efforts to revive the much-delayed **Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline project**.
 - India also discussed the best use of the **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)**.
 - Steps have also been taken to operationalize the **Chabahar port** in Iran which can provide a secure, viable and unhindered access to the sea for the Central Asian countries.
 - In addition, the **Ashgabat Agreement** on International Transport and Transit Corridor (ITTC) was discussed to enhance connectivity between India and Central Asian countries.
- **Afghanistan and Myanmar:**
 - The government kept channels open with repressive regimes like Afghanistan’s Taliban and the Myanmar Junta, opening a “technical mission” in Kabul and sending the foreign secretary to Myanmar to discuss border cooperation.
 - Earlier in December, 2022 **India abstained on a UNSC vote calling for Myanmar to end violence and release political prisoners**.
- **Iran and Pakistan:**
 - With Iran too, where protests against the killing of an activist have brought thousands onto the streets, India has steered clear of any criticism.
 - However, ties with Pakistan remain flat, with a big showdown at the UN in December, 2022 between the foreign ministers of the two nations.

What Progress has been made in the LAC-China Standoff?

- Despite a visit to Delhi by China’s Foreign Minister and disengagement at some stand-off points, tensions at the **Line of Actual Control** remained high, and an unsuccessful Chinese PLA attempt to take Indian posts at Yangtse in Arunachal Pradesh ended the year, signaling more violent clashes in 2023.

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- In spite of the fraught state of relations, India is due to host the Chinese President twice in 2023, at the **G-20** and **SCO summits**, opening up the possibility for talks to end the standoff.

What are the Current Challenges in India's Foreign Policy?

- **Pakistan-China Strategic Nexus:**
 - The most formidable threat India faces today is from the **Pakistan-China strategic nexus** that seeks to change the status quo at the contested borders and undermine India's strategic security.
 - China's aggressive actions since May 2020 to change the status quo at the Line of Actual Control have severely damaged Sino-Indian relations.
- **China's Expansion:**
 - For India, the issue of how to balance China's forays into South Asia and the **Indian Ocean region** is another concern.
 - Under the rubric of China's much touted **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**, it is developing **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)** in Pakistan (through the Indian territory in the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir), building China-Nepal Economic Corridor, China-Myanmar Economic Corridor and dual use infrastructure in the littorals of the Indian Ocean.
- **Balancing Big Power Relations:**
 - India's strategic autonomy precludes New Delhi to join any military alliance or strategic partnership that is inimical to another country or group of countries.
 - Traditionally, the **West has perceived India closer to the Soviet Union / Russia**. These perceptions are accentuated with India actively participating in SCO, **BRICS** and **Russia-India-China (RIC) forum**.
 - For India to balance an assertive China, it has to rely on external balancing in the Indo-Pacific to overcome the security dilemmas posed by the Pakistan-China hybrid threats.
 - India's participation in **QUAD**, signing of foundational agreements with US, Japan, France, UK and Indonesia should be seen from that perspective.
- **Refugee Crisis:** 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.

- The challenge here is to **balance protection of human rights and national interest**. As the Rohingya crisis unfolds, there is still a lot that India can do to facilitate the finding of long-term solutions.
- These actions will be key in determining India's regional and global standing on human rights.

Vijay Diwas and Indo Bangladesh Relations

Why in News?

Every year **16th December** is observed by **Indian Armed Forces and Bangladesh** as **Vijay Diwas (Bijoy Dibos)** to mark **India's victory over Pakistan in the 1971 war** and the birth of Bangladesh as an independent nation.

What are the Key Points about the Indo-Pak War for Bangladesh Liberation?

- **Background:**
 - Pakistan right after India's independence consisted of East and West Pak where a **major problem was the geographical disconnect** between the two regions.
 - **Cultural conflicts and negligence of East Pak's administration** were also challenges.
 - In the mid-1960s, leaders such as **Sheikh Mujibur Rahman** (the founding father of Bangladesh), actively began protesting against the policies of West Pak which was followed by a brutal crackdown by the Pakistani military.
- **India's Role:**
 - On 15 May 1971, **India launched Operation Jackpot** to recruit, train, arm, equip, supply and advise **Mukti Bahini fighters** engaged in guerrilla warfare against the Pakistan military.
 - On 3rd December 1971, **India decided to go on a war with Pakistan** to save Bengali Muslims and Hindus in East Pakistan. The war lasted for 13 days.
 - After that, a **written agreement** between India, Pakistan and the provisional government of Bangladesh came into effect bringing an end to the **Bangladesh Liberation War**.

Note:

How are India's Relations with Bangladesh since Its Independence?

- **India's Immediate Recognition:**
 - India was **one of the first countries to recognize Bangladesh** and **establish diplomatic relations immediately** after its independence in December 1971.
 - The **UN member nations** were also quick to recognise Bangladesh's independent identity.
- **Defence Cooperation:**
 - India and Bangladesh share 4096.7 km. of border; the **longest land boundary that India shares with any of its neighbours**.
 - Assam, West Bengal, Mizoram, Meghalaya, and Tripura share borders with Bangladesh.
 - The two also conduct Joint exercises - **Army (Exercise Sampriti)** and **Navy (Exercise Milan)**.
- **Economic Relations:**
 - In 2021-22, **Bangladesh has emerged as the largest trade partner for India in South Asia** and the **fourth largest destination for Indian exports** worldwide.
 - **Exports to Bangladesh grew more than 66%** from USD 9.69 billion in FY 2020-21 to USD 16.15 billion in FY 2021-22.
 - Recently, the **Prime Minister of Bangladesh visited India** and held talks with Indian Prime Minister where India and Bangladesh signed 7 agreements for cooperation in various areas.
- **Key Challenges in Relations:**
 - Despite the remarkable progress, the **unresolved Teesta water sharing issue** looms large.
 - The problem of **Bangladeshi civilians being shot at the border** has also dented relations; these shootings occur as many **Bangladeshi people try to illegally migrate into India**.
 - Despite its '**Neighbourhood First Policy**', India has been losing its influence in the region to China; **Bangladesh is an active partner of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**.

India-Armenia Relations

Why in News?

Armenia and India celebrated 30 years of bilateral diplomatic relations in 2022.

How have Historical Ties been?

- Armenia and India **maintain active political ties**. Effective cooperation exists between the two nations within international bodies.
- After Armenia's independence in 1991, **Armenian-Indian relations were reestablished**.
- Diplomatic relations were established between the Republic of Armenia and India in 1992.
- In 1999, the Indian Embassy in Yerevan began operations.
- If the Armenian-Indian political relations can be evaluated as "excellent", **Armenia is the only Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) country with which India had diplomatic relations in 1995 (other than Russia)**.
 - The CIS was founded in 1991 **after the dissolution of the Soviet Union**.
 - At present the CIS unites: Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Ukraine.
- India and Armenia signed a **Treaty on Friendship and Cooperation in 1995**.
- But the trade and economic cooperation between the two countries cannot be deemed adequate.

What are the Areas of Cooperation Between the Two Countries?

- **Defense Relations:**
 - Armenia had already shown interest in Indian military hardware before the 2020 war.
 - In 2020, Armenia signed a USD 40 million arms deal with India for the supply of four SWATHI radars to detect the location of weapons.
 - In October 2022, India signed an agreement with Armenia to export missiles, rockets & ammunition.
 - The missiles will also include Indigenous **Pinaka Multi-Barrel Rocket** Launcher.
 - India may also export its **Man Portable Anti-Tank Guided Missile (MPATGM)** to Armenia.
- **Supply Chain and Economy:**
 - In the contest over global supply chains, **Armenia provides a potential outpost for New Delhi in the Eurasian corridor** which extends from the **Persian Gulf** to Russia and Europe.

Note:



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- Armenia can also **prove a worthy developmental partner to India in domains such as agriculture, pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, and technology.**
- The collaboration can provide an outstanding substitute for the debt-fuelled Chinese **Belt and Road Initiative** model.
- Finally, it **goes without saying that Armenia growing purchases of Indian defence hardware would provide an impetus** to both public and private sector defence manufacturing in India.

India-Nepal Relations

Why in News?

Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda" was sworn in as Nepal's new Prime Minister.

- It is believed that **Deuba's predecessor - KP Sharma Oli was pro-China**, and the coming together of Communist forces is a turning back of the clock for India.
- After the bitterness in ties during Oli's terms in office from 2015-2016 and 2018-2021, **India-Nepal relations had improved after Deuba became PM in 2021.**

What are the Areas of Cooperation Between the Two Countries?

- **Trade and Economy:**
 - India remains **Nepal's largest trade partner**, with bilateral trade crossing USD 7 billion in FY 2019-20.
 - India provides transit for almost the entire third country trade of Nepal.
 - Indian firms are among the largest investors in Nepal, accounting for **more than 33% of the total Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) stock in Nepal**, worth nearly USD 500 million.
- **Connectivity:**
 - Nepal **being a landlocked country is surrounded by India from three sides** and one side is open towards Tibet which has very limited vehicular access.
 - India-Nepal has undertaken various connectivity programs to enhance people-to-people linkages and promote economic growth and development.
 - India is looking to develop the inland waterways for the movement of cargo, within the framework of trade and transit arrangements, providing additional

access to sea for Nepal calling it linking **Sagarmatha (Mt. Everest)** with **Sagar (Indian Ocean).**

➤ Defence Cooperation:

- Bilateral defence cooperation includes assistance to the Nepalese Army in its modernisation through the provision of equipment and training.
- The **Gorkha Regiments of the Indian Army** are raised partly by recruitment from hill districts of Nepal.
- India from 2011, every year undertakes a joint military exercise with Nepal known as **Surya Kiran.**

➤ Humanitarian Assistance:

- Nepal lies in the sensitive ecological fragile zone which is prone to **earthquakes and floods** causing massive damage to both life and money, whereby it remains the biggest recipient of India's humanitarian assistance.

➤ Multilateral Partnership:

- India and Nepal share multiple multilateral forums such as BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal), **BIMSTEC** (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation), **Non Aligned Movement**, and **SAARC** (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) etc.

Russia-China Joint Naval Drills

Why in News?

Recently, Russia and China have begun a **joint naval exercise in the East China Sea.**

What are the Key Points of the Exercises?

- It involves **firing exercises and anti-submarine drills.**
- The main goal of the drills is to **strengthen naval cooperation between the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China** and to maintain peace and stability in the **Asia Pacific region.**
- This joint exercise is directed at **demonstrating the determination and capability of the two sides to jointly respond to maritime security threats** and further deepen the **China-Russia comprehensive new-era strategic partnership** of coordination.
 - Russia and China have also **engaged in frequent military drills** over the past year, including in May 2022 when the two countries flew nuclear-capable bombers.

Note:



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- That was followed with a sweeping **joint exercise in September 2022 that involved more than 2,000 Chinese troops**, hundreds of military vehicles, combat aircraft and warships.

What are India's Exercises with China & Russia?

- **China:**
 - **Exercise Hand-in-Hand:**
 - The aim of the exercise is to practice **joint planning and conduct of counter terrorist operations** in semi urban terrain.
- **Russia:**
 - **Exercise Indra:**
 - The exercise will entail the conduct of **counter terror operations** under the **United Nations** mandate by a joint force against international terror groups.
 - The INDRA series of exercises **began in 2003 and was conducted as a bilateral naval exercise alternately** between the two countries.
 - However, the first joint Tri-Services Exercise was conducted in 2017.
 - **Exercise TSENR:**
 - Exercise **TSENR 2019 is part of the annual series of large-scale exercises** that form part of the Russian Armed Forces' annual training cycle.
 - The series rotates **through the four main Russian operational strategic commands** i.e Vostok (East), Zapad (West), TSENR (Centre) and Kavkas (South).

Strait of Hormuz

Why in News?

Recently, the United Arab Emirates and Iran's military have started their annual Drill in the coastal area of the **Gulf of Oman** and near the strategic Strait of Hormuz.

- The maneuvers are **aimed at improving readiness in confronting foreign threats and any possible invasion.**

What is the Strait of Hormuz?

- The strait is located at the **mouth of the Persian Gulf** and is crucial to global energy supplies, with about a fifth of all oil traded at sea passing through it.

- The waterway **separates Iran and Oman, linking the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea.**
- The Strait is 33 km wide at its narrowest point, but the shipping lane is just three km wide in either direction.
- Most crude exported from Saudi Arabia, Iran, the UAE, Kuwait and Iraq – all members of the **Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)** – is shipped through this waterway.
- It is also the route used for nearly all the **Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG)** produced by the world's biggest LNG exporter, Qatar.
- The UAE and Saudi Arabia have sought to find other routes to bypass the Strait, including building more oil pipelines.

India Norway Relations

Why in News?

Recently, **Norway's Ambassador to India** has reported that the bilateral trade between India and Norway has **doubled to \$2 billion in the last two years.**

What are the Upcoming Areas of Cooperation in India Norway Relations?

- Norway would invest \$1 billion from its **climate investment fund** in five years worldwide, how much of the funds would be invested in India **would depend on the projects.**
- Norway is working with the **National Institute of Wind Energy** for **Wind Energy** related projects.
 - However, the problem in India is that **only Tamil Nadu and Gujarat** had stable wind to make it viable.
- Norway is working closely with India to find a way to get **enough countries to ratify the Hong Kong Convention.** It will be a **binding international legal instrument.**

How has India's Relations with Norway been?

- **History:**
 - India and Norway have been enjoying a cordial and friendly relationship since the **establishment of relations in 1947.**
 - Norway's first Consulates in India opened in **Kolkata and Mumbai in 1845 and 1857, respectively.**

Note:



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- In 1952, the “India fund” was established” with the aim to provide development assistance with a **focus on fisheries**.
 - The same year, **Norway opened its Embassy in New Delhi**.
- Norway has supported **India’s membership to export control regimes the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), the Wassenaar Arrangement (WA) and the Australia Group (AG)**.
- India signed a **Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) with Norway** in 1986 which was revised in February 2011.
- **Developments:**
 - **Consulate General of Norway:**
 - The Consulate General in Mumbai re-opened its doors in 2015.
 - It had been closed since the 1970s.
 - It was joined by Innovation Norway, the Norwegian government’s official trade representative, which now has offices both in Mumbai and New Delhi.
- **India Strategy:**
 - In December 2018, the Norwegian government launched a new ‘**India Strategy**’. The strategy sets clear **priorities for the Norwegian government** until 2030 and gives **renewed impetus** to develop the bilateral cooperation.
 - **The India Strategy outlines five thematic priorities:**
 - Democracy and a rules-based world order
 - The oceans
 - Energy
 - Climate and Environment
 - Research, higher education and global health
 - To achieve these objectives, Norway focuses on political contact and cooperation between the authorities, business cooperation, and research cooperation.
 - **Task Force on Blue Economy:**
 - In 2020, the **India-Norway Task Force on Blue Economy for Sustainable Development** was inaugurated jointly by both the countries. This task force was launched during Norwegian Prime Minister’s visit to India earlier in 2019.
 - The purpose of the task force is to **develop and follow up joint initiatives** between the two countries.
- It also intends to **mobilise relevant stakeholders from both Norway and India at the highest level**, and ensure continued commitment and progress across ministries and agencies.
- **Norway’s PM Visit to India:**
 - In 2019, the Prime Minister of Norway visited India and **a number of MOUs were signed**.
 - The Prime Minister also delivered the inaugural address at the Raisina Dialogue and inaugurated the India-Norway Business Summit.
- **Economic Relations:**
 - As of 2019, more than 100 Norwegian companies have established themselves in India.
 - Another 50 are represented by agents.
 - ◆ The Norwegian Pension Fund Global is likely one of India’s largest single foreign investors. In 2019, its investments amounted to USD 9.5 billion.
 - **Exports from Norway to India** include Nonferrous metals, gas natural manufactured, plastic in primary form, crude minerals, chemical material and products.
 - The main items of **export from India to Norway** include articles of apparels and accessories, textile yarns, manufactures of metals, rice and miscellaneous manufactured articles.
- **Cooperation in Various Fields:**
 - Norway has the **fifth largest commercial ship fleet in the world**, and ship recycling was crucial to keep up a modern fleet, both for environmental as also for competitive reasons. Norway is **cooperating closely with India** in “**Ship recycling and shipbuilding**” activities.
 - **Academic collaborations exist** between the Indian **Institute of Technology-Madras** and the **Institute of Wind Energy in Chennai** with institutions in Norway.
 - The Norwegian company, Piql, was involved in creating a **digital archive for Indian monuments such as the Taj Mahal**. The company was also involved in digitalising historical monuments, **Dholavira** in Gujarat and the **Bhimbhetka Caves** in Madhya Pradesh.

Note:



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19th ASEAN-India Summit

Why in News?

Recently, the Vice President of India attended the 19th ASEAN-India Summit in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

What are the Highlights of the Meeting?

- **Act East Policy:**
 - India hailed the **deep cultural, economic and civilizational ties that have existed between India and South East Asia** from time immemorial and stated that the India-ASEAN relationship forms the **central pillar of India's ACT-EAST policy**.
 - India reiterated **its support to ASEAN centrality** in the Indo-Pacific.
- **Comprehensive Strategic Partnership:**
 - ASEAN and India adopted a **joint statement** announcing the elevation of the existing **Strategic Partnership to Comprehensive Strategic Partnership**.
 - It reiterated the **commitment to enhance India-ASEAN cooperation** in various areas such as maritime activities, counter-terrorism, cyber security, digital economy, environment, science & technology, tourism, among other areas.
 - It proposes expediting the review of **ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA)** to make it more user-friendly, simple, and trade-facilitative.
- **Peace and Security:**
 - Both sides reaffirmed the **importance of maintaining and promoting peace**, stability, maritime safety and security, freedom of navigation and overflight in the **Indo-Pacific region**.
- **Deepening Dialogue and Coordination:**
 - As part of maintaining "**ASEAN-Centrality**", the two sides reaffirmed the importance of deepening dialogue and coordination through ASEAN-led mechanisms including the ASEAN-India Summit, the East Asia Summit, the Post-Ministerial Conference with India (PMC+1), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus), the Expanded **ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF)**.

What is the Association of Southeast Asian Nations?

➤ About:

- It is a **regional grouping that promotes economic, political, and security cooperation**.
- It was established in **August 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand** with the signing of the ASEAN Declaration (Bangkok Declaration) by the founding fathers of ASEAN, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.
- Its chairmanship **rotates annually, based on the alphabetical order** of the English names of Member States.
- ASEAN countries have a **total population of 650 million people** and a combined **Gross Domestic Product (GDP)** of USD 2.8 trillion.

➤ Members:

- ASEAN brings together **ten Southeast Asian states** – Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam – into one organisation.

How has Been the ASEAN-India Relations?

➤ About:

- ASEAN is considered one of the most influential groupings in Southeast Asia.
- India and several other countries, including the US, China, Japan and Australia, are its dialogue partners.
- The ASEAN-India dialogue relations started with the **establishment of a sectoral partnership in 1992**.
- This graduated to full dialogue partnership in December 1995 and summit-level partnership in 2002.
- Traditionally the basis of **India-ASEAN ties** has been trade and people-to-people ties due to shared historical and cultural roots, a more recent and urgent area of convergence has been balancing China's rise.
 - Both India and **ASEAN aim to establish** a rules-based security architecture for peaceful development in the region, in contrast to China's aggressive policies.

➤ Areas of Cooperation:

○ Economic Cooperation:

- ASEAN is India's 4th largest trading partner.

Note:



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- India signed **FTA (Free Trade Agreement)** in goods in 2009 and an FTA in services and investments in 2014 with ASEAN.
 - Since the FTA came into effect, the trade between them has **almost doubled to reach over USD 87 billion** in 2019-20 and then declined to USD 79 billion in 2020-21 **due to pandemic-driven slowdown**.
- India has a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) with various countries of the ASEAN region which has resulted in concessional trade and a rise in investments.
- Commodity trade between India and ASEAN region has **reached USD 98.39 billion in the period April 2021- February 2022**.
- India's main trading ties are with Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam and Thailand.
- **Political Cooperation:**
 - ASEAN-India Centre (AIC) was established to undertake policy research, advocacy and networking activities with organizations and think-tanks in India and ASEAN.
- **Financial Assistance:**
 - India provides financial assistance to the ASEAN nations through various mechanism like ASEAN-India Cooperation Fund, ASEAN-India S&T Development Fund and ASEAN-India Green Fund.
- **Connectivity:**
 - India has been undertaking several connectivity projects like India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral (IMT) Highway and the **Kaladan Multimodal Project**.
 - India is also trying to establish a **Maritime Transportation Agreement** with ASEAN and also Plans for a Railway link between New Delhi in India to Hanoi in Vietnam.
- **Socio-Cultural Cooperation:**
 - Programmes to boost People-to-People Interaction with ASEAN are organized, such as inviting ASEAN students to India, Special Training Course for ASEAN diplomats, Exchange of Parliamentarians, etc.
- **Defence Cooperation:**
 - Joint Naval and Military exercises are conducted between India and most ASEAN countries.

- The maiden **Asean-India Maritime Exercise** will be held in 2023.
- **Watershed' Military Exercise** held in 2016.
 - Vietnam has traditionally been a close friend on defense issues, Singapore is also an equally important partner.

India-Belarus Relation

Why in News?

Recently, the **11th Session of the India-Belarus Inter-Governmental Commission** on Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technological and Cultural Cooperation was held.

What are the Highlights of the Session?

- The Intergovernmental Commission **reviewed the results of bilateral cooperation** that took place after the tenth session of the Commission in 2020.
- While expressing satisfaction at the progress made in regard to some projects, **the Commission also directed concerned Ministries and Departments to focus on key sectors** in the trade & investment spheres to finalize concrete outcomes.
- **India and Belarus reiterated their strong desire to further broaden their cooperation** with emphasis on key sectors such as pharmaceuticals, financial services, science and technology, heavy industries, culture, tourism, and education.
- The two ministers **directed their respective business communities to engage with each other** in these sectors to further mutually beneficial cooperation.
- The **two sides agreed to promote cooperation among various states in India** and regions in Belarus, especially in focus areas.

How Has Been India-Belarus Relations?

- **Diplomatic Relations:**
 - India's relations with Belarus have been traditionally warm and cordial.
 - India was one of the **first countries to recognize Belarus as an independent country in 1991** after the break-up of the Soviet Union.
- **Supports at Multilateral Fora:**
 - The cooperation between the two countries is **visible at many multilateral fora such as the UN**

Note:

Security Council (UNSC) and Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).

- Belarus was **one of the countries whose support helped in consolidating India's candidature** for the non-permanent seat at the UNSC in July 2020.
- India has also **reciprocated Belarus's support at various international fora**, such as Belarus's membership in the **Non Aligned Movement (NAM)** and other international and multilateral groups like **IPU (Inter-Parliamentary Union)**.
- **Comprehensive Partnership:**
 - The two countries **enjoy a comprehensive partnership and have established mechanisms for exchanging views on bilateral, regional and multilateral issues** through Foreign Office Consultations (FOC), Intergovernmental Commission (IGC), and Joint Commission on Military Technical Cooperation.
 - The two countries have signed a number of Agreements/MoUs on various subjects, including trade and economic cooperation, culture, education, media and sports, tourism, science & technology, agriculture, textiles, Avoidance of **Double Taxation**, Promotion and Protection of Investments, and defence and technical cooperation.
- **Trade and Commerce:**
 - In the economic sector, **the annual bilateral trade turnover in 2019 stands at USD 569.6 million.**
 - India's special gesture in 2015 that granted **Belarus the Market Economy Status** and a USD 100 million Line of Credit has also helped in the growth in the economic sector.
 - Market Economy status is a status conferred on the country exporting the goods accepted as the benchmark. Prior to this status, the country was considered as a Non-Market Economy (NME).
 - India's encouragement to the Belarusian businessmen to invest in **'Make in India'** projects are bearing fruits.
- **Indian Diaspora:**
 - The **Indian Community in Belarus consists of around 112 Indian nationals** and 906 Indian students pursuing studies in medicine in State medical universities in Belarus.
 - **Indian art and culture, dance, yoga, ayurveda, films, etc.** remain popular among Belarusian nationals.
 - Many young Belarusians also take keen interest in learning Hindi and dance forms of India.

Meeting of the SCO Council of Heads

Why in News?

Recently, China hosted a meeting of the **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)** Heads of Government

- The SCO Heads of Government meet is held annually to focus on the trade and economic agenda of the organisation and approves the SCO's annual budget.
- India has taken over as **Chairperson of the SCO for 2023**, and will host leaders of all SCO countries at a summit in Delhi expected in mid-2023.
- Earlier, the **SCO** summit 2022 was held recently in Samarkand, Uzbekistan.

What are the Highlights of the Meeting?

The heads of delegations of the SCO member states exchanged views on key issues of **global and regional development**, discussed priority steps to increase trade, economic, cultural, and humanitarian cooperation within the SCO.

India stated that its total trade with SCO Members is only USD 141 billion, which has potential **to increase manifold.**

- The bulk of India's trade with **SCO countries is with China, which crossed USD 100 billion** in 2022, while trade with Russia is less than USD 20 billion.
- Trade with Central Asian countries is less than USD 2 billion, and with Pakistan it is about USD 500 million.
- While taking aim at China's **BRI (Belt and Road Initiative)**, which passes through **parts of Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK)**, India said that **Connectivity projects should respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Member States** and respect international law.
- India underlined the need for better connectivity in the SCO region built on the centrality of interests of Central Asian states, which will unlock the **economic potential of this region in which Chabahar port and the International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC) could become enablers.**
- India drew attention to its commitment in fighting the challenge of **climate change** and also, its achievements made in this direction.

Note:



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- India pitched for more trade through Iran's Chabahar port and the **INSTC** that India is a part of, aiming to improve bilateral trade with Central Asian countries.
- A joint communique was issued after the meeting naming all countries except India, which **reaffirmed their support for the BRI**, "including the work to promote the alignment of the 'Belt and Road' construction with the construction of the **Eurasian Economic Union**".

What is the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation?

➤ About:

- It is a **permanent** intergovernmental international organisation. It was created in 2001.
- The **SCO Charter was signed in 2002**, and entered into force in 2003.
- It's a Eurasian political, economic and military organisation aiming to maintain peace, security and stability in the region.
- It is seen as a counterweight to **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)**, It is a **nine-member economic and security bloc** and has emerged as one of the largest transregional international organisations.

➤ Official Languages:

- Russian and Chinese.

➤ Permanent Bodies:

- SCO Secretariat in Beijing.
- Executive Committee of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) in Tashkent.

➤ Chairmanship:

It 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.
- **Current Members:** Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India and Pakistan.
- Iran is set to become a permanent member of the SCO in 2023.

What is Belt & Road Initiative (BRI)

- **Belt & Road Initiative (BRI)** is an ambitious project that **focuses on connectivity and cooperation among multiple countries** spread across the continents of Asia, Africa, and Europe. BRI spans about 150 countries (China's Claim).
- Initially announced in the year 2013, the project involves building networks of roadways, railways, maritime ports, power grids, oil and gas pipelines, and associated infrastructure projects.
- **The project covers two parts.**
 - **Silk Road Economic Belt:** It is land-based and is expected to connect China with Central Asia, Eastern Europe, and Western Europe.
 - **21st Century Maritime Silk Road:** It is sea-based and is expected to connect China's southern coast to the Mediterranean, Africa, South-East Asia, and Central Asia.

2nd BIMSTEC Agriculture Ministers Meeting

Why in News?

Recently, India hosted the **Second Agriculture Ministerial-level meeting** of the **Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)**.

What are the Highlights of the Meeting?

- India urged the **member countries to cooperate in developing a comprehensive regional strategy** to strengthen cooperation for the transformation of agriculture.
- It also **urged the member countries to adopt a conducive agricultural food system and a healthy diet for all** by referring to the **importance of millet as a nutritious food and the efforts made by India to promote millet** and its products during the **International Year of Millets - 2023**.
- **Natural and ecological farming** should be promoted to conserve agricultural biodiversity and reduce the use of chemicals.
 - **Along with digital farming and precision farming**, initiatives under the **'One Health' approach** are also taking shape in India.

Note:



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- Highlighted India's statement at the 5th BIMSTEC Summit held in Colombo in March, 2022 on enhancing regional cooperation between BIMSTEC nations for food security, peace and prosperity in the region.
- Adopted the **Action Plan for Strengthening BIMSTEC Agricultural Cooperation (2023-2027)**.
- An MoU (Memorandum of Understanding) between the BIMSTEC Secretariat and the **International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)** has been signed and approval has been given to bring fisheries and livestock sub-sectors under the Agricultural Working Group.

What is BIMSTEC?

- **About:**
 - The BIMSTEC is a **regional organisation comprising seven Member States**: five deriving from South Asia, including Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and two from Southeast Asia, including Myanmar and Thailand.
 - This sub-regional organisation came into being on **6th June 1997 through the Bangkok Declaration**.
 - The BIMSTEC region is **home to around 1.5 billion people which constitute around 22% of the global population** with a combined **Gross Domestic Product (GDP)** of 2.7 trillion economy.
 - The BIMSTEC Secretariat is in **Dhaka**.
- **Institutional Mechanisms:**
 - BIMSTEC Summit
 - **Ministerial Meeting**
 - Senior Officials' Meeting
 - BIMSTEC Working Group
 - Business Forum & Economic Forum
- **Significance:**
 - The BIMSTEC has **huge potential as a natural platform for development cooperation** in a rapidly changing geopolitical calculus and can leverage its unique position as a pivot in the **Indo-Pacific region**.
 - The **growing value of BIMSTEC can be attributed to its geographical contiguity**, abundant natural and human resources, and rich historical linkages and a cultural heritage for promoting deeper cooperation in the region.
 - The **Bay of Bengal region has the potential to become the epicentre of the Indo-Pacific idea**, a place where the strategic interests of the major powers of East and South Asia intersect.

- It serves as a bridge between two major high-growth centres of Asia — South and Southeast Asia.

Black Sea Grain Initiative

Why in News?

Recently, Russia re-joined the **Black Sea Grain Initiative**.

What is the Black Sea Grain Initiative?

- **About:**
 - The Black Sea Grain initiative **endeavors to tackle escalating food prices emanating from supply chain disruptions** because of Russian actions in the world's 'breadbasket'.
 - The deal brokered by the **United Nations (UN)** and Turkey, was signed in Istanbul in July, 2022.
- **Objective:**
 - **Initially stipulated for a period of 120 days, the deal was to provide for a safe maritime humanitarian corridor for Ukrainian exports (particularly for food grains)**.
 - The **central idea was to calm markets** by ensuring an adequate supply of grains, thereby limiting food price inflation.
- **Role of Joint Coordination Centre (JCC):**
 - The deal put in place a **Joint Coordination Centre (JCC)**, comprising senior representatives from Russia, Turkey, Ukraine and the UN for oversight and coordination.
 - **All commercial ships are required to register directly with the JCC** to ensure appropriate monitoring, inspection and safe passage. Inbound and outbound ships (to the designated corridor) transit as per a schedule accorded by the JCC post-inspection.
 - This is done so as to **ensure there is no unauthorized cargo or personnel onboard**.
 - Following this, **they are allowed to sail onwards to Ukrainian ports** for loading through the designated corridor.

Note:



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India-US Economic and Financial Partnership Meet

Why in News?

Recently, the 9th Ministerial meeting of the **India-US Economic and Financial Partnership** was held.

- The Indian delegation was led by the Union Minister for Finance & Corporate Affairs and the USA delegation was led by the Treasury Secretary.

What are the Key Highlights of the Meet?

- **Efforts to Increase Climate Ambition:**
 - Both countries shared the **re-energized global efforts to increase climate ambition** as well as respective domestic efforts to meet publicly expressed **climate goals**.
- **Macroeconomic Challenges:**
 - In the context of the **conflict in Ukraine**, both discussed the **current headwinds to the global macroeconomic outlook** including increased commodity and energy prices as well as supply side disruptions, and reemphasized their commitment to the central role of multilateral cooperation in addressing these global macroeconomic challenges.
- **Multilateral Development Banks:**
 - They acknowledged the importance of working through MDBS to help India access and mobilize available financing to support development objectives, including **climate action**.
 - Both plan to continue engaging on these and other global economic issues multilaterally and bilaterally.
- **Equal Debt Treatment:**
 - Both sides affirmed their **commitment to debt sustainability, transparency in bilateral lending, and coordinating closely on extending fair and equal debt treatment to countries facing debt distress**.
- **G20 Common Framework for Debt Treatment:**
 - Both reiterated commitment to step efforts to implement the **G20 Common Framework for Debt Treatment** in a predictable, timely, orderly and coordinated manner.
- **Collective Quantified Goal:**
 - Both agreed to mobilize USD 100 billion every year till 2025 from public and private sources for developing

countries, in the context of meaningful mitigation actions and transparency on implementation.

- The countries also discussed **mutual collaboration in sharing of information to tackle offshore tax evasion**.

➤ Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act:

- The two sides will continue to engage in discussions relating to the **Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA)** for sharing of financial account information.

How have been India's Relations with the US?

➤ About:

- The U.S.-India strategic partnership is founded on shared values including a commitment to democracy and upholding the rules-based international system.
- The United States and India have shared interests in promoting **global security, stability, and economic prosperity** through trade, investment, and connectivity.
- The United States supports **India's emergence as a leading global power and a vital partner** in efforts to safeguard the **Indo-Pacific as a region of peace, stability, and growing prosperity**.

➤ Economic Relations:

- In 2021, overall U.S.-India bilateral trade in goods and services reached a record **USD 157 billion**.
- The United States is **India's largest trading partner** and most important export market.
- America is one of the few countries with which India has a **trade surplus**. In 2021-22, India had a trade surplus of USD 32.8 billion with the US.

➤ International Cooperations:

- India and the United States 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**.
- The United States welcomed **India joining the UN Security Council in 2021** for a two-year term and supports a reformed UN Security Council that includes India as a permanent member.
- Together with Australia and Japan, the **United States and India convene as the Quad to promote a free and open Indo-Pacific** and provide tangible benefits to the region.

Note:

- India is also one of twelve countries partnering with the United States on the **Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF)**.
- India is a member of the **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)**, at which the United States is a dialogue partner.
- In 2021, the United States joined the **International Solar Alliance** headquartered in India, and in 2022 the **United States Agency for International Development (USAID)**.

India Abstains Russia's UNSC Resolution on Bioweapons

Why in News?

India has abstained from a **UNSC resolution** sponsored by **Russia alleging US and Ukraine** carrying out "**military biological activities**" violating the **Biological Weapons Convention (BWC)**.

- Before this resolution, India recently **abstained** from another UNSC resolution, which sought to declare **Russia's annexation of four Ukrainian territories as invalid**.

What is the Biological Weapon Convention?

- **About Biological Weapons:**
 - Biological weapons use microbiological agents (such as bacteria, viruses or fungi) or toxins to intentionally cause death or harm to humans, animals, or plants.
- **Biological Weapon Convention:**
 - **About:**
 - Formally known as "**The Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction**", the Convention was negotiated by the **Conference of the Committee on Disarmament in Geneva, Switzerland**.
 - It entered into force on 26th March 1975.
 - **Ambit:**
 - It effectively **prohibits the development, production, acquisition, transfer, stockpiling and use of biological and toxin weapons**. **Significance:**
 - It is a key element in the international community's efforts to address the proliferation of the **Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)**.

- It was the **first multilateral disarmament treaty** banning an entire category of **WMD**.
- It supplements the **1925 Geneva Protocol**, which prohibited only the use of biological (and chemical) weapons in war.
 - The Geneva Protocol was **signed at a conference held in Geneva** under the auspices of the **League of Nations**.
 - It entered into force in **1928**.
 - **India has ratified this protocol**.
- **Members:**
 - The Convention has an **almost universal membership** with **184 States Parties** and **four Signatory States**.
 - **India is a signatory** of the convention.

What are UN Resolutions?

- **About:** The UN Resolutions and decisions are formal expressions of the opinion or will of UN organs.
 - The nature of the resolution determines if it is considered binding on States.
- **UNGA Resolutions: Articles 10 and 14 of the UN Charter** refer to General Assembly resolutions as "**recommendations**".
 - The recommendatory nature of UNGA resolutions has **repeatedly been stressed by the International Court of Justice**.
 - However, some **UNGA resolutions dealing with matters internal to the United Nations**, such as budgetary decisions or instructions to lower-ranking organs, are **clearly binding**.
- **UNSC Resolutions:** In general, resolutions adopted by the **UN Security Council** acting under Chapter VII of the Charter, **are considered binding**, in accordance with Article 25 of the Charter.
 - However, they are **subject to veto exercised by permanent members of UNSC**.

Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue (IPRD-2022)

Why in News?

Recently, the fourth edition of Indo Pacific Regional Dialogue concluded in Delhi.

Note:



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What is Indo Pacific Regional Dialogue (IPRD)?**About:**

- IPRD is an **apex level international annual conference** of the **Indian Navy**.
 - In 2018, the initial conception of an IPRD was made.
 - With the exception of 2020, when it had to be postponed owing to the **Covid-19**, the event has been hosted annually since its initial year in 2018.
- The **National Maritime Foundation (NMF)** is the Navy's knowledge partner and chief organizer of each edition of the event.

Theme for 2022:

- **Operationalising the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative**

Objectives:

- The IPRD **reviews the current geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific region** and identifies opportunities, dangers, and problems that might be present.
- IPRD remains crucial to its interests because one of the main goals of the NMF is to **conduct analyses of international relations and geopolitical factors** that are important to India strategically,

- One of the reasons behind the popularity of this term is an understanding that the **Indian Ocean and the Pacific are a linked strategic theater**.

- Also, the centre of gravity has shifted to Asia. The reason being maritime routes, the Indian Ocean and the Pacific provide the sea lanes. The majority of the world's trade passes through these oceans.

Significance:

- The Indo-Pacific region is **one of the most populous and economically active regions of the world** which includes four continents: Asia, Africa, Australia and America.
- The dynamism and vitality of the region is self-evident, **60% of the world's population and 2/3rd of the global economic** output makes this region a global economic centre.
- The region is also a **great source and destination for Foreign Direct Investment**. Many of the world's critical and large supply chains have an Indo-Pacific connection.
- There are **vast reserves of marine resources in the Indian and Pacific Oceans** combined, including offshore hydrocarbons, methane hydrates, seabed minerals and **rare earth metals**.
 - Sizable coastlines and **Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs)** provide littoral countries with competitive capabilities for exploiting these resources.
 - In turn, a number of the world's largest economies are located in the Indo-Pacific region, including India, U.S.A, China, Japan, Australia.

What is the**Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)?**

- It was articulated by the Indian Prime Minister at the **14th East Asia Summit (EAS) in 2019**.
- It is a comprehensive and inclusive construct for regional cooperation that is focused on seven interconnected spokes or pillars:
 - Maritime Security
 - Maritime Ecology
 - Maritime Resources
 - Disaster Risk-reduction and Management
 - Trade-Connectivity and Maritime Transport
 - Capacity-building and Resource sharing
 - Science, Technology and Academic Cooperation

What is the Indo-Pacific Region?**About:**

- Indo-Pacific is a recent concept. It was about a decade ago that the world started talking about the Indo-Pacific; its rise has been quite significant.

India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement

Why in News?

Recently, the Australian Parliament approved the India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (Ind-Aus ECTA).

What is Ind-Aus ECTA?

- It is the first **Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** that India has signed with a major developed country in over a decade.

Note:

- The **Agreement encompasses cooperation across the entire gamut of bilateral economic and commercial relations** between the two friendly countries, and covers areas like:
 - Trade in Goods, Rules of Origin
 - Trade in Services
 - Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT)
 - **Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS)** measures Dispute Settlement, Movement of Natural Persons Telecom, Customs Procedures
 - Pharmaceutical products, and Cooperation in other Areas
- ECTA provides for an **institutional mechanism to encourage and improve trade** between the two countries.
- The **ECTA between India and Australia covers almost all the tariff lines** dealt in by India and Australia respectively.
 - India will benefit from preferential market access provided by Australia on 100% of its tariff lines.
 - This includes all the labour-intensive sectors of export interest to India such as Gems and Jewellery, Textiles, leather, footwear, furniture etc.
 - On the other hand, India will be offering preferential access to Australia on over 70% of its tariff lines, including lines of export interest to Australia which are primarily raw materials and intermediaries such as coal, mineral ores and wines etc.
- Under the agreement, **Indian graduates from STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics)** will be granted extended post-study work visas.
 - Australia will also set up a programme to grant visas to young Indians looking to pursue working holidays in Australia.
 - Annual Visa quota of 1800 is to be instituted for India Yoga teachers and Chefs.
- It is also **estimated that 10 lakh jobs will be created** as a result of ECTA.

How has been the India- Australia Relation so far?

- India and Australia enjoy excellent bilateral relations that have undergone transformational evolution in recent years, developing along a positive track, into a friendly partnership.

- This is a special partnership characterised by **shared values of pluralistic, parliamentary democracies, Commonwealth traditions**, expanding economic engagement, long standing people-to-people ties and increasing high level interaction.
- The India-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership initiated during the **India-Australia Leaders' Virtual Summit** held in June 2020 is the cornerstone of India-Australia multi-faceted bilateral relations.
- Growing India-Australia economic and commercial relations contribute to the stability and strength of a rapidly diversifying and deepening bilateral relationship between the two countries.
- **India and Australia have been each other's important trading partners.**
 - Australia is the 17th largest trading partner of India and India is Australia's 9th largest trading partner.
 - India-Australia bilateral trade for both merchandise and services is valued at USD 27.5 billion in 2021.
 - India's merchandise exports to Australia grew 135% between 2019 and 2021. India's exports consist primarily of a broad-based basket largely of finished products and were USD 6.9 billion in 2021.
 - India's merchandise imports from Australia were USD 15.1 billion in 2021, consisting largely of raw materials, minerals and intermediate goods.
- India and Australia are partners in the trilateral **Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI)** arrangement along with Japan which seeks to enhance the resilience of supply chains in the **Indo-Pacific Region**.
- Further, India and Australia are also members of the **QUAD grouping (India, the US, Australia and Japan)**, also comprising the US, and Japan, to further enhance cooperation and develop partnership across several issues of common concern.

G-20 Summit 2022

Why in News?

Recently, the 17th annual summit of G-20 was hosted by the Indonesian G20 presidency in Bali under the theme '**Recover Together, Recover Stronger**'.

- Now, India has **assumed the charge of the G20 presidency** and the 18th summit will be held in India in 2023.

Note:

What are the Outcomes of the Summit?

- **Condemning Russian Aggression:**
 - Member countries adopted a **declaration deploring Russia's aggression in Ukraine "in the strongest terms"** and demanding its unconditional withdrawal.
 - They also recognised that while most members condemned the war in Ukraine, "there were other views and different assessments of the situation and sanctions".
- **Focus on Global Economy:**
 - The G20 economies **agreed in their declaration to pace interest rate rises carefully to avoid spillovers** and warned of **"increased volatility" in currency moves**, a sea change from last year's focus on mending the scars of the **Covid-19 pandemic**.
- **Food Security:**
 - The leaders **promised to take coordinated action to address food security challenges** and applauded the **Black Sea grains initiative**.
- Climate Change:**
 - G20 leaders **agreed to pursue efforts to limit the global temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius** - confirming they stand by the temperature goal from the **2015 Paris Agreement** on climate change.
- **Digital Transformation:**
 - Leaders **recognised the importance of digital transformation** in reaching the sustainable development goals.
 - They **encouraged international collaboration to further develop digital skills and digital literacy** to harness the positive impacts of digital transformation, especially for women, girls, and people in vulnerable situations.
- **Health:**
 - Leaders also **expressed their continuous commitment to promoting a healthy and sustainable recovery** which builds towards achieving and sustaining universal health coverage.
 - They welcomed the **establishment of a new financial intermediary fund for pandemic prevention, preparedness and response** (the 'Pandemic Fund') hosted by the World Bank.
 - Leaders reaffirmed their **commitment to strengthen global health governance**, with the leading and coordination role of **World Health Organisation (WHO)** and support from other international organisations.

What are the Challenges before the G-20 Member Countries?

- **Impact of Russia's Invasion of Ukraine:**
 - **Russia's invasion of Ukraine** has not only created **massive geopolitical uncertainty but also spiked global inflation**.
 - The associated sanctions by the West have further queered the pitch.
 - Persistently high inflation — at historic highs in several countries — has eroded purchasing power across these countries, thus dragging down economic growth.
- **Impact of Rising Inflation:**
 - In response to high **inflation**, **central banks across countries have raised interest rates**, which, in turn, have dampened economic activity further.
 - **Some of the biggest major economies such as the US and the UK are set to face a recession**; others, such as those in the euro area, are likely to slow down to almost a halt.
- **Slowdown of Major Economies:**
 - China, one of the major engines for global growth, is **witnessing a sharp slowdown as it struggles with a real estate crisis**.
- **Rising Geopolitical Rifts:**
 - The world economy is struggling with **geopolitical rifts such as the tensions between the US and China**, the two biggest economies in the world, or the decline in trade between the UK and the euro area in the wake of the Brexit decision.

India Norway Maritime Cooperation

Why in News?

Recently, the 8th **Norway-India Joint Working Group Maritime meeting** was held in Mumbai, India.

- Norway has the **technical expertise in Maritime sector** and India has **huge potential for development of Maritime sector and large pool of trained seafarers**, which make both countries natural complementary partners.
- Earlier, India had also prepared **Maritime India Vision 2030**, which has identified more than 150 initiatives

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across various maritime sectors like ports, shipping and waterways focusing on capacity augmentation etc.

What are the Key Discussions of the Meeting?

- Discussion was held on **use of alternative fuels** like **green ammonia and hydrogen** for futuristic shipping.
- **The Norwegian Green Shipping Programme** has been successful and the experience and expertise was shared in the meeting.
- India and Norway are part of the **Green Voyage 2050 project**.
 - Both parties agreed on **willingness, devotion, partnership and capacity building** for achieving common goals.
- India is a signatory to **Hongkong Convention for Recycling of Ships**.
 - In the meeting, India requested that **European Union regulation should not hinder recycling of non-European countries** which are compliant as per International Convention.
 - Norway was requested **not to prolong Ship recycling to India** as a lot of investment has been made by Indian recyclers.
- The Norwegian delegation will also take part in **INMARCO, the Green Shipping Conclave**, and the **Maritime ShEO conference**.
- The Maritime ShEO conference is supported by Norway and focused on **maritime diversity and sustainability**, including **gender equality** in the maritime industry.

What is Maritime India Vision 2030?

- **About:**
 - **Maritime India Vision (MIV) 2030** is a ten-year blueprint for the **maritime sector** released by the Prime Minister of India at the **Maritime India Summit** in November 2020.
 - MIV 2030 has been formulated in consultation with over 350+ public and private sector stakeholders, comprising ports, shipyards, inland waterways, trade bodies and associations, national and international industry and legal experts.
- **Themes:**
 - MIV 2030 is based on **10 themes covering all the facets of the Indian maritime sector** and is a comprehensive effort to define and meet **national maritime objectives**:

- Develop best-in-class Port infrastructure.
- Drive Exchange to Exchange Logistics Efficiency and Cost Competitiveness.
- Enhance Logistics Efficiency through Technology and Innovation.
- Strengthen Policy and Institutional Framework to Support all Stakeholders.
- Enhance Global Share in Ship Building, Repair and Recycling.
- Enhance Cargo and Passenger Movement through Inland Waterways.
- Promote Ocean, Coastal and River Cruise Sector.
- Enhance India's Global stature and Maritime Co-operation.
- Lead the World in Safe, Sustainable & Green Maritime Sector.
- Become Top Seafaring Nation with World Class Education, Research & Training.

➤ Key Targets 2030:

- **Three Major Ports** with >300 Million Ton Per Annum (MTPA) cargo handling capacity.
- **More than 75%** of Indian cargo transshipment handled by Indian ports.
- **More than 85%** of cargo handled at Major Ports by **Public Private Partnership**/ other operators.
- Average vessel turnaround time (containers) of **less than 20 hours**.
- **Global ranking of Top 10** in ship building and ship repair.
- **More than 15 Lakh** annual cruise passengers.
- **More than 60%** share of renewable energy at Major Ports.

Meeting of China-Indian Ocean Region Forum

Why in News?

Recently, the **China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA)**, held a meeting of the **China-Indian Ocean Region Forum** in which 19 countries took part but **not India**.

What are the Key Highlights of the Meet?

- **Theme:** Shared Development: Theory and Practice from the Perspective of the Blue Economy.

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➤ Participating Countries:

- Indonesia, Pakistan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal, Afghanistan, Iran, Oman, South Africa, Kenya, Mozambique, Tanzania, Seychelles, Madagascar, Mauritius, Djibouti, Australia and representatives of 3 international organisations were present.
- India was reportedly **not invited**.

➤ Marine Disaster Prevention and Mitigation Cooperation Mechanism:

- China proposed to establish a marine disaster prevention and mitigation cooperation mechanism **between China and countries in the Indian Ocean region**.
- China expressed its willingness to **provide necessary financial, material, and technical support** to countries in need.

What does China Seek from the Meet?

- China is contending for influence in the **strategic Indian Ocean region with substantial investments in ports and infrastructure in several countries**.
- China has made **substantial investments in ports and infrastructure investments in several countries**, including Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
- China has acquired **Sri Lanka's Hambantota port on a 99-year lease besides building the port at Pakistan's Gwadar** in the Arabian Sea opposite India's western coast and infrastructure investments in the Maldives.

What are the Concerns?

- China has often been **accused of engaging in "debt diplomacy" in these countries under its Belt and Road Initiative** allegedly in the name of infrastructure development.
- Since 2008, China has regularly deployed a contingent of naval warships in the Gulf of Aden and established its **first foreign military base in Djibouti in 2017**.
- At the same time India's absence is seen as an attempt to **challenge India's traditional presence in the region** amid apprehensions of politicization of the Indian Ocean region. Moreover, the Chinese Foreign Ministry refused to disclose **who the participants were from other countries**.
 - India has been a traditional partner and supporter of Indian Ocean Region (IOR) countries.

How is India's Presence in IORA?

- In addition, to act as a first responder during major crises in the littoral countries, India regularly engages with the **Indian Ocean littoral countries through such mechanisms as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and Indian Ocean Navies Symposium (IONS)** under the vision of **Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR)**.
- India has strong influence in the Indian Ocean region where India-backed organisations like the IORA have taken strong roots.
- India continues to **promote its official policy of "coordination, cooperation and partnership"** in the regional maritime domain.
- As coordinator to the priority area on disaster risk management, India has published guidelines for IORA. It has also urged partners to join the **Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure** launched at the UN in September 2019.
- India has been trying to emerge as the net provider of information in the IOR and in that direction it created the **Information Fusion Centre** located in Gurugram to assist member countries of IOR with real-time crisis information. Bangladesh, Mauritius, Maldives, Sri Lanka and Seychelles have been part of the information support structure of India.

What is the Indian Ocean Rim Association?

- It was **established in 1997** and is a regional forum that seeks to build and expand understanding and mutually beneficial cooperation through a consensus-based, evolutionary and non-intrusive approach.
- **IORA has 23 member states** and 9 Dialogue Partners.
 - **Members:** Australia, Bangladesh, the Comoros, France, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Oman, Seychelles, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.
 - **China is a dialogue partner** in the IORA.
- The IORA Secretariat is based in **Mauritius**.
- The association gains importance by the fact that the Indian Ocean carries half of the world's container ships, one-third of the world's bulk cargo traffic and two-thirds of the world's oil shipments.
- It is a **lifeline of international trade and transport and the Indian ocean region is woven together by trade routes** and commands control of major sea-lanes.

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India and Gulf Cooperation Council

Why in News?

India and the **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)** have agreed to pursue a **Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** between the two regions and resume the negotiations.

- GCC is a **union of six countries in the Gulf region** — Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain. The council is the largest trading bloc of India.

Why is the Gulf Region Crucial for India?

- India has enjoyed centuries of good relations with countries like Iran, while smaller gas-rich nation Qatar is one of India's closest allies in the region.
- India shares good relations with most of the countries in the Gulf.
- The two most important reasons for the **relationship are oil and gas, and trade.**
 - Qatar accounts for **41% of India's total natural gas imports.**
- Two additional reasons are the **huge number of Indians who work in the Gulf countries**, and the remittance they send back home.
 - As per a research paper published by the **Reserve Bank of India**, in the financial year 2020-21, remittances from the UAE to India were USD15.40 billion, which is 18% of India's total inward remittances.

What is the State of the India-GCC Trade Relationship?

- India's exports to the GCC member countries **grew by 58.26% to about USD 44 billion** in 2021-22 against USD 27.8 billion in 2020-21.
- **Bilateral trade in goods has increased to USD 154.73 billion** in 2021-22 from USD 87.4 billion in 2020-21.
- **Services trade between the two regions was valued at around USD 14 billion** in 2021-22, with exports aggregated at USD 5.5 billion and imports at USD 8.3 billion.
- **GCC countries contribute almost 35% of India's oil imports and 70% of its gas imports.**

- India's overall crude oil imports from the GCC in **2021-22** were about USD 48 billion, while LNG and LPG imports in 2021-22 stood at about USD 21 billion.

What is the Status of Indian Trade Agreements with Other Countries?

➤ India-Australia Trade Agreement:

- Recently, the Australian Parliament **approved the India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (Ind-Aus ECTA).**
- It is the **first Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** that **India has signed with a major developed country** in over a decade.
- The Agreement encompasses cooperation across the entire gamut of bilateral economic and commercial relations between the two friendly countries.

➤ India-European Union FTA:

- India and the EU restarted their FTA negotiations in goods and services in early 2021 after a gap of eight years.
- The two regions **aim to work out pacts in investments and geographic indications parallel to FTA engagement.**
- Round three of India-EU FTA talks will begin later this year at Delhi.

➤ India-UK FTA:

- Over the next few months, India and the United Kingdom will start talks on a free trade agreement (FTA).
- On the agenda is securing a patent regime against evergreening by pharma companies, seeking easier work visas as well as access to Indian movies in the region under the proposed FTA.

➤ India-UAE CEPA

- The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between **India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)** came into force from **1st May, 2022**
- **CEPA provides for an institutional mechanism to encourage and improve trade** between the two countries.

➤ India-Canada CEPA:

- Canada had previously been working to advance negotiations on a Foreign Investment Promotion Protection Agreement (FIPA) and a CEPA.

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- In August 2022, India and Canada confirmed that they **would hold the fourth round of negotiations to secure an Early Progress Trade Agreement (EPTA)**, an intermediate step till a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) is reached.

India and Refugee Policy

Why in News?

Recently, many **Kuki-Chin refugees** from Chittagong Hill Tract Area in Bangladesh entered Mizoram (India) fearing an attack from Bangladesh security forces against them.

- Mizoram Government expressed sympathy for the refugees, who belong to the Chin-Kuki-Mizo communities, and resolved to give **temporary shelter, food and other relief as per convenience of the state government**.

What Causes these Refugee Influx?

- The CHT (Chittagong Hill Tracts) is an impoverished hilly, forested area that sprawls over more than 13,000 sq km of the Khagrachari, Rangamati, and Bandarban districts of **southeastern Bangladesh**, bordering **Mizoram to the east, Tripura to the north, and Myanmar to the south** and southeast.
- A significant portion of the population is tribal, and **culturally and ethnically different from the majority Muslim Bangladeshis** who live in the country's deltaic mainland.
- The tribal population of the CHT has ethnic links with **tribal populations in the adjacent areas of India, mainly in Mizoram**.
 - Mizoram shares a **318-km-long border with Bangladesh**
- Mizoram is already playing host to about 30,000 refugees who have been fleeing fighting in Myanmar's Chin state since around July-August 2021.

What is India's Refugee Policy?

- India **lacks specific legislation to address the problem of refugees**, in spite of their increasing inflow.
- India is not a party to **the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol**, the key legal documents pertaining to refugee protection.

- **However, India has had a stellar record on the issue of refugee protection.** India has a moral tradition for assimilating foreign people and culture.
- Moreover, the **Foreigners Act, 1946, fails to address the peculiar problems** faced by refugees as a class.
 - It also gives unbridled power to the Central government to deport any foreign citizen.
- Further, the constitution of India also respects the life, liberty, and dignity of human beings.
 - The Supreme Court in the *National Human Rights Commission vs. State of Arunachal Pradesh (1996)* held that "while all rights are available to citizens, persons including foreign citizens are entitled to the right to equality and the right to life, among others."
- Further, **Article 21 of the Constitution encompasses the right of non-refoulement**.
 - Non-refoulement is the principle under international law which states that a person fleeing persecution from his own country should not be forced to return to his own country.

What is the Current

Legislative Framework to Handle Refugees?

- **Foreigners Act of 1946:** Under Section 3, the Central government is empowered to detect, detain and deport illegal foreign nationals.
- **Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920 :** Under Section 5, authorities can remove an illegal foreigner by force under Article 258(1) of the Constitution of India.
- **Registration of Foreigners Act of 1939:** Under this, there 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) is required to register themselves with a Registration Officer within 14 days of arriving in India.
- **Citizenship Act, 1955:** It provided provisions for renunciation, termination, and deprivation of citizenship.
- Further, **Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 (CAA)** seeks to provide citizenship only to Hindu, Christian, Jain, Parsi, Sikh, and Buddhist immigrants persecuted in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.

Note:

What is the Difference Between Refugees and Migrants?

- Refugees are people outside their countries of origin who are in need of international protection because of a serious threat to their life, physical integrity or freedom in their country of origin as a result of persecution, armed conflict, violence or serious public disorder.
 - **Migrants** leave their country because they want to work, study or join a family.
- There are well-defined and specific grounds, which have to be satisfied before a person can qualify to be a 'refugee'
 - There is no internationally accepted legal definition of a migrant.

Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)

Why in News?

Recently, the US imposed sanctions against a Mumbai based petrochemical company, **Tibalaji Petrochem Pvt Ltd.** as it was accused of selling Iranian petroleum products.

- It is the **first Indian entity to face the US designation under unilateral sanctions passed in 2018-19**, after the US walked out of the **Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)**.

What was the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)?

- The deal is also known as **2015 Iran Nuclear Deal**.
- The JCPOA was the result of prolonged negotiations from 2013 and 2015 between **Iran and P5+1 (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States + Germany)**.
- Under the deal, **Iran agreed to significantly cut its stores of centrifuges, enriched uranium and heavy-water, all key components for nuclear weapons.**
- Iran also **agreed to implement a protocol that would allow inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to access its nuclear sites to ensure Iran would not be able to develop nuclear weapons in secret.**

- While the **West agreed to lift sanctions related to Iran's nuclear proliferation, other sanctions addressing alleged abuses of human rights and Iran's ballistic missile programme remained in place.**
- The US committed to lifting sanctions on oil exports, but continued to restrict financial transactions, which have deterred international trade with Iran.
- Nonetheless, Iran's economy, after suffering years of recessions, currency depreciation, and inflation, stabilized significantly after the deal took effect, and its exports skyrocketed.
- **After US abandoned the deal in 2018 and reinstated banking and oil sanctions, Iran ramped up its nuclear programme in earnest**, returning to approximately 97% of its pre-2015 nuclear capabilities.

What Happened After the US Pulled Out of the Deal?

- In April 2020, the **US announced its intention to snap back sanctions.** However, the **other partners objected to the move, stating that since the US was no longer part of the deal, it could not unilaterally reimpose sanctions.**
- Initially following the withdrawal, **several countries continued to import Iranian oil under waivers granted by the Trump administration.** A year later, the **US ended the waivers to much international criticism** and, by doing so, significantly curbed Iran's oil exports.
- The other powers, in an attempt to keep the deal alive, launched a **barter system known as Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX) to facilitate transactions with Iran outside the US banking system.** However, **INSTEX only covered food and medicine, which were already exempt from US sanctions.**
- In January 2020, after the **US assassinated the top Iranian general Qasem Soleimani**, Iran announced that it would **no longer limit its uranium enrichment.**
- In September 2022, **Iran and International Atomic Energy Agency officials held a round of talks to discuss the possibility of Iran's agreement to reallow inspectors back to Iran for oversight over reactors.**
- **The U.S. and Iran have also exchanged their stands indirectly via the European Union for a "final draft" on rejoining the JCPOA.**

Note:



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UN Peacekeeping Forces Fatalities

Why in News?

According to the **United Nations Undersecretary General**, the number of fatalities among **United Nations Peacekeeping Forces (UNPKF)** in direct attacks is growing.

- Strong requirements for better **training, technology, and equipment** were highlighted.

What are UN Peacekeeping Forces?

- **About:**
 - When the **UN Security Council** approved the deployment of UN military observers to the **Middle East in 1948**, the **UN Peacekeeping Forces** were established.
 - UN peacekeeping forces aid nations in negotiating the perilous transition from **war to peace**.
 - To carry out several missions approved by the **UN Security Council (UNSC)** and the **UN General Assembly**, it deploys soldiers and police from all over the world and combines them with civilian peacekeepers.
 - **International Day of UN Peacekeepers** is celebrated on date **29th May** every year.
 - **2022 Theme:** People. Peace. Progress. The Power of Partnerships.
 - **India and UNPKF:**
 - India is among the nations that send the most troops to the **United Nations Peacekeeping Forces**.
 - Example: India is the **second-highest military** and **fifth-highest police** contributing country to the **United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO)**.
 - Over **2,60,000 Indians** have served in **49 U.N. Peacekeeping missions** since **1948**.
 - In 2007, India became the first country to deploy an **all-women contingent** to a UN Peacekeeping mission.
 - In the last six decades, **179 Indian soldiers** have died in **UN Peacekeeping operations**.
 - Among **"blue helmets"** it has the greatest death toll of any nation.

- **Blue Helmets** are the **military personnel of the UN** that work alongside the UN Police and civilian colleagues to promote **"stability, security, and peace processes"**.

Sapta Kosi High Dam Project

Why in News?

Recently, **India and Nepal** have agreed to take forward the **Sapta Kosi high dam project** through further studies.

- Senior officials of the two sides have **met and reviewed the bilateral water-sector cooperation**, including the implementation of the **Mahakali Treaty**.

What is Sapta Kosi High Dam Project & Mahakali Treaty?

- **Sapta Kosi High Dam Project:**
 - Sapta Kosi High Dam is a **multipurpose project** proposed to be **constructed on the Saptakoshi River of Nepal (Known as Kosi River in India)**.
 - The project is primarily aimed to **control floods in south-east Nepal** and **northern Bihar** and to **generate hydropower**.
 - The project will provide irrigation, control floods and generate 3,000 MW of electricity.
- **Mahakali Treaty:**
 - **The Mahakali Treaty** was signed in 1996 over the integrated development of the **Mahakali River, including Sarada Barrage, Tanakpur Barrage and Pancheshwar project**.
 - Mahakali River is also known as **Sharda River or Kali Ganga in Uttarakhand**.
- It joins **Ghagra river in Uttar Pradesh**, which is a tributary of **Ganga**.

What do we know about the Kosi River System?

- The **Kosi** is a **trans-boundary river** which flows through **Tibet, Nepal and India**.
- It has its **source in Tibet** that includes the **world's highest upland**, it then drains a **large part of Nepal** before emerging onto the **Gangetic plains**.
- Its **three major tributaries:** the Sun Kosi, Arun and Tamur meet at one point just upstream of a 10 km gorge cut through the Himalayan foothills.

Note:

- The river crosses into **northern Bihar**, India where it branches into distributaries before **joining the Ganges near Kursela in Katihar district**.
- The Kosi carries the maximum amount of silt and sand after the **Brahmaputra** in India.
- It is also known as the **"Sorrow of Bihar"** as the annual floods affect about 21,000 sq. km. of fertile agricultural lands thereby **disturbing the rural economy**.

What are some other Recent Developments in India Nepal Relations?

- **Build Own Operate and Transfer (BOOT):**
 - A **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** was signed between the **Government of Nepal** and **Sutlej Jal Vikas Nigam (SJVN) Limited** for the project in 2008 for execution on a **Build Own Operate and Transfer (BOOT)** basis for a period of 30 years including five years of the construction period.
- **Hydropower Projects:**
 - Nepal also **invited Indian companies to invest** in the **West Seti hydropower project** in Nepal.
- **Cross-border Rail Link:**
 - The operationalisation of the **35 kilometers cross-border rail link from Jayanagar (Bihar) to Kurtha (Nepal)** will be further extended to Bijalpura (Nepal) and Bardibas (Nepal).

Nord Stream Pipeline

Why in News?

Recently, leaks were found in the pipelines comprising the **Nord Stream pipelines (Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2)** located near Denmark and Sweden.

- The leaks happened just before the ceremonial launch of the **Baltic Pipe carrying gas from Norway to Poland**, which is an effort by Poland to **decrease its dependence on Russia for energy**.

What are the Nord Stream Pipelines?

- Nord Stream consists of two pipelines, **which have two lines each**.
 - Nord Stream 1 is a 1,224 km underwater gas pipeline running from Vyborg in northwest Russia to Lubmin in northeastern Germany via the Baltic Sea. It was completed in 2011.

- **Nord Stream 2** which runs from Ust-Luga in Leningrad to Lubmin was completed in September 2021 and has the capacity to handle 55 billion cubic meters of gas per year once it becomes operational.
- The twin pipelines together can transport a combined total of 110 billion cubic metres (bcm) of gas a year to Europe for at least 50 years.
- The Nord Stream crosses the **Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs)** of several countries including Russia, Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Germany, and the territorial waters of Russia, Denmark, and Germany.
- In Germany, the pipeline connects to the OPAL (Baltic Sea Pipeline) and NEL (North European Pipeline) which further connects to the European grid.

How War Impacted Nord Stream Supply?

- Russia had already decreased the supply of gas to Europe after the European Union imposed sanctions on Moscow for invading Ukraine.
- Flows via Nord Stream 1 were reduced to 20 % of its capacity in July 2022.
- In August 2022, Russia further plugged the **supply and stopped Nord Stream 1 completely**, citing maintenance. Gazprom had reasoned that an oil leak in a turbine on the Nord Stream 1 pipeline was behind the closure.
 - The Nord Stream 2, despite being completed, could not **become operational after Germany pulled out of the project after Russia invaded Ukraine**.
 - The stream was supposed to double **Russia's energy export to Europe to 110 billion** cubic meters.
 - The short supply of the gas pipeline resulted in a **sudden hike in energy prices in Europe**. With the shutting down of the Nord Stream pipeline, **Europe faces a tough time ahead with winter approaching**.

Conflict in the Korean Peninsula

Why in News?

Recently, North Korea flew 12 warplanes near its border with South Korea, prompting the latter to scramble 30 military aircraft in response.

- Tensions have risen sharply on the **Korean Peninsula** as North Korea's recent barrage of missile tests prompted **South Korea, the United States and Japan** to conduct joint drills in response.

Note:

What is the Conflict in the Korean Peninsula?**➤ Origin:**

- The root of the conflict lies in the **Japanese occupation of Korea between 1910- 1945**.
- When Japan was defeated in the **Second World War**, the Allied forces agreed to establish a **"four-power trusteeship over Korea"** at the **Yalta Conference (1945)**.
- However, the **USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics)** invaded Korea and took control of the north while the south remained under the rest of the allies, mainly the USA.
 - The division of the two regions was along the **38th parallel north**, which still continues to be the official border dividing the two Koreas.
- In **1948**, the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) were established.
 - As both tried to enhance their reach, territorially and ideologically, the **Korean Conflict emerged** between the two nations. **The Korean War:**
- On **25th June 1950**, North Korea, backed by the USSR, launched **an attack on South Korea** and occupied most of the country.
 - In response, the United Nations force **led by the US retaliated**.
- In **1951**, the US forces led by Douglas MacArthur crossed the **38th parallel and triggered the entry of China** in support of North Korea.
 - To prevent further escalation, peace **talks began later in 1951**.
- **India was actively involved in negotiating peace in the Korean peninsula** by engaging all the major stakeholders – **US, USSR and China**.
 - In **1952**, the Indian resolution on Korea was adopted at the **United Nations (UN)**.

- On **27th July 1953**, the **Korean Armistice Agreement** was signed between the UN Command, the Korean People's Army and the Chinese People's Volunteer Army.
 - It led to an official ceasefire without a Peace treaty. Thus, the war officially never ended.
 - This also led to the establishment of the **Korean Demilitarised Zone (DMZ)** – a strip of land running across the Korean Peninsula to serve as a **buffer zone between North Korea and South Korea**.

- In **December 1991**, North and South Korea signed a **pact** agreeing to refrain from aggression.

What is the US-North Korea Conflict?

- During the **Cold War era**, the US extended its **Nuclear Umbrella** (guarantee of support during a nuclear attack) to its allies i.e. South Korea and Japan.
- North Korea withdrew from the **Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 2003** and afterwards, under present leader Kim Jong-un, it increased nuclear missile testing.
- In response to this, the US started deploying **THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defence)** in South Korea in March 2017.
- The territorial conflict which started between North and South Korea has transformed into a tussle between the US and North Korea.

What are the Recent Acts of Aggression by North Korea?

- In recent years **North Korea has accelerated its nuclear programme** by **increasing its nuclear stockpile**, withdrawn from the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and has tested nuclear explosives multiple times.
- USA has deployed **THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defence)** in South Korea to counter increasing missile adventurism of North Korea.
- North Korea recently **demolished the Inter-Korean Liaison Office in Kaesong**, which was **established in 2018**. In the absence of formal diplomatic relations, the building functioned as a de facto embassy and provided a direct communication channel for the two nations.
- Most recently in 2022, North Korea conducted a **record number of missile tests**.
 - It may further raise tensions by testing an **intercontinental ballistic missile** or **conducting its first nuclear test explosion** since 2017, following an old pattern of heightening tensions.

What about India's Position in Korean Conflict?**➤ India's Stand:**

- India has consistently **voiced its opposition to North Korean nuclear and missile tests**. However, it has **maintained a neutral stance** regarding sanctions.
- Earlier, during the Korean War (1950- 53), India played a **major role in a cease-fire agreement signed between both the warring sides**.

Note:



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- **India's Relations with North and South Korea:**
 - In May 2015, the bilateral relationship with South Korea was upgraded to 'special strategic partnership'.
 - India has a major role to play in **South Korea's Southern Policy** under which the latter is looking at expanding relations beyond its immediate region.
 - Similarly, South Korea is a major player in **India's Act East Policy** under which India aims to promote economic cooperation, cultural ties and develop strategic relationships with countries in the Asia-Pacific.
 - India has diplomatic relations with **North Korea** for over 47 years, which reflects the legacy of India's commitment to the **Non-Alignment Movement**.

India-New Zealand Relations

Why in News?

Recently, External Affairs Minister (EAM) of India has visited New Zealand and Australia.

- The meeting consisted of various geo-political issues like how India-New Zealand contributions together will shape the larger region, the Indo-Pacific region. They also discussed the present security situation in the Indo-Pacific and also the consequences arising out of the **Ukraine conflict**.

What are the Different Aspects of India-New Zealand Relations?

- **Historical Relations:** India and New Zealand have a longstanding, friendly and growing relationship. Our ties go back to the 1800s, with Indians settling in Christchurch as early as the 1850s. Larger numbers of immigrants from Punjab and Gujarat came to New Zealand in the 1890s. Indian troops fought alongside the Anzacs in Gallipoli in 1915.
- **Political Relations:** India and New Zealand have cordial and friendly relations rooted in the linkages of the Commonwealth, parliamentary democracy, and the English language. Both countries **became independent in the same year** and diplomatic representation of India was established in 1950 with the opening of a Trade Commission, which was later upgraded to High Commission.

- Both countries are fellow travellers in their commitment to disarmament, global peace, North-South Dialogue, human rights, ecological preservation and combating international terrorism.
- **Cooperation on the Covid-19 pandemic:** Both countries cooperated extensively both bilaterally in fighting against the pandemic by ensuring the continuity of supply chains of essential commodities, medicines, and vaccines. Both countries also facilitated the repatriation of each other's nationals stranded in the wake of **Covid-19**.
- **Trade Relations:** 11th largest two-way trading partner with total two-way trade valued at US\$1.80 bn during 2020. Education and tourism are NZ's growth sectors with India. Indian students numbering approximately 15000 (before the pandemic) are the 2nd largest source of international students for NZ.
- The number of Indian visitors to NZ in 2018 was the 9th largest at 67,953.
 - India primarily imports logs and forestry products, wood pulp, wool, and edible fruit & nuts from NZ.
 - Indian exports to NZ mostly are pharmaceuticals/medications, precious metals and gems, textiles and motor vehicles and non-knitted apparel and accessories.
 - India shares **Free Trade Agreements (FTAs)** with New Zealand.
- **Business Alliances:** India NZ Business Council (INZBC) and India NZ Trade Alliance (INZTA) are the two prominent organizations working to promote India-NZ trade and investment relations.
- **Cultural Relations:** All Indian festivals including Diwali, Holi, Rakshabandhan, Baisakhi, Guruparv, Onam, Pongal, etc. are celebrated with much enthusiasm all over NZ. A set of four new stamps depicting the story of Diwali has been issued by New Zealand Post in 2021. NZ has approximately 2,50,000 persons of Indian origin & NRIs, a vast majority of which has made NZ their permanent home.

What are the Different Aspects of India-Australia Relations?

- **Historical Relations:** India and Australia established diplomatic relations in the pre-Independence period, with the establishment of **India Trade Office in Sydney in 1941**. The end of the Cold War and simultaneously India's decision to launch major economic reforms

Note:

in 1991 provided the first positive move towards development of closer ties between the two nations. With the passage of time, the relationship gained momentum towards a strategic relationship, alongside the existing economic engagement.

- **India-Australia Strategic Relationship:** With the changing global scenario, Australia has come to look at India as an important partner in promoting regional security and stability. This led to upgradation of bilateral relationship to a '**Strategic Partnership**', including a **Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation in 2009**. Bilateral mechanisms include high level visits, Annual Meetings of Prime Ministers, Foreign Ministers' Framework Dialogue, Joint Trade & Commerce Ministerial Commission, **India-Australia '2+2' Foreign Secretaries and Defence Secretaries Dialogue**, **QUAD**, Defence Policy Talks, Australia-India Education Council, etc.
- **Trade Relations:** Growing India-Australia economic and commercial relations **contribute to the stability and strength of a rapidly diversifying and deepening bilateral relationship** between the two countries.
- Australia is the **17th largest trading partner of India** and India is Australia's 9th largest trading partner.
 - India-Australia bilateral trade for both merchandise and services is valued at **USD 27.5 billion in 2021**.
 - India's merchandise exports to Australia grew 135% between 2019 and 2021. India's exports consist primarily of a broad-based basket largely of finished products and were **USD 6.9 billion in 2021**.
 - India's merchandise imports from Australia were **USD 15.1 billion in 2021**, consisting largely of raw materials, minerals and intermediate goods.
 - India signed a historic trade agreement with Australia in 2022, the **India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement** (Ind-Aus ECTA).
 - India and Australia are partners in the trilateral **Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI)** arrangement along with Japan which seeks to enhance the resilience of supply chains in the **Indo-Pacific Region**.

Ethiopia

Why in News?

An **Ethiopian government team and Tigray forces** are going to have peace talks in South Africa.

What Paved the Way to the Peace Talks?

- The spectrum of political, economic, and security problems that confronted Ethiopia and Eritrea paved the way for a **strategy that essentially incorporated reconciliation and democratisation**, social and economic development, and, importantly, ties with the western world.
- This is the first formal Peace talks between the two led by the **African Union** and is happening at a time when Ethiopian forces and allies have made some gains in Ethiopia's northern Tigray region.
- Tigray was a prominent force in the **country's ruling coalition until Ethiopia's current leader** and Nobel Peace laureate (2019) Abiy Ahmed became the Prime Minister in 2018.

Where is Ethiopia?

- It is a landlocked country located in the Horn of Africa, officially known as the **Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia**.
- The country lies completely **within the tropical latitudes and is relatively compact**, with similar **north-south and east-west dimensions**.
- The capital is Addis Ababa.
- Ethiopia is one of the world's oldest countries, its territorial **extent having varied over the millennia of its existence**.
- It is the tenth-largest country in Africa in terms of area.
- Ethiopia is located from Sudan in the southeast, Eritrea to the south, Djibouti and Somalia to the west, Kenya to the north, and South Sudan to the east.
- It is the most **populous landlocked country in the world**.

What is the Conflict in Ethiopia?

- **Background:**
 - Ethiopia was an imperial state that gradually weakened with the **emergence of regional and religious rivalries**.
 - Currently Ethiopia has more than 70 ethnic groups. It has Oromo 34.5%, Amhara 26.91%, Somali 6.20%, Tigre 6.07%.
 - A major insurgency followed in the 1970s — in Tigray, where the Meles Zenawi-led **Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)**, rebelled against the military government and its policies.

Note:

- It was the backing of the then Soviet Union and allies that propped up both the armed forces and the Mengistu government, but this support began to dissipate in the **1980s, influencing the course of conflicts with the Eritreans and Tigray.**

➤ Separation of Eritrea:

- Eritrea, formerly part of Ethiopia, **separated from Ethiopia in 1991 and** a majority of Eritrea was in the hands of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), while in Ethiopia it was the TPLF.
- The war between 1998 and 2000 and the border in **Eritrea and Ethiopia remained tense until 2018.**

➤ Ethnic Rivalries:

- Abi Ahmed was elected to the post of Prime Minister in **2018 and signed a peace deal to end the border dispute with Eritrea.**
- After the implementation of this peace agreement, Abi Ahmad was **awarded the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize.**
- But then the conflict started after Ahmed, who belongs to the Oroma community, was accused **by local leaders of the Tigray community** that the community was being harassed by **military officials and bureaucrats.**
- The original inhabitants of Tigray are considered to be the fighting community of Ethiopia and 60% of senior military positions are **dominated by the Tigray community.**

➤ Civil War:

- Along with this, various international agencies have accused **Abi Ahmad of imposing an internet shutdown to curtail press freedom in Ethiopia** and curbing personal rights.
- As a result of Abi Ahmad's policies, the dissatisfaction of the Tigray community increased and **there was a situation of civil war.**
- Missiles were fired by the **Tigray army in the neighboring country of Eritrea, Asmara**, after which the Federal Government of Ethiopia declared an **armed struggle against the Tigray Army (Tigray People's Liberation Front).**

How have been the India-Ethiopia Relations?

- **Ethiopia is one of the largest recipients of long-term concessional credit from India in Africa.**

- Lines of Credit worth more than USD1 billion have been sanctioned to Ethiopia for sectors such as rural electrification, sugar industry and railways.
- Tele-Education and Tele-Medicine services under the **Pan African e-network Project** was launched in Addis Ababa in July 2007.
- The Tele-Education project has been replicated by the Ethiopian side and linkages established between the Addis Ababa University and the Indian Institutes of Technology at Delhi and Kanpur.
- **Bilateral trade** between Ethiopia and India stood at **USD 1.28 billion in 2018-19**, out of which Indian exports to Ethiopia were USD 1.23 billion and imports were USD 55.01 million.
- There are more than 586 Indian companies in Ethiopia employing more than 55,000 people with licensed investment of over USD 4 billion.
- About 58.7% of Indian investments are in the manufacturing sector, followed by agriculture (15.6%).
- Indian Mission has been celebrating the **International Day of Yoga** in Addis Ababa. Mission held Gandhi@150 celebrations in Addis Ababa (Oct 2020).

India-Africa Defence Dialogue

Why in News?

The **2nd India-Africa Defence Dialogue (IADD)** was held on the sidelines of **DefExpo 2022** in Gandhinagar, Gujarat.

What is India-Africa Defence Dialogue?

➤ Theme:

- Adopting Strategy for Synergizing and Strengthening Defence and Security Cooperation.

➤ Outcome Document:

- The Gandhinagar Declaration was adopted as an outcome document of IADD 2022.
- It proposes to enhance cooperation **in the field of training in all areas of mutual interest by:**
 - increasing training slots and deputation of training teams,
 - empowerment and capability building of the defence forces of Africa,
 - participation in exercises, and

Note:



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- providing humanitarian assistance during natural disasters.
- A volume on India–Africa Defence cooperation was also released.
- **India–Africa Security Fellowship Programme:**
- IADD also encouraged further research of security issues through offer of fellowships to experts from African countries.
- This will be done under the India–Africa Security Fellowship Programme.

How has India's Relations with Africa been?

➤ Loan and Assistance:

- India has extended concessional loans of over **USD 12.3 billion to Africa**.
- In addition, India has granted USD 700 millions of grant assistance.

➤ Projects:

- India has completed **197 projects so far, 65 more** are currently under execution, and 81 are at the pre-execution stage.
- In Gambia, India has constructed the National Assembly building and undertaken projects in water supply, **agriculture and food processing**.
- In Zambia, India is involved in an important **hydro-power project**, in the erection of pre-fabricated health posts and in the supply of vehicles.
- In **Mauritius**, recent notable projects include the metro express, the new Supreme Court and social housing.
- In **Namibia**, a new Centre of Excellence in IT has just become operational.
- Whereas in South Sudan, India is focusing on training and education.

Covid - 19 Assistance:

- 32 African countries received 150 tonnes of medical assistance from India.
 - Many of them also utilized '**Made in India**' **vaccines** received directly or otherwise from India.
 - At international forums, India has worked together to press for equitable and affordable access to vaccines, **including through a TRIPS waiver**.

➤ Human Resource:

- India had announced 50,000 scholarships during **India–Africa Forum Summit (IAFS)-III in 2015**, out of which more than 32,000 scholarship slots have already been utilized.
- To provide high quality **virtual education** and medical services to partners, the **e-VidyaBharti** and **e-ArogyaBharti** networks were launched in 2019 for **tele-education** and **tele-medicine** respectively.

➤ Help & Relief Assistance:

- Operation Sahayata to **assist cyclone** IDAI-hit Mozambique in 2019, **Operation Vanilla** to provide relief to flood victims in Madagascar in January 2020, the support to Mauritius in containing the **oil spill** due to the grounding of ship Wakashio.

➤ Energy:

- **The International Solar Alliance** is a notable platform that has promoted the rapid development of **clean energy technologies**.
- This has been followed by the '**One Sun One World One Grid**' initiative to further promote solar and renewable energy.

In recent years, clean and green energy have been increasingly prominent in India's development programmes in Africa as also in third country collaborations.

➤ Trade and Economics:

- India's bilateral trade with Africa has now reached USD 89.5 billion in 2021-22 compared with USD 56 bn the previous year.
- With cumulative investments at USD 73.9 billion from 1996-2021, India is among the top five investors in Africa.
- Through the Duty-Free Tariff Preference (DFTP) Scheme that extends duty free access to 98.2% of India's total tariff lines, India has opened its market to African countries.

- So far 33 Least Developed Countries (LDC) African nations have been entitled to get benefits under this scheme.

Interpol General Assembly Meeting

Why in News?

The **General Assembly of the International Criminal Police Organisation (Interpol)** is meeting in **Delhi** for four days from October 18, 2022.

Note:



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- This is the second time since 1997 the 195 member-strong body is holding such a large conference in India.

What is the Interpol?

- It was set up in 1923, as a **secure information-sharing platform** that facilitates criminal investigation of police forces **across the globe** through collection and dissemination of information received from various police forces.
 - It is headquartered in **Lyon, France**.
- It **keeps track of the movements of criminals and those under the police radar** in various regions and tips off police forces which had either sought the Interpol's assistance or which in its opinion will benefit from the particulars available with it.
- It aims **to promote the widest-possible mutual assistance between criminal police forces**.

How is the Interpol Organised?

- The **head of Interpol is the President who is elected by the General Assembly**. He comes from one of the member-nations and **holds office for four years**.
- The **day-to-day activities are overseen by a full-time Secretary General** elected by the General Assembly, who **holds office for five years**.
- The General Assembly lays down the policy **for execution by its Secretariat** which has several **specialised directorates for cybercrime, terrorism, drug trafficking, financial crime, environmental crime, human trafficking, etc.** Every member-country is the Interpol's face in that country.
- All contact of a country's law enforcement agency with Interpol is through the highest investigating body of the land.
- The **Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) assumes this role in India** with one of its senior officers heading its exclusive Interwing (the National Central Bureaus) for collation of **information and liaison with the world body**.

What are Interpol Notices?

- **About:** Its notices are international requests for cooperation or alerts allowing police in member countries to share critical crime-related information.
 - Notices are issued by the General Secretariat at the request of a member country's INTERPOL National Central Bureau and are made available

for all our member countries to consult in our Notices database.

- Notices can **also be used by the United Nations, International Criminal Tribunals and the International Criminal Court** to seek persons wanted for committing crimes within their jurisdiction, notably genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.

What are Interpol's Future Challenges?

- The **rising spectre of transnational, cyber and organised crime** requires a globally coordinated law enforcement **response**.
- Interpol has a legacy of trust and reliability. It **needs to acquire powers of sanction against a country which refuses to cooperate in implementing a red notice**. It is however highly unlikely that member-nations will ever agree to dilute their sovereignty and invest the Interpol with such authority.

Indo-Pacific

Why in News?

Emphasising sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth while preserving the ecosystem's health, the Defence Minister of India during the **18th Heads of Asian Coast Guard Agencies Meeting (HACGAM)** in New Delhi said India stands for open and rule-based maritime borders in Indo-Pacific.

What is the Heads of Asian Coast Guard Agencies Meeting (HACGAM)?

- It is an apex level forum facilitating the congregation of all the major Coast Guard Agencies of the Asian region, it was established in 2004.
- It is a **multilateral forum of 23 countries** including Australia, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, China, France, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Turkiye, Vietnam and one Region i.e., Hong Kong (China).
- The **Indian Coast Guard (ICG)** is hosting the 18th HACGAM in coordination with the HACGAM Secretariat.
- A total of 55 representatives from 18 countries and two International Organisations — **Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and**

Note:



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Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia Information Sharing Centre (ReCAAP ISC) and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime - Global Maritime Crime Programme (UNODC-GMCP) are participating in the meeting.

What is the Indo-Pacific Region?

➤ About:

- Indo-Pacific is a recent concept. It was about a decade ago that the world started talking about the Indo-Pacific; its rise has been quite significant.
- One of the reasons behind the popularity of this term is an understanding that the **Indian Ocean and the Pacific are a linked strategic theater**.
 - Also, the centre of gravity has shifted to Asia. The reason being maritime routes, the Indian Ocean and the Pacific provide the sea lanes. The **majority of the world's trade passes through these oceans**.

➤ Significance:

- The Indo-Pacific region is one of the **most populous and economically active regions of the world** which includes four continents: Asia, Africa, Australia and America.
- The dynamism and vitality of the region is self-evident, **60% of the world's population and 2/3rd of the global economic output** makes this region a global economic center.
- The region is also a **great source and destination for Foreign Direct Investment**. Many of the world's critical and large supply chains have an Indo-Pacific connection.
- There are **vast reserves of marine resources in the Indian and Pacific Oceans combined**, including offshore hydrocarbons, methane hydrates, seabed minerals and **rare earth metals**.
 - Sizable coastlines and **Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs)** provide littoral countries with competitive capabilities for exploiting these resources.
 - In turn, a number of the world's largest economies are located in the Indo-Pacific region, including India, U.S.A, China, Japan, Australia.

What is India's Perspective of the Indo-Pacific?

- **Cooperate with Others for Security Architecture:** A lot of India's special partners, the US, Australia, Japan

and Indonesia want India's presence in the **South China Sea**, East China Sea, basically to counter China.

- India, however, seeks to cooperate for an architecture for peace and security in the region. The common prosperity and security require the countries to evolve, through dialogue, a common rules-based order for the region.

- **Indo-Pacific Extends from Africa to America:** For India, Indo-Pacific stands for a free, open, inclusive region. It includes all nations in the geography and also others who have a stake in it. In its geographical dimension, India considers the area from the shores of Africa to the shores of America.

- **Equal Share in Trade and Investment:** India supports rule-based, open, balanced and stable trade environment in the Indo-Pacific Region, which lifts up all nations on the tide of trade and investment. This is the same as what the country expects from the **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)**.

- **Unified ASEAN:** Unlike China, India seeks a unified ASEAN, not a divided one. China tries to play off some ASEAN members against others, thereby in a way executing 'divide and rule' conquest strategy.

- **Work in Collaboration with China:** India does not comply with the US version of Indo-Pacific, that seeks to contain Chinese dominance. India is rather looking for the ways through which it can work together with China.

- **Against Dominance of a Single Player:** India is **looking for democratising the region**. Earlier, the region used to be almost like an American lake. However, there exists a fear that the region will become Chinese lake now. India doesn't want hegemony of any player in the region.

UNSC 1267 Committee

Why in News?

Recently, China placed a "hold" on two joint India-US proposals, to designate Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) top leaders at the **United Nations Security Council's (UNSC) 1267** list of terrorists affiliated to Al Qaeda and ISIS.

What is the UNSC 1267 Committee?

- It was **first set up in 1999** (updated in 2011 and 2015), and strengthened after the September, 2001 attacks.

Note:



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- It is now known as the Da'esh and Al Qaeda Sanctions Committee.
- It comprises all permanent and non-permanent members of the **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)**.
- The 1267 list of terrorists is a global list, with a UNSC stamp. It is full of Pakistani nationals and residents.
- It is **one of the most important and active UN subsidiary bodies** working on efforts to combat **terrorism**, particularly in relation to Al Qaeda and the Islamic State group.
- It **discusses UN efforts to limit the movement of terrorists**, especially those related to travel bans, the freezing of assets and arms embargoes for terrorism.

What is the Procedure of Listing?

- Any member state can **submit a proposal for listing an individual, group, or entity**.
- The proposal **must include acts or activities indicating the proposed individual/group/entity** had participated "in the financing, planning, facilitating, preparing, or perpetrating of acts or activities" linked to "ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida or any cell, affiliate, splinter group or derivative thereof".
- Decisions on listing and de-listing are adopted by **consensus**. The proposal is sent to all the members, and if no member objects within five working days, the proposal is adopted.
 - An "objection" means curtains for the proposal.
 - **Any member of the Committee may also put a "technical hold"** on the proposal and ask for more information from the proposing member state. During this time, other members may also place their own holds.
 - The matter remains on the "pending" list of the Committee until such time as the member state that has placed the hold decides to turn its decision into an "objection", or until all those who have placed holds remove them within a timeframe laid down by the Committee.
 - Pending issues must be resolved in six months, but the member state that has placed the hold may ask for an additional three months. At the end of this period, if an objection is not placed, the matter is considered approved.

India-Russia Trade

Why in News?

Recently, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry has released data showing that India's bilateral trade with **Russia** has soared to an all-time high of **USD 18,229.03 million in just five months (April-August)** of FY 2022-23.

What are the Findings?

➤ Overview:

- The **total annual bilateral trade between the two countries** stood at USD 13,124.68 million in 2021-22, and USD 8,141.26 million in 2020-21.
 - Pre-Covid, it was USD 10,110.68 million in 2019-20, USD 8,229.91 million in 2018-19, and USD 10,686.85 million in 2017-18.
- Russia has now become **India's seventh biggest trading partner** — up from its **25th position last year**.
 - The US, China, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Indonesia were the six countries which recorded higher volumes of trade with India during the first five months of 2022-23.
- Of the total USD 18,229.03, India's imports from Russia accounted for USD 17,236.29 million, while India's exports to Moscow were only worth USD 992.73 million, leaving a **negative trade balance of USD 16,243.56 million**.
- An analysis of the data shows that Russia's share in India's total trade has increased to **3.54%, up from 1.27% in 2021-22**. While Russia's share in India's total trade was 2.1% in 1997-98, it has hovered below 2% for the last 25 years.

➤ Drivers:

- It is mainly due to a **sudden jump in imports from Russia, mainly oil and fertilisers**, which began to surge earlier in 2022.
 - There was an over 500% increase in three months – 561.1% in June, 577.63% in July and 642.68% in August – as compared to the same months of the previous year.
 - Petroleum oil and other fuel items (mineral fuels, mineral oils and products of their distillation; bituminous substances; mineral waxes) **accounted for 84% of India's total imports** from Russia.

Note:



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- Fertilizers were second, fertilisers and fuel together **account for over 91% of the total imports** from Russia this year.

What are the Different Aspects of Indo-Russia Relations?

➤ Historical Background:

- During the **Cold War**, India and the **Soviet Union** had a strong strategic, military, economic and diplomatic relationship. After the Dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia inherited its close relationship with India which resulted in both nations sharing a Special Strategic Relation.
- However, the relations have taken a steep downfall over the past few years, especially in the post-Covid scenario. One of the biggest causes for this is **Russia's close relations with China and Pakistan**, which have caused many geopolitical issues in the past few years for India.

➤ Political Relations:

- In 2019, Russia signed the **Executive Order on awarding PM Narendra Modi Russia's highest state decoration** – The order of St Andrew the Apostle. The order was presented to PM for his distinguished contribution to the development of a privileged strategic partnership between Russia and India and friendly ties between the Russian and Indian peoples
- Two Inter-Governmental Commissions – **one on Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technological and Cultural Cooperation (IRIGC-TEC)**, and **another on Military-Technical Cooperation (IRIGC- MTC)**, meet annually.

➤ Trade Relations:

- The two countries intend to increase bilateral investment to USD 50 billion and bilateral trade to USD 30 billion by 2025.

➤ Defence and Security Relations:

- Both countries regularly conduct the **Tri-Services exercise 'INDRA'**.
- The joint military programmes between India and Russia include:
 - **BrahMos cruise missile programme**
 - **5th generation fighter jet programme**
 - **Sukhoi Su-30MKI programme**
 - **Ilyushin/HAL Tactical Transport Aircraft**

- **KA-226T twin-engine utility helicopters**
- **some frigates**
- The military hardware purchased/leased by India from Russia includes:
 - **S-400 Triumph**
 - **Kamov Ka-226 200 to be made in India under the Make in India initiative**
 - **T-90S Bhishma**
 - **INS Vikramaditya aircraft carrier programme.**

➤ Nuclear Relations:

- Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant (KKNPP) is being constructed within the scope of the Russia-India Inter-Governmental Agreement.
- Both India and Russia are implementing Rooppur Nuclear Power Project in Bangladesh.

7th ASEAN-India Ministerial Meeting

Why in News?

Recently, the **7th ASEAN-India Ministerial Meeting (AIMMAF)** on Agriculture and Forestry was held virtually.

What are the Highlights of the Meeting?

➤ India's Vision of keeping ASEAN:

- India **reiterated its vision of keeping Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)** at the center of **India's Act East Policy**.
- It also **emphasized mutually close regional cooperation with ASEAN to ensure sustainable and inclusive growth for agricultural development in the region.**

➤ Steps towards Millets Production:

- Referring to the importance of millet (nutritional-cereals) as a nutritious food and the **international nutritional-cereal year 2023**, India **urged the ASEAN member countries to support the efforts of India in increasing the production, processing, value addition and consumption of millets.**
- **India will promote nutritious cereal products for the health and nutrition of the people.**
- **Nutritious cereals help in the creation of nutrients with low resource requirements and more efficient agri-food systems.**

Note:

- **Implementation of Various Programs:**
 - The progress in **implementation of various programs and activities under the Medium Term Action Plan of ASEAN-India Cooperation (Year 2021-2025)** was reviewed.
- **Cooperation in Agriculture:**
 - The **commitment to ASEAN-India cooperation in agriculture** and forestry was reaffirmed.
- **Covid-19 Pandemic:**
 - In order to **mitigate the unprecedented impact of the Covid-19 pandemic** by ensuring a seamless flow of safe and nutritious agricultural products to ASEAN and India, **it is necessary to take continuous measures under ASEAN-India cooperation** for the implementation of post-pandemic recovery.
 - India ensured the **commitment to enhance India's cooperation with ASEAN** in **food security**, nutrition, **climate change** adaptation, digital farming, nature-friendly agriculture, food processing, value chain, agricultural marketing and capacity building.

What is the Association of Southeast Asian Nations?

- **About:**
 - It is a **regional grouping that promotes economic, political, and security cooperation**.
 - It was **established in August 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand** with the signing of the ASEAN Declaration (Bangkok Declaration) by the founding fathers of ASEAN, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.
 - Its **chairmanship rotates annually**, based on the alphabetical order of the English names of Member States.
 - ASEAN countries have a total population of 650 million people and a combined **Gross Domestic Product (GDP)** of USD 2.8 trillion.
 - Commodity trade between India and ASEAN region has reached 98.39 billion in the period April 2021- February 2022. India's main trading ties are with Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam and Thailand.
- **Members:**
 - ASEAN brings together ten Southeast Asian states – Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam – into one organization.

Pakistan Removed from FATF Grey List

Why in News?

Recently, the **Financial Action Task Force (FATF)**, the international watchdog on terror financing and money laundering, has **removed Pakistan from the list of countries under "increased monitoring" (Grey List)**.

- India's other neighbour on the grey list, **Myanmar**, was moved to the **"black list"** due to actions by the military leadership after the **2021 coup**.

What is the FATF?

- **About:**
 - FATF is the **global money laundering and terrorist financing watchdog**. It also aims to counter the financing of proliferation of **weapons of mass destruction**.
 - It was set up in 1989 out of a **G-7** meeting of developed nations in Paris.
 - Its **Secretariat** is located at the **Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)** headquarters in Paris.
- **Members:**
 - As of today, it is a 39-member body with 37 countries and two regional organisations: the **European Commission**, and the **Gulf Cooperation Council**.
 - Indonesia is the only observer country of FATF.
 - India joined with **'observer' status in 2006** and **became a full member of FATF in 2010**.
 - India is also a member of its regional partners, the **Asia Pacific Group (APG)** and the **Eurasian Group (EAG)**.
- Greylisting and Blacklisting Countries:**
 - The **FATF Plenary** (decision-making body of the FATF) meets tri-annually - in February, June and October, to take stock of **"Mutual Evaluation Reports" (MERs)** of the countries it reviews.
 - If a country appears to have major deficiencies in its **AML/CFT regime**, it is put on a list of "jurisdictions under increased monitoring" - **"grey list"** and if it fails to address FATF concerns, it is put on a "high-risk jurisdictions" list - **"black list"**.
 - AML/CFT refers to **"Anti-Money Laundering/ Combating the Financing of Terrorism"**.

Note:

- The Grey List includes countries that are considered safe haven for supporting terror funding and money laundering. It serves as a warning that the country may enter the blacklist.
- The Black List includes **Non-Cooperative Countries or Territories (NCCTs)** that support terror funding and money laundering activities. As of now, **Iran, North Korea and Myanmar** are the three black listed countries.
- The enlisted countries are subjected to **increased financial strictures**, thus making it **difficult for them to procure loans** from the financial institutions affiliated to FATF (as observers) such as the **IMF, World Bank** etc.

What are the Key Points about Pak's Removal from the Grey List?

- **FATF's Stand:** The FATF lauded "Pakistan's significant progress" saying that the country had completed two action plans comprising a 34-point tasklist in the period since 2018.
- Pakistan has been **removed from the list after four years**. It was first put on the list in **2008**, removed in 2009 and before adding it again in **2018**, it remained under increased monitoring from **2012 to 2015**.
- **India's Response:** India has protested Pakistan's lack of action against cross-border terror groups responsible for attacks on India, however, it **agreed to the decision to take Pakistan off the list**, as the latter had submitted "**documentary evidence**" of its actions against designated terrorists.
- India believes that Pakistan must continue to take "**credible, verifiable, irreversible and sustainable**" action against terror groups emanating from territories under its control.

Israel-Lebanon: Maritime Border Deal

Why in News?

Recently, Israel and Lebanon signed a U.S.-brokered Maritime Border Deal which paves the way for lucrative **offshore gas extraction** by the neighbors that remain technically at war.

What is the Deal?

➤ Background:

- Lebanon and Israel have been **officially at war since Israel's creation in 1948** and both countries claim some **860 square kilometers (330 square miles)** of the **Mediterranean Sea**.
- There have been decade old tensions between Israel and Lebanon's competing claims over offshore gas fields in the region, which contains part of the **Karish gas field and Qana, a prospective gas field**.
 - The Karish gas field, being developed by Israel, came under threat from **Hezbollah, Lebanon's powerful political and militant group backed by Iran**.
- The two countries **declared overlapping boundaries in 2011 in the Mediterranean Sea**.
- Since both countries have been technically at war, the **United Nations was asked to mediate**.
 - The issue gained significance **after Israel discovered two gas fields off its coast a decade ago**, which can help turn it into an energy exporter.

➤ About:

- It resolves a territorial dispute in the eastern Mediterranean Sea, in an area that **Lebanon wants to explore for natural gas**.
- The gas field is located on the **maritime boundary between the two countries** and this agreement would allow **both countries to get royalties from the gas**.
 - Under the deal, Israel receives **full rights to explore the Karish field**.
 - Lebanon receives full rights in the **nearby Qana field, but it agreed to allow Israel a share of the royalties**.
 - It sets a border between Lebanese and Israeli waters for the first time, largely along a **demarcation referred to as Line 23**.
 - The agreement does not **touch on the shared land border between Israel and Lebanon**, which is still disputed.
 - This border is also called the **Blue Line, a boundary that was drawn up by the UN after Israel withdrew from southern Lebanon in 2000**.

➤ Significance:

Note:



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- The agreement is also expected to avert the **immediate threat of conflict between Israel and Hezbollah militants in Lebanon**.
- The agreement will create **new sources of energy and income for both countries**, particularly important for Lebanon, which is facing a **crippling energy and financial crises**.
- It can provide Europe with a **potential new source of gas amid energy shortages** caused by the **Russian invasion of Ukraine**.

India Qatar GI Products Meet

Why in News?

Recently, the government of India organized a **Virtual Networking Meet** for **Agri and Food Geographical Indication (GI) products** in association with the **Embassy of India, Doha and Indian Business and Professionals Council (IBPC) Qatar**.

- This Meet provided a **platform for interaction** between the **India exporters and importers of Qatar** on the strength of India in **export of agri and food products of Indian origin** and distinct attributes.

What is a Geographical Indication (GI) Tag?

➤ About:

- **Geographical Indication (GI)** is an indication used to **identify goods having special characteristics** originating from a definite geographical territory.
- **The Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999** seeks to provide for the registration and better protection of geographical indications relating to goods in India.
- It is governed and directed by the **WTO Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS)**.
 - It was decided and also stated under **Articles 1 (2) and 10 of the Paris Convention** that the **“protection of industrial Property and Geographical Indication are elements of Intellectual Property”**.
 - It is primarily an agricultural, natural or a manufactured product (handicrafts and industrial goods).

➤ Validity:

- This tag is valid for a **period of 10 years** following which it can be renewed.

➤ Significance:

- Once a product gets this tag, **any person or company cannot sell** a similar item under that name.
- GI registration of a product provides it **legal protection and prevention** against unauthorised use by others.
- GI tag helps in **promoting the exports of the product**.
- It also provides **comfort to customers** about the authenticity of that product.

➤ Agri GI Products:

- Presently, there are more than **400 registered Geographical Indications** in India of which around **150 are agricultural and food products GI**.
- More than **100 registered GI products** fall under the category of **Agriculture and Processed Food Export Development Authority (APEDA) scheduled products** (fresh fruits and vegetables, processed foods, animal products and cereals).

How has India's

Relations with Qatar been?

➤ Developments during Indian Vice President visit June 2022:

○ India-Qatar Start Up bridge:

- **The Vice President** launched the **“India-Qatar Start Up bridge”** that aims to **link the start-up ecosystems of the two countries**.

- India has emerged as the **3rd largest ecosystem** for startups globally, with over 70,000 registered Startups.
- India is home to 100 unicorns with a total valuation of over USD 300 billion.

○ Environment and Climate Change:

- The Vice President invited Qatar, as India's trusted partner in its **energy security**, to be a partner in this journey for sustainability and join the **International Solar Alliance (ISA)**.
- **Joint Business Council Between Business Chambers:**
- A **Joint Business Council** between **Business Chambers of India and Qatar** has been established and that a **Joint Task Force on Investments** would take its work forward.

Note:



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- **Invest India and Qatar Investment Promotion Agency** was appreciated for entering into a partnership of guiding and assisting businesses on both sides to tap new and emerging opportunities.

○ **Collaborations at Multilateral Forums:**

- Greater collaboration between **India and Qatar** at multilateral forums like the **Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU)**, **Asian Parliamentary Assembly**, and others was emphasized.

Trade:

○ **India's Exports to Qatar:**

- In 2020, India exported **USD 1.34 Billion** to Qatar.

- The main products that India exported to Qatar are Rice, Jewellery and Gold.
- During the last 25 years the exports of India to Qatar have **increased at an annualized rate of 16.5%**, from USD 29.3 Million in 1995 to USD 1.34 Billion in 2020.

○ **India's Imports from Qatar:**

- In 2020, Qatar exported **USD 7.25 Billion** to India. The main products that Qatar exported to India were Petroleum Gas, Crude Petroleum and Halogenated Hydrocarbons.
- During the last 25 years the exports of Qatar to India have increased at an annualized rate of 19%, from USD 94.4 Million in 1995 to USD 7.25 Billion in 2020.
- Qatar accounts for **41% of India's total natural gas imports**.

What is the Agriculture and Processed Food Export Development Authority (APEDA)?

➤ **About:**

- APEDA was established by the **Government of India** under the **Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority Act** passed by the **Parliament** in December, 1985.
- The Authority replaced the **Processed Food Export Promotion Council (PFEP)**.
- APEDA, which comes under the **Ministry of Commerce & Industry** has contributed significantly in promoting export of agriculture and processed food products with a share of around 50% (USD 24.77 bn) in overall agri exports during 2021-22.

➤ **Functions:**

- **Development of industries** relating to the scheduled products for export by way of providing **financial assistance**.
- **Registration** of persons as exporters of the scheduled products on payment of such fees as may be prescribed.
- **Fixing of standards and specifications** for the scheduled products for the purpose of exports.
- Improving **packaging of the Scheduled products**.
- Improving **marketing of the Scheduled products** outside India.
- **Promotion** of export-oriented production and development of the Scheduled products.

IMF Bailout to Sri Lanka

Why in News?

Recently, The **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** approved a preliminary agreement with Sri Lanka on a four-year, **USD 2.9 billion bailout package** which is aimed at restoring economic stability and debt sustainability for the crisis-ridden south Asian nation.

What is the Bailout Package Offered to Sri Lanka?

➤ **Need:**

- The **Economic Crisis** of Sri Lanka with **USD 51 billion debt** which was caused due to various reasons:
 - The **Easter bomb blasts of April 2019** in churches in Colombo
 - The government policy of **lower tax rates and wide-ranging subsidies for farmers** during their campaign.
 - The **Covid-19 pandemic in 2020** which impacted exports of tea, rubber, spices, garments and the tourism sector.

➤ **About:**

- The IMF package is to be **paid in tranches over the next four years, which is less than what India provided to Sri Lanka over four months**.
- The package must be approved by the IMF's board of directors.

Note:



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- The approval is contingent on Sri Lanka's international creditors - commercial lenders such as banks and asset managers, multilateral agencies, as well as bilateral creditors including China, Japan, and India agreeing to restructure its debt.

➤ **Benefits:**

○ **Improve credit rating:**

- It can boost the receiving country's credit ratings, and the **confidence of international creditors and investors** who may then chip in to provide bridge financing to close the gaps between the tranches.

➤ **Aim:**

- Its program will aim to boost government revenue, encourage fiscal consolidation, introduce new pricing for fuel and electricity, hike social spending, bolster central bank autonomy, and rebuild depleted foreign reserves.
- The programme aims to reach a primary **surplus of 2.3% of GDP by 2024.**

What Measures are Taken by Sri Lanka's Economy to Improve its Economy?

➤ **Increase in Revenue:**

- The country's budget **aimed at increasing revenue to 15% of GDP by 2025 from 8.2% at the end of 2021** by reducing public debt.
 - An increase in VAT from 12 to 15%, and compulsory tax registration for everyone aged 18 years and older in order to widen personal income tax collections are among the measures.
 - Some 50 state-owned enterprises are up for privatisation.

➤ **Reduce the age of retirement:**

- The age of retirement in government and semi-government organisations has been **brought down to 60 from 65 and 62 respectively.**

➤ **Banking sector:**

- Staff and **depositors are to be offered a 20% shareholding in state banks to address recapitalization requirements** arising out of non-repayment of loans due to the economic meltdown.

What is the International Monetary Fund (IMF)?

➤ **About:**

- The **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** is an international organization that promotes global economic growth and financial stability, encourages international trade, and reduces poverty.

➤ **Conditionalities set by IMF:**

○ **About:**

- When a country borrows from the IMF, its government agrees to adjust its economic policies to overcome the problems that led it to seek financial aid.

- These policy adjustments are conditions for IMF loans and serve to ensure that the country will be able to repay the IMF.

- This system of conditionality is designed to promote national ownership of strong and effective policies.

- Conditionality helps countries **solve balance-of-payments problems** without resorting to measures that are harmful to national or international prosperity.

- **Policy commitments** agreed with country authorities can take different forms. They include:

• **Prior actions:**

- These are the steps a country agrees to **take before the IMF approves financing or completes a review.**

- They ensure that a program will have the **necessary foundation for success.**

➤ **Quantitative performance criteria (QPCs):**

- Specific, measurable conditions for IMF lending always relate to **macroeconomic variables under the control of the authorities.**

- Such variables include **monetary and credit aggregates, international reserves, fiscal balances, and external borrowing.**

➤ **Indicative targets (ITs):**

- In addition to QPCs, ITs **may be set for quantitative indicators to assess progress in meeting a program's objectives.**

• **Structural benchmarks (SBs):**

- These are **reform measures that often are non-quantifiable but are critical for achieving program goals** and are intended as markers to assess program implementation.

Note:



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India-South Africa Bilateral Meeting

Why in News?

Recently, **India and South Africa** agreed to develop institutional mechanisms for **tie-ups between Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) & Skill Institutions**.

Why are the Key Highlights of the Meeting?

➤ About:

- The bilateral meeting was held in **Bali, Indonesia**.
- It was decided to develop institutional mechanisms for **educational tie-ups**.
- Also, it was agreed to set up a **Joint Working Group on Education** between the two countries.

➤ Significance:

- This would further **extend the cooperation** that already exists and also to realise the full potential of bilateral cooperation in education.
- Introduction of **National Education Policy (NEP)** has already paved the way for the **internationalisation of Indian education**. India and **South Africa** relations are close and friendly and are rooted in **shared values and interests**.
 - Institutional mechanisms for educational tie-ups would strengthen **the academic & skill development partnerships** and bilateral education cooperation.
 - Further, it will be helpful in **mutual recognition of skill qualifications & capacity building in skill development**.

How has been the India-South Africa Relations?

➤ Background:

- India's links with the **struggle for freedom and justice in South Africa** date back to the period during which **Mahatma Gandhi** started his **Satyagraha movement in South Africa** over a century ago.
- **India was** at the forefront of the international community in its **support to the anti-apartheid movement**.
 - It was the first country to sever trade relations with the apartheid Government (in 1946) and subsequently imposed a complete -- diplomatic, commercial, cultural and sports -- **embargo on South Africa**.

- After a gap of four decades, **India re-established trade and business ties in 1993**, after South Africa **ended** its institutionalised racial segregation (**apartheid**).
 - In November 1993, **diplomatic and consular relations were restored**.

➤ Political Relations:

- After South Africa achieved democracy in 1994, it was the **Red Fort Declaration on Strategic Partnership between India and South Africa, signed in March 1997** which set the parameters for a rekindled relationship.
- The Strategic Partnership between the two countries was again reaffirmed in the **Tshwane Declaration (October 2006)**.
 - Both these declarations have been **instrumental mechanisms** that have contributed in the past to both South Africa and India for **achieving their respective national objectives**.
- India and South Africa have a long history of working together by **coordinating their views and efforts in institutions of global governance/multilateral fora**, in order to achieve greater autonomy and ensure that the agenda of 'South' is prioritised.
 - For Example: **BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa)**, **IBSA (India, Brazil, and South Africa)**, **G20**, **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)** and **World Trade Organisation (WTO)**.

➤ Economic:

- In 2016, both the countries agreed to **collaborate in the defence sector, especially in terms of the opportunities available for South African private sector under 'Make in India' initiative**, energy sector, agro-processing, human resource development, and infrastructure development.
- Trade between India and South Africa has **exceeded the USD 10 billion target set by the leaders of the two countries in 2020**.

➤ Science & Technology:

- The Department of Science and Technology of both countries have collaborated, especially in the **Square Kilometer Array (SKA) project**.

Note:

➤ Culture:

- With the help of the **Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)**, an intensive programme of cultural exchanges is organised throughout South Africa including scholarships for South African nationals.
- The 9th **World Hindi Conference** was held in **September 2012** at Johannesburg.

➤ Indian Community:

- The major part of the **Indian origin community** came to South Africa from 1860 onwards as farm labours.
- South Africa is home to the **highest number of Indian Diaspora in the African continent**, with a total strength of 1,218,000 thereby constituting 3% of South Africa's total population.
- Since 2003 onwards, **India has celebrated Pravasi Bhartiya Divas (PBD)** each year on 9th January (the day Mahatma Gandhi returned from South Africa to India).

India Bangladesh Agreements

Why in News?

Recently, the **Prime Minister of Bangladesh** has visited **India** and held talks with Indian Prime Minister.

- India and Bangladesh have **signed seven agreements** for **cooperation in areas** ranging from **sharing of river waters to space** and unveiled **new connectivity and energy initiatives**.

What are the Key Highlights of the Meeting?

- The two sides have signed seven Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which includes:
 - The **withdrawal of water from the cross-border Kushiara river**.
 - The agreement will **benefit southern Assam** in India and the **Sylhet region** of Bangladesh.
 - Cooperation in **space technology**.
 - Collaboration on **Information Technology** systems used by **railways in areas such as movement of freight**.
 - **Science and technology** cooperation.

- Training of **Bangladesh Railway personnel** and **Bangladeshi judicial officers** in India.

- Cooperation in broadcasting between **Prasar Bharati and Bangladesh Television**.

Thermal Power Project:

- The two nations unveiled the first unit of the **Maitree super thermal power project** being built in **Khulna division of Bangladesh** with **concessional funding from India**.
- The unit was **synchronized with Bangladesh's power grid** in August 2022, and the project will generate 1,320MW, when completed.

➤ Rushpa Rail Bridge:

- The **5.13-km Rupsha rail bridge** was also inaugurated, a key part of the **64.7-km Khulna-Mongla** port broad gauge railway project.
- The bridge was constructed with an **Indian line of credit of \$389 million**.
- It will increase **connectivity with Mongla, Bangladesh's second largest port**.

Loans and Advances:

- India has provided **concessional loans worth USD 9.5 billion** for development projects in Bangladesh, which includes:
 - Rail connectivity between **Khulna and Dhaka, Chilahati and Rajshah**.
 - Connecting **Mongla port with Darshana-Gede** at a cost of USD 312 million.
 - The **Parbatipur-Kaunia rail project** to facilitate the **transportation of fuel** is being built at a cost of USD 120 million.
 - Supply of **road construction equipment and machinery** worth USD 41 million to repair and maintain Bangladesh's road network.

➤ Defence Procurement:

- In 2018, India has extended **USD 500 million defence Line of Credit (LoC)** to Bangladesh.
- In May 2018, Defence public sector undertaking of Kolkata had signed a **Memorandum of Understanding** with Bangladesh to provide **assistance and know-how in the design and construction of warships**.
- Dhaka has shared a **wish list of military platforms and systems** that its armed forces would like to procure from India.

Note:



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- Bangladesh Army has approved procurement of three items:
 - 5 Bridge Layer Tanks (BLT-72) at USD 10 million
 - 7 Portable Steel Bridges (Bailey) at USD 2.2 million
 - 1 Mine Protective Vehicles at USD 2.2 million.
- **Other Proposed Procurements include:**
 - Off-road vehicles, heavy recovery vehicles, armoured engineer reconnaissance vehicles and bullet proof helmets.
 - Modernisation and extension of automobile assembling unit for a Bangladesh machine tools factory, supply of explosives, raw materials and tools
 - The Bangladesh Navy has proposed the procurement of a logistics ship, floating dock, oil tanker, and an ocean-going tug.

What is India's Vision on CEPA with Bangladesh?

- **About:**
 - The Prime Minister of India has said that India and Bangladesh will soon commence negotiations on a Bilateral Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA).
 - The CEPA is likely to focus on trade in goods, services, and investment, with a key objective being the reduction of the trade gap between the two countries.
 - For the year 2021, India's imports from Bangladesh stands at USD 1.76 billion and exports to Bangladesh stands at USD 14.09 billion, resulting in a trade gap of USD 12.33 billion.
 - Bangladesh prepares to graduate into a developing nation by 2026, after which it may no longer qualify for trade benefits that it currently enjoys as a least-developed country; it is keen to clinch the CEPA within a year.
- **India Bangladesh Trade Relations:**
 - In 2021-22, Bangladesh has emerged as the largest trade partner for India in South Asia and the fourth largest destination for Indian exports worldwide.
 - Exports to Bangladesh grew more than 66% from USD 9.69 billion in FY 2020-21 to USD 16.15 billion in FY 2021-22.
 - Despite Covid-19 related disruptions, bilateral trade grew 44% from USD 10.78 billion in 2020-21 to USD 18.13 billion in 2021-22.

- **India's Exports to Bangladesh:**
 - Raw cotton, non-retail pure cotton yarn, and electricity
- **India's Imports from Bangladesh:**
 - Pure vegetable oils, non-knit men's suits, and textile scraps.

What are some Issues which Both Nations should Resolve?

- 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.
 - PM of Bangladesh held out the hope that the two countries will resolve the issue of sharing the waters of the Teesta River – an agreement on the matter has been pending since 2011.
 - Bangladesh has already raised concerns over roll out of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam, an exercise carried out to identify genuine Indian citizens living in Assam and weed out illegal Bangladeshis.
 - Currently, Bangladesh is an active partner of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that Delhi has not signed up to.
 - In the security sector, Bangladesh is also a major recipient of Chinese military inventory, including submarines.

Uyghur Rights Abuse

Why in News?

Recently, according to a report by United Nations, China is conducting serious human rights violations against Uyghurs that may amount to crimes against humanity.

What are the Key Highlights of the Report?

- **Persecution of Uyghurs:**
 - The report accuses China of sweeping a million or more people from minority groups into detention camps where many have said they were tortured, sexually assaulted, and forced to abandon their language and religion.

Note:

- **Ruthless campaign:**
 - There is a ruthless campaign against extremism in the far western province of **Xinjiang** that also included draconian birth control policies and all-encompassing restrictions on people's movement.
- **Set-up Independent International Body:**
 - Human rights groups renewed calls for the UN Human Rights Council, to **set up an independent international body to investigate the allegations**.

Who are Uyghurs?

- **About:**
 - The Uyghurs are a predominantly **Muslim minority Turkic ethnic group**, whose origins can be traced to **Central and East Asia**.
 - The Uyghurs speak their own language, similar to Turkish, and see themselves as culturally and ethnically close to Central Asian nations.
 - The Uyghurs are considered to be one of the **55 officially recognized ethnic minority communities in China**.
 - However, China recognizes the community only as a regional minority and **rejects that they are an indigenous group**.
 - Currently, the **largest population of the Uyghur ethnic community** lives in the **Xinjiang region** of China.
 - A significant population of Uyghurs also lives in the neighbouring Central Asian countries such as **Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan**.
 - **Xinjiang** is technically an autonomous region within China — its largest region, rich in minerals, and **sharing borders with eight countries**, including India, Pakistan, Russia and Afghanistan.

China Objects Indo-US Military Drill Near LAC

Why in News?

Recently, China opposed the war games between India and the US near the disputed Sino-India border, saying it's an **interference in the bilateral boundary issue**.

- While the drill is yet to be officially confirmed, it is anticipated that the two countries will participate

in the 18th edition of the **"Yudh Abhyas"** at Auli in Uttarakhand in October 2022, some **100km from the Line of Actual Control (LAC)**.

Why Does China

Oppose the Military Drill Near LAC?

- China says both countries have agreed that **no military drill will be held near the LAC**, the de facto border between the two countries.
- China cited two agreements signed by India and China in 1993 and 1996, saying the **exercise violates both**.
 - **1993 Agreement** on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China Border Areas.
 - **1996 Agreement** on Confidence-Building Measures in the Military Field Along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China Border Areas.
- A key element of both the 1993 and 1996 agreements is that the two sides would keep their forces in the areas along the LAC to a minimum level. However, **the agreements do not define** what comprises the minimum level.
 - The 1993 and 1996 agreements also mandate that pending a final solution to the boundary question, **the two sides shall strictly respect the LAC**.
- Use of firearms on the LAC is strictly regulated as per the **agreements of 1993, 1996 and 2005**.

What is Yudh Abhyas?

- It is the largest **running joint military training and defence cooperation endeavor between India and the US**.
- The exercise was **started in 2004 under the US Army Pacific Partnership Program**. The exercise is hosted alternately between both countries.
- The exercise **aims at enhancing understanding, cooperation and interoperability** between two Armies.
- This will help them in undertaking joint operations at battalion level in mountainous terrain with cold climatic conditions under the ambit of the United Nations.

What is the Point of

Contention between two countries?

- The major disagreements are in the **western sector**.

Note:



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- After the 1962 War, the Chinese claimed **they had withdrawn to 20 km behind the LAC in November 1959.**
- In the eastern sector the border coincides in the main with the so-called **McMahon Line**, and in the western and middle sectors **it coincides in the main with the traditional customary line** which has consistently been pointed out by China.
- During the **Doklam crisis in 2017**, China **urged India to abide by the "1959 LAC"**.
 - India rejected **the concept of LAC in both 1959 and 1962.**
 - India's objection was that the Chinese line **"was a disconnected series of points on a map that could be joined up in many ways; the line should omit gains from aggression in 1962 and therefore should be based on the actual position on September 8, 1962 before the Chinese attack, and the vagueness of the Chinese definition left it open for China to continue its creeping attempt to change facts on the ground by military force.**

What are the Recent Issues and Developments between India and China?

- **Issues:**
 - **May 2020:** Chinese and Indian forces clashed at **Nathu La, Sikkim (India).**
 - **June 2020:** Indian and Chinese armies were engaged in the **standoff in Pangong Tso, Galwan Valley, Demchok and Daulat Beg Oldie in eastern Ladakh.**
 - **June 2020:** India banned **59 apps originating from China.**
 - **November 2020:** India blocked 43 new mobile apps, **mostly Chinese.**
 - The ban has been enforced under **Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000.**
- **Developments:**
 - **February 2021:** India and China decided to finally reach an **agreement on disengagement at Pangong Lake.**
 - **September 2022:** Recently, Indian and Chinese armies have begun to **disengage from Patrolling Point-15 in the Gogra-Hot Springs area of Eastern Ladakh**, marking a step forward to end the standoff ongoing since May 2020.

What is the Line of Actual Control?

- The LAC is the **demarcation that separates** Indian-controlled territory from Chinese-controlled territory.
- India considers the **LAC to be 3,488 km long, while the Chinese consider it to be only around 2,000 km.**
- It is divided **into three sectors**,
 - **The eastern sector** which spans Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim.
 - **The middle sector** in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh
 - **The western sector** in Ladakh.

How is the LAC different from the Line of Control with Pakistan?

- The LoC emerged from the **1948 ceasefire line negotiated by the UN** after the Kashmir War.
- It was designated as the LoC in 1972, following the **Shimla Agreement between the two countries.**
- It is delineated on a map signed by Director General of Military Operations (DGMOs) of both armies and has the international sanctity of a legal agreement.
- The LAC, in contrast, **is only a concept – it is not agreed upon by the two countries**, neither delineated on a map or demarcated on the ground.

Indo-China Disengagement at Hot Springs & Gogra Post

Why in News?

Recently, the **Indian and Chinese troops** have begun **disengaging at Patrolling Pillar-15 (PP-15) in the Gogra-Hotspring region of Eastern Ladakh.**

- Forces of the **two countries have been locked in a confrontational position** in the area since April 2020.
- The move comes ahead of **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in Uzbekistan.** a

Why are the Key Highlights about the Current Disengagement?

- Indian and Chinese armies have begun to **disengage from Patrolling Point-15 in the Gogra-Hotsprings area of Eastern Ladakh**, marking a step forward to **end the standoff ongoing since May 2020.**
 - **PP-15 is one of the 65 patrolling points** in Ladakh along the **Line of Actual Control (LAC).**

Note:

- The disengagement has begun in a **coordinated and planned way**, which is conducive to peace and tranquility in the border areas.
- As per the understanding reached earlier on disengagement, **a buffer zone is to be created at the friction points once troops are withdrawn by both sides and new patrolling norms are to be worked out** after complete disengagement and de-escalation.
- The consensus about the disengagement was reached in the **16th round of India China Corps Commander Level Meeting**.
- The 16th round of talks was held on July 17, 2022, at the **Chushul border personnel meeting point on the Indian side**.
- Since the stand-off began in May 2020, the two sides have so far held 16 rounds of talks with disengagement undertaken from both sides of Pangong Tso.
- With disengagement at PP-15, forces of the **two countries have disengaged at all friction points** in the region which included the North and South banks of the **Pangong Tso**, PP-14, PP-15 and PP-17A.
 - The **last disengagement** between the forces of the **two countries** had been achieved at PP-17 A in **August 2021 following the 12th Corp Commander Level meeting**.
- The **friction points that remain now** are Demchok and Depsang, which **China has constantly refused to accept**, maintaining that they are not a part of the current stand-off.

What We Need to Know about the Hot Springs and Gogra Post?

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

US - Indonesia Military Drill

Why in News?

Recently, the **United States and Indonesian militaries** had conducted annual **joint combat exercises** on Indonesia's Sumatra Island.

- **For the first time**, participants from other partner nations have also joined amid growing maritime activity by China in the **Indo-Pacific region**.

What do we need to know about the Joint Military Drill?

- More than 5,000 soldiers from the **U.S., Indonesia, Australia, Japan and Singapore** participated in this 2022's exercises.
- The exercises were designed to **strengthen interoperability, capability, trust and cooperation** in support of a **free and open Indo-Pacific**.
- The exercises lasted till 14th August 2022, encompassing army, navy, air force and marine drills.

Which are India's Exercises with the US & Indonesia?

- **US:**
 - **Exercise Yudh Abhyas**: It is the **largest running joint military training and defence cooperation** endeavor between India and the US.
 - **Exercise Tiger Triumph (Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief exercise)**: It aims to develop **interoperability for conducting HADR operations**.
 - **Exercise Vajra Prahar (Special Forces' Exercise)**: The joint exercise by the **Special Forces** of both the countries is conducted alternatively between India and the United States.
- **Indonesia:**
 - **Exercise Samudra Shakti (Maritime)**: In pursuance of **India's Act East Policy**, Exercise 'Samudra Shakti' was conceived in 2018 as a bilateral IN-IDN exercise.
 - The exercise aims to strengthen the **bilateral relationship, and enhance mutual understanding and interoperability** in maritime operations between the **two navies**.

Note:



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- **IND-INDO CORPAT (Maritime Exercise):** India-Indonesia Coordinated Patrol build up understanding and interoperability **between navies** and facilitate institution of measures to prevent and suppress **Illegal Unreported Unregulated (IUU) fishing**, drug trafficking, maritime terrorism, armed robbery and piracy.

Indo-Pacific Economic Framework

Why in News?

Recently, the Minister of Commerce & Industry addressed the **Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) Ministerial meeting** in the US, where India decided to stay away from the Fair & resilient trade Pillar.

- India agreed to **three out of four pillars**, which are **Supply Chains, Tax & Anti-Corruption and Clean Energy**.

What is IPEF?

- It is a **US-led initiative** that aims to **strengthen economic partnership among participating countries** to enhance resilience, sustainability, inclusiveness, economic growth, fairness, and competitiveness in the **Indo-Pacific region**.
- The IPEF was launched in 2021 with a **dozen initial partners** who together represent **40% of the world GDP**.
- The IPEF is **not a Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** but allows members to **negotiate the parts they want to**. The negotiations will be along **four main "pillars"**.
- **Supply-chain resilience**
- **Clean energy, decarbonisation & infrastructure**
- **Taxation & anti-corruption**
 - Fair & resilient trade.
- Currently, **India and 13 countries located in the Pacific Ocean** are its members,
- Australia, Brunei, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, United States, and Vietnam.

Tenth Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference

Why in News?

Recently, the **Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference** which was held in New York ended without adopting a substantive outcome due to Russia's objection.

What is the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty?

➤ About:

- The NPT is an **international treaty whose objective is to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology**, to foster the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, and to further the goal of disarmament.
- The treaty was **signed in 1968 and entered into force in 1970**. Presently, it has **191 member states**.
- **India is not a member**.
- It requires **countries to give up any present or future plans to build nuclear weapons** in return for access to peaceful uses of nuclear energy.
 - It represents the only binding commitment in a multilateral treaty to the goal of disarmament by the nuclear-weapon States.
 - Nuclear-weapon states parties under the NPT are defined as those that manufactured and exploded a nuclear weapon or other nuclear explosive devices before 1st January, 1967.

➤ India's Stand:

- **India** is one of the only five countries that **either did not sign the NPT or signed but withdrew later**, thus becoming part of a list that includes Pakistan, Israel, North Korea, and South Sudan.
- India always considered the **NPT as discriminatory and had refused to sign it**.
 - India has **opposed the international treaties** aimed at non-proliferation since they were **selectively applicable to the non-nuclear powers and legitimised the monopoly of the five nuclear weapons powers**.

What are the Concerns

Arising Out of Russia's Disagreement?

- The **occupation of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant** in southeastern Ukraine as well as the **takeover of the Chernobyl nuclear plant**, scene of the world's worst nuclear disaster in 1986, **renewed global fears of another nuclear emergency**.
- The **threat of nuclear weapons use today is higher than at any time** since the heights of the Cold War and the deteriorated international security environment.
- This NPT conference represents a **missed opportunity to strengthen the treaty and global security by agreeing to a specific action plan with benchmarks**

Note:



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and timeframes to effectively address the growing dangers of nuclear arms racing and nuclear weapons use.

What are the Other Treaties and Agreements related to Nuclear Weapons?

- The Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests in the Atmosphere, In Outer Space and Under Water, also known as the **Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT)**.
- **Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT)**: India has **not signed the CTBT** as India is a **strong advocate for a time-bound disarmament commitment from nuclear weapon states (NWS)** and may use the lack of a commitment as a reason to refrain from signing the CTBT.
- **The Treaty on the Prohibition of nuclear weapons (TPNW)**: It entered into force on 22 January 2021 and **India is not a member of this treaty**.
- **Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG)**: India is not a member of the NSG.
- **The Missile Technology Control Regime**.
- **Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation**.
- **The Wassenaar Arrangement**.

Japan & India to Boost Defence Ties

Why in News?

Recently, India & Japan held the 2+2 ministerial meeting in Tokyo to enhance security and defence cooperation.

What are the Key Highlights of this Meeting?

- **Enhanced Defence Cooperation**: Both countries are examining all options necessary for national defence including counterstrike capabilities, and will **increase their defence budget substantially** to strengthen their capabilities.
 - As there is a need to tackle increased security threats mostly from neighbouring China.
- **Enhancing Maritime Cooperation**: There were extensive discussions on ways to enhance maritime cooperation including **maritime domain awareness** that includes **India's inclusive vision of Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR)**.

- **Global cooperation**: Both countries acknowledged that global cooperation is required more than ever to address security challenges.
 - Further, here is consensus on both sides that a **strong India-Japan relationship** is very important for a **free, open, rule-based and inclusive Indo-Pacific** based upon sovereignty and territorial integrity of nations.

How has India's Relations with Japan been?

- **Defence Exercises**:
 - India and Japan's defence forces organize a series of bilateral exercises namely, **JIMEX (naval)**, **SHINYUU Maitri (Air Force)**, and **Dharma Guardian (Army)**.
 - The participation of Japan for the first time in the **multilateral exercise MILAN** and operationalisation of the **Reciprocal Provision of Supply and Services Agreement** in March, 2022 are milestones in the progress of defence cooperation.
 - Both countries also participate in the **Malabar exercise (Naval Exercise)** with the USA and Australia.
- **Multilateral Groupings**:
 - Both India and Japan are members of **Quad**, **G20** and **G-4**.
 - They are also member countries of the **International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER)**.
- **Health-Care**:
 - In view of the similarities and synergies between the goals and objectives of **India's AYUSHMAN Bharat Programme** and **Japan's AHWIN**, both sides had been consulting with each other to identify projects to build the narrative of AHWIN for AYUSHMAN Bharat.
- **Investment and ODA**:
 - India has been the largest recipient of the Japanese **Official Development Assistance (ODA)** Loan for the past decades.
 - **Delhi Metro** is one of the most successful examples of Japanese cooperation through the utilization of ODA.
 - India's **Western Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC)** project is funded by a soft loan provided by Japan International Cooperation Agency.

Note:



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- Japan and India had committed to build a **High-Speed Railways in India**.
- **India Japan Nuclear Deal 2016** will help India build the six nuclear reactors in southern India, increasing nuclear energy capacity ten-fold by 2032.

Economic Relations:

- Japan's bilateral trade with India totaled USD 20.57 billion during FY 2021-22.
 - Japan's exports to India were **2.35% of India's total imports** and India's exports to Japan were **1.46% of India's total exports**. This underlines that there remains a big potential.
 - India was the 18th largest trading partner for Japan, and Japan was the 12th largest trading partner for India in 2020.
- **Developments during 14th India-Japan Annual Summit, 2022:**
- **Sustainable Development Initiative for the North Eastern Region of India:**
 - It has been launched with an eye on India's infrastructure development in the Northeast, and includes both ongoing projects and possible future cooperation in connectivity, healthcare, new and renewable energy, as well as an initiative for **strengthening bamboo value chain**.
 - **India-Japan Digital Partnership:**
 - On **cyber security**, the leaders discussed the "India-Japan Digital Partnership" with a view to enhancing the digital economy through the promotion of joint projects in the area of **IoT (Internet of Things), AI (Artificial Intelligence)** and other emerging technologies.
 - Japan is looking forward to attracting more highly skilled Indian IT professionals to contribute to the Japanese ICT sector.
 - **Clean Energy Partnership:**
 - It was launched for cooperation in areas such as **electric vehicles, storage systems including batteries, electric vehicle charging infrastructure**, development of solar energy; hydrogen; ammonia; etc.
 - The objective is to **encourage manufacturing in India, creation of resilient and trustworthy supply chains** in these areas as well as foster collaboration in R&D (Research and Development).

India to host G20 Summit in 2023

Why in the News?

Recently, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) announced that India is hosting the **G-20 (Group of 20)** leaders' summit in New Delhi next year 2023.

- The 17th G20 Heads of State and Government Summit will happen in November 2022 in Indonesia, after which **India will assume the presidency of G20 from December 2022**.
- India is assuming the Presidency of the G20 for one year.

What are the Key Points?

➤ Guest Countries:

- India, as G20 Presidency, will be inviting **Bangladesh, Egypt, Mauritius, Netherlands, Nigeria, Oman, Singapore, Spain and UAE** as Guest countries

➤ Troika:

- During the Presidency, **India, Indonesia and Brazil would form the troika**. This would be the first time when the **troika would consist of three developing countries** and emerging economies, providing them a greater voice.
 - Troika refers to the **top grouping within the G20 that consists of the current, previous and the upcoming presidencies** (Indonesia, India and Brazil).

➤ Key Priorities:

- Inclusive, Equitable and Sustainable Growth,
- LiFE (Lifestyle For Environment),
- Women's Empowerment;
- Digital public infrastructure and tech-enabled development in areas ranging from health, agriculture and education to commerce,
- Skill-mapping, culture and tourism; climate financing; circular economy; global food security; energy security; green hydrogen; disaster risk reduction and resilience;
- Developmental cooperation; fight against economic crime; and multilateral reforms.

What is the G20?

➤ About:

Note:

- The G20 was formed in **1999 in the backdrop of the financial crisis of the late 1990s** that hit **East Asia and Southeast Asia** in particular.
- It aims to secure global financial stability by involving middle-income countries.
- Together, the G20 countries include 60 % of the world's population, 80 % of global GDP, and 75 % of global trade.
- **Members:**
 - Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States and the EU.
 - **Spain** is invited as a **permanent guest**.
- **Presidency:**
 - The presidency of the G20 **rotates every year among members**, and the country holding the presidency, together with the previous and next presidency-holder, forms the 'Troika' to **ensure continuity of the G20 agenda**.
 - **Italy, Indonesia, and India** are the Troika countries right now and Indonesia holds the current Presidency.
- **Mandate:**
 - The G20 has no permanent secretariat. The agenda and work are coordinated by **representatives of the G20 countries, known as 'Sherpas'**, who work together with the finance ministers and governors of the central banks.
 - The primary mandate of the grouping is for International Economic cooperation with particular emphasis to **prevent future financial crises across the world**.
 - It plays a significant role in **shaping the global economic agenda**.
 - From 1999-2008 the forum **exalted from a grouping of Central bank governors and finance ministers** to Heads of states.

India Mexico Relations

Why in News?

On the Occasion of Mexico National Day (16th September), India extended its greetings and felicitations to all Mexico Nationals and commemorated the **72 years of the establishment of diplomatic Relations**.

How is India-Mexico Relations?

➤ Historical Ties:

- Being colonies in the past, India and Mexico have **European connections of the colonial era**.
- Mexico was the **first Latin American country** to recognise India after Independence and establish **diplomatic relations with India in 1950**.
- Mexican wheat varieties **used in Indo-Mexican hybrids were** the backbone of India's **Green Revolution in the 1960s**.
- In the **Cold War years**, Mexico and India had worked together closely as **members of the United Nations (UN)**, both actively championing the interests of developing countries such as in the Uruguay Round of Trade Negotiations (**under the World Trade Organisation**).
 - Both countries are members of **G-20**.

➤ Political and Bilateral Cooperation:

- Both countries established a '**Privileged Partnership**' in 2007.
- In 2015, both countries agreed to work towards achieving a '**Strategic Partnership**'.
- The two countries have several bilateral agreements and MoUs, including for Investment Promotion and Protection, **Extradition**, Administrative Assistance in Customs Matters, Space Cooperation, etc.
- India gives 20 scholarships to Mexico under the **Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme** and Mexican diplomats are also given training at **Forest Survey of India (FSI)**.

➤ Economic and Commercial Relations:

- India is the **10th largest trading partner of Mexico**, and the trade balance has remained in favor of India for eight years.
- Mexico is currently **India's largest trading partner in Latin America**.
- In 2021, exports to Mexico from India reached USD 5.931 billion and imports from Mexico were at USD 4.17 billion, taking the total trade to USD 10.11 billion.
 - **India's Exports:** Vehicles and auto parts, organic chemicals, electrical machinery and electronic equipment, aluminium products, readymade garments, iron and steel products and gems and jewellery.

Note:



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- **India's Imports:** Crude oil, mineral fuel, fertilizers, etc. Crude oil occupies 75% of the export basket from Mexico.
- **India's exports of pharmaceutical products remained steady in 2020** and increased by more than 80%.

➤ **Security:**

- Both countries share a **common concern** over growing traditional and non-traditional security challenges, particularly the rise of **global terrorism**.

➤ **Cultural Ties:**

- The **Gurudev Tagore Indian Cultural Centre** has been functioning in Mexico since October 2010, teaching Yoga, classical dances, music, etc.
- An agreement on cultural cooperation has been in existence since 1975 and cooperation activities are carried out through four-yearly '**Programmes of Cultural Cooperation**'.

➤ **Indian Community:**

- The Indian community in Mexico is estimated to be more than 7,000, comprising mostly software engineers of Indian IT companies, academics/professors, and private businessmen.
- Tourism between the two countries is steadily increasing and Mexicans have been extended the **online e-Tourist Visa facility**.
- Indian nationals holding ordinary passports but having a valid visa for the USA, the UK, Canada, Schengen area or Japan, and holders of permanent residence in the same countries or Member States of **Pacific Alliance viz. Colombia, Chile and Peru do not need a visa for short tourism or business visits to Mexico**.

➤ **Differences:**

- Mexico and India have had different viewpoints on the issue of **nuclear non-proliferation**. However, during the Indian Prime Minister's 2016 visit, Mexico pledged support for India's bid to be part of the **Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG)**.
- Both countries have differences on the issue of **United Nations Security Council (UNSC) reforms**.
 - Mexico has been a member of the **United for Consensus (UfC) group/Coffee Club** that, unlike India and the other **Group of Four (G-4)** members (Japan, Germany and Brazil), opposes the expansion of permanent membership in the UNSC.

Issue of Tamilians in Sri Lanka

Why in News?

Recently, India has expressed concern over the **lack of any measurable progress** by Sri Lanka on its **commitment towards reaching a political solution** on the Tamil issue.

- India, in its statement at the **51st session** of the **United Nations Human Rights Council** in Geneva said it has "always believed in the responsibility of **States for promotion and protection of human rights** and constructive international dialogue and cooperation" guided by the **U.N. Charter**.

What concerns were Raised by India?

- The current crisis in Sri Lanka has **demonstrated the limitations of a debt-driven economy** and the impact it has on the standard of living.
- It is in the best interests of Sri Lanka to build the capacity of its citizens and work towards their empowerment.
- Over 13 years since the end of Sri Lanka's civil war in 2009, when tens of thousands of civilians were killed and disappeared, **survivors continue demanding justice and accountability** for war-time crimes.
- In the post-war years, Sri Lanka's human rights defenders have **frequently flagged concerns over persisting militarisation**, especially in the Tamil-majority north and east; repression, and the shrinking space for dissent.

What is the Tamil issue and its History?

➤ **Background:**

- Sri Lanka is 74.9 % Sinhalese and 11.2 % Sri Lankan Tamil. Within these two groups, **Sinhalese tend to be Buddhist and Tamils tend to be Hindu**, displaying significant **linguistic and religious** divisions.
- It is believed that the Tamils arrived in Sri Lanka both as **invaders and traders** from India's **Chola Kingdom**.
- Some origin stories suggest that the **Sinhalese and Tamil communities have experienced tension** from the very beginning—not out of cultural incompatibility, but **rather out of power disputes**.

Note:



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➤ Pre-Civil War:

- During British Rule the pattern of Tamil favoritism **left Sinhalese people feeling isolated** and oppressed. Soon after **British occupiers left the island in 1948, these patterns of Tamil dominance changed dramatically.**
- After British independence, many Sinhalese gained power and went **on to gradually pass acts effectively disenfranchising their Tamil counterparts, which led to the** creation of **Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)** in 1976.
 - LTTE was an uncompromising group inspired by **Che Guevarra and his guerilla warfare tactics.**
- The **conflict then escalated into civil war in 1983, leading to** riots targeting Tamils in Colombo.
- The fighting lasted just under **three decades and ended in May 2009**, when the Sri Lankan government announced that **they killed the LTTE leader.**

➤ Post-Civil War:

- Although the Civil War ended in 2009, the current **situation in Sri Lanka has only partially improved.**
- A large portion of the **Tamil population remains displaced.** While there are fewer political and civil rights issues, **instances of torture and enforced disappearances persist** even in recent years.
- The government's **Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) targets mostly Tamils.** In a more subtle sense, the **Sri Lankan government continues to disenfranchise the Tamil community.**
 - Through the process of "Sinhalization," for instance, Sinhalese culture has slowly replaced that of the Tamil population.
 - Sinhalese monuments, road signs, street and village names, as well as Buddhist places of worship became more common in predominantly Tamil areas.
 - These efforts have infringed upon, and in some cases even erased, the Tamil perspective on Sri Lankan history, as well as Tamil and Hindu elements of the country's culture.

What are the Concerns for India?

- **Rehabilitation of Refugees:** A lot of Sri Lankan Tamils who evaded from Sri Lankan civil war (2009) are seeking refuge in Tamil Nadu. They are not returning in fear of being targeted again. It is a challenge for India to rehabilitate them.

- **Sentiments of Indian Tamils:** A number of protests and criticism is drawn at the end of the Indian Government for overlooking the plight of Sri Lankan Tamils to maintain good relationship with Sri Lanka.
- **Strategic interests vs Tamil question:** Often India has to trade off on the question of Tamilian minority rights over strategic issues to protect its economic interests in its neighborhood and to counter Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean.

What are the other Issues in India-Sri Lanka Relations?

➤ Killing of Fisherman:

- Killing of Indian fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy is a lingering issue between these two nations.
- In 2019 and 2020, a total of 284 **Indian fishermen were arrested** and a total of 53 Indian boats were confiscated by the Sri Lankan authorities.

➤ East Coast Terminal project:

- In 2021 Sri Lanka canceled an MoU signed with India and Japan for the **East Coast Terminal project.**

➤ Influence of China:

- China's rapidly growing economic footprint (and political clout as a corollary) in Sri Lanka is straining India-Sri Lanka relations.
- China is already the largest investor in Sri Lanka, accounting for 23.6% of the total **Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)** during 2010-2019 as against 10.4% from India.

➤ 13th Amendment of the Sri Lankan Constitution:

- It envisages devolution of necessary powers to the provincial councils to address the just demand of the Tamil people for equality, justice, peace, and respect within a united Sri Lanka.

Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan Conflict

Why in News?

Recently, nearly 100 people have been killed and scores injured in violent border clashes between **Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.**

What Led to the Clash between the Two Countries?

- **Historical Legacy:**

Note:

- The current clashes are replaying old pre- and post-Soviet era legacies.
- The borders of the two republics were demarcated under Joseph Stalin's leadership.
- **Common Rights over Natural Resources:** Historically, the Kyrgyz and Tajik populations **enjoyed common rights over natural resources**.
- The creation of the **Soviet Union** saw the **large-scale redistribution of livestock to collective and state farms**, which upset the existing status quo.
- **Present Tussle:**
 - Recent incidents saw groups from either side **planting trees in disputed areas and engaging in a physical confrontation** using agricultural equipment as weapons.
 - Currently, **Ferghana Valley** continues to be a site of struggle and frequent violent outbursts, with the location consisting primarily of **Tajiks, Kyrgyz, and Uzbeks**, who have historically shared common sociological specificities, economic activities, and religious practices.
 - Both countries **share multiple water channels** with undulating trajectories and flow, which **upset equitable access to water on both sides**. As a result, small-scale conflicts occur practically every year during the crucial irrigation period.
 - Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan share 971 kilometers of border territory of which about 471 kilometers remain disputable.
 - Leaders of both countries have contributed to the continuation of the conflict through the imagination of a particular type of development project which resulted in the **large-scale displacement of nomadic communities**, hoping to stabilise the internal dynamics of their respective countries and legitimise their power.

How are India-Tajikistan Relations?

- **Cooperation in International Forums:**
 - In 2020, Tajikistan extended support for India's candidature for a non-permanent seat in **United Nation Security Council** for the term 2021-22.
 - Tajikistan strongly supported **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Member status for India**.
 - India also supported **Tajikistan's candidature to United Nations' Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)** and accession to **WTO** in March 2013.
- **Development & Aid Partnership:**

- **Development Assistance:**
 - With a grant of USD 0.6 million, an **Information and Technology Centre (Bedil Centre)** was commissioned in 2006.
 - The project ran for a full hardware cycle of 6 years and trained almost all first-generation IT experts in the government sector in Tajikistan.
 - A project for setting up computer labs in **37 schools in Tajikistan** was completed and delivered in August 2016.
- **Humanitarian Assistance:**
 - In June 2009, USD 200,000 cash assistance was given by India to overcome damage caused by floods in Tajikistan.
 - After the outbreak of **Polio** in southwest Tajikistan, India provided 2 million doses of **oral polio vaccine** through **UNICEF** in November 2010.
- **Human Capacity Building:**
 - Since the establishment of the Indian embassy in Dushanbe in 1994, Tajikistan has been a beneficiary of the **Indian Technical & Economic Cooperation Programme (ITEC)**.
 - In 2019, under **India-Central Asia Dialogue Process**, some Tajik diplomats were trained at Foreign Service Institute, Delhi.
- **Trade & Economic Relation:**
 - Indian exports to Tajikistan mainly consist of pharmaceuticals, medical preparations, cane or beet sugar, **tea, handicraft** and machinery.
 - Indian pharmaceutical products **occupy approximately 25% of Tajik market**.
- **Cultural & People-to-People Relation:**
 - **Deep rooted historical and cultural linkages** have helped expand and widen the relationship to a new level.
 - Cooperation between the two countries encompasses all aspects of human endeavour with **special focus on military and defence ties**.
 - **Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre in Dushanbe** offers courses in **Kathak & Tabla** through teachers deployed by **Indian Council for Cultural Relations** from India. The centre **also offers Sanskrit and Hindi language classes**.
 - In 2020 '**My Life My Yoga**' video blogging competition saw participation from Tajikistan yoga enthusiasts.

Note:

➤ **Strategic:**

- India has an airbase at a place called **Ayni**, about thirty kilometres from Dushanbe. Over the years, it developed into an Indian Air Force (IAF) base known as **Gissar Military Aerodrome (GMA)**.

India Saudi Arabia Relations

Why in News?

Recently, the **Union Minister of Commerce and Industry, Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution and Textiles** visited Saudi Arabia to attend the Ministerial meeting of the **India-Saudi Arabia Strategic Partnership Council**.

What are the Key Outcomes of the Meeting?

- Streamlining efforts to carry out the declaration of investments of **USD \$100 billion in India** made by Saudi Arabia in February 2019.
- Endorsement of the **41 areas of cooperation** identified by the technical teams under the **4 broad domains of**:
 - **Agriculture & Food Security**
 - **Energy**
 - **Technology & Information Technology**
 - **Industry & Infrastructure**
- A commitment to carrying out **important projects in a timely way**. The following are some of the priority areas for cooperation:
 - **Digital fintech sector cooperation** through the operationalization of **Unified Payments Interface (UPI)** and **Rupay Card** in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
 - Reiteration of **commitment to ongoing collaboration** on joint projects, such as the **construction of a refinery on the West Coast**, an investment in **Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG)** infrastructure, and the creation of strategic petroleum storage facilities in India.
- **Discussions were also held on:**
 - **Institutional tie-up of the EXIM banks** of the two countries,
 - **Mutual recognition of standards**,
 - Establishment of **startup and innovation bridge**,
 - Strengthening collaboration in **infrastructure development**, particularly in the **domains of construction**,
 - **Railways** etc.

What is the India

Saudi Arabia Strategic Partnership Council?

- **The Strategic Partnership Council** was instituted in **October, 2019** during the visit of the **Prime Minister of India to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**.
- **It has two main pillars:**
 - **Political, Security, Social and Cultural Committee**
 - **Committee on Economy and Investments**
- India is the **fourth country with which Saudi Arabia has formed such a strategic partnership**, after the UK, France and China.

How has India's

Relations with Saudi Arabia been?

➤ **Oil & Gas:**

- Saudi Arabia is currently **India's second-largest supplier of crude oil** (Iraq has been India's top supplier).
- India **imports around 18% of its crude oil requirement** and around **22 % of its Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) requirement** from Saudi Arabia.
- Saudi Arabia will assist in setting up the **world's largest greenfield refinery at Raigarh in Maharashtra** by Saudi Aramco, Adnoc of the United Arab Emirates and Indian public sector oil companies.

➤ **Bilateral Trade:**

- Saudi Arabia is **India's fourth largest trade partner** (after the USA, China and UAE).
- In FY 2021-22, bilateral trade was valued at **USD 42.8 billion**.
 - India's **imports from Saudi Arabia reached USD 34.01 billion** and **exports to Saudi Arabia were worth USD 8.76 billion**. An increase of **49.5% over 2021**.
 - Total trade with Saudi Arabia accounted for **4.14% of India's total trade in FY 2021-22**.

➤ **Indian Diaspora:**

- The **2.6 million-strong Indian community in Saudi Arabia** is the largest expatriate community in the Kingdom and is the 'most preferred community' due to their expertise, sense of discipline, law-abiding and peace-loving nature.

➤ **Cultural Linkages:**

- **Haj pilgrimage** is another important component of bilateral relations between India and Saudi Arabia.

Note:



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➤ **Naval Exercise:**

- In 2021, India and Saudi Arabia started their first-ever Naval joint exercise called the **Al-Mohed Al-Hindi Exercise**.

Future of the Commonwealth

Why in News?

The death of **Queen Elizabeth II** of the United Kingdom, marks not only the end of an era for the British monarchy but also a turning point for the 14 Commonwealth realms of which she was the Head of State.

What is the Background?

- There has been a significant transformation of the socio-economic environment in the 14 realms countries since the death of Queen Elizabeth II.
- Several countries out of these 14 called to **establish a republic and break free of historical ties to the British monarchy**.
 - A republic is a form of government in which **"supreme power is held by the people and their elected representatives"**.
 - Thus, it is likely that during the reign of the **incumbent King Charles III**, the Queen's successor, more nations will follow in the **footsteps of Barbados**.
 - In 2021, Barbados became the **18th country to remove the British monarch from the role of head of state** and substitute them with a national government functionary.

What is the Commonwealth?

➤ **About:**

- The Commonwealth of Nations is a group of **56 countries composed mostly of former British colonies**.
- It was established by the **London Declaration in 1949**.
- While members of the Commonwealth are predominantly located in Africa, the Americas, Asia, and the Pacific, with many of them emerging economies, the three European members of the group are Cyprus, Malta, and the U.K.
- The developed nations of the Commonwealth are Australia, Canada, and New Zealand.

➤ **Republics and Realms:**

- The Commonwealth **consists of both Republics and Realms**.
- The British monarch is the **Head of State for the realms, whereas the republics are ruled by elected governments** except in the case of five countries — **Brunei Darussalam, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malaysia, and Tonga** — each a self-governed monarchy.
 - The **realms** are Antigua and Barbuda, Australia, the Bahamas, Belize, Canada, Grenada, Jamaica, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, the Solomon Islands, and Tuvalu.

ASEAN-India Economic Ministers' Meeting

Why in News?

Recently, India and Cambodia co-chaired the **19th ASEAN-India Economic Ministers' meeting** in Cambodia.

- The Economic Ministers or their representatives from all the **10 ASEAN countries** attended the meeting.

What are the Highlights of the Meeting?

➤ **Noted Economic Relations:**

- The Ministers noted that trade and economic relations between ASEAN and India are starting to recover **from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic** and the two-way trade between ASEAN and India reached USD 91.5 billion in 2021 increasing by 39.2% year-on-year.

➤ **ASEAN India Business Council:**

- The Ministers also took note of the recommendations made by **ASEAN India Business Council (AIBC)** to enhance the ASEAN India economic partnership and the activities undertaken by AIBC in 2022.
 - ASEAN India-Business Council (AIBC) was set up in March 2003 as a forum **to bring key private sector players from India and the ASEAN countries** on a single platform for business networking and sharing of ideas.

➤ **Post Covid-19 Recovery:**

- Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to **take collective actions to mitigate the economic impact of the pandemic** and work towards a sustainable post-Covid-19 recovery.

Note:



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➤ Supply Chain Connectivity:

- The Ministers welcomed ASEAN and India to forge collective actions in securing a robust supply chain connectivity to **maintain the flow of essential goods** and services through ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA) Upgrade Negotiations, mutual recognition of Covid-19 vaccination, vaccines production, public health surveillance, and medical technologies.

➤ ASEAN India Trade in Goods Agreement:

- The Ministers endorsed the Scope of the Review of the AITIGA to make it **more user-friendly, simple, and trade facilitative for businesses**, as well as responsive to the current global and regional challenges including supply chain disruptions.
- The Ministers also activated the **AITIGA Joint Committee** to undertake the review of AITIGA expeditiously.

What is the Association of Southeast Asian Nations?

➤ About:

- It is a **regional grouping** that promotes economic, political, and security cooperation.
- It was established in **August 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand** with the signing of the ASEAN Declaration (Bangkok Declaration) by the founding fathers of ASEAN, namely **Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand**.
- Its chairmanship **rotates annually, based on the alphabetical order** of the English names of Member States.
- ASEAN countries have a total population of 650 million people and a combined **Gross Domestic Product (GDP)** of USD 2.8 trillion.
- Commodity trade between India and ASEAN region has reached **98.39 billion** in the period April 2021- February 2022. India's main trading ties are with Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam and Thailand.

➤ Members:

- ASEAN brings together ten Southeast Asian states – Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam – into one organisation.

Eastern Economic Forum

Why in News?

Recently, Russia hosted the **7th Eastern Economic Forum (EEF)** at Vladivostok.

- The forum is a platform for entrepreneurs to expand their businesses into **Russia's Far East (RFE)**.

What is the Eastern Economic Forum?

➤ About:

- The EEF was established in 2015 to encourage **foreign investments in the RFE**.
- The EEF displays the **economic potential, suitable business conditions and investment opportunities** in the region.
- Agreements signed at the EEF increased from **217 in 2017 to 380 agreements in 2021, worth 3.6 trillion roubles**.
- The agreements focus on **infrastructure, transportation projects, mineral excavations, construction, industry and agriculture**.

➤ Key Players:

- China, South Korea, Japan and India are the Key Players in the region, where China is the biggest investor.
 - China sees potential in promoting the **Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)** And the **Polar Sea Route** in the RFE.
 - China's investments in the region **account for 90% of the total investments**.

➤ Objectives:

- Russia has strategically developed the region with the **aim of connecting Russia to the Asian trading routes**.
- With the fast modernisation of cities like Vladivostok, Khabarovsk, Ulan-Ude, Chita and more, Russia aims to **attract more investments** in the region.
- To **survive the economic crisis and the sanctions** with the help of China and other Asian powers.

What does India Seek at the Forum?

- **India** seeks to expand **its influence in the RFE**. During the forum, India expressed its **readiness in expanding trade, connectivity and investments** in Russia.

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- India is keen to **deepen its cooperation in energy, pharmaceuticals, maritime connectivity**, healthcare, tourism, the diamond industry and the Arctic.
- In 2019, India offered a USD 1 billion **line of credit to develop infrastructure in the region**.
- Through the EEF, **India aims to establish a strong inter-state interaction** with Russia.
 - Business representatives of Gujarat and the Republic of Sakha (Russia) have **launched agreements in the diamond and pharmaceuticals industry**.

How does India act at

Balancing Between the EEF and IPEF?

- Since the coming together of countries like Myanmar, Armenia, Russia, and China for EEF seems like the forming of an **Anti-Sanctions Group** in the international order, India has vested interests in both the forums, EEF and **IPEF (U.S.-led Indo-Pacific Economic Framework)**.
- India has **not shied away from investing** in the Russia-initiated EEF despite the current international conditions, where western countries impose Sanctions on Russia.
- At the same time, India has given **its confirmation and acceptance to three of the four pillars in the IPEF**.
- India understands the benefits of being involved in the development of the RFE but it **also perceives the IPEF as a vital platform to strengthen its presence in the Indo-Pacific region**.
- The IPEF also presents an ideal opportunity for India to act in the region, without being part of the China-led **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership** or other regional groupings like the **Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership**.

Quad Grouping

Why in News?

Foreign Ministers of the **Quad (India, the U.S., Australia, and Japan)** met on the fringes of the **United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)** to sign a **Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) partnership** into effect.

- Under the HADR, **the member countries will coordinate their disaster response operations** in the **Indo-Pacific region** with other National and International agencies, private non-governmental organizations.

What is QUAD?

- It is the grouping of four **democracies—India, Australia, the US, and Japan**.
- All four nations find a common ground of being democratic nations and also support the common interest of unhindered maritime trade and security.
- It aims to ensure and support a **“free, open and prosperous” Indo-Pacific region**.
- The idea of Quad was first mooted by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007. However, the idea couldn't move ahead with Australia pulling out of it, apparently due to Chinese pressure.
- Finally in 2017, India, Australia, the US and Japan, came together and formed this “quadrilateral” coalition.

What are the Opportunities for India Under Quad Arrangement?

- **Countering China:**
 - The maritime space is a lot more **important to China than engaging in opportunistic land grab attempts** in the Himalayas.
 - A huge chunk of Chinese trade happens via the Indian oceanic routes that pass through maritime chokepoints.
 - In the event of any Chinese aggression on borders, India by cooperating with Quad countries can potentially disrupt Chinese trade.
 - Hence, unlike in the continental sphere where India seems facing a ‘nutcracker like situation’ due to China-Pakistan collusion, the maritime sphere is wide open to India to undertake coalition building, rule setting, and other forms of strategic exploration.
- **Emerging as a Net Security Provider:**
 - There is a growing **great power interest in the maritime sphere**, especially with the arrival of the concept of ‘Indo-Pacific’. For instance, many European countries have recently released their Indo-Pacific strategies.
 - With India, located right at the centre of the Indo-Pacific geopolitical imagination can realise **the vision of a ‘broader Asia’ that can extend its influence away from geographical boundaries**.
 - Moreover, India can build around **collective action in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, monitoring shipping** for search and rescue or

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anti-piracy operations, infrastructure assistance to climatically vulnerable states, connectivity initiatives and similar activities.

- Further, India with **Quad countries can check imperialist policies** of China in Indian ocean region and ensure Security and growth for all in the region.

What are the Issues Related to Quad?

- **Undefined Vision:** Although there is potential for cooperation, the **Quad remains a mechanism without a defined strategic mission.**
- **Maritime Dominated:** The entire focus on the Indo-Pacific makes the **Quad a maritime, rather than a land-based grouping**, raising questions whether the cooperation extends to the Asia-Pacific and Eurasian regions.
- **India's Aversion of Alliance System:** The fact that India is the only member that is averse to a **treaty alliance system**, has slowed down the progress of building a stronger **Quadrilateral engagement**.

Group of Four (G-4) Countries

Why in News?

On the sidelines of the **76th session of the UN General Assembly**, the **G-4 countries** highlight 'urgent need' for reform in **U.N. Security Council (UNSC)**.

Who are the Group of Four(G-4) Countries?

- The G4 is a grouping of **Brazil, Germany, India and Japan** which are **aspiring to become permanent members of the UNSC**.
- The G4 countries are supporting each other's bids for permanent membership of the UNSC.
- The G4 nations traditionally meet on the sidelines of the annual high-level UN General Assembly session.

What are the Key Highlights of the G-4 Meeting?

- They felt that the UN decision-making bodies **needed to be urgently reformed as global issues were increasingly complex and interconnected**.
- Further, they reiterated their **joint commitment to work toward text-based negotiations that lead to Reformed Multilateralism**.

- They highlighted that **General Assembly did not make "meaningful progress"** in the **Inter-Governmental Negotiations (IGN)** and **lacked transparency**.
- They reiterated their support for African countries being represented in a permanent and non-permanent capacity.
- The Ministers agreed on the need for **enhanced role and presence of developing countries and of major contributors** to the United Nations to enhance the capacity of the Council to respond effectively to the complex and evolving challenges on questions of international peace and security.

Combined Maritime Forces (CMF)

Why in News?

Recently, **INS Sunayna** arrived in Port Victoria, **Seychelles** to participate in the annual training exercise **Operation Southern Readiness of Combined Maritime Forces (CMF)**.

- This not only reinforces the **Indian Navy's commitment to maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region** but also marks the maiden participation of an Indian Navy ship in the CMF exercise.

What do we know about

Combined Maritime Forces (CMF)?

- **About:**
 - It is a **multinational maritime partnership**, which exists to **uphold the Rules-Based International Order (RBIO)** by countering illicit non-state actors on the high seas and promoting security, stability, and prosperity across approximately 3.2 million square miles of international waters, which encompass some of the world's most important shipping lanes.
 - **CMF is Commanded by a U.S. Navy Vice Admiral.**
- **Members:**
 - **CMF has 34 member nations:** Australia, Bahrain, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, Egypt, France, Germany, Greece, Iraq, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Republic of Korea, Kuwait, Malaysia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, the Philippines, Portugal, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Seychelles, Singapore, Spain, Thailand, Turkey, UAE, United Kingdom, United States, and Yemen.

Note:

- India is not a member of CMF. At the **India-US 2+2 dialogue held in April (2022)**; India had announced that it would **join the CMF as an Associate Partner**.

➤ **Focus Area:**

- CMF's main focus areas are **counter-narcotics, counter-smuggling, suppressing piracy, encouraging regional cooperation**, engaging with regional and other partners to strengthen relevant capabilities in order to improve overall security and stability.
- When requested, CMF assets at sea will also respond to environmental and humanitarian incidents.

ICAO Joins International Solar Alliance

Why in News?

Recently, the **International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)** signed a **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** with the **International Solar Alliance (ISA)** during the 42nd session of ICAO Assembly in Montreal, Canada.

- Cochin International Airport in India became the world's first fully Solar powered airport in the world in 2015.

What is the MoU About?

- The MoU carries forward the legacy of ISA.
- The event marks a new beginning **for solar energy use in the global civil aviation sector**.
- It will enable the **solarization of the aviation sector** across all Member States of ISA
- It aims to check the growth of CO₂ emissions in the **Aviation sector**, leading to India's **Net Zero Targets**.
- It will work towards **providing information, providing advocacy, capacity building** and demonstration projects.

What is the India's Net Zero Target?

- India has pledged for **Net Zero Carbon goal by 2070** in **COP 26**.
 - India has pledged a target of installing 175 GW of renewable energy of which 100 GW will be solar energy by 2022 and reduction in emission intensity by **33-35% by 2030**, to let solar energy reach the most unconnected villages and communities.

What is the International Solar Alliance (ISA)?

➤ **About:**

- Co-founded by India and France during 2015, the **ISA** is an action-oriented, member-driven, collaborative platform for increased deployment of **solar energy** technologies.
- Its basic motive is to facilitate energy access, ensure energy security, and drive energy transition in its member countries.
- ISA is the nodal agency for implementing **One Sun One World One Grid (OSOWOG)**, which seeks to transfer solar power generated in one region to feed the electricity demands of others.

➤ **Headquarters:**

- The Headquarters is in India with its **Interim Secretariat** being set up in Gurugram.

➤ **Member Nations:**

- A total of 109 countries have signed the ISA Framework Agreement and 90 have ratified it.
- All member states of the **United Nations** are eligible to join the ISA.

➤ **Observer Status to International Solar Alliance:**

- The **United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)** has granted Observer Status to the International Solar Alliance (ISA).
- It will help provide for regular and well-defined cooperation between the Alliance and the United Nations that would benefit global energy growth and development.

What is the International Civil Aviation Organisation?

- ICAO is a **United Nations (UN) specialized agency, established in 1944**, which laid the foundation for the standards and procedures for peaceful global air navigation.
- The Convention on International Civil Aviation was signed on 7th December 1944 in Chicago commonly known as the '**Chicago Convention**'.
- It established the core principles permitting international transport by air, and also led to the creation of the ICAO.
- India is among its **193 members**.
- It is headquartered in **Montreal, Canada**.

Note:

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit 2022

Why in News?

The **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation(SCO)** summit 2022 was held recently in **Samarkand, Uzbekistan**.

- Samarkand declaration was signed by the member states.
- India takes over Presidency of the SCO for 2023.

What are the Key Highlights of the Summit?

- The Samarkand declaration advocated “commitment to peaceful settlement of differences and disputes between countries through dialogue and consultation”.
- They stress that the principles of mutual respect for **sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity of States**, equality, mutual benefit, non- interference in internal affairs, and non-use or threat of use of force are the basis for sustainable development of international relations.
- The member countries are planning to develop common principles and approaches to form a **unified list of terrorists, separatist and extremist organizations** whose activities are prohibited on the territories of the SCO member states.
- Russia is also looking at **more customers for its gas** as Western countries look to cut their dependence on it.
- Russia suggested that the organisation should think about holding its own big athletic event.
- **Indian Perspective:**
 - **Connectivity:** India urged Shanghai Cooperation Organisation **member states to give each other full right to transit**, as it would **enhance connectivity** and help in establishing **reliable and resilient supply chains in the region**.
 - **Food Security:** As the whole world is facing an unprecedented energy and food crisis, India emphasised the initiative to promote millet and address issues related to food security.
 - In this context, India is trying to popularise millets, as SCO can play a big role in marking 2023 as the **International Year of Millets**.

- **Working Group on Traditional Medicine:** **World Health Organisation(WHO)** opened its **Global Center for Traditional Medicines** in Gujarat in April 2022.
- This was the **first and only worldwide centre for conventional medicine** established by the WHO.
- **Tourism:** Varanasi was declared as the **SCO Tourism and Cultural Capital** for 2022-2023 to promote the **rich cultural and historical heritage** of the people and the **tourism potential of SCO member states**.
 - Further, it will **promote tourism, cultural and humanitarian exchanges** between India and the SCO member Countries.
 - It also underlines **India's ancient civilizational links with the Member States of SCO**, especially the Central Asian Republics.
 - Under the framework of this **major cultural outreach program**, a number of events will be hosted in Varanasi during 2022-23.

What do we know about

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation(SCO)?

➤ About:

- It is a **permanent intergovernmental international organisation**. It was **created in 2001**.
- The **SCO Charter was signed in 2002**, and **entered into force in 2003**.
- It's a **Eurasian political, economic and military organisation** aiming to maintain peace, security and stability in the region.
- It is seen as a counterweight to **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)**, It is a **nine-member economic and security bloc** and has emerged as one of the **largest transregional international organisations**.

➤ Official Languages:

- Russian and Chinese.

➤ Permanent Bodies:

- SCO Secretariat in Beijing.
- Executive Committee of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) in Tashkent.

➤ Chairmanship:

- It is by rotation for a year by Member States.

➤ Genesis:

Note:



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- 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.**
- **Current Members: Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India and Pakistan.**
- **Iran is set to become a permanent member of the SCO in 2023.**
 - **India was made an observer at the SCO in 2005** and has generally participated in the ministerial-level meetings of the grouping which focus mainly on security and economic cooperation in the Eurasian region.

Asian Palm Oil Alliance

Why in News?

The apex edible oil industry associations from five major palm oil importing countries of Asia -- **India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal** -- have come together to form the **Asian Palm Oil Alliance (APOA)**.

- APOA held its first general body meeting on the sidelines of the Globoil Summit being held at Agra, India and the next meeting is expected to be held in **Indonesia early next year 2023.**
- **Globoil Summit** is one of the World's Leading Edible Oils and Agri Trade Conference, Exhibitions & Awards.
- 2022 also marks the 25th year celebration of Globoil India.

What is APOA?

- The APOA aims is safeguarding the **economic and business interests of the palm oil consuming countries** and will work towards increasing the consumption of palm oil in member countries.
- The alliance would work **towards ensuring that palm oil is recognised as a high-quality, economical, and healthy vegetable oil** and to change the negative image of palm oil.

- Membership of APOA would be **further expanded to include companies or industry bodies** associated with production or refining of palm oil across the continent.

What is Palm Oil?

- Palm oil is **currently the world's most consumed vegetable oil.**
 - It is used extensively in the **production of detergents, plastics, cosmetics, and biofuels.**
 - Indonesia and Malaysia together account for almost **90% of the global palm oil production**, with Indonesia producing the largest quantity at over 45 million tonnes in 2021.
 - Top consumers of the commodity are India, China, and the **European Union (EU).**
 - India's annual imports of edible oil is around **13-14 million tonne (MT).**
 - Around 8 MT of palm oil is imported from **Indonesia and Malaysia**, while other oils, such as soya and sunflower, come from Argentina, Brazil, Ukraine and Russia.
 - Asia accounts for **around 40% of the global palm oil consumption** while Europe accounts for 12% of palm oil trade. Indonesia and Malaysia are the biggest palm oil exporters in the world.
- India is the **largest importer of palm oil in Asia**, accounting for 15% of global imports, followed by China (9%), Pakistan (4%) and Bangladesh (2%).

Iran Nuclear Deal Talks

Why in News?

Recently, there has been a fresh round of talks over **Iran's nuclear programme** in Vienna to revive the 2015 nuclear deal which is also known as the **Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)**.

- Officials from various countries including Iran were meeting for the first time since March 2022.

What is the Iran Nuclear Deal?

- **About:**
 - The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action aims to guarantee the civilian nature of Iran's nuclear programme in **exchange for a gradual lifting of sanctions.**

Note:

- Iran signed the agreement with the **five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council** — the U.S., Russia, France, China, and the United Kingdom — as well as Germany and the European Union.
- Under the deal, **Iran agreed to significantly cut its stores of centrifuges, enriched uranium and heavy-water**, all key components for nuclear weapons.
- Iran also agreed to implement a protocol that it would **allow inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)** to access its nuclear sites to ensure Iran would not be able to develop nuclear weapons in secret.

➤ **Issues:**

- Due to the unilateral withdrawal of the United States in 2018 under former president Donald Trump and the re-imposition of U.S. sanctions, Iran has backtracked on its obligations.
- Iran subsequently exceeded the JCPOA's uranium enrichment rate of 3.67%, rising to 20% in early 2021.
 - It then crossed an unprecedented 60% threshold, getting closer to the 90 percent needed to make a bomb.
- **Opposing countries:**
 - **Israel**, America's closest ally in the Middle East, strongly rejected the deal, and other countries like Iran's great regional rival **Saudi Arabia**, complained that they were not involved in the negotiations even though Iran's nuclear programme **posed security risks for every country in the region**.

What is the significance of JCPOA for India?

➤ **Enhance regional connectivity:**

- Removing sanctions may revive **India's interest in the Chabahar port**, Bandar Abbas port, and other plans for regional connectivity.
- This would **further help India to neutralize the Chinese presence in Gwadar port**, Pakistan.
- Apart from Chabahar, **India's interest in the International North-South Transit Corridor (INSTC)**, which runs through Iran, and will improve connectivity with five Central Asian republics, may also get a boost.

➤ **Energy Security:**

- Due to the pressure linked to the **US Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)**, **India has to bring down oil imports to zero**.
- Restoration of ties between the US and Iran will **help India to procure cheap Iranian oil and aid in energy security**.

India-Uzbekistan Relations

Why in News?

Recently, the Union Minister for Commerce & Industry attended the 13th Session of the India-Uzbekistan Inter-Governmental Commission.

- Further, he highlighted **India-Uzbekistan** relations as key to India's vision of integrated extended neighbourhood.
- IGC meeting is **an important platform to deliberate on ideas, discuss issues & strengthen bilateral relations** especially in the field of trade & investment.

What are the Key Highlights of the Session?

➤ **Minister Highlighted:**

- That there is a need to take the relationship forward in newer areas like technology, digital payment solutions, and investment in start-ups.
- The need for an integrated approach for regional connectivity and cooperation.
- Further, there are seven emerging areas of cooperation between both nations namely **Digital Payments, Space Cooperation, Agri and Dairy, Pharma, Gems and Jewellery, MSME, and Inter-regional cooperation**.

How has been India-Uzbekistan Relations?

➤ **About:**

- India and Uzbekistan have a long history of cooperation.
- After Uzbekistan's independence, India was one of the first countries to acknowledge its state sovereignty.
- Bilateral relations now encompass a wider canvas, including political and strategic issues, defense and security, trade and investment, energy, agriculture, S&T, education, and people-to-people ties.

Note:



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➤ **Initiatives:**○ **Defense Cooperation:**

- The first-ever **joint military exercise** held between India and Uzbekistan was named **Dustlik**.
 - India has also assisted in setting up an India Room at the Armed Forces Academy of Uzbekistan in Tashkent.

○ **Security Cooperation:**

- India and Uzbekistan share common perspectives on a number of **security issues, including terrorism, trans-national organized crime, illegal trafficking, smuggling, etc.**
- The main focus of engagement in this sphere has been to **provide assistance to Uzbek security agencies through training and capacity building.**

○ **Trade:**

- It has increased from USD 247 million in 2019-20 to USD 342 million in 2021-22, a growth of 38.5%.

➤ **Investments:**

- Indian investments by Indian companies include those in the **field of pharmaceuticals, amusement parks, automobile components, and the hospitality industry.**
 - **Amity University and Sharda University have opened campuses in Tashkent** and Andijan respectively.
 - Indian institutions like **iCreate** are actively cooperating with Uzbek counterparts for **promoting a start-up ecosystem in Uzbekistan and training entrepreneurs in setting up incubators.**
- **Tourism:**
 - The Uzbek government has extended the **e-Visa facility to Indian tourists.**
 - Uzbekistan has also emerged as a significant source of medical tourism with about 8,000 Uzbeks annually seeking medical treatment in India.
- **Solar Power:**
 - Uzbekistan has expressed interest in joining the **International Solar Alliance.**
 - There is interest in Indian participation in the development of the solar power sector through competitive bidding.

➤ **Bilateral Mechanism:**

- **National Coordination Committees:** India and Uzbekistan have set up National Coordination Committees to **oversee the implementation of mutually agreed projects and initiatives.**

Multilateral Initiatives:

- **India-Central Asia Business Council:** The dialogue brought together Business Councils of all five Central Asian countries to take the trade and investment partnership forward with a special focus on energy, pharmaceuticals, automotive, agro-processing, education, and urban infrastructure, transport, civil aviation, IT and tourism.
- **India-Central Asia Dialogue:** It enables the issues of further strengthening ties between India and the countries of Central Asia in the spheres of politics, economics, digitalization, and cultural and humanitarian direction.

India Maldives Relations

Why in News?

Recently, the Prime Minister of India held bilateral talks with the visiting **Maldives President**.

- The Prime Minister while highlighting the threat of **transnational crime, terrorism and drug trafficking** in the **Indian Ocean** said that the coordination between India and Maldives in the field of **defence and security** is vital for peace and stability.

What are the Outcomes of the Bilateral Talks?

- **Security:**
 - To counter the threat of **transnational crime, terrorism and drug trafficking** in the Indian Ocean region, India will give **24 vehicles and one naval boat** to the **Maldives Security Force** and help **train the island-nation's security personnel.**
 - India will also cooperate in building **police facilities in 61 islands of Maldives.**
- **Male connectivity project:**
 - The two leaders also welcomed the launch of the **Greater Male Connectivity Project**, a USD 500 million project funded by New Delhi.
 - Both leaders participated in the virtual "pouring of the first concrete" ceremony of the USD500-million Greater Male Connectivity Project, being **built under grant and concessional loan support from India.**

Note:

➤ Agreements:

- The countries signed six agreements to expand cooperation in a range of areas in Maldives, including:
 - **Cybersecurity**
 - Capacity Building
 - Housing
 - **Disaster Management**
 - **Infrastructure Development**
- India announced USD100 million financial aid to help the island-nation **complete certain infrastructure projects**.

How has India's Relations with Maldives been?

➤ Security Partnership:

- Recently, the **National College for Policing and Law Enforcement (NCPLE)** was inaugurated by India's External Affairs Minister during his two day visit to Maldives in 2022.

➤ Rehabilitation Centre:

- Signing of an **USD80-million contract for the Addu reclamation and shore protection project**.
- A **drug detoxification and rehabilitation centre** in Addu built with Indian assistance.
 - The centre is **one of 20 high impact community development projects** being implemented by India in areas such as **healthcare, education, fisheries, tourism, sports** and **culture**.

➤ Economic Cooperation:

- **Tourism** is the mainstay of Maldivian economy. The country is now a **major tourist destination** for some Indians and a job destination for others.
- In August 2021, **Afcons, an Indian company**, signed a contract for the **largest-ever infrastructure project in Maldives** which is the **Greater Male Connectivity Project (GMCP)**.
- India is Maldives **2nd largest trading partner** – rising up from its 4th position in 2018.
 - In 2021, **bilateral trade registered a growth of 31%** over the previous year – overcoming the pandemic-related challenges.

Critical Minerals Alliance

Why in News?

There is growing concern in the Government over India not finding a place in the **Minerals Security Partnership**.

- Minerals Security Partnership is an **ambitious new US-led partnership** to secure supply chains of **critical minerals**, aimed at reducing dependency on China.
- **Demand for critical minerals**, which are essential for **clean energy** and other technologies is projected to **expand significantly in the coming decades**.

What are Critical Minerals?

➤ About:

- Critical minerals are elements that are the **building blocks of essential modern-day technologies** and are at **risk of supply chain disruptions**.
- These **minerals are now used everywhere** from making mobile phones, computers to batteries, **electric vehicles** and green technologies like **solar panels** and wind turbines.

➤ Major Critical Minerals:

- **Graphite, Lithium and Cobalt** are used for making EV batteries.
- **Aerospace, communications and defence industries** also rely on several such minerals as they are used in manufacturing **fighter jets, drones, radio sets** and other critical equipment.
- While **Cobalt, Nickel and Lithium** are required for batteries used in electric vehicles, rare earth minerals are critical, in trace amounts, in the **semiconductors** and **high-end electronics manufacturing**.

➤ Significance:

- As countries around the world scale up their transition towards **clean energy** and **digital economy**, these critical resources are key to the ecosystem that fuels this change.
 - Any **supply shock** can severely imperil the economy and strategic autonomy of a country over-dependent on others to procure critical minerals.

What is a Minerals Security Partnership (MSP)?

➤ About:

- It is an initiative by the United States to bolster critical mineral supply chains.

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- **Partners:**
 - Australia, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the European Commission.
- **Objective:**
 - The goal of the MSP is to ensure that **critical minerals are produced, processed, and recycled** in a manner that supports the ability of countries to **realize the full economic development benefit of their geological endowments**.
 - **Focus** would be on the supply chains of minerals such as **Cobalt, Nickel, Lithium** and also the 17 “rare earth” minerals.
- **Significance:**
 - The MSP will help **catalyze investment from governments** and the **private sector** for strategic opportunities across the full value chain that adhere to the highest **environmental, social, and governance standards**.

India-Mauritius Joint Trade Committee

Why in News?

Recently, India hosted the 1st Session of “India-Mauritius High-Powered Joint Trade Committee” under the “India-Mauritius Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA)”.

What are the Outcomes of the Session?

- **Trade:**
 - **Bilateral merchandise trade** between India and Mauritius rose to **USD 786.72 million in 2021-22** from USD 690.02 million in 2019-20.
 - Both sides agreed to **enhance bilateral collaboration** to further increase bilateral trade and realize the true potential of the bilateral relationship especially under the CECPA.
- **CECPA:**
 - Inclusion of the **General Economic Cooperation (GEC) Chapter** and **Automatic Trigger Safeguard Mechanism (ATSM)** in CECPA.
 - **The GEC chapter** will enable enhancement of **export competitiveness** and enlarging the existing scope for collaboration in the fields of Investments, Financial Services, Textile, **Small**

and **Medium Enterprises**, Handicrafts, Gems and Jewellery etc.

- ATSM protects the country from any sudden or dramatic increase in imports.
 - Under this mechanism, if the imports of a product are rising alarmingly, then after reaching a certain threshold, India can impose safeguard duties on imports from Mauritius automatically.
 - The same provision applies to Mauritius as well against Indian imports.

➤ **Skilled Professional:**

- Interactions were held between both the sides in the **Services sector** with regard to **establishing equivalence** in certification, skills and licensing requirements of various professional bodies arrangement between the **Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship** and its **counterpart in Mauritius** on developing skill-sets.
- The Mauritian side, while conveying the shortage of professionals in Mauritius in various sectors such as Information and communication technologies (ICT), Financial Services, Film production, Engineering, Health etc., welcomed movement of high skilled professionals from India to Mauritius.

What is India-Mauritius CECPA?

➤ **About:**

- It is a kind of **free trade pact** that aims to provide an institutional mechanism to **encourage and improve trade** between the two countries.
- It is a limited agreement that will **cover only select sectors**.
 - It will cover sectors such as Trade in Goods, Rules of Origin, Trade in Services, Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT), Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures, Dispute Settlement, etc.

➤ **Benefit to India:**

- More than 300 domestic goods from **agriculture, textiles, electronics and other sectors** will get market access at concessional customs duties in Mauritius.
- **Indian service providers** will have access to around 115 sub-sectors from the 11 broad service sectors, such as professional services, computer related services, research & development, other business services, etc.

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➤ **Benefit to Mauritius:**

- It will benefit from **preferential market access** into India for its 615 products, including frozen fish, speciality sugar, biscuits, fresh fruits, juices, mineral water, beer, alcoholic drinks, soaps, bags, medical and surgical equipment, and apparel.
- India has offered around **95 sub-sectors from the 11 broad services sectors**, including professional services, R&D, other business services, telecommunication, environmental, health, etc.

How has India's relations with Mauritius been?

➤ **Economic:**

○ **Social Housing Units:**

- In May 2016, India had extended a grant of USD 353 million to Mauritius as **Special Economic Package (SEP)** to execute **five priority projects identified by Mauritius**, among others:
 - Metro Express Project
 - Supreme Court Building
 - New ENT Hospital
 - Supply of Digital Tablets to Primary School Children

➤ **Social Housing Project.**

- With the inauguration of the Social Housing Project, all the high-profile projects under the SEP have been implemented.

○ **Construction of a State-of-the-Art Civil Service College:**

- It is being financed through a **grant support of USD 4.74 million**, under an MoU signed in 2017 during the visit of **Prime Minister of Mauritius to India**.

○ **8 MW Solar PV Farm:**

- It involves the installation of **25,000 PV cells to generate approximately 14 GWh of green energy annually**, to electrify approximately 10,000 Mauritian households.

○ **Foreign Direct Investment:**

- Mauritius was the **third top source (15.98%) of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)** into India in 2021-22.

➤ **Recent Developments:**

- India has signed a contract with Mauritius for the **export of an Advanced Light Helicopter Mk III**.

- The helicopter will be used by the Mauritius Police Force.
- India and Mauritius signed a **USD 100 million Defence Line of Credit agreement**.
- The two sides also discussed the **Chagos Archipelago dispute**, which was an issue of **sovereignty and sustainable development** before the **United Nations (UN)**.
 - In 2019, India voted at the UN General Assembly **in support of the Mauritian position** on the issue. India was one of the 116 countries that voted demanding that the **UK end its "colonial administration" from the group of islands**.
- India also delivered **1,00,000 Covishield vaccines to Mauritius**.

India & its Neighbourhood

Why in News?

Recently, Indian External Affairs Minister met with Maldives President stating that **India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy and the Maldives' 'India First' policy complement each other**, advancing the special partnership.

What is India's Neighbourhood First Policy?

➤ **About:**

- Under its '**Neighbourhood First**' policy, India is committed to **developing friendly and mutually beneficial relations** with all its neighbours.
 - India is an **active development partner** and is involved in several projects in these countries.
- India's policy of '**Neighbourhood First**' focuses on **creating mutually beneficial, people-oriented, regional frameworks** for stability and prosperity.
- India's engagement with these countries is based on a consultative, non-reciprocal and outcome-oriented approach, which focuses on delivering benefits like **greater connectivity, improved infrastructure, stronger development cooperation** in various sectors, security and broader people-to-people contacts.

➤ **Purpose:**

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- **Connectivity:**

- India has entered into **MoU (Memorandum of Understanding)** with members of the **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)**.
 - These agreements ensure a **free flow of resources, energy, goods, labour, and information across borders**.

- **Improving Relations with Neighbours:**

- Priority is to **improve the relations** with immediate neighbours as **peace and tranquillity in South Asia** is essential for realising development agenda.

- **Dialogue:**

- It focuses on **vigorous regional diplomacy** by engaging with neighbouring nations and building political connectivity through dialogue.

- **Economic Cooperation:**

- It focuses on **enhancing trade ties** with neighbours.
- India has participated and invested in SAARC as a vehicle for development in the region.
- One such example is the **Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN)** grouping for energy development i.e. motor vehicles, waterpower management and inter-grid connectivity.

- **Disaster Management:**

- The policy also focuses on cooperating on **disaster response, resource management, weather forecasting and communication** and also capabilities and expertise in disaster management for all South Asian citizens.

- **Military and Defence Cooperation:**

- India is also focusing on **deepening security** in the region through **military cooperation** by conducting as well as participating in **various defence exercises**.

How has India's Relations with its Neighbours been?

- **India - Maldives:**

- **Security Partnership:**
 - Recently, the **National College for Policing and Law Enforcement (NCPLE)** was inaugurated by India's External Affairs Minister during his two day visit to Maldives in 2022.
- **Rehabilitation Centre:**

- Signing of an **USD80-million contract for the Addu reclamation and shore protection project**.
- A **drug detoxification and rehabilitation centre** in Addu built with Indian assistance.
 - The centre is **one of 20 high impact community development projects** being implemented by India in areas such as **healthcare, education, fisheries, tourism, sports and culture**.

- **Economic Cooperation:**

- **Tourism** is the mainstay of Maldivian economy. The country is now a **major tourist destination** for some Indians and a job destination for others.
- In August 2021, **Afcons, an Indian company**, signed a contract for the **largest-ever infrastructure project in Maldives** which is the **Greater Male Connectivity Project (GMCP)**.

- **India - Bhutan:**

- **Indo-Bhutan Treaty of Peace and Friendship, 1949:**
 - The Treaty provides for, among other things, **perpetual peace and friendship, free trade and commerce** and equal justice to each other's citizens.
 - In 2007 the treaty was re-negotiated, and provisions were included to **encourage Bhutan's sovereignty**, abolishing the need to take India's guidance on foreign policy.

- **Hydropower Cooperation:**

- This **hydropower cooperation** comes under the **2006 Agreement on Cooperation in Hydropower**.
- Under a protocol to this agreement, India has agreed to assist Bhutan in the development of a minimum of **10,000 MW of hydropower and import of surplus electricity** from the same by 2020.

- **Economic Assistance:**

- India is Bhutan's **leading development partner**.
- Since the launch of the **First Five Year Plan of Bhutan in 1961**, India has been extending financial support to Bhutan's FYPs.
- India has allotted **Rs 4500 crore to Bhutan's 12th FYP (2018-23)**.

- **India - Nepal:**

- **High Level Visit:**
 - Recently, the Indian Prime Minister has visited **Lumbini, Nepal**, the birthplace of **Buddha**,

Note:

where he laid a **foundation stone** along with **Nepalese Prime Minister** for a **Buddhist Vihara**, being built with **Indian assistance**.

- **Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1950:**
 - The treaty talks about **reciprocal treatment of Indian and Nepali citizens** in the two countries, in residence, property, business and movement.
- It also establishes **national treatment for both Indian and Nepalese businesses** (i.e. once imported, foreign goods would be treated no differently than domestic goods).
- **Hydropower Projects:**
 - The two countries **signed five agreements**, including one between the **Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam (SJVN) Ltd and the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA)** for development and implementation of 490.2 megawatts Arun-4 hydropower project.
 - Nepal also **invited Indian companies** to invest in the West Seti hydropower project in Nepal.
- **India - Sri Lanka:**
- **Hybrid Power:**
 - India & Sri Lanka signed a MoU that provided India to **set up hybrid power projects in three Islands** (Nainativu, Delft or Neduntheevu, and Analaitivu) off Jaffna.
- **Maritime Rescue Coordination Center:**
 - India and Sri Lanka have also agreed to set up a **Maritime Rescue Coordination Center (MRCC)**, signaling greater **defence sector collaboration** between the neighbours.
- **Unitary Digital Identity framework:**
 - India has agreed to **provide a grant to Sri Lanka** to implement a '**Unitary Digital Identity framework**', apparently modelled on the **Aadhaar card**.
 - It is similar to India's own Aadhaar and under the proposed **Unitary Digital Identity framework**, Sri Lanka is expected to introduce a:
 - Personal identity **verification device** based on **biometric data**.
 - **Digital tool** that can represent the identities of individuals in **cyberspace**.
 - **Identification of individual identities** that can be accurately verified in digital and physical environments by combining the two devices.

What are the Challenges

in India's Neighbourhood First Policy?

- **Growing Chinese Pressure:**
 - It failed to take a meaningful direction and growing Chinese pressure has prevented the country from winning allies in the region.
 - On the maritime front, China is extending its influence across the **Indo-Pacific region**.
- **Interference in Domestic Affairs:**
 - India is **interfering in the domestic affairs of neighbouring countries** especially in Nepal in the violation of their sovereignty.
 - India is also creating **hurdles in free transit and free trade** within and beyond Nepal and keeps **suppressing its people and government**.
- **Impact of India's Domestic Politics:**
 - India's domestic policies are creating **problems in Bangladesh**, a Muslim-majority country, showing India's neighbourhood first policy faces serious challenges even in friendly territories like Bangladesh.
- **Impact of India's Tilt towards West:**
 - India draws closer to the West, particularly through the **Quad** and other **multilateral and mini-lateral initiatives**.
 - But Sri Lanka's connections with the West are **not moving in a good direction** as the country's current government **faces increasing criticism** from Western capitals on **human rights issues and freedoms**.

US-China Tensions

Why in News?

Recently, the Speaker of the House of Representatives of US visited Taiwan, the highest level American official to go to the island since 1997.

- This visit has raised tension between US and China.

What is the Taiwan-China issue?

- **About:**
 - **Taiwan** is an island about 160 km off the coast of southeastern China, opposite the Chinese cities of Fuzhou, Quanzhou, and Xiamen.

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➤ **History:**

- It was administered by the **Qing imperial dynasty**, but its control was passed to the Japanese in 1895.
 - After the defeat of Japan in **World War II**, the island passed back into Chinese hands.
- After the communists led by Mao Zedong won the civil war in mainland China, Chiang Kai-shek, the leader of the **nationalist Kuomintang party**, fled to Taiwan in 1949.
- Chiang Kai-shek set up the government of the Republic of China on the island and remained President until 1975.
- Following the split of China and Taiwan in the civil war, the Republic of China (ROC) government was relocated to Taiwan. On the other hand, The Communist Party of China (CPC) established the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the mainland.
 - Since then, the PRC observes Taiwan as a traitor province and awaits reintegration with Taiwan, if possible, by peaceful means.

➤ **Present status:**

- China has never recognized the existence of Taiwan as an independent political entity, arguing that it was always a Chinese province.
 - But China and Taiwan have had economic ties.
 - Many migrants from Taiwan work in China, and China has investments in Taiwan.

What is USA's Policy toward Taiwan?

➤ **About:**

- It has maintained a '**One China**' policy since the 1970s, under which it recognizes Taiwan as a part of China.
 - '**One China**' policy means that the nations who want to have diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC) have to recognize the PRC but not the ROC as China, breaking the relations with **Republic of China (ROC)**.
 - It established that the communist government in mainland China was the legitimate representative and Taiwan was a breakaway part of it.
 - But it also has unofficial ties with Taiwan.

- And do support Taiwan in the form of defending the island from external aggression by providing military equipment and intelligence.

➤ **China's Concern with the Recent Visit:**

- As China considers Taiwan as a part of its territory, it claimed that the visit would severely undermine China's sovereignty and territorial integrity.
 - It could gravely impact the foundation of **China-US relations** and send a seriously wrong signal to Taiwan's independence forces.
 - According to China, the presence of a senior American figure in Taiwan would indicate some kind of US support for Taiwan's independence.

What is Indian Policy towards Taiwan?

- India also follows One China Policy and it doesn't have formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan. But it has an office in Taipei for diplomatic functions.
 - **India-Taipei Association (ITA)** is headed by a senior diplomat.
- whereas, Taiwan has the **Taipei Economic and Cultural Center (TECC)** in New Delhi.
- The Indo-Taiwanese ties basically **focused on trade, commerce, culture, and education**.
- In recent times, after China's belligerence in **Galwan**, India has stepped up its relationship with Taiwan.
 - The Indian government had handpicked diplomat to become its envoy in Taipei.
 - Also, the ruling party's two MPs attended the swearing-in ceremony of Taiwan President through virtual mode.

What is the Importance of Taiwan?

- Semiconductors are critical components that power electronics from computers and smartphones to brake sensors in cars.
 - The production of chips involves a complex network of firms that design or make them, as well as those that supply the technology.
- The majority of semiconductors are produced in Taiwan and it dominates the outsourcing of semiconductor manufacturing.
- Further, its contract manufacturers together **accounted for more than 60% of total global semiconductor revenue** last year.

Note:

Ceasefire between Israel and Palestine

Why in News?

After three days of violence between Israel and Palestine, which resulted in killing of dozens of populations in both the countries, a ceasefire took place recently.

- Earlier this year as well, tensions flared up at **Jerusalem's al-Aqsa Mosque** between the **Palestinians and Israeli police**.
- These recurring clashes are part of the ongoing **Israeli–Palestinian conflict**.

What do we know about the Recent Conflict?

- **Reason for Conflict:**
 - **Israeli aircraft** pummelled targets (**Islamic Jihad Leaders**) in **Gaza**.
 - In response, **Iran-backed Palestinian Jihad militant group** fired hundreds of rockets at Israel.
 - Islamic Jihad has fewer fighters and supporters than **Hamas**.
- **Actions from Israel:**
 - Israel launched its operation with a **strike on a leader of the Islamic Jihad** and followed up on with **another targeted strike** on a second prominent leader.
- **Actions from Gaza:**
 - As per the Israeli army, **militants in Gaza fired about 580 rockets toward Israel**.
 - Israel had intercepted many of them, with two of those shot down being fired toward Jerusalem.
- **UNSC Meeting:**
 - **The U.N. Security Council** scheduled an **emergency meeting** on the violence.
 - **China**, which holds the council presidency for August 2022, scheduled the session in response to a request from the **United Arab Emirates**, which represents **Arab nations** on the council, as well as **China, France, Ireland and Norway**.

What is the Conflict between Israel and Palestine?

- **Conflict Over Jerusalem:**
 - **Jerusalem** has been at the **center of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict**.

- According to the original 1947 **United Nations (UN)** partition plan, **Jerusalem was proposed to be an international city**.
 - However, 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**.
 - Following the **Six-Day War in 1967**, an **armed conflict** between Israel and a coalition of Arab states primarily comprising **Jordan, Syria and Egypt**, the **Waqf Ministry of Jordan** that had till then held control of the al-Aqsa Mosque, **ceased to oversee the mosque**.
 - Israel captured **East Jerusalem from Jordan in the Six-Day War 1967** and **annexed it later**.
- Since its annexation, Israel has **expanded settlements in East Jerusalem**.
 - Israel sees the whole city as its “**unified, eternal capital**”, whereas the Palestinian leadership across the political spectrum have maintained that they would **not accept any compromise formula** for the future Palestinian state unless **East Jerusalem is its capital**.
- **Recent Developments:**
 - **Al-Aqsa Mosque & Sheikh Jarrah:**
 - In May 2021, **Israeli armed forces attacked 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.
 - The threatened **eviction of dozens of Palestinian families in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah** escalated the crisis further.
 - **West Bank Settlement:**
 - Israel's Supreme Court has rejected a petition **against the eviction of more than 1,000 Palestinian inhabitants** of a rural part of the occupied **West Bank in an area which Israel has designated for military exercises**.
 - The judgment paved the way for the **demolition of eight small villages** in a rocky, arid area near Hebron known to **Palestinians as Masafer Yatta** and to **Israelis as the South Hebron Hills**.
- **India's Stand on the Crisis:**

Note:



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- India in the recent years has been **following a dehyphenation policy between Israel and Palestine**.
 - India's policy on the longest running conflict in the world **has gone from being unequivocally pro-Palestine** for the first four decades, to a **tense balancing act with its three-decade-old friendly ties with Israel**.
- In 2017, in an unprecedented move, **India's PM visited only Israel** and not Palestine.
 - Then, the recent visit of the **Prime Minister to Palestine (2018), Oman and the UAE** is again a continuation of similar policy.

New START Treaty

Why in News?

Recently, Russia suspended United States of America's on-site inspections under **New START Treaty** with Washington due to Western sanctions and coronavirus infections.

What is New START Treaty?

- **New START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty)** was the last remaining arms reduction pact between the former Cold War rivals and caps to 1,550 the number of nuclear warheads that can be deployed by **Russia and United States of America**.
- It entered into force on 5th February, 2011.
- It continues the bipartisan process of verifiably reducing U.S. and Russian strategic nuclear arsenals by limiting both sides to 700 strategic launchers and 1,550 operational warheads.
- Its duration was **for ten years** that is till 2021, but it was extended by five more years till 2026.

What are the various Treaties signed Between USA & Russia?

- **Strategic Arms Limitation Talks-1(SALT):**
 - It began in 1969, Under the Interim Agreement, **both sides pledged not to construct new Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) silos**, not to increase the size of existing ICBM silos significantly, and capped the number of **Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missile (SLBM)** launch tubes and SLBM-carrying submarines.

- **Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty-1 (START):**
 - Signed in 1991, the agreement required the destruction of excess delivery vehicles which was verified using an intrusive verification regime that involved on-site inspections, the regular exchange of information (including telemetry), and the use of national technical means (i.e., satellites).
- **Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty-2:**
 - Signed in 1993, called for reducing deployed strategic arsenals to 3,000-3,500 warheads and banned the deployment of destabilizing multiple-warhead land-based missiles.
- **Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT):**
 - Signed in 2004, under which the United States and Russia reduced their strategic arsenals to 1,700-2,200 warheads each.
- **Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START):**
 - Signed in 2010, **a legally binding, verifiable agreement that limits each side to 1,550 strategic nuclear warheads deployed on 700 strategic delivery systems** (ICBMs, SLBMs, and heavy bombers) and limits deployed and nondeployed launchers to 800.

UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan

Why in News?

Recently, **U.N. Secretary General** has appointed **Rear Admiral Guillermo Pablo Rios** of Argentina as the **Head of Mission and Chief Military Observer** for the **United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP)**.

What is UNMOGIP?

- It was established in January 1949.
- After the first war in Kashmir (1947-1948), India approached the **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)** to bring the conflict in Kashmir to the notice of Security Council members.
- In January 1948, the **UNSC adopted Resolution 39**, establishing the three-member **United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP)** to investigate and mediate the dispute.

Note:

- In April 1948, by its Resolution 47, the UNCIP was reconstituted as UNMOGIP.

What is the Function of UNMOGIP?

- The **Karachi Agreement** of July 1949 firmed up the role of UN-level military observers and **permitted supervision of the Ceasefire Line** established in Jammu and Kashmir.
 - After the **1st Indo-Pak armed conflict in 1948** under the supervision of the UNCIP, military representatives of both Pakistan and India met in Karachi and signed the Karachi Agreement on 27th July 1949.
 - It established a **Cease-Fire Line (CFL) in Kashmir**.
- UNMOGIP has **six field stations in Pakistan-administered Kashmir (PAK)** and four field stations in **Indian-administered Kashmir (IAK)** to monitor ceasefire.
- Following renewed hostilities of 1971, UNMOGIP has **remained in the area to observe developments pertaining to the strict observance** of the ceasefire of 17 December 1971 and report thereon to the UN Secretary-General.

Why does the UNMOGIP seem Contentious for India?

- India officially maintains that the **UNMOGIP's role was "overtaken" by the Simla Agreement of 1972** that established the **Line of Control (LoC)**.
 - In the **Shimla Agreement**, India and Pakistan agreed to move the ceasefire line to the Line of Control and **to resolve their disputes bilaterally, without the intervention of a third party**.
 - Kashmir and the Pakistan-sponsored terrorism **within now is largely an internal matter of India**.
- Since 1972 India has not gone to UNMOGIP with complaints against Pakistan.
- In 2014, **India requested that UNMOGIP cease operations in Kashmir**, and the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) reiterated in 2017 that **UNMOGIP has no mandate to monitor the situation in Kashmir**.
- Pakistan, on the other hand, does not accept the **Indian argument and continues to seek cooperation from the UNMOGIP**.
- As a result of these divergent policies, Pakistan continues to lodge complaints with the UNMOGIP against **alleged Indian ceasefire violations**.

What is United Nations

Security Council Resolution 47?

➤ About:

- It is concerned with the **resolution of the Kashmir conflict**.
- According to it, Pakistan was to **withdraw its nationals who had entered the State for the purpose of fighting** and to prevent future intrusions.
- The **five member UNMOGIP reconstituted** through this resolution urged India and Pakistan to hold a plebiscite after the restoration of law and order.
- The UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) was meant to supervise the Cease Fire Line (CFL) established in Jammu and Kashmir in July 1949 under the Karachi Agreement.
- UNMOGIP is funded **through the UN's regular budget**.

➤ India's stand on Resolution 47:

- India rejected the **UNSC Resolution 47 and maintained that the resolution ignored the military invasion by Pakistan** and placed both nations on an equal diplomatic ground as a dismissal of Pakistan's aggression.
- The Instrument of Accession (IoA) signed by the Maharaja of Kashmir was ignored in the resolution.

➤ Pakistan's stand on Resolution 47:

- It objected to even the minimum presence of Indian forces in Kashmir, as mandated by the resolution.
- It wanted equal representation in the state government for the dominant party in Pakistani-held Kashmir i.e the Muslim Conference.

Maritime Security

Why in News?

Recently, **Sri Lanka's envoy in India** said India-Sri Lanka should build a **framework to discuss maritime concerns** like the **Chinese satellite and missile tracking ship, the Yuan Wang 5** in Hambantota Port.

Note:



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What is Yuan Wang 5?

- **Yuan Wang 5:**
 - It is a third-generation vessel of the **Yuan Wang series** that entered service in 2007.
 - This series of ships include “**space tracking ships involved in supporting the manned space programme**”.
 - It has the ability to **track satellites and intercontinental missiles**.
- **Hambantota Port:**
 - Hambantota International Port Group is a **Public Private Partnership** and a Strategic Development Project between the **Government of Sri Lanka and China Merchants Port Holdings (CMPort)**.
 - This port was **given to China by Sri Lanka** on a 99-year lease after Sri Lanka failed to repay Chinese loans.
 - It is seen as a case of Chinese “**debt trap**” Diplomacy.

What is the need for Maritime Security in India?

- **About:**
 - Maritime security **doesn't have a commonly agreed definition**.
 - It classifies issues in the maritime domain comprising **national security, marine environment, economic development, and human security**.
 - Besides the world's oceans, it also deals with **regional seas, territorial waters, rivers and ports**.
- **Significance:**
 - Maritime security is of **utmost significance to the world community** as there are maritime concerns ranging from **piracy at sea to illegal immigration and weapon smuggling**.
 - It also deals with **threats of terrorist attacks and environmental catastrophes**.
 - For India, maritime security is an important aspect of national security as it has a coastline of over 7,500 km.
 - With advancement in technology, **physical threats in the maritime region** have now been overshadowed by technological threats.
 - India's **exports and imports** have remained mostly across the shipping lanes of the Indian Ocean. Therefore, securing **Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs)** have been an important issue for India in the 21st century.

Chinese presence:

- In 2019, the Chinese **research vessel** Shiyan 1, was seen near the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
- In August 2020, in the middle of the ongoing **conflict in eastern Ladakh on the Sino-Indian border**, China sent its Yuan Wang class research vessel into the Indian Ocean.

What are India's Initiatives for Maritime Security?**Security and Growth for All (SAGAR) Policy:**

- India's SAGAR policy is an integrated regional framework, unveiled by Indian Prime Minister during a visit to Mauritius in March 2015. The pillars of SAGAR are:
 - India's role as a **net security provider in the Indian Ocean region (IOR)**.
 - India would continue to **enhance the maritime security capacities and economic resilience** of friendly countries in IOR.
 - A more integrated and cooperative focus on the future of the IOR, which would enhance the prospects for the sustainable development of all countries in the region.
 - The primary responsibility for peace, stability and prosperity in the IOR would be on those “who live in this region”.

Mission SAGAR:

- Launched in May 2020, ‘**Mission Sagar**’ was India's initiative to deliver **Covid-19** related assistance to the countries in the Indian Ocean Littoral states. The countries included were **Maldives, Mauritius, Madagascar, Comoros and Seychelles**.
 - Under ‘Mission Sagar’, the **Indian Navy has been deploying its ships to send medical and humanitarian aid** to the counties in the **Indian Ocean Region (IOR)** and beyond.

Abiding by the International Law:

- India accepted an **United Nations Convention for the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)** tribunal award on the maritime boundary arbitration between India and Bangladesh.
- It envisaged contributing a new impulse to effective international economic cooperation among the littoral states of the **Bay of Bengal (BIMSTEC)**.

Data Sharing:

Note:



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- Sharing data on **threats to commercial shipping** is an important component of enhancing maritime security.
- In this context, India established an **International Fusion Centre (IFC)** for the **Indian Ocean region in Gurugram in 2018**.
- IFC is jointly administered by the **Indian Navy and Indian Coast Guard**.
- IFC serves the objective of generating Maritime Domain Awareness on safety and security issues.

India-Iran Pact on Seafarers

Why in News?

India and Iran signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to smoothen movement of seafarers from both the countries as per the provisions of **International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping (STCW) for Seafarers (1978)**.

What is the International Convention on STCW for Seafarers?

- It sets **qualification standards for masters, officers and watch personnel** on seagoing merchant ships.
- STCW was adopted in 1978 by a conference at the **International Maritime Organization (IMO)** in London and entered into force in 1984. The Convention was **significantly amended in 1995**.
- The 1978 STCW Convention was the first to establish basic requirements on training, certification and watchkeeping for seafarers on an international level.
- It prescribes **minimum standards relating to training, certification and watchkeeping** for seafarers which countries are obliged to meet or exceed.
- One especially important feature of the Convention is that it applies to ships of non-party States when visiting ports of States which are Parties to the Convention.

How have been the India-Iran Relations?

- **India and Iran** share close civilizational ties since the times of the Persian Empire and Indian kingdoms.
- Iran is an important **nation in India's neighborhood and in fact, the two countries shared a border until India's partition** and independence in 1947.

- The "Tehran Declaration" signed during former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's visit to Iran affirmed the **shared vision of the two countries for an "equitable, pluralistic and co-operative international order"**.
- It recognized the then Iranian President Mohammad Khatami's vision of a "dialogue among civilisations" as a paradigm of international relations based on principles of tolerance, pluralism and respect for diversity.

What is the Significance of India-Iran Relations?

➤ Location and Connectivity:

- Iran is located at a strategic and **crucial geographical location** between the **Persian Gulf** and the **Caspian Sea**.
- Iran is important to India as **it provides an alternate route of connectivity to Afghanistan and Central Asian** republics through **Chabahar Port** without passing the land route through Pakistan.

Cheaper Crude Oil:

- Since, Iran is one of the **largest deposits of crude oil and natural gas** in the world.
- India may well consider restarting oil imports from Iran. If India changes course and resumes imports of Iranian oil, **it could potentially encourage some other countries to follow suit and open up additional oil** in the market, which could eventually bring prices of crude oil down.

➤ Connectivity with Eurasia:

- The **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)**, aims to connect India, Iran, Afghanistan, Russia, Central Asia, and **Europe through multi-modal transport, reducing the transit time of goods drastically**.
- Although some part of it has been operationalized, again, due to sanctions on Iran, its full potential has not been realised. India and Iran could well play a major part in giving INSTC the required boost to reap the benefits of resultant trade.

➤ Energy Security:

- The **Iran-Oman-India gas pipeline (IOI) too is an ambitious project** that has been stuck for a long time. Fortunately, Iran and Oman signed a deal to develop two gas pipelines and an **oil field along their maritime borders**.

Note:



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- If this comes through, there is potential for the pipeline being extended to India, which would help overcome the loss of the failed **Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) pipeline and facilitate the supply of natural gas to India.**

Talks Between India & NATO

Why in News?

Recently, India held its first political dialogue with the **North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)** in Brussels on December 12, 2019.

What is NATO?

- **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)** is a **military alliance established by the North Atlantic Treaty** (also called the **Washington Treaty**) of **April 1949**, by the United States, Canada, and several Western European nations to provide collective security against the **Soviet Union**.
- There are currently **30 member states**.
 - **Original Members:**
 - Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and the United States.
 - **Other Countries:**
 - **Greece and Turkey** (1952), **West Germany** (1955, from 1990 as Germany), **Spain** (1982), the **Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland** (1999), **Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia** (2004), **Albania and Croatia** (2009), **Montenegro** (2017), and **North Macedonia** (2020).
 - France withdrew from the integrated military command of NATO in 1966 but remained a member of the organization, it resumed its position in NATO's military command in 2009.
 - Recently, **Finland and Sweden** have shown interest to join NATO.
 - **Headquarters:** Brussels, Belgium.

What is the NATO-India Political Dialogue?

- **About:**
 - India held its first political dialogue with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in Brussels on December 12, 2019.

Significance:

- NATO has been engaging both China and Pakistan in bilateral dialogue.
- While Engaging NATO in a political dialogue would provide India an opportunity to bring about a **balance in NATO's perceptions** about the **situation in regions and issues of concern to India**.
 - There is convergence in the perspectives of both India and NATO on China, terrorism, and Afghanistan, including **Pakistan's** role in Afghanistan.

Issues:

- According to NATO's perspective, the biggest threat it face was not China, but Russia whose aggressive actions are threatening European security.
- Further, NATO had faced difficulties to convene meetings of the **NATO-Russia Council** due to Russian refusal to place issues such as Ukraine and Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty,
 - Given the **divergence among NATO countries**, its view on China was seen as mixed; while it did deliberate on China's rise, it presented **both a challenge and an opportunity**,
 - Further, in **Afghanistan**, NATO saw the Taliban as a political entity.

NATO's View:

- Dialogue with India would further enhance the cooperation among NATO countries and India's geo-strategic location shares a unique perspective and **enhances international security in India's own region and beyond**.

India-Gabon Relations

Why in News?

Recently, A delegation from Gabon visited India and interacted with the Indian business community, also India congratulated Gabon on its **Independence Day (17th August)**.

- Earlier, the Vice President of India visited Gabon, where he signed two **MoUs (Memorandum of Understanding)**.

What are the MoUs?

- **Establishment of a Joint Commission** between the Governments of India and Gabon.

Note:

- Diplomats' training institutes, Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Services and Gabonese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- India signed to work with **Gabon to strengthen cooperation in various spheres** at bilateral, regional, and multilateral levels.

How has been the India-Gabon Partnership?

- **Diplomatic:**
 - India and Gabon have **enjoyed warm and friendly relations dating back to the pre-independence era** of Gabon.
 - Former Vice President of India visited the African nation of Gabon in May 2022 making it the **first-ever high-level visit of India to Gabon**.
 - Both India and Gabon are **currently serving as non-permanent members** of the **UNSC (United Nation Security Council)**.
- **Business and Trade:**
 - The Bilateral trade between both nations reached USD 1.12 billion in 2021-22.
 - India is the **2nd largest destination for Gabonese exports**.
 - In the business sector, more than **50 Indian companies are engaged in the Gabon Special Economic Zone**.
- **Cooperation on International Forum:**
 - Both India and Gabon are members of the **Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)**.
 - NAM focuses on **mainstream contemporary issues of relevance to the developing world**.
 - Gabon **supports India's candidature at various international forums**.
 - India congratulated Gabon for getting elected as a non-permanent member of UN Security Council for the term 2022-23.
 - India supported for the Common African Position enshrined in **the Ezulwini Consensus and Sirte Declaration**.
 - The **Ezulwini Consensus** is a position on international relations and reform of the United Nations, agreed by the African Union.
- It calls for a more representative and democratic Security Council, in which Africa, like all other world regions, is represented.

- The **Sirte Declaration (1999)** was the resolution adopted to establish the African Union.
- **International Solar Alliance:**
 - Gabon was among the first countries **to sign and ratify the International Solar Alliance agreement**.
 - India conveyed **to extend all possible assistance to Gabon to achieve its renewable energy targets**.
 - Gabon plans to have **100% clean energy by 2030**.
- **Education:**
 - A number of Gabonese nationals pursue scholarship/training programs offered by India under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) and ICCR schemes.
- **Energy Cooperation:**
 - India imported about USD 670 million worth crude oil from Gabon in 2021-22, making it an **important partner for India's energy security** requirement.
- **Indian Diaspora:**
 - People from the Indian community are basically engaged in **infrastructure projects, trading, export of timber and metal scrap**.
 - The Indian diaspora have been making significant contributions in various fields in Gabon.
 - The Indian community in Gabon has kept Indian culture alive and major Indian festivals are celebrated by the entire community together.

Airspace Violations Near LAC

Why in News?

Recently, India and China held a special round of military talks on **Air space Violations** at the **Chushul-Moldo border meeting point in Eastern Ladakh**.

- The talks were held against the backdrop of the **"provocative behaviour"** by Chinese fighters flying close to the **Line of Actual Control (LAC)** often violating the 10-km no-fly zone Confidence Building Measure (CBM).

Why do Such Incidents Keep Happening?

- The LAC is **not fully demarcated** and there are **differences of perception on the alignment** due to which such incidents keep happening.
- To maintain peace and tranquillity along the LAC, the **two sides regularly hold talks at various levels on the ground**.

Note:



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- Since the **stand-off began** in eastern Ladakh in May 2020, both sides have forward **deployed air assets along the LAC** and also augmented bases and air defences.

What is the Picture of India China Recent Conflicts?

- The **June 2020** clash in the Galwan Valley - fought with sticks and clubs, not guns - **was the first fatal confrontation between the two sides since 1975.**
 - The most recent conflict was - in **January 2021** - left troops on both sides injured. It took place along the border in India's Sikkim state, which is **sandwiched between Bhutan and Nepal.**
- Lately, the Chinese have been **complaining about the IAF upgrading its capability to detect Chinese Air Force aircraft operating within the territory** controlled by them in the Tibet region.
- The two sides have been **able to resolve three friction points in eastern Ladakh** and are holding discussions to find solutions for the **Hot Springs** area also. The two have conducted 16 rounds of Corps commander-level talks to de-escalate the situation and tensions which began after the Chinese tried to alter the status quo on the LAC in 2020.

What is Line of Actual Control?

- **About:** The Line of Actual Control (LAC) is **the demarcation that separates Indian-controlled territory from Chinese-controlled territory.**
 - LAC is different from the **Line of Control (LoC) with Pakistan:**
 - The LoC was designated so in 1972, following the **Shimla Agreement** between the two countries. **It is delineated on a map.**
 - The **LAC, in contrast, is only a concept – it is not agreed upon by the two countries,** neither delineated on a map or demarcated on the ground.
 - **Length of the LAC:** India considers the LAC to be 3,488 km long, while the Chinese consider it to be only around 2,000 km.
- **Sectors Across the LAC:**
 - **It is divided into three sectors:** the eastern sector which spans Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim (1346 km), the middle sector in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh (545 km), and the western sector in Ladakh (1597 km).

- The alignment of the LAC in the eastern sector is along the 1914 McMahon Line.
- The McMahon line marked out previously unclaimed/undefined borders between Britain and Tibet.
- The middle sector is the least disputed sector, while the western sector witnesses the highest transgressions between the two sides.

What are the Agreements Between India-China on Air Space?

- As per the existing agreements between India and China, **operation of fighter aircraft and armed helicopters is restricted to a distance from the LAC.**
- According to the '**Agreement on Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity along the LAC in India-China Border Area**' of 1996, "combat aircraft (to include fighter, bomber, reconnaissance, military trainer, armed helicopter and other armed aircraft) **shall not fly within 10 km of the LAC.**"
- **Between 1993 and 2012,** a set of **Confidence Building Measures (CBMs)** were agreed upon by India and China **to maintain peace between the two countries.**

What are the Confidence Building Measures (CMB)?

- In a face-off situation **neither side shall use force or threaten to use force** against the other;
- Both sides **shall treat each other with courtesy** and refrain from any provocative actions;
- If the border personnel of the two sides come to a face-to-face situation due to differences on the alignment of the LAC, they shall exercise self-restraint and take all necessary steps to avoid an escalation of the situation.
- **No military aircraft of either side shall fly across the LAC,** except by prior permission.
- Neither side shall **open fire, cause biodegradation, use hazardous chemicals,** conduct blast operations or hunt with guns or explosives within two kilometres from the LAC.

What do We know about Air Space and Related Laws?

- **About:**
 - Air space, in international law, is the **space above a particular national territory,** treated as belonging to the **government controlling the territory.**

Note:

- It **does not include outer space**, which, under the **Outer Space Treaty of 1967** is declared to be free and not subject to national appropriation.
 - The treaty, however, **did not define the altitude at which outer space begins and air space ends.**
- **Air Sovereignty:**
 - It is the fundamental right of a sovereign state to **regulate the use of its air space and enforce its own aviation law.**
 - State controls the **entry of foreign aircraft into its territory** and that persons within its territory are subject to its laws.
 - The principle of air space sovereignty is **established through the Paris Convention on the Regulation of Aerial Navigation (1919)** and subsequently by other multilateral treaties.
 - Under the **1994 Chicago Convention**, contracting states **agree to permit aircraft registered in the other contracting states and engaged in commercial non-scheduled flights** to fly into their territory without prior **diplomatic permission** and, moreover, to pick up and discharge passengers, cargo, and mail.
 - This provisions, in practice, has become a dead letter.
- **Prohibited Air Space:**
 - It refers to an area of air space within which flight of aircraft is not allowed, usually due to security concerns. It is one of many types of special use airspace designations and is depicted on aeronautical charts with the letter "P" followed by a serial number.
- **Restricted Air Space:**
 - Different from prohibited air space, in this space, the entry is **typically forbidden for all aircrafts and is not subjected to clearance from ATC (Air Traffic Control)** or the air space's controlling body.

CPEC Authority

Why in News?

Recently, China gave nod to Pakistan's decision to scrap the **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) Authority** amid reports of **growing rift between the all-weather friends** over the slow pace of the USD 60 billion project.

What do we know about the CPEC Authority?

- **About:**
 - The **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) Authority** was established through an ordinance in 2019.
 - It was aimed at **accelerating the pace of CPEC-related activities**, finding **new drivers of growth**, unlocking the **potential of interlinked production networks** and **global value chains** through regional and global connectivity.
- **Reasons for Suspension:**
 - **Pakistan occupied Gilgit Baltistan** has been witnessing a spurt in the local protest against the Pakistan Army over land issues.
 - The local population is angry at the **"land grabbing"** spree of the army, all in the name of CPEC.
 - In April 2022, **three Chinese were killed in a suicide bombing in Karachi University by Baloch Liberation Army (BLA)**, which opposed China's investments in Balochistan.
 - China is reportedly pressing Pakistan to **permit the Chinese agencies to provide security** for their personnel while **Islamabad is resisting** as it meant boots on the ground for Chinese armed forces.
 - The **CPEC projects** were also **facing delays** because of the change in taxation policies by the last government in violation of commitments given to China.

What is the China Pakistan Economic Corridor?

- **About:**
 - CPEC is a **3,000-km long route of infrastructure projects** connecting China's **northwest Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region** and the **Gwadar Port in the western province** of Balochistan in Pakistan.
 - It is a **bilateral project between Pakistan and China**, intended to promote **connectivity across Pakistan** with a network of highways, railways, and pipelines accompanied by **energy, industrial, and other infrastructure development projects.**
 - It will pave the way for China to **access the Middle East and Africa** from Gwadar Port, enabling China to **access the Indian Ocean** and in return China will support **development projects in Pakistan** to overcome the latter's **energy crises** and stabilising its faltering economy.

Note:



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- CPEC is a part of the **Belt and Road Initiative**.
 - The BRI, launched in 2013, aims to link Southeast Asia, Central Asia, the Gulf region, Africa and Europe with a network of land and sea routes.
- **Concern for India:**
 - **India's Sovereignty:**
 - India has continuously opposed the project since it passes through the **Pakistan-occupied Kashmir territory of Gilgit-Baltistan** – a claim opposed by Pakistan.
 - The corridor is also perceived to be an **alternative economic road link for the Kashmir Valley** lying on the Indian side of the border.
 - **Chinese Control Over Trade Via Sea:**
 - Major US ports on the East Coast depend on the Panama Canal to trade with China.
 - Once CPEC becomes fully functional, China will be in a position to offer a '**shorter and more economical**' trade route (avoiding travel through the entire Western Hemisphere) to most North and Latin American enterprises.
 - This will give China the **power to dictate the terms** by which the international movement of goods will take place between the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans.
- **Chinese String of Pearls:**
 - China has been increasing its presence in the Indian Ocean with the '**String of Pearls**' ambition: A term coined by the Americans and often used by Indian defence analysts to refer to a Chinese game-plan of encircling India through a network of airfields and ports.
 - With an existing presence in **Chittagong port** (Bangladesh), **Hambantota port** (Sri Lanka), **Port Sudan** (Sudan), **Maldives**, **Somalia** and **Seychelles**, a control of **Gwadar port** establishes complete dominance of the Indian ocean by the Communist nation.
 - **Stronger BRI and Chinese Dominance in Trade Leadership:**
 - China's BRI project that focuses on the **trade connectivity between China and the rest of Eurasia** through a network of ports, roads and railways has been often seen as **China's plan to dominate the region politically**.
- CPEC is one giant step in the same direction.

What is One Belt One Road (OBOR)?

➤ About:

- **One Belt One Road** is a multi-billion-dollar initiative launched in 2013.
- It aims to link Southeast Asia, Central Asia, the Gulf region, Africa and Europe with a network of land and sea routes.
- It has been launched to **undertake big infrastructure projects** in the world which in turn would also enhance the global influence of China.

Structure:

- It contains the following six economic corridors:
 - The New Eurasian Land Bridge
 - The China-Mongolia-Russia Corridor
 - The China-Central Asia-West Asia Corridor
 - The China-Indochina Peninsula Corridor
 - The China-Pakistan Corridor
 - The Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Corridor
 - Additionally, the maritime Silk Road connects coastal China to the Mediterranean via Singapore-Malaysia, the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea, and the Strait of Hormuz.

Chief of Royal Malaysian Navy Visits India

Why in News?

Recently, the Chief of Royal Malaysian Navy visited India at the invitation of Chief of the Naval Staff, Indian Navy.

- Both Navies have recently concluded the **Bilateral Exercise Samudra Laksamana** in May 2022 and the **Navy-to-Navy Staff Talks** in June 2022.

How has India Malaysia Relations been?

- India established **diplomatic relations with Malaysia in 1957**.
- **Economic Relation:**
 - India and Malaysia have signed the **Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA)**.
 - CECA is a kind of **Free Trade Agreement (FTA)**.

Note:

- India has also signed the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in services and investments with the 10-member **Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)**.
 - Malaysia is the third largest trading partner in **ASEAN**.
- Bilateral trade between India and Malaysia is significantly biased in favour of Malaysia.
- **Defence & Security Cooperation:**
 - Joint military exercises “**Harimau Shakti**” are held annually between the two countries.
- **Traditional medicine:**
 - India and Malaysia signed a MoU on cooperation in the field of **Traditional Medicine** in October 2010.
 - The Government of Malaysia has been working to popularize **AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy)** systems in Malaysia.
 - AYUSH systems are practiced in Malaysia.
- **Recent Developments:**
 - In 2020, India resumed purchases of **Malaysian palm oil** after a gap of four-month following a diplomatic row between the two countries.
 - The former Prime Minister of Malaysia had criticised India’s **Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA)** which was considered as an interference in the internal matters of India.

India-Bangladesh River Water Sharing MoU

Why in News?

Recently, India and Bangladesh have finalised the text of the **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** on interim water sharing of the Koshiyara river.

What are the Key Highlights of the MoU?

- It was finalised during the **38th meeting of the ministerial-level Joint Rivers Commission (JRC)** of India and Bangladesh,
- It welcomed the finalisation of the design and location of the water intake point on Feni River to meet the drinking water needs of Sabroom town in Tripura as per the October 2019 India-Bangladesh MoU.

- Further, the discussion was held on a number of ongoing bilateral issues of mutual interest, including **water-sharing of common rivers, sharing of flood data, addressing river pollution, conducting joint studies on sedimentation management, river bank protection works, etc.**

What is Joint Rivers Commission (JRC)?

- **About:**
 - The **Joint Rivers Commission** of India and Bangladesh was **constituted in the year 1972 as a bilateral mechanism to address issues of mutual interest on common / border / transboundary rivers.**
 - The JRC is headed by **Water Resources Ministers of both countries.**
- **Significance:**
 - It is **commencing after a long gap of twelve years**, although technical interactions under the framework of JRC have continued in the interim.
 - As **India and Bangladesh share 54 rivers**, of which seven have been identified earlier for developing the framework of water-sharing agreements on priority.
 - During the latest meeting, they **agreed to include eight more rivers for data exchange.**
- **Outcomes:**
 - It discussed the whole gamut of issues related to **common rivers between the two countries, especially the Ganges, Teesta, Manu, Muhuri, Khowai, Gumti, Dharla, Dudhkumar, and Koshiyara.**
 - Apart from this, the exchange of **flood-related data and information, riverbank protection works, joint basin management, and the Indian river interlinking project** was discussed in detail.
 - It agreed to undertake some more common rivers for the exchange of data and information towards preparing the draft framework of the interim water sharing agreement.

What are the Key Points of Koshiyara River?

- The Koshiyara River is a **tributary river in Bangladesh and Assam.**
 - It **forms on the India-Bangladesh border as a branch of the Barak River when the Barak separates into the Koshiyara and Surma.**
- The waters of the Koshiyara pick up **tributaries from Manipur, Mizoram, and Assam.**

Note:



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- The Kushiara rejoins with the Surma at Markuli in Ajmiriganj upazila (Bangladesh) and flows south upto Bhairab Bazar (Bangladesh) receiving the name Kalni.
 - The Kalni meets with the Dhanu (Bangladesh), a branch of the Surma and renamed as the Meghna.

What are the Key Facts About Feni River?

- The Feni River, also known as Feni Nodi in Bengali, forms part of the India-Bangladesh border.
- It originates in the South Tripura district, passes through Sabroom town on the Indian side, and meets the Bay of Bengal after it flows into Bangladesh
- It has great agricultural importance for the people living in the towns near to this river.
- This river is also the **source of their livelihood** through which they obtain a number of benefits like watering their crops with its water and also using the water for their regular use.
- **Maitri Setu, a 1.9km Long Bridge Over Feni River** is constructed in Tripura to link India-Bangladesh.

Russia-China Cooperation in the Arctic

Why in News?

Recently, **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)** Warned Russia's Military built up and Chinese interest in Arctic Region.

- As per various reports, China has deepening **strategic partnership with Russia in the Arctic Region**.

What are the Concerns Regarding the Cooperation?

- **Russian Military Build-up:**
 - Russia has set up a **new Arctic Command and has opened hundreds of new and former Soviet-era Arctic military sites**, including airfields and deep-water ports.
 - Significant **Russian military build-up with new bases**, new weapons systems and also using the High North as a test bed for their most advanced weapons, including hypersonic missiles.
- **China's Claim:**
 - China has declared itself a near-Arctic state. Further, China plans to build the **world's largest**

icebreaker and is spending tens of billions of dollars on energy, infrastructure and research projects in the north.

➤ Climate Change:

- As **climate change** thaws more ice, it is predicted to **open up more waterways enabling deeper penetration in the area**.
 - Further, these channels can be **exploited by nations as they explore new shipping routes that could be a gamechanger in trade**, cutting down longer and costlier journeys around the globe.

➤ Conflict with US's Interest:

- While China is not an Arctic nation, its **deepening strategic partnership with Russia and increased cooperation in the Arctic** has worried the US which thinks this pairing is against American values and interests.

Is there any cooperation among Nations in the Arctic?

- There are eight Arctic nations - **The US, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and Russia**.
 - These are part of the **Arctic Council**, an **intergovernmental forum that was formed to promote cooperation in the region**.
 - On three occasions, the Arctic States have negotiated legally binding agreements. these are -
 - Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic (signed 2011),
 - Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic (signed 2013),
 - Agreement on Enhancing International Arctic Scientific Cooperation (signed 2017).

What is the Relevance of Arctic Region for India?

➤ About:

- **India's interests in the Arctic region are scientific, environmental, commercial as well as strategic.**
- **India became the observer of Arctic Council** in 2013 and its membership as an observer was **renewed in 2018 for another five years**.

Note:

- **The National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR)**, Ministry of Earth Sciences, Government of India, is the nodal agency for India's Polar research programme, which includes Arctic studies.
- India's Ministry of External Affairs provides the external interface to the Arctic Council.
- **Research Station:**
 - India's engagement with the Arctic dates back to 1920 with the signing of the **Svalbard Treaty in Paris**.
 - Since July 2008, India has a **permanent research station in the Arctic called Himadri at NyAlesund, Svalbard Area in Norway**.
 - It has also deployed a multi-sensor moored observatory called **IndARC** in the Kongsfjorden fjord since 2014.
- **Impacts on India:**
 - The Arctic influences atmospheric, oceanographic and biogeochemical cycles of the earth's ecosystem.
 - Moreover, the Arctic is **vulnerable to climate change and global warming**.
 - The effects are manifested by the loss of sea ice, ice caps, and warming of the ocean and atmosphere.
 - It will lead to **lowering of salinity levels, rising temperature differential between land and oceans in the tropical regions**, drying of subtropical areas and increase in precipitation at higher latitudes.

World Summit of Information Society 2022

Why in News?

Recently, the Minister of Communications attended the opening ceremony of the **World Summit of Information Society (WSIS) 2022** in Geneva, Switzerland, where **India showcased its telecom prowess during multilateral & bilateral engagements**.

- The participation comes with India contesting the re-election to the **ITU (International Telecommunication Union) Council**, for the term 2023-2026. India has been a member of ITU, since 1869 and has been continuously participating, actively in the works, and activities of the Union.

What is WSIS?

- The World Summit on the Information Society Forum 2022 represents the world's **largest annual gathering of the 'ICT for development' community**.
- The Forum provides **structured opportunities to network, learn and participate in multi-stakeholder discussions and consultations on WSIS implementation**.
- The Agenda and Programme of the Forum will be built on the basis of the submissions received during the Open Consultation Process.
- Furthermore, the 2022 WSIS Forum will **provide an opportunity to serve as a platform to track the achievements of WSIS Action Lines** in collaboration with the UN Agencies involved and provide information and analyses of the implementation of WSIS Action Lines since 2005.

What are the Highlights of the Minister's Address?

- India has developed the Low mobility Large Coverage Standard, earlier called **5Gi** using a new waveform that enables 5G towers to cover wider areas in rural and remote areas.
 - These standards were among the first 5G standards, which have been approved by the **ITU** and have also become part of Globally harmonized 3GPP (3rd Generation Partnership Project) Release 17 standards. These will be immensely helpful for countries with similar geographical spread.
- Over six hundred villages are being connected on **Optical Fibre cable**, with nearly 175,000 already connected.
- Villages left out of 4G connectivity are being covered through **Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF)**.
- India focuses on the **use of technologies that can accelerate development and bridge this divide**, like using E band wireless carriers, **LEO (Low Earth Orbit)** and **MEO (Middle earth Orbit)** satellite connectivity among others.
- India has issued the first service license for LEO or MEO connectivity and hopes to harness the technology to enable digital inclusion in remote areas.
- Developing 5G test bed, indigenous 4G and 5G stack, development of Indian 5G standards and setting up of 6G innovation forum are the initiatives to reduce cost, facilitate faster 5G spread in rural areas and eliminate dependency on specific vendors.

Note:



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What is Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF)?

- **USOF** ensures that there is universal **non-discriminatory access to quality ICT services** at economically efficient prices to people in rural and remote areas.
 - Currently, it is charged at the rate of 5%, while the TSPs demand it to be reduced to 3%.
- It was created under the Department of Telecommunications in **2002**.
- It is a **non-lapsable fund**, i.e., the unspent amount under a targeted financial year does not lapse and is accrued for next years' spending.
 - All credits to this fund require **parliamentary approval** and it has a **statutory support** under **Indian Telegraph (Amendment) Act, 2003**.

India & Gulf Countries

Why in News?

Recently, Indian Vice President visited **Qatar**, which is one of the **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Countries** (**Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE**), where he highlighted the **strength of India-Qatar ties** and called for **building an enabling environment and forging more collaborations** for mutual benefit.

What are the Key Highlights of the Vice President's Visit to Qatar?

- **India-Qatar Start Up bridge:**
 - The Vice President launched the "India-Qatar Start Up bridge" that **aims to link the start-up ecosystems of the two countries**.
 - India has emerged as the **3rd largest ecosystem for startups globally**, with over 70,000 registered Startups.
 - India is home to 100 unicorns with a **total valuation of over USD 300 billion**.
- **Environment and Climate Change:**
 - India has been making sustained efforts for the protection of environment and combating climate change.
 - He recalled **India's leadership in establishing the International Solar Alliance (ISA)** and increasing the thrust on renewable energy.

- He invited Qatar, as **India's trusted partner in its energy security**, to be a partner in this journey for sustainability and join the ISA.

- **Joint Business Council Between Business Chambers:**

- He expressed happiness that a Joint Business Council between Business Chambers of India and Qatar has been established and that a Joint Task Force on Investments would take its work forward.
- He also complimented Invest **India and Qatar Investment Promotion Agency** for entering into a **partnership of guiding and assisting businesses** on both sides to tap new and emerging opportunities.

- **Collaborations at Multilateral Forums:**

- He called for more collaboration between India and Qatar at multilateral forums like the **Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU)**, Asian Parliamentary Assembly, and others.

How much trade does India do with countries in this region?

- **UAE:**

- The UAE was **India's third largest trading partner in 2021-2022**, and second largest for both exports (USD 28 billion) and imports (USD 45 billion) when these are counted individually.
- In terms of total trade volume, the UAE (USD 72.9 billion) was **behind the United States (USD 1.19 trillion) and China (USD 1.15 trillion)**.
- The UAE accounted for **6.6% of India's total exports and 7.3% of imports in the last financial year**, up 68.4% since the previous year when international trade was impacted by the pandemic.

- **Saudi Arabia:**

- At a total volume of USD 42.9 billion in 2021-22, **Saudi Arabia was India's fourth largest trading partner**.
- While exports were low at USD 8.76 billion (2.07% of India's total exports), imports from **Saudi Arabia were the fourth largest at USD 34.1 billion (7%)**, up 50% from the previous year. Most of it was crude oil.

- **Iraq:**

- It was **India's fifth largest trading partner** in 2021-22 at USD 34.3 billion.

Note:

- **Qatar:**
 - The total trade was USD 15 billion, accounting for just 1.4% of India's total trade, but the country is India's most important supplier of natural gas.
 - Qatar accounts for **41% of India's total natural gas imports**.
 - The UAE accounts for another 11%.
- **Oman:**
 - For Oman, India was the 3rd largest (after UAE and China) source for its imports and 3rd largest market (after UAE and Saudi Arabia) for its non-oil exports in 2019.
 - Major Indian financial institutions have a presence in Oman. Indian companies have invested in Oman in sectors like iron and steel, cement, fertilisers, textile etc.

What is the Scenario of Indians in the Gulf and the Remittances?

- More than 13.46 million Indian citizens work abroad. If **Persons of Indian Origin** (those who have taken up citizenship of other countries, and their descendants) are added, this number goes up to over 32 million.
- Counting only the 13.4 million **non-resident Indians (NRIs)**, the Gulf has the largest numbers.
 - The UAE (3.42 million), Saudi Arabia (2.6 million) and Kuwait (1.03 million) together account for over half of all NRIs.
 - In terms of remittances from abroad, **India was the largest recipient in 2020 at USD 83.15 billion**, according to World Bank data.
 - This was nearly **twice the remittances to the next highest recipient**, Mexico, at USD 42.9 billion.
- The largest contributor is the **huge Indian diaspora in the Gulf**.
 - The UAE accounted for 26.9%, Saudi Arabia for 11.6%, Qatar for 6.4%, Kuwait for 5.5% and Oman for 3%. Beyond the GCC, remittances from the US accounted for 22.9%, second only to the UAE.

What are Recent Developments?

- Recently, India and Oman signed a **Programme of Cooperation (POC)** in the fields of Science and Technology for the period 2022 – 2025.
 - The POC for Cooperation in the fields of Science and Technology was signed in pursuance of

the Agreement for Cooperation in Science and Technology (S&T) concluded on 5th October, 1996 between Oman and India.

- In September 2021, India and the UAE **formally launched negotiations on the India-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)**.
- In 2021, the Indian External Affairs Minister met the Foreign Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, where both countries discussed **bilateral cooperation in multilateral forums** such as the **United Nations, G-20 and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)**.
- In 2021, India and Bahrain agreed to strengthen their **historic ties, including in areas of defence and maritime security**.
- In 2020, the legal and legislative committee of Kuwait's National Assembly approved the **draft expat (expatriate) quota bill**.

Organisation of Islamic Cooperation

Why in News?

Recently, the **Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)** condemned and denounced the comments on Prophet Muhammed made by two Indians.

- Ministry of External Affairs rejected the OIC comments, adding that the views expressed by the individuals did not reflect the views of the Indian government.
- Earlier, India has **lashed out at the OIC for being "communal minded"** amid the **Karnataka hijab row**.

What is the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation?

- **About:**
 - The OIC claims to be the **"collective voice of the Muslim world"**.
 - It was established at a 1969 summit in Rabat (Morocco) after what it describes as the 'criminal arson' of **Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem**.
- **Members:**
 - It has 57 member Countries.
 - India is not a Member of OIC.
- **Objectives:**
 - The OIC endeavours **to establish solidarity** among member states.

Note:



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- To support **restoration of complete sovereignty and territorial integrity** of any member state under occupation.
- To protect, defend and **combat defamation of Islam**.
- To prevent **growing dissension in Muslim societies** and work to ensure that member states take a united stand at the **U. N. General Assembly, Human Rights Council** and other international fora.
- **Headquarters:** Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.
 - The organisation plans to permanently move its headquarters to **East Jerusalem once the disputed city is 'liberated'**.
 - Moreover, it aspires to hold Israel accountable for **'War Crimes'** and violations of international law.
- **OIC charter:**
 - The organisation **adheres to a charter that lays out its objectives, principles and operating mechanism**.
 - First adopted in 1972, the **charter has been revised multiple times** in line with emerging conditions in the developing world.
 - The present charter was adopted in March 2008 at Dakar in Senegal.
 - It enshrines that **all members be guided and inspired by the noble Islamic teachings and values** alongside committing themselves to the purposes and **principles of the U. N. charter**.

How does OIC Function?

- **Membership:**
 - U. N. members with a **Muslim majority can join the organisation**.
 - The membership is to be **ratified with full consensus** at the OIC's Council of Foreign Ministers.
 - The same provisions apply for **acquiring an observer status**.
- **Decision Making:**
 - All decision-making in the forum **requires a quorum defined by the presence of two-thirds of the member states** and complete consensus.
 - In case a consensus cannot be reached, decisions shall be made by a **two-thirds majority of members present and voting**.
 - The Council of Foreign Ministers is the **chief decision-making body and meets annually to decide on how to implement the OIC's general policies**.

- They take decisions and resolutions on matters of common interest, review their progress, consider and approve programmes and their budgets, consider specific issues bothering member states and recommend establishing a new organ or committee.
- **Finance:**
 - The OIC is financed by **the member states proportionate to their national incomes**.
 - A member's voting rights are **suspended when their arrears equal or exceed the amount of contributions** due from them for the preceding two years.
 - The member is **only allowed to vote if the Council of Foreign Ministers is satisfied** that the failure is due to conditions beyond the member's control.
- **Islamic Summit:**
 - It is composed of Kings and heads of state, is the **supreme authority of the organisation**.
 - Convening every three years, it **deliberates, takes policy decisions, provides guidance on issues relevant to the organisation** and considers issues of concern to the member states.
- **Council of Foreign Ministers:**
 - The Council of Foreign Ministers is the **chief decision-making body and meets annually** to decide on how to implement the OIC's general policies.
 - They **take decisions and resolutions on matters of common interest**, review their progress, consider and approve programmes and their budgets, consider specific issues bothering member states and recommend establishing a new organ or committee.
- **Standing Committees:**
 - The OIC also has **standing committees for cooperation on information and cultural affairs, economic and commercial matters, scientific and technological initiatives and for Jerusalem**.

India-Israel Relations

Why in News?

Recently, Israel's Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister visited India and held bilateral Meetings and agreed to deepen defence ties.

Note:

What are the Key Highlights of the Visit?

➤ Joint Declaration:

- The two Ministers presented a joint declaration marking 30 years of Israel-India relations.
- The declaration reiterated the commitment of both the countries to deepen defence ties.

➤ India-Israel Vision on Defense Cooperation:

- Both sides adopted the **India-Israel Vision on Defense Cooperation** to further strengthen the existing framework of the Indo-Israeli defense cooperation architecture.

➤ A Letter of Intent was Exchanged:

- A Letter of Intent on enhancing cooperation in the field of futuristic defence technologies was exchanged.
- Bilateral Cooperation will be in line with Prime Minister Modi's Make in India vision.

➤ Military-To-Military Activities:

- Both countries reviewed the existing military-to-military activities which have increased despite the challenges due to **Covid-19 pandemic**.
- They discussed ways to increase cooperation in all domains with a focus on Research & Development in future technologies and defence co-production.

➤ Acknowledgement of Mutual Security Challenges:

- Both the Ministers acknowledged mutual security challenges and their convergences on a number of strategic and defence issues.
- They expressed commitment to work together to enhance cooperation in all forums.

How has the India-Israel Relations been So Far?

➤ Diplomatic Ties:

- Though India officially recognised Israel in 1950, the two countries established full diplomatic ties only on 29th January 1992. As of December 2020, **India was among 164 United Nations (UN) member states** to have diplomatic ties with Israel.

➤ Economic and Commercial Relations:

- From USD 200 million in 1992, bilateral merchandise trade stood at USD 4.14 billion (excluding defence) during the period **April 2020 – February 2021 with the balance of trade being in India's favour**.
 - Trade in diamonds constitutes about 50% of bilateral trade..

- India is **Israel's third-largest trade partner in Asia** and seventh largest globally.

- Israeli companies have invested in India in energy, renewable energy, telecom, real estate, water technologies, and are focusing on setting up R&D centers or production units in India.

- India is also in dialogue with Israel for concluding a **Free Trade Agreement (FTA)**.

➤ Defence:

- India is the **largest buyer of military equipment from Israel**, which, in turn, is the second-largest defence supplier to India, after Russia.

- The Indian armed forces have inducted a wide array of Israeli weapon systems over the years, which range from Phalcon AWACS (Airborne Warning And Control Systems) and Heron, **Searcher-II** and Harop drones to Barak anti-missile defence systems and Spyder quick-reaction anti-aircraft missile systems.

- The acquisitions also include a host of Israeli missiles and precision-guided munitions, from Python and Derby air-to-air missiles to Crystal Maze and Spice-2000 bombs.

- At the **15th Joint Working Group (JWG 2021)** meeting on Bilateral Defence Cooperation, countries agreed to form a Task Force to formulate a comprehensive Ten-Year Roadmap to identify new areas of cooperation.

➤ Cooperation in Agriculture:

- In May 2021, "**a three-year work program agreement**" for development in agriculture cooperation, was signed.

- The programme aims to grow existing Centres of Excellence (CoE), establish new centers, increase CoE's value chain, bring the Centres of Excellence into the self-sufficient mode, and encourage private sector companies and collaboration.

➤ Science & Technology:

- Recently, experts from India and Israel deliberated on widening the scope of India-Israel Industrial R&D and Technological Innovation Fund (I4F) at its 8th Governing Body meeting.

- They approved 3 joint R&D projects worth 5.5 million USD and suggested measures to create a broader India-Israel collaborative ecosystem.

- I4F is a cooperation between the two countries to promote, facilitate and support joint industrial

Note:



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R&D projects between companies from India and Israel to address the challenges in the agreed 'Focus Sectors'.

India-Bangladesh Railway Links Restored

Why in News?

Two years after train services were stopped due to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, passenger train services between India and Bangladesh resumed recently.

- The following trains have been flagged off after the resumption of train services:
 - **Bandhan Express** from **Kolkata to Khulna**
 - **Maitree Express** from **Dhaka to Kolkata**.
 - **Mitali Express** from **New Jalpaiguri to Dhaka**

What are other Important Rail Links Between India and Bangladesh?

- **Petrapole (India)-Benapole (Bangladesh),**
- **Gede (India)-Darshana (Bangladesh),**
- **Singhabad (India)-Rohanpur (Bangladesh),**
- **Radhikapur (India)-Birol (Bangladesh),**
- **Haldibari (India)-Chilahati (Bangladesh).**
- **Agartala (India)- Akahaura (Bangladesh)**

Indo-Bangladesh ties

- **Historical Ties:**
 - Fifty years ago, the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971 had added the colours of victory for India as it led the charge towards the formation of the new nation of Bangladesh.
- **Defence Cooperation:**
 - **Joint exercises:**
 - **SAMPRITI (Army).**
 - **TABLE TOP (Air).**
 - **IN-BN CORPAT (Navy).**
 - **Exercise Bongosagar (Navy).**
 - **SAMVEDNA (Multinational Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Exercise with Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and UAE)**
 - **Border Management:** India and Bangladesh share **4096.7 km. of border**, which is the longest land boundary that India shares with any of its neighbours.

Economic Relations:

- Bangladesh is **India's largest trading partner** in the sub-continent with the total bilateral trade between the two nations standing at USD 9.5 billion (2019-20), down compared to the previous fiscal (2018-19), having crossed USD10 billion.
- India's exports to Bangladesh account for more than 85% of the total bilateral trade.
- In December 2020, to further boost the bilateral trade cooperation, an **India-Bangladesh CEO's Forum** was launched.
- Bangladesh has appreciated the Duty-Free and Quota Free access given to Bangladeshi exports to India under **South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA)** since 2011.

Cooperation in Connectivity:

- In March 2021, **Maitri Setu—a 1.9 km bridge** built over Feni River joining **Sabroom in India and Ramgarh in Bangladesh** was inaugurated.
- Protocol on **Inland Water Transit and Trade (PIWTT).**
- **Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) Motor Vehicles Agreement** is in pipeline.

Partnership on Multilateral forums:

- **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).**
 - **Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC).**
 - **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA).**

Other Developments:

- **Line of Credit:**
 - India has extended 3 Lines of Credits (LOC) to Bangladesh in the last 8 years amounting to USD 8 billion for development of infrastructure in sectors including roads, railways, shipping and ports.
- **Covid-19 Support:**
 - Bangladesh is the biggest recipient of Made-in-India **Covid-19** vaccine doses, accounting for 16% of the total supplies.
 - India also offered collaboration in therapeutics and partnership in vaccine production.

Emerging Disputes:

- Bangladesh has already raised concerns over roll out of the **National Register of Citizens (NRC)** in Assam, an exercise carried out to identify genuine

Note:



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Indian citizens living in Assam and weed out illegal Bangladeshis.

- Currently, Bangladesh is an active partner of the **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)** that Delhi has not signed up to.
- In the security sector, Bangladesh is also a major recipient of Chinese military inventory, including submarines.

The International Day of UN Peacekeepers

Why in News?

International Day of **UN (United Nations) Peacekeepers** is observed globally on **29th May**.

- **Theme for 2022:** People. Peace. Progress. The Power of Partnerships.

What is UN Peacekeeping?

➤ About:

- UN Peacekeeping began in 1948 when the UN Security Council authorized the deployment of UN military observers to the Middle East.
- UN Peacekeeping helps countries navigate the difficult path from conflict to peace.
- It deploys troops and police from around the world, integrating them with civilian peacekeepers to address a range of mandates set by the **UN Security Council (UNSC) and the General Assembly**.

➤ Composition:

- UN peacekeepers (often referred to as Blue Berets or Blue Helmets because of their light blue berets or helmets) can include **soldiers, police officers, and civilian personnel**.
- Peacekeeping forces are **contributed by member states on a voluntary basis**.
- Civilian staff of peace operations are international civil servants, recruited and deployed by the UN Secretariat.

➤ UN Peacekeeping and India:

- India has been among the **largest troop-contributing countries to the UN peacekeeping missions**. As of November 2021, India is the second-highest military (1,888) and fifth-highest (139) police-contributing

country to the United Nations Organisation Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).

- More than 200,000 Indians have served in 49 of the 71 UN peacekeeping missions established around the world since 1948.
- India has a long tradition of sending women on UN peacekeeping missions.
- In 2007, India became the first country to deploy an all-women contingent to a UN peacekeeping mission.
- Despite its presence in several countries as part of the Peacekeeping missions, India has routinely **expressed its displeasure at a similar mission headquartered in Srinagar and Islamabad**.
 - The United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) was established in January, 1949 to supervise the ceasefire between India and Pakistan.
 - India has reiterated that the mission has “outlived its relevance” after the Simla Agreement was signed by India and Pakistan in July 1972 and the establishment of the LoC (Line of Control).

China's Expansion in the Pacific Island Countries

Why in News?

The Foreign Minister of China is currently on a **visit to ten Pacific Island Countries (PICs)** and has co-hosted with Fiji the Second China-Pacific Island Countries Foreign Ministers Meeting.

- However, China's effort to push through a comprehensive framework deal **failed to gain consensus among the PICs at the meeting**.
- In April 2022, China signed a **controversial security deal with the Solomon Islands**, which raised regional concerns.

What are Pacific Islands Countries?

- The Pacific Island Countries are a **cluster of 14 states which are located largely in the tropical zone of the Pacific Ocean** between Asia, Australia and the Americas.
- They include Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Republic of Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

Note:



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What are the Implications of China's Latest Move?

- **May Drag PICs into Major power Conflicts:**
 - The PICs as a collective did not agree to China's **extensive and ambitious proposals**, and therefore China failed to get a consensus on the deal.
 - Signing the economic and security deal proposed by China, **could have negative implications for the sovereignty and unity of PICs** and may drag them into major power conflicts in the future.
- **Made Traditional Powers in the Region More Cautious:**
 - The **intensification of China's diplomacy towards the Pacific Islands** have made the powers who have traditionally controlled the regional dynamics like the US and Australia more cautious.
 - The US has **started revisiting its diplomatic priority for the region** ever since the China-Solomon Islands deal.
 - The role played by the US in mobilising opposition against China's proposed deal could not be ruled out as the **Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)** is the only country which recognises China and at the same time is part of the Compact of Free Association with the US.
 - The Federated States of Micronesia is a country spread across the western Pacific Ocean comprising more than 600 islands.

What are the Highlights of the India-PICs Relations?

- **About:**
 - India's interaction with the PICs is **still largely driven by the presence of sizeable Indian Diaspora** in the region.
 - Nearly 40% of Fiji's population is of Indian origin and about 3000 Indians living in Papua New Guinea at present.
 - In terms of institutional engagements, India participates in the **Pacific Island Forum (PIF)** as one of the key dialogue partners of the Forum.
 - The most important development in facilitating India's interaction with the PICs in recent years has been the formation of an action-oriented **Forum for India and Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC)**.
 - FIPIC, a multinational grouping, was launched in 2014.

➤ Areas of Cooperation:

- **Blue Economy:**
 - The PICs with their **resource-rich EEZs can be attractive sources of natural resources like Liquefied natural gas (LNG) and hydrocarbons** to fuel India's growing economy and can also provide new markets.
 - India can engage with these countries particularly, given its own emphasise on the idea of '**Blue Economy**'.
- **Climate Change and Sustainable Development:**
 - The geography of these island countries makes them vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate challenges.
 - The increasing soil salinity due to the **rising sea level** threatens the low lying island states, also giving rise to the problem of displacement.
 - Therefore, **climate change and sustainable development are crucial areas of concern** where a closer partnership can be developed for effective and concrete solutions.
- **Disaster Management:**
 - Most of the Pacific Island countries are prone to a variety of natural disasters, with widespread social, economic and environmental consequences.
 - India can assist in building capacities of Disaster Risk Resilience.
 - In September 2017, India launched Climate Early Warning Systems in seven PICs.

Trincomalee Port of Sri Lanka

Why in News?

Sri Lanka plans to develop Trincomalee port into an industrial hub that would spark global interest.

- The proposal is a long-standing plan to monetise land that belongs to the **Sri Lanka Port Authority**, by getting foreign and local investment for a **special economic zone, an industrial park, or an energy hub**.

What are the Key Highlights?

➤ About Trincomalee Port:

- Trincomalee harbour is **on the northeastern coast of Sri Lanka**. It is situated on a peninsula in Trincomalee Bay—formerly called Koddiyar Bay.

Note:

- Trincomalee is the **nearest port to Chennai, India.**
- **Significance of the Port:**
 - **Geopolitical and Strategic Significance:** The location of this port in Indian ocean has strategic significance, it has been of interest to several countries, including India, Japan and the US.
 - Japan commissioned the **2020 ADB (Asian Development Bank) study** on the development of Trincomalee port.
 - **Dedicated Port Terminal:** Trincomalee already has several dedicated port terminals —it has Lanka Indian Oil Company facility, Tokyo Cement facility, and grain facility for a flour factory, and a tea terminal.
 - There is also a **jetty for bulk cargo such as coal, gypsum and cement.**
 - **Decongest Other Ports:** This development will decongest and help in offloading operations at **Colombo Port** which will increase the supply chain.
 - **Non-Containerised Cargo Traffic:** This would also entail the development of the port for non-containerised cargo traffic, such as cement, coal or other industrial raw material.

Industry Transition Dialogue between India and Sweden

Why in News?

Recently, India and Sweden hosted the **Industry Transition Dialogue** in Stockholm, as a part of their joint initiative i.e. **Leadership for Industry Transition (LeadIT).**

- This high level dialogue has contributed to the UN Conference '**Stockholm+50**' and set the agenda for COP27 (Climate Change).

What is LeadIT?

- **About:**
 - The LeadIT initiative **lays specific focus on hard to abate sectors** that are key stakeholders in the global climate action and require specific interventions.
 - It gathers **countries and companies that are committed to action** to achieve the **Paris Agreement.**
 - It was launched by the **governments of Sweden and India at the UN Climate Action Summit** in 2019 and is supported by the **World Economic Forum.**

- LeadIT members subscribe to the notion that energy-intensive industry can and must progress on low-carbon pathways, aiming to achieve **net-zero carbon emissions** by 2050.

Members:

- The total membership of LeadIT is 37 including countries and companies together.
 - Japan and South Africa, the latest members of the initiative.

What are the Highlights of India - Sweden Relations?

Political Relations:

- Diplomatic relations were **established in 1948** and steadily strengthened over the decades.
- The first **India-Nordic Summit** (India, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Iceland and Denmark) took place in the year 2018 in Sweden.
- Sweden also participated in the **First India Nordic Baltic** (including Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) Conclave co-chaired by India in November 2020.
- In May 2022, the **Prime Minister of India held a series of bilateral meetings** with his counterparts from Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Iceland and Finland.

Multilateral Engagement:

- In the 1980s India and Sweden worked together on nuclear disarmament issues within the framework of the '**Six Nation Peace Summit**' (that also included Argentina, Greece, Mexico and Tanzania).
- At the UN General Assembly, **India and Sweden present an annual Joint Statement on Humanitarian Affairs.**
- In 2013, during the Swedish Presidency, India joined the **Arctic Council** as an Observer at the Kiruna Ministerial Meeting.

Economic and Commercial relations:

- **India is Sweden's third-largest trade partner** after China and Japan in Asia.
- Trade in goods and services has increased from USD 3 billion (2016) to USD 4.5 billion (2019).

Defence and Aerospace (Sweden-India Joint Action Plan 2018):

- It highlights collaboration on space research, technology, innovation, and applications.

Note:



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India Vietnam Partnership

Why in News?

Recently, Indian Defence Minister visited Vietnam, where he signed some Defence Agreements, which will significantly enhance the scope and scale of existing defence cooperation.

- India and Vietnam are marking **50 years of the establishment of bilateral diplomatic relations**.
- Earlier, **India and Vietnam** signed a **Letter of Intent (LOI)** to collaborate in the field of digital media, paving the way for further strengthening the partnership between the two countries.

What are the Key Highlights of the Visit?

- **India-Vietnam Defence Partnership towards 2030:**
 - Both the Defence Ministers signed the '**Joint Vision Statement on India-Vietnam Defence Partnership towards 2030**' to bolster bilateral defence cooperation.
- **Defence Line of Credit:**
 - The two ministers agreed on the finalisation of the **USD 500 million Defence Line of Credit extended to Vietnam** with implementation of the projects under it adding substantially to Vietnam's defence capabilities and **furthering the government's vision of 'Make in India, Make for the World.'**
- **Mutual Logistics Support:**
 - Both inked a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on **Mutual Logistics Support**.
 - This is a **major step towards simplifying procedures for mutually beneficial logistic support and is the first such major agreement** which Vietnam has signed with any country.
 - India has signed several logistics agreements including all **Quad countries**, France, Singapore and South Korea beginning with the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement with the U.S. in 2016.
 - Logistics agreements are administrative arrangements facilitating access to military facilities for exchange of fuel and provisions on mutual agreement simplifying logistical support and increasing operational turnaround of the military when operating away from India.

➤ Simulators and a Monetary Grant:

- India will gift **two simulators and a monetary grant towards setting up of Language and IT (Information Technology) Lab** at the Air Force Officers Training School for capacity building of the Vietnamese Armed Forces.

How has been the India-Vietnam Relations?

➤ Background:

- While defence cooperation has been one of the most significant pillars of the **Comprehensive Strategic Partnership** initiated by the two countries in 2016, the relationship between the two countries was established much earlier.
 - India had established the Consul General's office in Hanoi as early as 1956.
 - Vietnam established its diplomatic mission in 1972.
- India had stood by Vietnam in opposing US intervention in that country at the cost of embittering Indo-US relations.
- The relationship was further strengthened when India, in the early 1990s, initiated its **"Look East Policy"** with the specific objective of economic integration and political cooperation with Southeast Asia and East Asia.

➤ Areas of Cooperation:

- **Strategic Partnership:**
 - India and Vietnam agreed to strengthen their strategic partnership "in line with **India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)** and the **ASEAN's Outlook on Indo-Pacific** to achieve shared security, prosperity and growth for all in the region."
- **Economic Cooperation:**
 - Trade and economic relations for mutual benefit, which have significantly improved over the years particularly after the **ASEAN- India Free Trade Agreement** was signed.
 - India realises that Vietnam is a potential regional power in South East Asia with great political stability and substantial economic growth.
 - India is investing in development and capacity assistance for Vietnam through quick impact projects (QIP), proposals in the area of water resource management in **Vietnam's Mekong**

Note:



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Delta region, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and digital connectivity.

○ **Trade relations:**

- During the **Financial Year (FY) April 2020 – March 2021**, bilateral trade between India and Vietnam reached USD 11.12 billion.
 - Indian exports to Vietnam amounting to USD 4.99 billion and Indian imports from Vietnam at USD 6.12 billion.

○ **Defence Cooperation:**

- While Vietnam is interested in modernising its armed forces, India is interested in developing defence capabilities of its South-East Asian partners sufficiently to maintain peace in the strategic region.
- Vietnam is interested in India's **Akash surface-to-air systems and Dhruv advanced light helicopters and Brahmos missiles**.
 - Apart from this, the defence relations include capacity building, dealing with common security concerns, training of personnel, and cooperation in defence R&D.
 - Indian Naval Ship INS Kiltan undertook a visit to Ho Chi Minh City in 2020 to deliver flood relief materials for the people of Central Vietnam (**Mission Sagar III**).
 - It also participated in the **PASSEX Exercise** with the Vietnam People's Navy.
 - The China factor also weighs heavily in the respective strategic calculus of India and Vietnam.
 - Both countries had fought wars with China and both have border problems with that country. China aggressively continues to encroach in the territories of the two countries.
 - Hence, it is natural for both the countries to come closer with a view to restrain China from its aggressive actions.

○ **Cooperation at Multiple Fora:**

- At the **UN Security Council**, both India and Vietnam are serving concurrently as non-permanent members in 2021.
- India and Vietnam closely cooperate in various regional forums such as **East Asia Summit**, **Mekong Ganga Cooperation**, **Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM)**.

○ **People-to-People Contacts:**

- The year 2019 was celebrated as the ASEAN-India Year of Tourism. Both countries have facilitated a simplified visa regime to promote bilateral tourism.
- The Embassy of India organised various events to celebrate Mahatma@150 in 2018-19. These include Jaipur artificial limb fitment camps, which were organised in four provinces of Vietnam, benefitting 1000 people, under the '**India for Humanity**' initiative of the Government of India.

Israel Signs Free Trade Deal with UAE

Why in News?

Recently, **Israel signed a free trade deal with the United Arab Emirates, its first with an Arab country**, building on their US-brokered normalization of relations in 2020.

- The UAE was the first Gulf country to normalize ties with Israel and only the third Arab nation to do so after Egypt and Jordan.

What are the Key Highlights?

- **Trade between the Two Countries:** In comparison to 2020, Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics recorded more than a 30% increase in import and export of goods, excluding diamonds, to and from the United Arab Emirates.
 - Two-way trade in 2021 totaled some USD 900 million.
 - Non-oil trade surpassed reached USD 1.06 billion in the first three months of 2022 - a fivefold increase from the same period last year.
- **Significance of the Free Trade Deal:**
 - **Builds on the US-brokered Normalisation of Relations:** The deal shows the durability of a series of diplomatic deals in 2020 known as the **Abraham Accords**, which normalized relations between **Israel** and four Muslim countries—the **U.A.E., Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan**.
 - **Great Economic Potential:**
 - Israel's relationship with the UAE has **great economic potential** due to the geographic and

Note:



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cultural proximity between the peoples, as well as the UAE's unique characteristics.

- The **UAE** is the **second largest economy** in the **Arab world (after Saudi Arabia)**, with significant weight placed on technology products and advanced solutions, where Israel holds a relative advantage.
- **Faster Access to Markets and Lower Tariffs:**
 - Businesses in both countries will benefit from faster access to markets and lower tariffs as these nations work together to increase trade, create jobs, promote new skills and deepen cooperation.
 - The deal abolishes customs duties on 96% of the products exchanged between the two sides.
 - The agreement also relates to regulatory and standardisation issues, customs, collaboration, government procurement, e-commerce and intellectual property rights.
- **Boost up Trade:**
 - This deal will push the **value of non-oil bilateral trade** between Israel and the UAE beyond \$10 billion.
 - UAE-Israel trade will exceed \$2 billion in 2022, rising to around \$5 billion in five years, bolstered by collaboration in renewables, consumer goods, tourism and the life sciences sectors.
- **Israel can Gain foothold in International Market:**
 - A long-term hope for both countries is that Israeli companies will set up manufacturing in the U.A.E., which serves as a hub for the Middle East, Asia and Africa—markets where Israel has struggled to gain a foothold.

What is the Significance for India?

- This agreement, jointly with the **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)** signed between India and the UAE, has the potential for **extensive trilateral cooperation and business partnerships**.
- It has also further created opportunities for collaborations in different fields with the US.
 - These were made possible by the Abraham Accords, which have been a significant turning point in promoting peace and prosperity for all.
 - Israel, India, the UAE, and the US are also part of a new grouping, **West Asian Quad** which was established as a forum for economic cooperation.

- They are pursuing a constructive agenda focused on the economy, especially **infrastructure projects**.

What is a Free Trade Agreement?

- FTAs are arrangements between two or more countries or trading blocs that primarily agree to reduce or eliminate customs tariff and non-tariff barriers on substantial trade between them.
- FTAs normally cover trade in goods (such as agricultural or industrial products) or trade in services (such as banking, construction, trading etc.).
- FTAs can also cover other areas such as intellectual property rights (IPRs), investment, government procurement and competition policy etc.
- **Example:** India has negotiated FTA with many countries e.g. Sri Lanka and various trading blocs as well e.g. **ASEAN**.
- FTAs can be categorised as Preferential Trade Agreement, **Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement, Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)**.

Australia India Water Security Initiative (AIWASI)

Why in News?

The Union Cabinet has approved a MoU (Memorandum of Understanding) between India and Australia on **Technical Cooperation for Australia-India water Security initiative (AIWASI)**.

What is AIWASI?

- AIWASI is a project Under **South Asia Water Security Initiative (SAWASI)** of Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Australia.
- It aims to work towards the **Water Sensitive City vision** which is based on **holistic management** of the **integrated water cycle**.
- AIWASI will **strengthen India's water governance** and **undertake investments** that **provide urban water services**,
- support to disadvantaged communities to access reliable, safe water and sanitation services.
- The project will undertake and deliver a **Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD) demonstration project**.

Note:



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- This AIWASI project is also a **'living laboratory'** with **multiple educational, social and environmental benefits** like **water literacy** of students and the community, **creation of green spaces**, **improved air quality from blue-green infrastructure** and **rejuvenation of degraded water bodies and aquifers**.

What is water security?

- The definition of **water security** proposed by **UN-Water** – The capacity of a population to safeguard **sustainable access to adequate quantities of acceptable quality water for sustaining livelihoods**, human well-being, and socio-economic development, for ensuring **protection against water-borne pollution** and **water-related disasters**, and for **preserving ecosystems** in a climate of peace and political stability.

Aegean Sea

Why in News?

Recently, Turkish President warned Greece to demilitarize islands in the Aegean Sea.

What is the Dispute?

- **Turkey's Stand:**
 - Turkey says **Greece has been building a military presence in violation of treaties** that guarantee the unarmed status of the Aegean islands.
 - It argues the islands were ceded to Greece on the condition they remained demilitarised.
- **Greece Stand:**
 - Greece maintains **Turkey has deliberately misinterpreted the treaties** and says it has legal grounds to defend itself including a **long-standing threat of war** if Greece extended its territorial waters.
 - Greek-Turkish differences are **not presently about land, but water**.
 - They **currently each have six nautical miles (11km) of territorial water** in the Aegean.
 - The **UN Convention on the International Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)**, concluded in 1982 and ratified by 158 countries, says states may claim up to 12 miles (about 20km).
- **Related Treaty:**

- Greece absorbed the islands of Limnos, Samothrace, Lesbos, Samos, Chios and Ikaria from the **Ottoman Empire** in the Balkan Wars of 1912-13.
 - It was officially awarded sovereignty over them in the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923.
- Another treaty **drawn up in London in 1914** had made Greek possession of the islands conditional on their demilitarisation.
 - According to Turkey, the **Lausanne Treaty** makes reference to the 1914 treaty, it implies the same conditionality.
- Greece rejects that interpretation.

What are the Key Highlights about the Aegean Sea?

- Aegean Sea an arm of the Mediterranean Sea, located between the **Greek peninsula on the west** and **Asia Minor on the east**.
- The Aegean is connected through the **straits of the Dardanelles, the Sea of Marmara, and the Bosphorus to the Black Sea**, while the **island of Crete** can be taken as marking its boundary on the south.

China's Presence in the Horn of Africa

Why in News?

- Recently, first **"China-Horn of Africa Peace, Governance and Development Conference."** was held.
- This is the first time **China aims "to play a role in the area of security"**.
 - The conference held in Ethiopia witnessed the / participation of foreign Ministries from the following countries of the Horn: Kenya, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia, South Sudan, and Uganda.

What is Horn of Africa?

- The Horn of Africa is a **peninsula in Northeast Africa**.
- Located on the **easternmost part of the African mainland**, it is the fourth largest peninsula in the world.
- It lies **along the southern boundary of the Red Sea** and **extends hundreds of kilometres into the Guardafui Channel, Gulf of Aden, and Indian Ocean**.
- The Horn of Africa is equidistant from the equator and the Tropic of Cancer.

Note:

- The Horn contains such diverse areas as the **highlands of the Ethiopian Plateau, the Ogaden desert, and the Eritrean and Somali coasts.**
- The Horn of Africa denotes the region containing the countries of **Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia.**
- The area has experienced imperialism, neo-colonialism, **Cold War**, ethnic strife, **intra-African conflict, poverty**, disease, **famine** and much else.

What are the Recent Chinese Projects?

- In January 2022, China asserted its three objectives in Africa: **controlling the pandemic, implementing a Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) outcomes, and upholding common interests while fighting hegemonic politics.**
- In the 2021 forum, the entire region of the Horn participated, and **four resolutions were adopted:**
 - **The Dakar Action Plan:**
 - The two sides commend the development of relations between China and Africa, and believe that over the past 21 years since its inception, the Forum has strongly promoted the development of relations between China and Africa, and become an important benchmark for international cooperation with Africa.
 - **China-Africa Cooperation Vision 2035:**
 - It was formulated to determine the directions and objectives of mid- and long-term cooperation and promote a closer community with a shared future for China and Africa.
 - **Sino-African Declaration on Climate Change:**
 - It is aimed at enhancing coordination and cooperation in the multilateral process on climate, and jointly safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of China, Africa and other developing countries.
 - **Declaration of the Eighth Ministerial Conference of FOCAC:**
 - Under the theme “Deepen China-Africa Partnership and Promote Sustainable Development to Build a China-Africa Community with a Shared Future in the New Era” and committed to the development of FOCAC and to the deepening of the China-Africa comprehensive strategic and cooperative partnership, both adopted by consensus the **Dakar Declaration of the Eighth Ministerial Conference of FOCAC.**

- **The FOCAC promotes China’s role in the infrastructural and societal development of the Horn.**

- During the **Covid-19 pandemic**, China donated over 3,00,000 vaccines to Ethiopia and Uganda, and 2,00,000 vaccines to Kenya and Somalia. Sudan and Eritrea have also benefited from China’s vaccine diplomacy.

What are China’s Primary Interests in the Region?

➤ Infrastructure:

- One of its landmark projects was fully funding the USD 200 million African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa.
- China has also invested in the Mombasa-Nairobi rail link in Kenya, and has already delivered on railway projects in Sudan.
- It also has a **viable military hardware market in Ethiopia** and has built over 80 infrastructural projects in Somalia, including hospitals, roads, schools and stadiums.
- In Djibouti, 14 infrastructural projects are funded by China.

➤ Financial Assistance:

- **Ethiopia, is one of the top five African recipients of Chinese investments**, and also has a debt of almost USD 14 billion.
- China accounts for **67% of Kenya’s bilateral debt.**
- In 2022, China promised to provide USD 15.7 million assistance to Eritrea.

➤ Natural Resources (Oil and Coal):

- China is also interested in minerals such as gold, **iron-ore**, precious stones, chemicals, oil and **natural gas** in Ethiopia.
- South Sudan, a source for petroleum products, has had continued Beijing investment in the industry since the latter’s initial entry in 1995.

➤ Maritime Interests:

- China’s first and only military base outside **its mainland is in Djibouti.**
- In 2022, China hinted its willingness to **develop Eritrea’s coast which would connect to China’s investments in land-locked Ethiopia.**
- The U.S. has **speculated that China wishes to build another military base in Kenya and Tanzania**, thereby increasing its military presence in the region.

Note:



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What is the Significance of Horn of Africa for India?

- **Africa has been a Growing Interest:**
 - Africa has been of growing interest to India for **political, economic and security reasons**, especially the sub-region - the Horn of Africa.
- **Proximity to Oil Producing Region:**
 - The Horn of Africa is **strategically important since it is close to the oil-producing region of the Middle East**.
 - Approximately 40% of the oil produced in the Middle East **crosses through the shipping lanes of Red Sea**.
- **Shipping Routes:**
 - Djibouti is the choke point on this shipping route. It is due to this reason **thssat countries like the United States, France, and China have a military base in Djibouti**.
 - With the new reliance on the sea lines of communication for India's economic growth, **Delhi declared that its national interests were no longer limited to the Subcontinent but stretched from the "Aden to Malacca"**.

What is India's Concern over China's presence?

- **Dominance in the Indian Ocean:**
 - Situated on the north-western edge of the Indian Ocean, Djibouti could become **another of China's "string of pearls" of military alliances** and assets ringing India, including Bangladesh, Myanmar and Sri Lanka.
 - China has stepped up activity in the Indian Ocean, which India considers within **its sphere of influence, in recent days**, citing anti-piracy patrols and freedom of navigation. It has forced the Indian Navy to tighten surveillance of the strategic waters.
- **China seeks to control over Vital Shipping Routes:**
 - The Indian Ocean shipping lanes **carry 80% of the world's oil and a third of the global bulk cargo**. China is looking to secure **its energy and trade transportation links along the vital shipping route**.
- **Influencing Indian Ocean Countries:**
 - The Indian Ocean is also emerging as the playground for countries eyeing a bigger role in world affairs. China is looking to **generate goodwill and influence in the Indian Ocean countries by investing in projects such ports, roads and railways**.

- China is looking to expand its presence in the Indian Ocean, and is building ports and other infrastructure in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

➤ Expanding through OBOR:

- The Indian Ocean figures prominently in China's ambitious **One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative** to build a new Silk Route.
- India has kept away from OBOR as its centrepiece.

WTO's Appellate Body

Why in News?

There was no discussion to revive the **World Trade Organization's (WTO) Appellate Body (AB)**, which has been **redundant since 2019**, at the recently concluded **12th ministerial conference**.

What is WTO's Appellate Body?

➤ About:

- WTO was established to **provide a platform for negotiations for liberating trade and creating rules**, as well as to monitor and administer multilateral trades.
- One of the key **objectives was also to address the grievances between its members by acting as a court for global trade**.

- The Appellate Body, set up in 1995, is a **standing committee of seven members** with a limited four year term that presides over appeals against judgments passed in trade-related disputes brought by WTO members.
- Disputes arise when **a member country observes that another member government is breaching a commitment or a trade agreement made at the WTO**.

➤ Structure:

- The Appellate Body is composed of **seven Members** who are appointed by the **Dispute Settlement Body (DSB)** to serve for four-year terms.
- The **DSB has authority to establish dispute settlement panels**, refer matters to arbitration, adopt panel, Appellate Body and arbitration reports, maintain surveillance over the implementation of recommendations and rulings contained in such reports, and authorize suspension of concessions in the event of non-compliance with those recommendations and rulings.

Note:



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- Each person may be **reappointed for another four-year term.**

➤ **Appointment:**

- Each member of the Appellate Body is required to be a person with demonstrated expertise in law, international trade and the subject-matter of the covered agreements generally.
- They are also required to be **unaffiliated with any government and are to be broadly representative of the membership** of the WTO.
- A Chairman is elected among the Members to serve a one-year term, which can be extended for an additional period of one year.
- He is responsible for the **overall direction of Appellate Body business.**
- The current Chairperson is Hong Zhao of China.
- A Division of **three Members is selected to hear each appeal and each division elects a Presiding Member.**

What are the Issues?

- **Stopping of the Judges' Appointment:**
 - The United States stopped the process of reappointing judges, after their terms expired in 2017. In December 2019, the number of judges in the court fell below three — the minimum required.
 - It believes the WTO is biased against it, and has criticised it for being "unfair".
 - At least three people are required to preside over an appeal, and **if new members are not appointed to replace** the two retiring ones, the body will cease to be relevant.
- **Very Less Efficient at Rulings:**
 - Over 600 cases reached the body since its formation in 1995 and rulings were issued in some 350.
 - It has even blamed that the AB has failed to issue rulings within the 90-day deadline.

What are the Implications?

- With the Appellate Body unable to review new applications, **there is already great uncertainty over the WTO's dispute settlement process.**
- If the body is declared non-functional, countries may be **compelled to implement rulings by the panel even if they feel that gross errors** have been committed.

- Countries **may refuse to comply with the order of the panel** on the ground that it has no avenue for appeal. It will run the risk of facing arbitration proceedings initiated by the other party in the dispute.
- This also does not bode well for India, which is facing a rising number of dispute cases, especially on agricultural products.
- In the backdrop of rising trade tension between the US and China, the overall weakening of the WTO framework **could have the effect of undoing over two decades of efforts to avoid protectionism in global trade.**

What are the Disputes Involving India at the WTO?

- The disputes where India is a **complaining party** are countervailing duty by the US on Indian steel products; measures by America concerning non-immigrant visas; renewable energy programmes of the US; and import duties imposed on steel and aluminium products by America.
- WTO disputes where **India is a responding party** include prohibition by India on import of poultry and poultry products filed by the US, and import duties on certain information and communication technology goods filed by the EU, Japan and Taiwan.
- In January 2022, India **appealed against a ruling of WTO** trade dispute settlement panel which ruled that the country's domestic support measures for **sugar and sugarcane** are inconsistent with global trade norms.

I2U2 Initiative

Why in News?

As part of I2U2 initiatives, India, Israel, UAE, and the US will hold its first virtual summit in July 2022.

What is I2U2 Initiative?

- **Background:**
 - I2U2 was initially formed in October, 2021 following the **Abraham Accords** between Israel and the UAE, to deal with issues concerning **maritime security**, infrastructure and transport in the region.

Note:



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- At that time, it was called the 'International Forum for Economic Cooperation'.
- That was referred as the 'West Asian Quad'.

➤ **About:**

- I2U2 initiative is a new grouping of **India, Israel, USA and UAE**.
- In the grouping's name, '**I2**' stands for **India and Israel**, whereas '**U2**' stands for **USA and the UAE**.
- This is a great achievement which tells the geopolitical changes that happen in the region.
- This will not only **revitalize and re-energize the system of alliances and partnerships** around the world, but also **stitch together partnerships** that did not exist previously or were not utilized to their full extent.

➤ **Significance:**

- **Security Cooperation:**
 - This will help the countries in **exploring security cooperation** among the four nations within the framework of these new groupings.
- **Technological Hubs:**
 - Each of these countries is a technological hub.
 - **Biotechnology**, of course, is prominent in each of these countries as well.
- **Food Security:**
 - This initiative offers an opportunity to discuss **food security**.
- **Work Together in Different Fields:**
 - These countries could cooperate on a number of levels, whether it's technologies, trade, climate, fighting against **Covid-19**, or even security.

What will be the Significance of I2U2 for India?

➤ **Advantage from Abraham Accords:**

- India will get **advantage of the Abraham Accords** to deepen engagement with Israel without risking its ties with the UAE and the other Arab states.

➤ **Benefit Market:**

- India is a **massive consumer market**. It's a massive producer of high-tech and highly sought-after goods as well. India will benefit from this grouping.

➤ **Alliances:**

- It will help India in building alliances — **political alliances, social alliances**.

India-Malaysia Defence Cooperation

Why in News?

Recently, Indian Defence Minister interacted with his Malaysian counterpart to deepen **Defence Cooperation** between the two countries.

- The Malaysian air force has been looking for 18 new light fighter jets with several nations, including South Korea, Pakistan, China and Sweden, making a pitch. The Indian offer is for the **LCA Mk1A version**.
- India has offered a **dual package for the indigenous fighter jets** as well as maintenance of the Russian origin Su30 MKM aircraft being operated by Malaysia.

What are the Highlights of the Meeting?

- Both countries highlighted the areas in which **Indian defence industries could assist Malaysia**. India invited senior officers from Malaysia to India to **get a first-hand experience of the facilities and products of Indian defence industry**.
- Malaysia expressed the **need for inducting women personnel in peace keeping missions**. Both sides agreed to engage each other on this issue.
- Both countries agreed to **upgrade capability for Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations**.
- Both sides discussed the **existing defence cooperation activities and framework** between the two countries, and ways to further enhance them under the existing **Malaysia India Defence Cooperation Meeting (MIDCOM) framework**.
 - The next MIDCOM is scheduled to held in July 2022, and it was decided to use this **platform for a deeper engagement in defence**.

What are the Key Points of India-Malaysia Relations?

- India established **diplomatic relations with Malaysia in 1957**.
- **Economic Relation:** India and Malaysia have signed Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA). CECA is a kind of **Free Trade Agreement (FTA)**.
 - India has also signed the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in services and investments with the 10-member **Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)**.

Note:



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- Malaysia is the third largest trading partner in ASEAN.
- Bilateral trade between India and Malaysia is significantly biased in favour of Malaysia.
 - **Defence & Security Cooperation:** Joint military exercises “Harimau Shakti” are held annually between the two countries.
 - **Traditional medicine:** India and Malaysia have signed a MoU on cooperation in the field of Traditional Medicine in October 2010.
- The Government of Malaysia has been working to popularize **AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy) systems** in Malaysia.
- AYUSH systems are practiced in Malaysia.
- **Recent Developments:**
 - In 2020, India **resumed purchases of Malaysian palm oil** after a gap of four-month following a diplomatic row between the two countries.
 - The former Prime Minister of Malaysia had criticised India’s **Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA)** which was considered as an interference in the internal matter of India.

What is the Significance of Malaysia for India?

- As a country where 7.2 % of the population is of Indian origin, **Malaysia assumes an important place in India’s foreign policy.**
 - Surrounded by busy sea lines of communications such as the **Strait of Malacca** and the **South China Sea**, Malaysia is also a key pillar of **India’s Act East policy** and critical to **India’s maritime connectivity strategies.**

14th BRICS Summit

Why in News?

Recently, Prime Minister of India attended the 14th BRICS summit which was virtually hosted by China.

- **Theme of the 14th BRICS Summit:** Foster High-quality BRICS Partnership, Usher in a New Era for Global Development.
- BRICS Plus virtual conference was also held as part of the main meeting **with ministers from countries, including the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Kazakhstan, Indonesia, Argentina, Nigeria, Senegal, and Thailand.**

What are the Key Highlights of the Summit?

- **Adopting the Beijing Declaration:**
 - It states that **BRICS supports talks between Russia and Ukraine.**
 - The grouping is willing to support the United Nations’ and the **International Committee of the Red Cross’s (ICRC)** efforts to deliver humanitarian aid to Ukraine.
 - Countries also expressed concerns about the situation in Taliban-held Afghanistan.
- **Discussions on the Issues: ss**
 - **Humanitarian Situation in Ukraine:**
 - Concerns over the humanitarian situation in and around Ukraine and expressed **their support to efforts of the UN Secretary-General, UN Agencies and International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to provide humanitarian assistance** in accordance with the basic principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality.
 - **Terrorism:**
 - While discussing terrorism and terror cooperation, the BRICS countries said that only the **UN Security Council has the authority for imposing sanctions.**
 - On Afghanistan, BRICS countries called for **“Afghanistan authorities to achieve national reconciliation** through dialogue and negotiation, and to establish a broad-based and inclusive and representative political structure”, adding that **Afghan territory must not be used to shelter terrorists or attack any other country.**
 - **Initiative on Denial of Safe Haven to Corruption:**
 - The BRICS Initiative on **Denial of Safe Haven to Corruption** aims to further **strengthen anti-corruption capacity building** through education and training programs and **enhance anti-corruption exchanges and cooperation within multilateral frameworks.**
 - **Framework for Consumer Protection in E-commerce:**
 - The declaration welcomed the establishment of the **Digital Economy Working Group** by upgrading the **E-commerce Working Group.**
 - And the BRICS nations have agreed to promote consumer protection in e-commerce by advancing the implementation of BRICS Framework for Consumer Protection in E-commerce.

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○ **More Focus on Combating Transnational Drug Trafficking:**

- The summit also expressed concern over the serious drug situation in the world. BRICS declaration appreciate **BRICS Anti-Drug Working Group's active role in combating transnational drug trafficking and promoting global drug governance** and will further strengthen drug control cooperation.

What is BRICS?

➤ **About:**

- BRICS is an **acronym** for the grouping of the world's leading emerging economies, namely **Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa**.
- In **2001**, the **British Economist Jim O'Neill** coined the term BRIC to describe the four emerging economies of Brazil, Russia, India, and China.
- The grouping was **formalised** during the first meeting of BRIC Foreign Ministers' in **2006**.
- **South Africa was invited to join BRIC in December 2010**, after which the group adopted the acronym BRICS.

➤ **Share of BRICS:**

- The BRICS brings together five of the largest developing countries of the world, representing 41% of the global population, 24% of the global GDP and 16% of the global trade.

Chairmanship:

- The **chairmanship of the forum is rotated annually** among the members, in accordance with the acronym B-R-I-C-S.
- **India is the chair for 2021.**

➤ **Initiatives of the BRICS:**

○ **New Development Bank:**

- During the **Sixth BRICS Summit in Fortaleza (Brazil) in 2014**, the leaders signed the Agreement establishing the **New Development Bank (NDB - Shanghai, China)**.
- It has so far approved 70 infrastructure and sustainable development projects worth.

○ **Contingent Reserve Arrangement:**

- In 2014, the **BRICS governments had signed a treaty on the setting up** of the contingent reserve arrangement

- The arrangement is **aimed at forestalling short-term balance of payments pressures**, provide mutual support and strengthen financial stability of the BRICS nations.

○ **BRICS Payment System:**

- **BRICS countries are trying to create a payment system as an alternative to the SWIFT** payment system.
- This has taken on a new urgency as post Ukraine war, Russia has been frozen out of SWIFT.

○ **Customs Agreements:**

- Customs agreement were signed to **coordinate and ease trade transport** between BRICS countries

○ **Launched of Remote Sensing Satellite:**

- A **Remote Sensing constellation of satellites** has been launched – with 6 satellites including **2 from India, 2 from China, 1 from Russia, and 1 Brazil-China collaboration**

24th ASEAN-India Meeting

Why in News?

Recently, the **24th ASEAN-India Senior Official's Meeting (SOM)** was hosted in Delhi.

- India and ASEAN celebrated the 30th anniversary of their Dialogue Relations.
- Earlier, the **2nd ASEAN Digital Ministers' (ADGMIN) Meeting** with India held, where two sides **finalized India-ASEAN Digital work plan 2022** for future collaboration in the field.

What is Association of Southeast Asian Nations?

➤ **About:**

- It is a **regional grouping that promotes economic, political, and security cooperation**.
- It was **established in August 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand** with the signing of the ASEAN Declaration (Bangkok Declaration) by the founding fathers of ASEAN, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.
- Its **chairmanship rotates annually**, based on the alphabetical order of the English names of Member States.

Note:



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- ASEAN countries have a total population of 650 million people and a combined **Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of USD 2.8 trillion**. It is India's 4th largest trading partner with about USD 86.9 billion in trade.

➤ **Members:**

- **ASEAN brings together ten Southeast Asian states** – Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam – into one organisation.

What are the Key Highlights?

- The SOM reviewed the ASEAN-India strategic partnership and its future direction.
- The leaders made their assessment on the progress of cooperation under three pillars of Partnership – **Political-Security, Economic and Socio-Cultural**.
- The meeting deliberated on the **steps for further implementation of the ASEAN-India Plan of Action (2021-2025)**.
- The two sides **exchanged views on regional and international issues of mutual interest** including the Covid-19 pandemic and post-pandemic recovery.
- Underlining the India's vision of the Indo-Pacific, emphasized the implementation of the **ASEAN-India Joint Statement on Cooperation on ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific (AOIP)** to strengthen the ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership.
- The ASEAN side appreciated **India's support to ASEAN and ASEAN-led architecture** in the region.

How has Been the ASEAN-India Relations?

➤ **About:**

- ASEAN, a 10-nation grouping, is **considered one of the most influential groupings in Southeast Asia**.
- India and several other countries, including the US, China, Japan and Australia, are its dialogue partners.
- The **ASEAN-India dialogue relations started with the establishment of a sectoral partnership in 1992**.
- This graduated to full dialogue partnership in **December 1995 and summit-level partnership in 2002**.
- Traditionally the basis of India-ASEAN ties **has been trade and people-to-people ties due to shared historical and cultural roots**, a more recent and

urgent area of convergence has been balancing China's rise.

- Both **India and ASEAN aim to establish a rules-based security architecture** for peaceful development in the region, in contrast to China's aggressive policies.

➤ **Areas of Cooperation:**

○ **Economic Cooperation:**

- ASEAN is India's **4th largest trading partner**.
- India signed **FTA (Free Trade Agreement)** in goods in 2009 and an FTA in services and investments in 2014 with ASEAN.
- India has a **Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) with various countries** of the ASEAN region which has resulted in concessional trade and a rise in investments.

○ **Political Cooperation:**

- ASEAN-India Centre (AIC) was established to **undertake policy research, advocacy and networking activities** with organizations and think-tanks in India and ASEAN.

○ **Financial Assistance:**

- India provides **financial assistance to the ASEAN nations through various mechanism like ASEAN-India Cooperation Fund, ASEAN-India S&T Development Fund and ASEAN-India Green Fund**.

○ **Connectivity:**

- India has been undertaking several connectivity projects like India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral (IMT) Highway and the Kaladan Multimodal Project.
- India is also trying to **establish a Maritime Transportation Agreement** with ASEAN and also Plans for a Railway link between New Delhi in India to Hanoi in Vietnam.

○ **Socio-Cultural Cooperation:**

- Programmes to boost **People-to-People Interaction with ASEAN** are organized, such as inviting ASEAN students to India, Special Training Course for ASEAN diplomats, Exchange of Parliamentarians, etc.

○ **Defence Cooperation:**

- Joint Naval and Military exercises are conducted between India and most ASEAN countries.

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- Vietnam has traditionally been a close friend on defense issues, Singapore is also an equally important partner.

West Seti Power Project: Nepal

Why in News?

India will be taking over **West Seti Hydropower Project** nearly four years after China withdrew from it, ending a six-year engagement between 2012 and 2018.

- Earlier, the Indian **Prime Minister visited Lumbini**, where he celebrated **2566th Buddha Jayanti** celebrations, also Nepal invited India to invest in West Seti Hydropower Project.

What is the West Seti Power Project?

- It is a proposed **750-megawatt Hydropower Project**, which is to be built on the **Seti river in far-western Nepal**, which has remained on the drawing board for the last six decades.
- Lately, the government has **remodeled the project as West Seti and Seti River (SR-6)**, a joint storage project, with the capacity to generate 1,200 megawatts of electricity.
- This storage or reservoir will **fill up during the monsoon season and the water will be drawn to generate power during peak hours** each day in the dry season.
 - Its success is expected to **restore India's image in Nepal and give it weightage in future** considerations for hydropower projects, when competition is bound to be tough. West Seti, therefore, **has the potential to be a defining model for Nepal India's power relations in future**.

How have been India-Nepal Power relations?

- Nepal is **rich in power sources with around 6,000 rivers and an estimated potential for 83,000 MW**.
- **Mahakali treaty was signed back in 1996**, to produce 6,480 MW, but India has still not been able to come out with the Detailed project Report.
- The Upper Karnali project, for which the multinational GMR signed the contract, has not made any headway for years.
- **India's success in executing the 900-MW Arun Three project in eastern Nepal's Sankhuwa Sabha**,

and whose foundation was laid in 2018 and which is set for completion by 2023 has helped build faith in India recently.

- During the Indian PM's visit to Nepal in 2014, he had said **India must start executing its projects timely**.
- Nepal's Constitution has a provision under which **any treaty or agreement with another country on natural resources will require Parliament's ratification by at least a two-thirds majority**. That will also mean homework will be required before any hydro project is signed and given for execution.
- Nepal has a massive power shortfall as it generates only around 900 MW against an installed capacity of nearly 2,000 MW. Although it is currently selling 364 MW power to India, it has over the years importing from India.

How have been

India-Nepal Diplomatic Ties?

- After a standoff between Nepal and India led to the economic blockade of 2015, **equations changed after the new PM Deuba took over Oli**, who visited India recently where he decided to establish Fraternal Ties with India.
- Nepal is an **important neighbour of India and occupies special significance** in its foreign policy because of the geographic, historical, cultural and economic linkages/ties that span centuries.
- India and Nepal share similar ties in terms of **Hinduism and Buddhism with Buddha's birthplace Lumbini** located in present day Nepal.
- The two countries not only share an open border and unhindered movement of people, but they also have close bonds through marriages and familial ties, popularly known as Roti-Beti ka Rishta.
- The India-Nepal **Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1950** forms the bedrock of the special relations that exist between India and Nepal.
- Rivers originating in Nepal feed the **perennial river systems** of India in terms of ecology and hydropower potential.
- However, the **border issue** erupted in November 2019 when Nepal had released a new political map that claims Kalapani, Limpiyadhura and Lipulekh of Uttarakhand as part of Nepal's territory. The area of Susta (West Champaran district, Bihar) can also be noted in the new map.

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48th G-7 Summit

Why in News?

Recently, at the 48th G7 Summit, Indian Prime Minister invited the **G7 Nations** to tap into the huge market for **clean energy technologies** emerging in the country.

- **Germany** holds the presidency of the G7 in 2022.
- The German Presidency has invited Argentina, India, Indonesia, Senegal and South Africa to the G7 Summit.

What is Group of Seven (G7)?

- It is an **intergovernmental organisation** that was **formed in 1975**.
- The bloc meets annually to discuss issues of common interest like **global economic governance, international security and energy policy**.
- The G7 countries are the **UK, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the US**.
- **All the G7 countries and India are a part of G20.**
- **The G7 does not have a formal charter or a secretariat.** The presidency, which rotates among member countries each year, is in charge of setting the agenda. **Sherpas, ministers and envoys hammer out policy initiatives before the summit.**
- As of 2022, **G7 countries make up 10% of the world's population, 31% of global GDP, and 21% of global carbon dioxide emissions**, according to the **Summit website**. **China and India, the two most populous countries with among the largest GDP figures in the world, are not part of the grouping.**
- In all G7 countries, annual public sector expenditure exceeded revenue in 2021. Most G7 countries also had a **high level of gross debt**, especially **Japan (263% of GDP), Italy (151%) and the US (133%)**.
- The G7 countries are important players in global trade. The US and Germany in particular are major export nations. Both sold goods worth well over a trillion US dollars abroad in 2021.

What are the Other Highlights of G7 Summit?

- **PGII:**
 - G7 announced the collective mobilization of **600 billion dollars by 2027 under Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII)** to deliver **"game-changing" and "transparent"**

infrastructure projects to developing and middle-income countries.

➤ LiFE Campaign:

- Indian Prime Minister highlighted Global Initiative for **LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment)** campaign.
- The goal of this campaign is to encourage an eco-friendly lifestyle.

➤ Stand on Russia-Ukraine Crisis:

- Russia-Ukraine crisis has pushed the energy prices to a record high, Indian Prime Minister addressed the need for **equal energy distribution amongst the population of rich and poor nations**.
- On **Russia-Ukraine war**, Prime Minister reiterated his stand that there must be an immediate end to the hostilities and a resolution should be reached by choosing the path of dialogue and diplomacy.

What is Clean Energy Technology?

➤ About:

- It refers to **any process, product or service that reduces negative environmental impacts** through significant energy efficiency improvements, **sustainable use of resources** or environmental protection activities.
- Clean energy technologies **also endure economic growth** by enhancing the supply of energy demand and **tackling environmental challenges** and their impacts due to the use of other conventional sources of energy and their impacts due to the **use of other conventional sources of energy**.
- Clean technology includes a broad range of technology related to recycling, **renewable energy (Wind power, solar power, biomass, hydropower, geothermal, biofuels, etc.)**, information technology, green transportation, electric motors, green chemistry, lightning, greywater, etc.

➤ Emerging Market for Clean Technology in India:

- **Governmental Regulations:**
 - With a more active media and awareness of people towards the environment, India is driven towards adopting a **pro-environment stance in all its development strategies**.
- **Adopting Newer & Cleaner Technologies:**
 - The adoption of newer and cleaner technologies will **help India in leapfrogging into the sustainable growth pathway** as the Indian economy grows at an unprecedented rate.

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- **Global Climate Negotiations:**
 - The current global negotiations on climate change have put pressure on rapidly developing economies like India to adopt **green technologies**.
- **Foreign Direct Investment (FDI):**
 - The Indian market offers strong **business prospects for foreign investors**.
 - India's growing economy and surging demand for clean power to strengthen energy security and reduce pollution, as well as ongoing sector reforms, is making **India one of the most attractive destinations in the world for environmentally-friendly investments**.
- **Low-carbon Technologies:**
 - India is particularly well placed to become a global leader in **renewable batteries and green hydrogen**.
 - Other low-carbon technologies **can create a market worth up to 80 billion dollars in India by 2030**.
- **Development in India:**
 - **India has achieved the target of 40% energy-capacity from non-fossil sources and 10% Ethanol-blending in petrol.**
 - India has the **world's first fully solar power operated airport**.
 - India is one of the largest energy producing countries from renewable sources. In the electricity sector, renewable energy (excluding large hydro) accounted for 20% of the total installed power capacity.

Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII)

Why in News?

Recently, at the 48th G-7 Summit, the U.S. along with G7 allies unveiled the ambitious **Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII)**.

What is the Background?

- The U.S. along with its allies had announced the launch of the **Build Back Better World (B3W)** in **2021** with the aim of narrowing the 40 trillion dollar infrastructure gap in the developing world.
 - **Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment is therefore a relaunch of the B3W plan.**

- The **PGII is being seen as the G7's counter to China's multi-trillion dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)** to build connectivity, infrastructure, and trade projects in **Asia, Europe, Africa, and Latin America**.

What is Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment?

- **About:**
 - PGII is a **"values-driven, high-impact, and transparent infrastructure partnership** to meet the enormous infrastructure needs of low and middle-income countries
 - And support the **United States and its allies** economic and national security interests.
 - Under the PGII, **G7 will mobilize 600 billion dollars by 2027** to deliver **"game-changing" and "transparent"** infrastructure projects to developing and middle-income countries.
 - **U.S. President** announced the country's pledge to channel **200 billion USD in grants**, public financing, and private capital over the next five years for the PGII.
 - **The European Commission President** declared Europe's pledge of mobilizing **300 billion euros for the partnership** over the same period.
- **Pillars of PGII:**
 - **First:** G7 grouping aims to tackle the **climate crisis and ensure global energy security** through **clean energy supply chains**.
 - **Second:** The projects will focus on bolstering **digital Information and Communications technology (ICT)** networks facilitating technologies such as **5G and 6G internet connectivity and cybersecurity**.
 - **Fibre-optic cable project** to link Europe and Latin America.
- **Third:** The projects aim to advance **gender equality and equity**.
- **Gender Equality:** It requires equal enjoyment by women and men of socially-valued goods, opportunities, resources and rewards.
- **Gender Equity:** It recognizes that each person has different circumstances and allocates the exact resources and opportunities needed to reach an equal outcome.
- **Fourth:** The project stresses upgrading **global health infrastructure**.

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- The **U.S International Development Finance Corporation (DFC)**, along with the G7 nations and the EU are disbursing a **3.3 million USD** technical assistance grant to **build a vaccine facility in Senegal**.
- The **European Commission's Global Gateway** initiative is also undertaking projects supporting the PGII such as **mRNA vaccine plants in Latin America**.
- **Benefits to India:**
 - **U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC)** will invest up to USD 30 million in **Omnivore Agritech** and **Climate Sustainability Fund**.
 - **Climate Sustainability Fund:** It is an impact venture capital fund that invests in entrepreneurs building the future of **agriculture, food systems, climate, and the rural economy in India**.
 - The Fund seeks to **invest in companies that increase food security and promote both climate resilience and climate adaptation in India** and it will also improve the **profitability and agricultural productivity of smallholder farms**.
 - **Omnivore Agritech:** It is a technology driven agricultural practice that will increase agricultural prosperity and transform food systems to make farming more resilient and sustainable.
 - It includes farmer platforms, precision agriculture, Agri-biotech etc.

India-Nordic Countries Bilateral Talks

Why in News?

Recently, the Prime Minister of India held a series of **bilateral meetings with his counterparts from Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Iceland and Finland**.

- At the meetings, a discussion was made regarding ways to further **deepen bilateral ties and views were exchanged on regional and global developments**.
- The meeting was organized on the sidelines of the **second India-Nordic Summit in the Danish capital, Copenhagen**.

What is the Background of Second India-Nordic Summit?

- The **second edition** held against the backdrop of the **two most significant events that affected the world**.

- One is **post-pandemic economic recovery**, and the other is the **ongoing war between Ukraine and Russia**.
- Besides **economy, trade and investment**, the summit can be seen from the perspective of the **concept of the welfare state** that goes along with **capitalism and democratic practices, blending the welfare model with the market economy**.
- India invited Nordic companies for **investing in the blue economy sector, especially in Sagarmala Project**.
 - India's **Arctic Policy** provides a good framework for expansion of India-Nordic cooperation in the Arctic region.
- The Nordic countries reiterated their **support for India's permanent membership of a reformed and expanded United Nation Security Council**.
- At the **inaugural edition of the summit in 2018**, the focus of the leadership was on **global security, economic growth, innovation and climate change while emphasizing innovation and digital transformation as a driver of growth**.
 - The first summit sought to explore an extension of the application to New Delhi's flagship programmes like **Make in India, Startup India, Digital India and Clean India**, besides the support of the **Nordic countries' Sustainable Cities Project to India's Smart Cities project**.
 - At the first summit, the Nordic countries welcomed India's application for membership in the **Nuclear Suppliers' Group**.

What are the Highlights of the Meeting?

- **India-Denmark:** Discussed a wide range of issues of mutual interest to boost bilateral relations, including the war in Ukraine, the India-European Union (EU) free trade deal and the situation in the Indo-Pacific.
 - Agreed to further strengthen the **Green Strategic Partnership** with a focus on **green hydrogen, renewable energy and wastewater management**.
- **India-Norway:** Both leaders discussed the potential for deepening engagement in areas like Blue Economy, renewable energy, green hydrogen, solar and wind projects, green shipping, fisheries, water management, rainwater harvesting, space cooperation, long term Infrastructure investment, health and culture.
 - Indian PM asserted that Norway is a key pillar of India's recently announced **Arctic Policy**.

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- **India-Sweden:** During the meeting, the two leaders took stock of the progress in the Joint Action Plan and appreciated the expanding scope of the jointly launched **Leadership Group on Industry Transition (LeadIT) initiative**.
 - This was an India-Sweden joint global initiative to set up a **Leadership Group on Industry Transition (LeadIT) in September 2019 at the UN Climate Action Summit** to help guide the world's heaviest greenhouse gas emitting industries toward a low-carbon economy.
 - **During the 2018 visit of Prime Minister Modi to Sweden**, the two sides adopted a wide-ranging **Joint Action Plan** to take forward a wide range of initiatives in defense, trade and investment, renewable energy, smart cities, women's skill development, space and science and healthcare etc.
- **India-Iceland:** Both leaders discussed ways to further strengthen economic cooperation especially in the sectors of geothermal energy, Blue Economy, Arctic, renewable energy, fisheries, food processing, education including digital universities, and culture.
 - Discussions also took place on expediting the **India-European Free Trade Association (EFTA) trade negotiations**.
- **India-Finland:** Discussions were done regarding opportunities to expand cooperation in the fields of new and emerging technologies like **Artificial Intelligence, quantum computing**, future mobile technologies, clean technologies and smart grids.
 - Indian PM invited Finnish companies to partner with **Indian companies and take advantage of the enormous opportunities** that the Indian market presents, particularly in telecom infrastructure and digital transformations.

India and Denmark

Why in News?

During the **Indian Prime Minister's Visit to Denmark**, India and Denmark agreed to further strengthen the **Green Strategic Partnership** with a focus on **green hydrogen, renewable energy and wastewater management**.

- Further, India conveyed its acceptance of the Danish invitation to join the **International Center for Antimicrobial Resistance Solutions (ICARS)** as a **Mission Partner**.

- The Danish Prime Minister confirmed Danish accession to the **Global Digital Health Partnership** on India's invitation to **improve public health and well-being through evidence-based digital technologies**.

What is the Status of India-Denmark Ties?

- **Background:** The diplomatic relations between **India and Denmark**, established in September 1949, are marked by **regular high-level exchanges**.
 - Both countries **share historical links, common democratic traditions and a shared desire for regional**, as well as international peace and stability.
 - Bilateral relations were elevated to the level of "Green Strategic Partnership" during the Virtual Summit held in 2020.

What is Green Strategic Partnership?

- The Green Strategic Partnership is a mutually beneficial arrangement to advance political cooperation, expand economic relations and green growth, create jobs, and strengthen cooperation on addressing global challenges and opportunities; with a focus on an ambitious implementation of the **Paris Agreement and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals**.
- India and Denmark both have **ambitious goals within the climate agenda**.
- India is the world's **third-largest CO₂ emitter and by 2030**, the country is expected to have doubled its carbon emissions.
- The Danish government has the ambition to reduce **CO₂ emissions by 70% by 2030** and aims to undertake international leadership on SDG 7 on affordable and clean energy.
- By partnering, India and Denmark will demonstrate to the world that delivering on ambitious climate and sustainable energy goals is possible.

- **Commercial and Economic Relations:** Bilateral trade in goods and services between India and Denmark has grown by 78%, from USD 2.8 billion in 2016 to USD 5 billion in 2021.
 - The **major export items from India** to Denmark are textiles, apparels and yarns related, vehicles and components, metal goods, iron and steel, footwear, and travel goods.

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- Major **Danish exports to India** are medicinal/ pharmaceutical goods, power generating machinery, industrial machinery, metal waste and ore, and organic chemicals.
- **Cultural Exchange:** India's 75th Independence Day was celebrated in Copenhagen with a great enthusiasm with a flag hoisting ceremony and vibrant Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav celebrations, attended by a large number of the diaspora.
 - Indian community in Denmark include IT professionals, doctors and engineers.
 - Important streets and public places have been named after Indian leaders which include the **Gandhi Plaene (Gandhi Park)**, Copenhagen and a **Nehru Road** near Aarhus University in Aarhus.

International Center for Antimicrobial Resistance Solutions (ICARS)

- The idea of an **international independent research and knowledge centre** focusing on intervention and implementation research in **low- and middle-income countries** was fostered through talks between Denmark and the World Bank during fall 2017 and spring 2018.
- At a meeting in **March 2018**, it was agreed that there was an unmet need in this area, and that it was important to pursue the idea further, **exploring whether Denmark could initiate and host such a centre given its long history of working in One Health**.
- In November 2018, the Danish Government formally announced its ambition to establish ICARS.

Global Digital Health Partnership

- The **Global Digital Health Partnership (GDHP)** is an **international collaboration of governments, government agencies and multinational organisations** dedicated to improving the health and well-being of their citizens through the best use of evidence-based digital technologies.
- It was established in February 2018, to **provide an opportunity for transformational engagement between its participants**.
- **Australia was the host country** for the inaugural summit in 2018.
- The **'4th Global Digital Health Partnership Summit'** was held in February, 2019 in New Delhi.

Indian PM's Visit to European Countries

Why in News?

The **Prime Minister (PM) of India** is on visit to **three European countries namely, Germany, Denmark and France**. This foreign visit comes at a time Europe is witnessing the **Russia-Ukraine War**.

- The visit of Indian PM highlights the **importance India attaches to its ties with Europe**.

What is the Significance of the Visit?

➤ India-Germany Relations:

- **Background:** **Germany is one of India's most important partners in Europe**, with deep bilateral relations, and because of its key role in the **European Union**.
 - India was among the first countries to establish diplomatic ties with the Federal Republic of Germany after **World War II (WWII)**.
 - India and Germany have a **'Strategic Partnership' since May 2000**, and it has been strengthened with the launch of the **Inter-Governmental Consultations (IGC)** in 2011 at the level of heads of government.
 - India is among a select group of countries with which Germany has such a **dialogue mechanism**.
- **Significance:** Germany has made key strategic choices in the **Russia-Ukraine war**.
 - It has promised to reduce its **energy dependence on Russia and decided to increase defence spending** — a significant move, given its **post-WWII posture**.
 - With India too dependent on **Russia for defence supplies**, it will be important for India and Germany to exchange notes on strategic choices — and **moving away from Russia for their respective needs**.

➤ India-Denmark Relations:

- **Background:** Bilateral relations were elevated to the level of a **"Green Strategic Partnership"** during the Virtual Summit held in September 2020.
 - The **first India-Nordic Summit** took place in April 2018 to explore new areas of cooperation.

Note:

- This format is special; the only other country with which the **Nordic countries — Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark, Iceland** — have this kind of engagement is with the US.
- **Significance:** Nordic countries are pioneers in **innovation, clean energy, green technologies, education, health-care, human rights, rule of law**. This presents enormous opportunities for India to expand its own strengths by collaborating with these countries.
- Also, India presents an ideal opportunity to these countries because of its large market.
- Many new flagship schemes have been launched by India — like **Make in India, Smart Cities Mission, Start-up India, Clean Ganga** etc — in which Nordic countries can take active part and provide their expertise.

➤ **India-France Relations:**

- **Background:** India and France have **traditionally had close relations**.
- In 1998, the two entered into a **Strategic Partnership**, with defence & security cooperation, space cooperation and civil nuclear cooperation being its pillars.
- India and France also have a **robust economic partnership**, and are increasingly engaged in new areas of cooperation.
- France was among the few western countries to not condemn India after the **1998 Pokhran tests**.
- It has continued to support India's claim for permanent membership of the **United Nations Security Council**.
- France's support was vital in India's accession to the **Missile Technology Control Regime, Wassenaar Arrangement and Australia Group**.
- France continues to support India's bid for accession to the **Nuclear Suppliers Group**.
- France has also supported India's requests to block attempts by Pakistan to enlist Indian citizens under the **UNSC 1267 Sanctions Committee**.

➤ **India-Europe Relations:**

- **Background:** India in **1962 had been one of the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with the European Economic Community** — the precursor of the European Union.

- A Cooperation Agreement signed in 1994 broadened the relationship to include **ministerial meetings and a political dialogue**.
- These ties have expanded to include political and security issues, climate change and clean energy, information and communications technology, space and nuclear, health, agriculture and food security, and education and culture.
- **Significance of the Visit:** The visit to Europe is likely to set the stage for the India-EU summit and a **boost in Free Trade Agreement negotiations**, which have been ongoing for a decade and a half now.

Twin Hurdles Hinder India's Maritime Role

Why in News?

Recently, **QUAD grouping** consisting of India, Australia, Japan and the US rolled out an **Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) initiative** for information sharing and maritime surveillance across the Indo Pacific region.

- But **Infrastructure constraints and continued delay in posting Indian liaison officers** limit India's ability to further expand its role.

What is the Indo Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness Initiative (IPMDA)?

- The **IPMDA initiative was announced at the Quad Leaders' Summit in Tokyo, 2022 to track "dark shipping"** and to build a "faster, wider, and more accurate maritime picture of near-real-time activities in partners' waters" **integrating three critical regions in the Indo-Pacific — the Pacific Islands, Southeast Asia, and the Indian Ocean Region (IOR)**.
 - **Dark ships** are vessels with their Automatic Identification System (AIS) - a transponder system - switched off so as not to be detectable.
- It will **also allow tracking other tactical-level activities**, such as rendezvous at sea, as well as improve partners' ability to respond to climate and humanitarian events and to protect their fisheries, which are vital to many Indo-Pacific economies.
- The IPMDA will **help QUAD countries as well as littoral states in the backdrop of expanding Chinese naval presence** across the region.

Note:

- This will further increase the existing role of **Indian Liaison Officers** in building linkages with various agencies in their home countries.

What are the Two Issues that Limit India's Role?

- **Infrastructure Constraints:** This includes not only shipbuilding and ship repair but also modernisation and hinterland connectivity through rail and road network for integrated development of both the coastal and the interior regions of India.
 - It also includes coastal shipping. Due to infrastructure constraints, India cannot induct the postings of **International Liaison Officers (ILO)** at the **Indian Navy's Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR)**.
 - India has signed **white shipping exchange agreements** with 22 countries and one multinational grouping.
 - The white shipping information refers to an exchange of relevant advance information on the identity and movement of commercial non-military merchant vessels.
 - Ships can be classified into white (commercial ships), grey (military vessels), and black (illegal vessels).
 - It is not just important to have ILOs in India, but also equally important that Indian Navy officers be posted at similar centers in other countries.
- **Continued Delay in Posting Indian Liaison Officers** at other facilities and centers in the region:
 - Proposals to post Indian Naval Liaison Officers (LO) at the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre (RMIFC), Madagascar, and the Regional Coordination Operations Centre, Seychelles, have been pending for more than two years.
 - Another proposal to post an LO at the European-led mission in the **Strait of Hormuz** (EMASOH) in Abu Dhabi has also not been approved so far.
 - There is a **delay in continuing the present LOs** as well. For instance, India has had an LO at the IFC in Singapore since 2009.

What is the Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR)?

- The Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) hosted by the Indian Navy, was

established by the Government of India at Gurugram in December 2018 to further Maritime Safety and Security in the Indian Ocean Region.

- IFC-IOR was envisaged to address the very need to promote collaboration for maritime safety and security in view of the region's importance with respect to world trade and security.
- Since its inception, the Centre has established working level linkages with more than 50 nations and multinational/ maritime security centers.

Chinese Bridge on Pangong Tso

Why in News?

Recently, the Ministry of External Affairs has confirmed that China is building a second bridge on the **Pangong Tso lake**.

- The site of the bridge is **around 20 km east of Finger 8 on the lake's north bank** – where the **Line of Actual Control (LAC)** passes.
- However, the actual distance by road is more than 35 km between the bridge site and Finger 8.

What are the Key Points?

- The construction site is just **east of Khurnak Fort**, where **China has major frontier defence bases**.
- China calls it **Rutong Country**.
- It has a frontier defence company at the Khurnak Fort, and further east, a water squadron deployed at Banmozhang.
- Although it is being built in territory that is under China's control since 1958, the exact point is just west of India's claim line.
- The Ministry of External Affairs considers the area as illegally occupied by China.

Pangong Tso

- Pangong Tso is a 135-km long landlocked lake located at an altitude of over 14,000 feet i.e., 4350 m above sea level.
- Indian and China have around one-third and two-thirds of Pangong Tso Lake respectively.
 - India has around 45 km of Pangong Tso under its control while approximately 60% of the lake, in terms of length, lies in China,
 - The eastern end of Pangong Tso lies in Tibet.

Note:

- The lake, a glacial melt, has mountain spurs of the Chang Chenmo range jetting down, referred to as **fingers**.
- It is **one of the highest altitude lakes** in the world that is filled with **saline water**.
 - However, even though it is a saline water lake, Pangong Tso freezes completely.
 - The brackish water of this region has very low micro-vegetation.
 - No aquatic life or fish, except crustaceans during winters are found.
- It is a kind of **endorheic basin**, which implies that **it retains its water and does not allow outflow of its water to other external water bodies**, such as oceans and rivers.
- Pangong Tso is **popular for its changing colour** ability.
 - Its colour changes from shades of **blue to green to red**.

Why does China choose this Location?

- The constructions are a direct outcome of the ongoing standoff that began in May 2020.
- The location is the consequence of an operation conducted by the Indian Army in August 2020 where Indian troops outmaneuvered the People's Liberation Army to occupy the heights of **Kailash Range** in the Chushul sub-sector on the south bank of Pangong Tso.
- The positions allowed India to dominate the strategically significant Spanggur Gap, which could be used to launch an offensive as China had done in 1962.
- Also, India got a direct view of **China's Moldo Garrison (China's military base)**. This was a cause of immense concern for the Chinese.
- After this operation, the Indian Army also readjusted on the lake's north bank to position themselves above Chinese positions.
- The **north bank** was one of the first friction points to have come up in May 2020.
 - During this jostling, warning shots were fired for the first time by both sides, a first in over four decades.
- New bridge will allow Chinese troops to slash travel time from around 12 hours at the moment to around four hours.

Nagorno-Karabakh Region

Why in News?

Recently, protests against **possible concessions by Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh** which is disputed with neighboring Azerbaijan, **have increased**.

- In September 2020, clashes broke out that rapidly escalated to become the deadliest since the 1990s.

What is Nagorno-Karabakh Region?

About:

- Nagorno-Karabakh is a **mountainous and heavily forested region** that under international law is recognised as part of Azerbaijan.
 - However, **ethnic Armenians who constitute the vast majority** of the population there reject Azeri rule (the legal system of Azerbaijan).
- After **Azerbaijan's troops were pushed out of the region** following a war in the 1990s, these ethnic Armenians have been in administrative control of Nagorno-Karabakh, with support from Armenia.

Strategic Significance:

- The energy-rich Azerbaijan has **built several gas and oil pipelines across the Caucasus** (the region between the **Black Sea** and the **Caspian Sea**) to Turkey and Europe.
- **Some of these pipelines pass close to the conflict zone** (within 16 km of the border).
- In an open war between the two countries, **the pipelines could be targeted**, which would impact energy supplies and may even lead to higher oil prices globally.

What is the Genesis of the Conflict?

- **Background of the Conflict:** The conflict can be traced back to the pre-Soviet era when the region was at the meeting point of Ottoman, Russian and the Persian empires.
 - Once Azerbaijan and Armenia became Soviet Republics in 1921, Russia (erstwhile Soviet Union) gave Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan but offered autonomy to the contested region.
 - In the 1980s, when the Soviet power was receding, separatist currents picked up in Nagorno-Karabakh. In 1988, the national assembly voted to dissolve the region's autonomous status and join Armenia.

Note:



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- However, Azerbaijan suppressed such calls, which led to a military conflict.
 - **Flash Point of Conflict:** The self-declaration of independence by Nagorno-Karabakh in September 1991 in the backdrop of an imminent collapse of the USSR resulted in a war between Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh — supported by Armenia.
 - **Ceasefire:** This clash lasted till a ceasefire agreement was reached in 1994, mediated largely by Russia. Since then, the **Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group** co-chaired by the USA, Russia and France have engaged Azerbaijan and Armenia extensively to resolve the conflict.
- By that time, Armenia had taken control of Nagorno-Karabakh and handed it to Armenian rebels.

What is the Role of India?

- With Armenia, India has a friendship and cooperation treaty (signed in 1995), which, incidentally, would prohibit India from providing military or any other assistance to Azerbaijan.
- In the case of Azerbaijan, ONGC/OVL has made investments in an oilfield project in Azerbaijan and GAIL is exploring the possibilities of cooperation in LNG.
 - Azerbaijan also falls on the **International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC) route**, connecting India with Russia through Central Asia.
 - It can also connect India with Turkey and beyond through the **Baku-Tbilisi-Kars passenger and freight rail link**.
- Armenia extends its unequivocal support to India on Kashmir issue whereas Azerbaijan not only opposes but also promotes Pakistan's narrative on this issue.
- India does not have a publicly articulated policy for the South Caucasus — **unlike "Neighbourhood First", "Act East" or "Central Asia Connect"**.
 - The region has remained on the periphery of its foreign policy radar.

NATO Membership for Finland and Sweden

Why in News?

Recently, Finland and Sweden have shown interest to join the **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)**.

Why are Sweden and Finland Not NATO Members?

- **Finland:**
 - It has stayed out of such alliances because it **always wanted to maintain cordial relations with its neighbour, Russia**.
 - For a long time, the idea of not joining NATO or getting **too close to the West was a matter of survival** for the Finns.
 - However, the change in perception and an overwhelming support to join NATO came about following the Russian invasion of Ukraine.
- **Sweden:**
 - Unlike Finland, whose policy stance was a matter of survival, Sweden has been opposed to joining the organisation for ideological reasons.

What would a Membership mean and will it Benefit NATO as well?

- **Give Security Guarantee:**
 - Being a member of NATO will **give the nations a security guarantee** under the alliance's **"Article 5" on collective defence**.
 - The article essentially guarantees a **military response and protection by NATO countries** if any member of the organisation comes under attack.
- **Strengthen the Alliance's Position:**
 - Finland's **geographical location plays in its favour** as once it becomes a member, the length of borders Russia shares with NATO would double and it would also **strengthen the alliance's position in the Baltic Sea**.
- **Counter Russia's Aggression:**
 - More sovereign powers siding with the west and increasing its strength is a direct blow to Russia.
 - If Sweden and Finland do join NATO, especially under these circumstances, **"it would show Russia that the war is counterproductive** and it only strengthens Western unity, resolve and military preparedness".

How have Russia and other Countries Reacted?

- **Russia:**
 - Russia threatened to **take military measures if the membership goes through** and warned Finland to be aware of the consequences of this move.

Note:



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➤ European and US:

- **European Nations** and the United States have welcomed the announcement.
 - Norway and Denmark have said they will push for NATO admission faster.
 - Until the membership is formally accepted, the US stated it is prepared to provide any necessary defence support or address any concerns.

➤ Turkey:

- Turkey opposes Finland and Sweden joining NATO.
- The Turkish government claimed that it could use its membership in the Western alliance to veto moves to admit the two nations.
- The Turkish government cited Sweden and other Scandinavian countries for supporting Kurdish militants and other groups it considers terrorist.

What is NATO?

- It is a military alliance established by the North Atlantic Treaty (also called the Washington Treaty) of April, 1949, by the United States, Canada, and several Western European nations to provide collective security against the **Soviet Union**.
- There are currently 30 member states.
 - Its **original members were** Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and the United States.
 - Joining the original signatories were **Greece and Turkey** (1952), **West Germany** (1955, from 1990 as Germany), **Spain** (1982), the **Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland** (1999), **Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia** (2004), **Albania and Croatia** (2009), **Montenegro** (2017), and **North Macedonia** (2020).
 - France withdrew from the integrated military command of NATO in 1966 but remained a member of the organization, it resumed its position in NATO's military command in 2009.
- **Headquarters:** Brussels, Belgium.
- **Headquarters of Allied Command Operations:** Mons, Belgium.

What are the Objectives of NATO?

- NATO's essential and enduring purpose is to **safeguard the freedom and security** of all its members by political and military means.

- **Political objectives:** NATO promotes democratic values and enables members to consult and cooperate on defense and security-related issues to solve problems, build trust and, in the long run, prevent conflict.
- **Military Objectives:** NATO is committed to the peaceful resolution of disputes. If diplomatic efforts fail, it has the military power to undertake crisis-management operations.
 - These are carried out under the collective defence clause of NATO's founding treaty - Article 5 of the Washington Treaty or under a United Nations mandate, alone or in cooperation with other countries and international organisations.
 - NATO has only once invoked Article 5, on 12th September 2001 following the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center in the US.

WHO Reforms

Why in News?

Recently, the Prime Minister addressed the **Second Global Covid Virtual Summit** of the **World Health Organisation (WHO)**, where he emphasized on WHO Reforms.

- The Indian government has repeatedly raised the need to reform WHO at multilateral forums such as the **G20** and **BRICS** this year (2021-22). India's calls for WHO reforms, especially after the body's initial handling of the Covid-19 pandemic, **have been backed by countries around the world**.

What are the Reforms Suggested by India?

- **Strengthening the Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) declaration process:**
 - It is important to devise **objective criteria with clear parameters for declaring PHEIC**.
 - The **emphasis must be on transparency and promptness** in the declaration process.
 - A PHEIC **implies a situation** that is:
 - Serious, sudden, unusual or unexpected;
 - Carries implications for public health beyond the affected State's national border; and
 - May require immediate international action.

Note:



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➤ **Funding:**

- Most of the financing for Programmatic Activities of the WHO comes from extra budgetary contributions, which though voluntary in nature, are normally earmarked. The WHO enjoys very little flexibility in the use of these funds.
- There is a **need to ensure that extra budgetary or voluntary contributions are unearmarked to ensure that the WHO has the necessary flexibility for its usage in areas** where they are required the most.
- There is also **a need to look at increasing the regular budget of the WHO so that most of the core activities of the WHO are financed** from it, without putting an overwhelming financial burden on developing countries.

➤ **Ensuring transparency of funding mechanism and accountability framework:**

- There is **no collaborative mechanism** wherein the actual projects and activities are decided in consultation with member states, there is no review with respect to value for money and whether projects are being done as per the member states priorities or if there are abnormal delays.
- Establishing strong and robust financial accountability frameworks will enable maintaining integrity in financial flows.
- It is also **crucial to establish a significant amount of transparency with respect to data reporting and disbursement of funds for increased accountability.**

➤ **Enhancement of the Response Capacities of the WHO and Member States:**

- Implementation of the IHR 2005 has highlighted critical gaps in the basic health infrastructure of member States. This has become more evident in their dealing with COVID 19 pandemic.
- It is important that the **programmatic activities carried out by the WHO, under its General Programme of Work, should focus on building and strengthening capacities in member states as required under IHR 2005**, which are found lacking or deficient on the basis of the self-reporting on IHR 2005 done by the Member States.

➤ **Improvement of the WHO's Governance Structure:**

- Being a technical Organisation, most of the work in WHO is done in Technical Committees composed of independent experts. Moreover, considering the growing risks associated with emergence of disease

outbreaks the role of the Independent Oversight and Advisory Committee (IOAC), responsible for the performance of the WHO Health Emergencies Programme (WHE), becomes extremely crucial.

- It is important that the **member States have a greater say in the functioning of the WHO**, given that it is the States which are responsible for implementation on the grounds of the technical advice and recommendations coming from the WHO.
- There is a need to **devise specific mechanisms like a Standing Committee of the Executive Board to ensure effective supervision by member States.**

➤ **Improvement in IHR Implementation:**

- The Member States have a **self-reporting obligation under IHR (International Health Regulations) 2005**. However, review of IHR implementation is voluntary.
 - IHR (2005), represents a binding international legal agreement involving 196 countries across the globe, including all the Member States of the WHO.
 - Their aim is to help the international community prevent and respond to acute public health risks that have the potential to cross borders and threaten people worldwide.
 - The review of the **IHR implementation should continue to be on a voluntary basis.**
 - It is critical to **accord priority to enhance international cooperation, which should be directed at aiding** developing countries in areas which they have been identified as lacking the necessary capacity to implement the IHR.

➤ **Access to Therapeutics, Vaccines and Diagnostics:**

- It has been felt that the **TRIPS flexibilities** provided for public health, under Doha Declaration, may not be sufficient to deal with crises such as Covid-19 pandemic.
- It is important **to ensure fair, affordable, and equitable access to all tools for combating Covid-19 pandemic** and, therefore, the need to build a framework for their allocation.

➤ **Creation of Global Framework for Management of Infectious Diseases & Pandemics:**

- There is a need to create a monitoring mechanism and support to member states on International Health Regulations, preparedness of infrastructure, human resources and relevant health systems capacities such as testing and surveillance systems.

Note:



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- Enhancement of capacities of countries in preparation for and response to infectious diseases of pandemic potential, including guidance on effective public health and economic measures for health emergencies by leveraging a multidisciplinary approach which includes social science alongside health and natural sciences.
- **Role of Hosted Partnerships in Pandemic Management:**
 - The risks imposed on humankind by new influenza viruses causing more disease outbreaks are very real.
 - There is an urgent need for the global community to address this issue by making bold efforts and ensuring vigilance and preparedness in our healthcare systems.
 - The primary objective should be to improve capacity for global pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response, and strengthening our ability to fight back any such pandemic in future.

BRICS High Level Meeting on Climate Change

Why in News?

Recently, the Union Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change participated in the **BRICS** high-level meeting on Climate Change where he highlighted the **relevance of the forum to jointly address climate change, to explore approaches to accelerate low-carbon and resilient transition, and to achieve sustainable recovery and development.**

- The Meeting was chaired by People's Republic of China and was attended by Environment Ministers of **BRICS** nations including **Brazil, Russia, India and South Africa.**

What are the Highlights of the Meeting?

- India underscored its commitment to **strong climate action including the promotion of sustainable lifestyles based on mindful consumption and reduction of waste.**
- India is today leading by example by taking several robust steps in the field of renewable energy, sustainable habitats, creation of **carbon sinks** through additional forest and tree cover, transition to sustainable transport, **E-mobility**, mobilizing the private sector to make climate commitments, etc.

- India has progressively **continued decoupling economic growth from greenhouse gas emissions.**
- Ambitious implementation of climate actions by developing countries is contingent on the ambitious and adequate delivery of climate finance, technology transfer, and other implementation support, as mandated by the **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)** and the **Paris Agreement.**
- BRICS nations expressed optimism towards the **delivery of climate finance as per the Glasgow decision and the Climate Finance Delivery Plan released by the COP 26 Presidency.**
- BRICS Environment Ministers **expressed commitment to strengthen collaboration on climate change and broaden and deepen the contents of cooperation.**
- Further, the countries agreed to **carry out policy exchanges and cooperation in areas of environment and climate change.**

What is BRICS?

- BRICS is an acronym for the grouping of the world's leading emerging economies, namely **Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.**
 - In 2001, the British Economist Jim O'Neill coined the term BRIC to describe the four emerging economies of Brazil, Russia, India, and China.
 - The grouping was formalised during the first meeting of BRIC Foreign Ministers' in 2006.
 - South Africa was invited to join BRIC in December 2010, after which the group adopted the acronym BRICS.
- The BRICS **brings together five of the largest developing countries of the world, representing 41% of the global population, 24% of the global GDP and 16% of the global trade.**
- The chairmanship of the forum is rotated annually among the members, in accordance with the acronym B-R-I-C-S.
 - **India was the chair for 2021.**
- During the Sixth BRICS Summit in Fortaleza (Brazil) in 2014, the leaders signed the Agreement establishing the **New Development Bank (NDB - Shanghai, China).** They also signed the BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement to provide short-term liquidity support to the members.

Note:



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SCO 'Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS)' Meeting

Why in News?

Recently, a meeting held between the member nations of the **SCO** under the framework of the **SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS)**. It is the first such meeting in India since Russia's evasion of Ukraine and China's transgression along the Line of actual control.

- In the SCO-RATS meeting agenda to boost cooperation in fighting different global and regional security challenges have been discussed.
- **India was the chairman** of the Council of Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure of SCO (RATS SCO).

What is the Agenda Discussed in the Meeting?

- Situation of Afghanistan and security concerns raised due to the fall of Afghanistan in the hands of the Taliban was the main agenda of the meeting.
- India has expressed a strong desire to strengthen its security cooperation with the **SCO** and its **Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure**, which focus on security and defence matters.

What is Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure-SCO?

- **SCO-RATS** is a permanent body of the **Sanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)**.
- It is promoting coordination and interaction between the **SCO** member states as per as fight against **terrorism, extremism** and **separatism** are concern.
- The main functions of **SCO-RATS** are **information sharing**.
- As a member, India has actively participated in the activities of **SCO-RATS**.
- India's permanent membership would enable it to generate greater understanding among members for its perspective.

What is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization?

- **About:**
 - SCO was created in 2001.
 - The **Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)** was established as a **multilateral association** to ensure security and maintain stability across the vast **Eurasian region**.

- It envisages joining forces to counteract emerging challenges and threats, and enhance trade, as well as cultural and humanitarian cooperation.
- 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 organization in 2001, the **Shanghai Five** was renamed the SCO.
- 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,
 - Executive Committee of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) in Tashkent.
- **Member Nations:** Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India, Pakistan.
- Recently, **Iran's bid to become a full member of the SCO has been approved**.

Investment Incentive Agreement (IIA)

Why in News?

Recently, India and the United States signed an **Investment Incentive Agreement (IIA)** at Tokyo, Japan.

What is an Investment Incentive Agreement (IIA)?

- **About:**
 - This IIA **supersedes the Investment Incentive Agreement** signed between both the countries in the year 1997.
 - There have been significant developments since the earlier IIA was signed in 1997, such as the **founding of a new organization called Development Finance Corporation (DFC)**.
 - DFC as a **successor agency of the erstwhile Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC)** after the enactment of a recent legislation of USA, the **BUILD Act 2018**.

Note:

➤ **Purpose:**

- To **keep pace with the additional investment support programmes**, offered by the DFC, such as debt, equity investment, investment guaranty, investment insurance or reinsurance, feasibility studies for potential projects and grants.
- The Agreement is the **legal requirement for DFC**, to continue providing investment support in India.
- It is expected that **signing of IIA would lead to enhanced investment support provided** by DFC in India, which shall further help in India's development.

What is the Status of DFC in India?

- DFC or their predecessor agencies **have been active in India since 1974** and have so far **provided investment support worth USD 5.8 billion** of which USD 2.9 billion is still outstanding.
- Proposals worth USD 4 billion are under consideration by DFC for providing investment support in India.
- DFC has provided investment support in sectors that matter for development such as **Covid-19 vaccine manufacturing**, healthcare financing, renewable energy, **Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) financing**, financial inclusion, infrastructure etc.

What is the current Status of India-US Relations?➤ **About:**

- India-US bilateral relations have **developed into a "global strategic partnership"**, based on shared democratic values and increasing convergence of interests on bilateral, regional and global issues.
- In 2015, both the countries issued a **Delhi Declaration of Friendship** and adopted a **Joint Strategic Vision for Asia-Pacific** and the **Indian Ocean Region**.

➤ **Civil-Nuclear Deal:**

- The **bilateral civil nuclear cooperation** agreement was signed in October 2008.

➤ **Energy and Climate Change:**

- As a priority initiative under the **PACE (Partnership to Advance Clean Energy)**, the US Department of Energy (DOE) and the Government of India have established the Joint Clean Energy Research and Development Center (JCERDC) designed to promote clean energy innovations by teams of scientists from India and the United States.

- **India-US Clean Energy Agenda 2030 Partnership** was launched at the Leaders climate summit 2021.

➤ **Defence Cooperation:**

- Defence relationship has emerged as a major pillar of India-US strategic partnership with the signing of **'New Framework for India-US Defense Relations' in 2005** which was further updated for 10 years in 2015.
- India and US inked **important defence pacts in the last few years** and also formalised the four nation alliance of **QUAD (India, US, Japan and Australia)**.
 - The alliance is seen as an important counter to China in the Indo-Pacific.
- The **Malabar exercise** in November 2020 portrayed a high point in Indo-US strategic ties, it was the **first time in 13 years** that all four countries of QUAD came together sending a strong message to China.
- India now has access to American bases from **Djibouti in Africa** to Guam in the Pacific. It can also access advanced communication technology used in US defence.
- India and US have **four foundational defence agreements**:
 - **Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geospatial Intelligence (BECA)**.
 - **General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA)**.
 - **Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA)**.
 - **Communication Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA)**.
- India-US Counter-Terrorism Cooperation Initiative was signed in 2010 to expand collaboration on counter-terrorism, information sharing and capacity building.
- A tri-services exercise– **Tiger Triumph**- was conducted in November 2019.
- Bilateral and regional exercises include: Yudh Abhyas (Army); **Vajra Prahar** (Special Forces); RIMPAC; Red Flag.

➤ **Trade:**

- The US is **India's second largest trading partner** and a major destination for India's exports of goods and services.
- The US replaced Mauritius as the second largest source of **foreign direct investment** into India during 2020-21.

Note:

- The previous US government **ended India's special trade status (GSP withdrawal)** and also imposed several bans, India also retaliated with bans on 28 US products.
- **Science & Technology:**
 - **Indian Space Res** India's Prime Minister participated in an event in Tokyo to launch the **Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF)**.
 - **earch Organization (ISRO)** and **National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)** are working together to realize a joint microwave remote sensing satellite for Earth observation, named **NASA-ISRO Synthetic Ape**
 - **rture Radar (NISAR)**.

Indo-Pacific Economic Framework

Why in News?

Recently, This economic initiative came a day before the **second in-person summit** of the **Quad leaders** (India, the US, Australia and Japan) in Tokyo.

What is QUAD?

- It is the grouping of **four democracies** –India, Australia, the US, and Japan.
- All four nations find a common ground of being democratic nations and also support the common interest of unhindered **maritime trade and security**.
- The Quad is billed as four democracies with a shared objective to ensure and support a **“free, open and prosperous”** Indo-Pacific region.
- The idea of Quad was first mooted by **Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007**. However, the idea couldn't move ahead with Australia pulling out of it, apparently due to Chinese pressure.
- Finally in 2017, **India, Australia, the US, and Japan**, came together and formed this **“quadrilateral”** coalition.

What is the Significance of IPEF?

- **About:**
 - It is a **US-led initiative** that aims to strengthen economic partnership among participating countries to enhance resilience, sustainability, inclusiveness,

economic growth, fairness, and competitiveness in the **Indo-Pacific region**.

- The IPEF was launched with a dozen initial partners who together represent **40% of the world GDP**.
- **Opportunity for Indo-Pacific Region:**
 - It is a declaration of a collective desire to make the Indo-Pacific region an engine of global economic growth.
- **An Economic Vision:**
 - The Indo-Pacific covers half the population of the world and more than **60% of the global GDP** and the nations who will join this framework in the future, are signing up to work toward an economic vision that will deliver for all people.
- **Focus Areas:** Unlike traditional trade blocs, IPEF won't negotiate tariffs or market access, and the framework will focus on integrating partner countries in **four areas which include:**
 - **Trade:** It intends to build high-standard, inclusive, free, and fair-trade commitments and develop new and creative approaches in trade and technology policy that advance a **broad set of objectives that fuels economic activity** and investment, promotes sustainable and inclusive economic growth, and benefits workers and consumers.
 - **Supply Chains:** IPEF is committed to improving transparency, diversity, security, and sustainability in supply chains to make them more resilient and well-integrated.
 - To coordinate crisis response measures; expand cooperation to better prepare for and mitigate the effects of disruptions to better ensure business continuity; improve logistical efficiency and support; and ensure access to key raw and processed materials, semiconductors, critical minerals, and clean energy technology.
 - **Clean Energy, Decarbonization, and Infrastructure:** In line with the **Paris Agreement** goals and efforts to support the livelihood of peoples and workers, it plans to accelerate the development and deployment of clean energy technologies to decarbonize our economies and build resilience to climate impacts.
 - This also involves deepening cooperation on technologies, on mobilizing finance, including concessional finance, and on seeking ways

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to improve competitiveness and enhance connectivity by supporting the **development of sustainable and durable infrastructure** and by providing technical assistance.

- **Tax and Anti-Corruption:** It is committed to promoting fair competition by enacting and enforcing effective and robust tax, anti-money laundering, and anti-bribery regimes in line with existing multilateral obligations, standards, and agreements to curb tax evasion and corruption in the Indo-Pacific region.
- This involves sharing expertise and seeking ways to **support the capacity building** necessary to advance accountable and transparent systems.

What is India's

Vision for Indo-Pacific Region?

- India's trade in this region is growing rapidly, with overseas investments being directed towards the East, e.g., the **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements** with Japan, South Korea, and Singapore, and the Free Trade Agreements with **ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations)** and Thailand.
- India has been active in **championing a Free and Open Indo-Pacific**. The US, Australia, and the members of the ASEAN have all expressed a common view that **India plays a greater role in the region**.
- India, along with its **Quad partners**, is upping its game in the Indo-Pacific.
- India's view is to work with other like-minded countries in the Indo-Pacific region to cooperatively manage a rules-based multipolar regional order and **prevent any single power from dominating the region or its waterways**.

Bongosagar Exercise

Why in News?

Recently, the third edition of **Exercise Bongosagar**, bilateral naval exercise between India and Bangladesh, commenced at Port Mongla, Bangladesh.

What are the Key Highlights of the Exercise?

- **About:**
 - It is an **annual exercise**. **Second edition** of the exercise, held in **Northern Bay of Bengal in 2020**.

- The exercise is aimed at **developing a high degree of interoperability and joint operational skills** through the conduct of a wide spectrum of maritime exercises and operations between the two navies.

Participants in the Third Edition:

- Participating in the exercise are **Indian Naval Ships Kora**, a guided missile corvette, and **Sumedha**, an offshore patrol vessel.
- Bangladesh Navy is being represented by BNS Abu Ubaidah and Ali Haider, both Guided Missile Frigates.

What are the other Related Exercises between two Countries?

➤ Bilateral:

- **SAMPRITI:** Military Exercise

➤ Multinational:

- **Bangladesh's Military exercise 'Shantir Ogroshena'.**
- **TABLE TOP (Air)**
- **IN-BN CORPAT (Navy)**
- **SAMVEDNA (Multinational Air Exercise with Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and UAE).**

India-Canada Science and Technology Cooperation

Why in News?

Recently, two memorandums of understanding (MoUs) were renewed at the 7th India-Canada Joint Science and Technology Cooperation Committee (JSTCC) meeting.

- The MoUs were signed by the **Indian Ministry of Science and Technology** with the **Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC)** and **National Research Council Canada (NRC)**, respectively, under the **2005 Agreement for Scientific and Technological Cooperation**.
- Earlier, India and Canada held the **fifth Ministerial Dialogue on Trade & Investment (MDTI)**, where Ministers agreed to formally re-launch the negotiations for **India-Canada Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)** and consider an Interim Agreement or **Early Progress Trade Agreement (EPTA)** that could bring early commercial gains to both the countries.

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What are the Highlights of the Meeting?

- The focus areas of the collaboration include national missions, **quantum computing, artificial intelligence (AI)**, and **cyber-physical systems**, among others.
 - A large number of Indian students studying in Canadian universities will benefit from the collaboration.
- India and Canada benefit from strong bilateral relations and are **committed to deepening ties, with science, technology, and innovation being key pillars of the relationship**.
- Under the terms of the agreement made in 2005, the JSTCC meets **every two years to review ongoing collaborations between Canadian and Indian researchers and set priorities for the next period** in fields like agriculture and food security, healthcare and healthtech, clean technologies and environmental research, marine and polar research, quantum tech and AI, and human capacity development and researcher mobility.
- Both countries **agreed to continue monitoring progress on key priorities in bilateral science, technology, and innovation projects (STIP) during the 2022-2024 period**.
- India plays an active role in the **global technology research and development ecosystem by facilitating academic and scientific relationships with other countries**.

How is India-Canada Cooperation in Various Spheres?

➤ Political:

- India and Canada share **commonalities in Parliamentary structure and procedures**. After the general election in October 2019, Mr Raj Saini, MP from the House of Common has been appointed as the Chair of the Canada-India Parliamentary Association.
- As of 2020, the House of Common in Canadian Parliament (total strength of 338) has 22 Members of Indian origin.
- In India, **Canada is represented by the High Commission of Canada in New Delhi**. Canada also has Consulates General in Bengaluru, Chandigarh and Mumbai, as well as trade offices in Ahmedabad, Chennai, Hyderabad and Kolkata
- India is represented in Canada by a High Commission in Ottawa and by consulates in Toronto and Vancouver.

➤ Economic:

- Bilateral trade between India and Canada stands **at USD 5 billion**.
- More than 400 Canadian companies have a presence in India, and more than 1,000 companies are actively pursuing business in the Indian market.
- Indian companies in Canada **are active in the field such as Information Technology, software, steel, natural resources and banking sectors**.
- **India's exports to Canada** include pharma, iron and steel, chemicals, gem and jewelry, nuclear reactors and boilers.
- Energy has been a primary area of our focus, considering that Canada is an 'energy superpower' with one of the world's largest resources of uranium, natural gas, oil, coal, minerals and advanced technologies in hydropower, mining, renewable energy and nuclear energy.

➤ Science and Technology:

- Indo-Canadian Science and Technology cooperation has been **primarily focused on promoting Industrial R&D (Research and Development)** which has potential for application through development of **new IP (Intellectual property) processes**, prototypes or products
- Department of Biotechnology under **IC-IMPACTS program implements joint research projects in health care, agri-biotech and waste management**.
 - IC-IMPACTS (the India-Canada Centre for Innovative Multidisciplinary Partnerships to Accelerate Community Transformation and Sustainability) is the first, and only, Canada-India Research Centre of Excellence established through the Canadian Networks of Centres of Excellence (NCE) as a Centre dedicated to the development of research collaborations between Canada and India.
 - Department of Earth Science and Polar Canada have started **a programme for exchange of knowledge and scientific research on Cold Climate (Arctic) Studies**.

➤ Space:

- India and Canada are pursuing successful **cooperative and commercial relations in the field of Space since 1990s** mainly on space science, earth observation, satellite launch services and ground support for space missions.

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- ISRO and Canadian Space Agency (CSA) have signed **MOUs** in the field of exploration and utilisation of outer space.
- **ANTRIX**, the Commercial arm of **ISRO**, has launched several nanosatellites from Canada
- ISRO in its 100th Satellite **PSLV** launched in 2018, also flew Canadian first LEO (Low earth Orbit) satellite, from Indian spaceport Sriharikota.
- **Security and Defence:**
 - India and Canada **collaborate closely in international fora particularly through the UN, Commonwealth and G-20.**
 - A Statement of Intent (Sol) on Cooperation between DRDO and **Canada's Defence Research and Development Council** has been signed in 2015.
 - The security cooperation was further enhanced with the **Framework for Cooperation between India and Canada on Countering Terrorism** and Violent Extremism signed by the National Security Advisor of India and the National Security and Intelligence Advisor of Canada in 2018.
 - There is **substantial engagement on counter terrorism issues** particularly through the framework of the Joint Working Group (JWG) on Counter Terrorism.

India's Trade with the USA

Why in News?

Recently, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry has released the data, which showed that the **US has surpassed China** becoming India's **top trading partner in 2021-22.**

- Major export items from India to the US include **petroleum, polished diamonds, pharmaceutical products, jewellery, frozen shrimp**, whereas major imports from the US include **petroleum, rough diamonds, liquified natural gas, gold, coal, waste and scrap, almonds** and so on.
- The data showed that China was India's top trading partner from 2013-14 till 2017-18 and also in 2020-21.
- Before China, the UAE was the country's largest trading partner.

What are the Key Points?

- **Bilateral Trade with the US:**

- Bilateral trade between the US and India stood at **USD 119.42 billion (2021-2022)** as against USD 80.51 billion in 2020-21.
- Exports to the US increased to USD 76.11 billion in 2021-22 from USD 51.62 billion in the previous fiscal year, while imports rose to USD 43.31 billion as compared to about USD 29 billion in 2020-21.
- America is **one of the few countries with which India has a trade surplus.**
- In 2021-22, India had a trade surplus of USD 32.8 billion with the US.
- **Bilateral trade with China during the Same Period:**
 - During 2021-22, **India's two-way commerce with China aggregated at USD 115.42 billion** as compared to USD 86.4 billion in 2020-21.
 - Exports to China **marginally increased to USD 21.25 billion last FY 2021-22** from USD 21.18 billion in 2020-21.
 - On the other hand, imports from China jumped to USD 94.16 billion from about USD 65.21 billion in 2020-21.
 - The trade gap (Import - Export) rose to USD 72.91 billion in 2021-22 from USD 44 billion in the previous fiscal year.

What Factors made the US Largest Trading Partner?

- India is emerging as a trusted trading partner and global firms are reducing their dependence on China for their supplies and are diversifying business into other countries like India.
- India has joined a **US-led initiative to set up an Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF)** and this move would help boost economic ties further.
- The US has consistently been India's largest market for services exports, but the recent overseas sales of merchandise goods to that country overtook China, making it the largest bilateral trading nation of India.
 - India's total merchandise exports touched a record USD 418 billion in 2021-22, exceeding the Center's target by about 5% and clocking a 40% growth over the previous year.

How have been India's Relations with the US Lately?

- India-US bilateral partnership today encompasses a whole host of issues including the response to

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Covid-19, economic recovery post-pandemic, the **climate crisis** and **sustainable development**, **critical and emerging technologies**, **supply chain resilience**, education, the **diaspora**, and **defence and security**.

- The breadth and depth of Indo-US ties remain **unmatched and the drivers of this partnership have been growing** at an unprecedented rate.
- The relationship remains unique insofar as this is driven at both levels: at the strategic elite as well as at the people-to-people level.
- Although India and the US have **quite contradictory responses towards the Russia-Ukraine crisis**.
- India and the US have **underscored their commitment to continue to build on the momentum of recent years** and not lose sight of the larger strategic picture.

What are the Associated Challenges of India-US Ties?

- **Tariff Imposition:** In 2018, the US imposed a 25% tariff on certain steel products and a 10% tariff on certain aluminum products from India.
 - India retaliated in June 2019, by increasing tariffs on 28 products worth about USD 1.2 billion on US imports.
 - However, after the imposition of the Section 232 tariffs, steel exports to the US declined by 46% year-on-year.
- **Misunderstanding Self-Reliance as Protectionism:** The **Atmanirbhar Bharat Campaign** has exacerbated the view that India is increasingly becoming a protectionist closed market economy.
- **Exemption from US' Generalised System of Preferences:** Effective since June 2019, the USA decided to withdraw duty-free benefits to Indian exporters under the GSP programme.
 - Consequently, **special duty treatment on USD 5.6 billion worth of exports to the US was removed**, affecting India's export-oriented sectors such as pharmaceuticals, textiles, agricultural products and automotive parts.
- **US' Hostility towards Other Countries:**
 - Some of the differences between India and the US are not direct consequences of India-US relationship but due to **US' hostility towards third countries** like Iran and Russia – the traditional allies of India.

- The other issues that are challenging India-US relationship include India's ties with Iran and India's purchase of S-400 from Russia.
- The US' call for India to distance itself from Russia may have a far-reaching consequence to South Asia's status quo.
- **US' policy in Afghanistan:**
 - India is also concerned over the US' policy in Afghanistan as it is jeopardizing India's security and interest in the region.

US-Taiwan Relations

Why in News?

Ahead of the **Quad summit** in Japan, the **US President** made a controversial statement giving **affirmative reply** in response to a question with regards to providing **military aid to Taiwan in case of China's invasion**.

- This has raised questions about **whether the US is shifting from its long-standing policy of strategic ambiguity over Taiwan to that of strategic clarity**.
- **Quad grouping includes India, the US, Australia and Japan.**

What is the Taiwan Issue?

- **China-Taiwan Relations:**
 - Taiwan is an **island territory across the Taiwan Strait**, located off the coast of mainland China.
 - The ruling **Kuomintang (Nationalist) government of China fled to Taiwan after being defeated by the communist forces in the Chinese civil war of 1945-1949**.
 - Following the **split of China and Taiwan** in the civil war, the **Republic of China (ROC) government was relocated to Taiwan**. On the other hand, The **Communist Party of China (CPC) established the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the mainland**.
 - Since then, the **PRC observes Taiwan as a traitor province and awaits reintegration with Taiwan, if possible, by peaceful means**.
 - Simultaneously, the **United Nations membership was continued by the ROC maintaining its permanent seat at the UN Security Council (UNSC)**.

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- PRC allied itself with the **Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)** and **ROC** with the **US** in the cold war further **straining the China-Taiwan relations**.
- Consequently, **two Taiwan Strait crises** of the 1950s happened.
- **Reconciliation of the US with China and the Subsequent Events:**
 - The **US and China reconciled in the 1970s** due to the **Cold War's shifting geopolitics**, so that the growing influence of the **USSR** could be countered.
 - This was followed by the **visit of the then US President to the PRC in 1972**.
 - Subsequently, **ROC was displaced by the PRC as the official representative at the UN**.
 - Then, **"One-China Principle"** came into picture.
- **One-China Principle and its Impact:**
 - This means that the **nations who want to have diplomatic relations with the PRC** have to **recognize the PRC but not the ROC as China**, breaking the relations with ROC.
 - Simultaneously, **China evolved as a multi-party democracy** alongside the **reformation of its economic system**.
 - Since then, the **two countries became economically entangled and continuously competing**.

Bilateral Security and Defence Cooperation: Indo-Japan

Why in News?

Recently, India and Japan agreed to further enhance **Bilateral Security and Defence Cooperation**, including in defence manufacturing.

What are the Highlights of the Meeting?

- Both sides **should work jointly towards implementing their decision to have 5 trillion yen in public and private investment** and financing from Japan to India in the next five years.
- India highlighted the steps taken by it to **improve ease of doing business, logistics through the 'Gati Shakti' initiative** and urged Japan to support greater investments by Japanese companies in India.

- Such investments would help in creating resilient supply chains and would be mutually beneficial.
- India appreciated that **Japanese companies are increasing their investments in India** and that 24 Japanese companies had successfully applied **under the various Production Linked Incentive schemes**.
- Both Countries noted the **progress in implementation of Mumbai-Ahmedabad High Speed Rail project** and welcomed the signing of **exchange of notes of the 3rd tranche of loan for this project**.
- Agreed to encourage **greater collaboration between private sectors of both sides** in the development of **next generation communication technologies**.
- Also agreed to deepen cooperation in the area of Clean Energy including **green hydrogen**.
- Took note of the progress in implementation of the **Specified Skilled Workers (SSW) programme** and agreed to further scale up this programme, boosting people to people linkages.
- Concurred that the **India-Japan Act East Forum** was useful in prioritising development of India's North East Region.

What are other Recent Developments between India and Japan?

- In March 2022, the Japanese Prime Minister was on an official visit to India for the **14th India-Japan Annual Summit** between the two Countries.
- Earlier, the Indian PM virtually inaugurated a Japanese **'Zen Garden - Kaizen Academy'** at the Ahmedabad Management Association (AMA) in Gujarat.
- Recently, India, Japan and Australia have formally launched the **Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI)** in a move to counter China's dominance of the supply chain in the Indo-Pacific region.
- In 2020, India and Japan signed a **logistics agreement** that will allow armed forces of both sides to coordinate closely in services and supplies. The agreement is known as the **Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA)**.
- In 2014, India and Japan upgraded their relationship to **'Special Strategic and Global Partnership'**.
- The **India-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)** that came into force in August 2011 covers trade in goods, services, movement of natural persons, investments, Intellectual Property Rights, custom procedures and other trade related issues.

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- Japan is 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**.
- **Defence Exercises:** India and Japan defence forces organize a series of bilateral exercises namely, **JIMEX (naval)**, **SHINYUU Maitri (Air Force)**, and **Dharma Guardian (Army)**. Both countries also participate in **Malabar exercise (Naval Exercise)** with the USA and Australia.
- Both India and Japan are members of **Quad, G20 and G-4**.
- They are also member countries of the **International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER)**.

India and Senegal

Why in News?

Recently, the **Indian Vice President visited Senegal** and three **MoUs (Memorandums of Understanding) for cultural exchange, cooperation in youth matters and visa free regime** were signed.

- Both countries are celebrating **60 years of their diplomatic relations**.

What are the Highlights of the Recent Visit?

- **Visa-Free Regime:**
 - The first MoU pertains to visa-free regime for diplomatic and official passport holders which would strengthen cooperation between the two countries through seamless travel of officials/diplomats.
- **Cultural Exchange Programme:**
 - MoU for Cultural Exchange Programme (CEP) for the period 2022-26 was renewed.
 - With the renewal of the CEP, **there will be more cultural exchanges, thereby strengthening people-to-people contacts**.
- Bilateral Cooperation in Youth Matters:**
 - Recognizing that both India and Senegal have a relatively young population, this MoU will be **mutually beneficial to both the countries through sharing of information, knowledge and good practices**, and youth exchanges.
- **Diversification of Trade Basket:**
 - Indo-Senegalese trade saw a 37% increase to USD 1.5 billion during last one year despite Covid-19

pandemic. India called for diversifying trade basket, particularly in the sectors of Agriculture, Oil & Gas, Health, Railways, Mining, Defence, green energy etc.

- In view of the **large number of phosphates imported by India from Senegal**, Indian companies, especially those producing heavy earth moving equipment, can offer their expertise in this area.
- **Upgradation of Entrepreneurial Training & Development Centre:**
 - Phase II of the upgradation of Entrepreneurial Training & Development Centre (CEDT) at Dakar was approved.
 - The CEDT was set up in Dakar in 2002 under Indian grant assistance and every year around 1000 youth, though mainly from Senegal, but many also from 19 other African countries, **get trained in six different disciplines at the Centre**.
- **ITEC Course:**
 - Noting that Senegal, being a French speaking country, is **not able to avail various training/capacity building programmes under ITEC (Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation)** which are in English language, India offered a Special ITEC Course on the English training for Senegalese public servants for 20 persons at a time.
- **E-Vidya Bharati and E-Aarogya Bharati initiative:**
 - Recognizing that many African students come to India for higher studies, India called for enhanced cooperation with Senegal in implementing the E-Vidya Bharati and E-Aarogya Bharati (E-VBAB) initiative (tele-education and tele-medicine) for the larger benefit of Senegalese students.
- **Issue of Indian Nationals Detained:**
 - India took up the issue of **four Indian nationals, crew members of ship M.V. Asso-6, who have been detained in Senegal since June 2021** on alleged drug trafficking charges and **requested the Senegalese government to expedite their trial** so that if released, they could return to their anxious families.
- **India's permanent UNSC membership:**
 - Appreciating Senegal's support for India's permanent UNSC membership, India reiterated **India's unwavering support to the Common African Position, enshrined in the Ezulwini Consensus and the Sirte Declaration** and underscored the need to rectify the historical injustice done to the African continent.

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- The Ezulwini Consensus (2005) is a position on international relations and reform of the United Nations, agreed by the African Union.

➤ **Non-Aligned Movement:**

- India called for **re-energizing and re-invigorating Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)** and making it more responsive to contemporary issues of relevance to the developing world.
- India sought **Senegalese support for early adoption of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT)** under the UN umbrella, terming it vital to combat the menace of **cross-border terrorism**.

➤ **Presidency of African Union:**

- India congratulated Senegal on its assumption of the Presidency of African Union.

What are the Key Points of India-Senegal Relations?

➤ **Political Relations:**

- Diplomatic relations between the two countries **were established at Ambassadorial level in 1962**, with a resident Indian Mission in Dakar.
 - Both countries enjoy warm and friendly bilateral relations **sharing common values of democracy, development and secularism**.
 - They are **both members of the Non-Aligned Movement and G-15** and that of **International Solar Alliance**.
 - G-15 was essentially conceived as an economic forum designed to foster South-South cooperation.

➤ **Commercial Relations:**

- Major items of export from India include textiles, food items, automobiles and pharmaceuticals. Major items of import from Senegal are phosphoric acid and raw cashew.

➤ **Development Assistance Programmes:**

- India has extended Lines of Credit to Senegal in such sectors as agriculture and irrigation, transport, rural electrification, fisheries, women poverty alleviation, IT training and equipment, medical, railways etc.
- India supplied **250 e-Rickshaws with lithium-ion batteries to Senegal**.

➤ **Cultural Cooperation:**

- Some of the Indian cultural events organized in 2019 Senegal included TIRANGA 3.0 – the 3rd edition of Festival of India in Senegal, Dakar; Tiranga Holi, **4th International Day of Yoga**; and, and various events related to 150th Mahatma Gandhi Birth Anniversary celebrations.

- India also offers **10 ICCR (Indian Council for Cultural Relations) Scholarships**.

➤ **Indian Diaspora:**

- The Indian community numbers around 500 (five hundred). Most of them are working for Indian companies including those executing development projects under Lines of Credit extended by India. Some of them are running their own businesses.

Security Deal between China and Solomon Island

Why in News?

A recent leaked document has revealed that the Solomon Islands in the South Pacific has reached a deal with China which outlines an unprecedented level of security cooperation.

- This is the first deal of its kind for China in the region, which is not yet signed and it is not fully known whether the provisions mentioned in the leaked document are present in the final draft.

What are the Provisions under the Proposed Deal?

- The document explicitly enables China to send its “police, armed police, military personnel and other law enforcement and armed forces” to the islands on the latter government’s request, or if the former sees that the safety of its projects and personnel in the islands are at risk.
 - It also provides for China’s naval vessels to utilise the islands for logistics support.

What are the Reasons for China’s Interest in the Solomon Islands?

➤ **Role of Taiwan:**

- The Pacific islands are among the few regions in the world where China has competition from Taiwan for diplomatic recognition.

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- China considers Taiwan to be a renegade territory awaiting reunification, and opposes its recognition as an independent state on the international stage.
- Hence, any country which has to officially establish relations with China will have to break diplomatic ties with Taiwan.
- The Solomon Islands was one among the six Pacific island states which had official bilateral relations with Taiwan.
- However, in 2019, the Solomon Islands, along with Kiribati, switched allegiance to China. Now, only four regional countries backing Taiwan, mostly belonging to the Micronesian group of islands which are under the control of the US.
- **Potential Vote Banks for Mobilising Support:**
 - The small Pacific island states act as potential vote banks for mobilizing support for the great powers in international fora like the United Nations.
- **Presence of Large Maritime Exclusive Economic Zones:**
 - These Pacific island states have disproportionately large maritime Exclusive Economic Zones when compared to their small sizes.
- **Presence of Reserves of Timber and Mineral Resources:**
 - Solomon Island in particular has significant reserves of timber and mineral resources, along with fisheries.
- **Strategic Significance:**
 - The islands in the Pacific are strategically located for China to insert itself between America's military bases in the Pacific islands and Australia.
 - This is especially significant in the current scenario, given the emergence of the AUKUS (Australia, the UK and the US) which seeks to elevate Australia's strategic capabilities vis-à-vis China through Anglo-American cooperation.

India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement

Why in News?

Recently, India signed a historic trade agreement with Australia, the India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (Ind- Aus ECTA).

- In February 2022, India and Australia announced that they were going to sign such an agreement.
- The negotiations for India-Australia ECTA were formally re-launched in September 2021 and concluded on a fast-track basis by the end of March 2022.

What is the Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement?

- It is the first Free Trade Agreement (FTA) that India has signed with a major developed country in over a decade.
 - In February, India signed an FTA with the UAE and is currently working on FTAs with Israel, Canada, UK and the European Union.
- The Agreement encompasses cooperation across the entire gamut of bilateral economic and commercial relations between the two friendly countries, and covers areas like:
 - Trade in Goods, Rules of Origin.
 - Trade in Services.
 - Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT).
 - Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures.
 - Dispute Settlement, Movement of Natural Persons.
 - Telecom, Customs Procedures.
 - Pharmaceutical products, and Cooperation in other Areas.
- ECTA provides for an institutional mechanism to encourage and improve trade between the two countries.
- The ECTA between India and Australia covers almost all the tariff lines dealt in by India and Australia respectively.
 - India will benefit from preferential market access provided by Australia on 100% of its tariff lines.
 - This includes all the labor-intensive sectors of export interest to India such as Gems and Jewellery, Textiles, leather, footwear, furniture etc.
 - On the other hand, India will be offering preferential access to Australia on over 70% of its tariff lines, including lines of export interest to Australia which are primarily raw materials and intermediaries such as coal, mineral ores and wines etc.
- Under the agreement, Indian graduates from STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) will be granted extended post-study work visas.

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- Australia will also set up a programme to grant visas to young Indians looking to pursue working holidays in Australia.

What is the Significance of the Agreement?

- It will provide zero-duty access to 96% of India's exports to Australia including shipments from key sectors such as engineering goods, gems and jewellery, textiles, apparel and leather.
- It will boost bilateral trade in goods and services to USD 45-50 billion over five years, up from around USD 27 billion, and generate over one million jobs in India, according to a government estimate.
- It will also give about 85% of Australia's exports zero-duty access to the Indian market, including coal, sheep meat and wool, and lower duty access on Australian wines, almonds, lentils, and certain fruits.

How has been the India-Australia Trade Relation so far?

- India and Australia enjoy excellent bilateral relations that have undergone transformational evolution in recent years, developing along a positive track, into a friendly partnership.
- This is a special partnership characterized by shared values of pluralistic, parliamentary democracies, Commonwealth traditions, expanding economic engagement, long standing people-to-people ties and increasing high level interaction.
- The India-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership initiated during the India-Australia Leaders' Virtual Summit held in June 2020 is the cornerstone of IndiaAustralia multifaceted bilateral relations.
- Growing India-Australia economic and commercial relations contribute to the stability and strength of a rapidly diversifying and deepening bilateral relationship between the two countries.
- India and Australia have been each other's important trading partners.
 - Australia is the 17th largest trading partner of India and India is Australia's 9th largest trading partner.
 - India-Australia bilateral trade for both merchandise and services is valued at USD 27.5 billion in 2021.
 - India's merchandise exports to Australia grew 135% between 2019 and 2021. India's exports consist primarily of a broad-based basket largely of finished products and were USD 6.9 billion in 2021.

- India's merchandise imports from Australia were USD 15.1 billion in 2021, consisting largely of raw materials, minerals and intermediate goods.

- India and Australia are partners in the trilateral Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI) arrangement along with Japan which seeks to enhance the resilience of supply chains in the Indo-Pacific Region.
- Further, India and Australia are also members of the QUAD grouping (India, the US, Australia and Japan), also comprising the US, and Japan, to further enhance cooperation and develop partnership across several issues of common concern.

India, Turkmenistan Bilateral Meet

Why in News?

Recently, the Indian President for the first time visited Turkmenistan, where he signed four agreements, including in financial intelligence and disaster management and agreed to expand bilateral trade and energy cooperation to further strengthen the multifaceted partnership.

- Earlier, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between India and Turkmenistan on Cooperation in the field of Disaster Management.

What are the Highlights of the Bilateral Meet?

- Highlighted the significance of the International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and the Ashgabat Agreement on International Transport and Transit Corridor.
- The Chabahar port built by India in Iran could be used to improve trade between India and Central Asia.
- Discussing the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline, India suggested that issues related to the security of the pipeline and key business principles may be addressed in Technical and Expert level meetings.
- India expressed its readiness to partner with Turkmenistan in its drive towards digitalisation and noted that Space can be another area of mutually beneficial cooperation.
- Underlined the importance of holding regular cultural events in each other's territory since both countries share centuries-old civilisational and cultural linkages.

Note:



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- Emphasized on the need for both countries to cooperate closely on the effective management of the Covid-19 pandemic that has affected their population.
- Agreed to further enhance cooperation under the framework flowing from the India-Central Asia Summit.
- India thanked Turkmenistan for its support to India's permanent membership in a reformed and expanded UN Security Council as well as for India's initiatives as a non-permanent member of UNSC for the period of 2021-22.
- Both share a broad 'regional consensus' on the issues related to Afghanistan, which includes formation of a truly representative and inclusive government, combating terrorism and drug trafficking, central role of the UN, providing immediate humanitarian assistance for the people of Afghanistan and preserving the rights of women, children and other national ethnic groups and minorities.

What are the Key

Points of India -Turkmenistan Relations?

- Turkmenistan shares borders with Kazakhstan in the north, Uzbekistan in the north and North-east, Iran in the South and Afghanistan in the Southeast.
- India's 'Connect Central Asia' policy 2012 envisages deeper mutual relations with the region and energy linkage is an important component of the policy.
- India has joined the Ashgabat agreement, which envisages setting up of an international transport and transit corridor linking central Asia with the Persian Gulf to significantly ramp up trade and investment.
- India considers the TAPI pipeline (Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India) a 'key pillar' in its economic relations with Turkmenistan.
- In 2015, Hindi Chair was established in Azadi Institute of World languages, Ashgabat where Hindi is being taught to university students.
- India provides training for Turkmen nationals under ITEC (Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation) programme.
- Turkmenistan supports India's permanent position in the UN Security Council.
- Turkmenistan is a USD 40 billion plus economy, but the bilateral trade with India is below its potential. India can increase its economic presence in Turkmenistan, particularly in the Information and communication technologies (ICT) sector. This would help maintain the future balance of trade.

- Recently, the 3rd meeting of the India-Central Asia Dialogue was held in New Delhi.
 - It is a ministerial-level dialogue between India and the Central Asian countries namely Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.
 - Turkmenistan possesses very large reserves of natural gas.
 - Turkmenistan is also strategically placed in Central Asia and connectivity is something on which India feels a partnership with Turkmenistan will pay dividends.

4th India- US '2+2' Dialogue

Why in News?

Recently, the fourth '2+2' dialogue between India and the United States took place in Washington DC, US. India's External Affairs and Defence Ministers meet with their American counterparts.

- This meeting was held on the sidelines of a virtual meeting between the Prime Minister of India and the President of the US.

What are the Key Points of this Meeting?

- **Space Situational Awareness Arrangement:** India and the US have signed a bilateral space situational awareness arrangement.
- This lays the groundwork for more advanced cooperation in space.
- **Inaugural Defense Artificial Intelligence Dialogue:** They also agreed to launch an inaugural Defense Artificial Intelligence Dialogue, while expanding joint cyber training and exercises.
- **Military Supply Chain Cooperation:** The US asserted that it supports India as a defense industry leader in the Indo-Pacific and a net provider of security in the region.
- In this context, new supply chain cooperation measures were launched that will let both countries more swiftly support each other's priority defense requirements.
- **Observing Crisis in Ukraine:** They agreed to maintain close consultations on the ongoing crisis in Ukraine, including on humanitarian assistance efforts, and echoed support for an independent investigation into the brutal violence deployed against civilians.

Note:



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What is the Status of India's 2+2 Dialogue with the US?

- The US is India's oldest and most important 2+2 talks partner.
- The first 2+2 dialogue between the two countries was held during the Trump Administration in 2018.
- India and the US have signed a troika of "foundational pacts" for deep military cooperation:
 - Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) in 2016
 - Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) after the first 2+2 dialogue in 2018
 - Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) in 2020.

- The strengthening of the mechanisms of cooperation between the two militaries are of significance in the context of an increasingly aggressive China.

What is the 2+2 Dialogue?

- 2+2 Ministerial is the highest-level institutional mechanism between the two countries.
- It is a format of dialogue where the defense/foreign ministers or secretaries meet with their counterparts from another country.
- India has 2+2 dialogues with four key strategic partners: the US, Australia, Japan, and Russia.
 - Besides Russia, the other three countries are also India's partners in the Quad.



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Summary

Key Points

Details

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Summary

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