



Drishti IAS Presents...



PT **SPRINT** 2024

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

(March 2023 – March 2024)



Drishti IAS, 641, Mukherjee Nagar,
Opp. Signature View Apartment,
New Delhi

Drishti IAS, 21
Pusa Road, Karol Bagh
New Delhi - 05

Drishti IAS, Tashkent Marg,
Civil Lines, Prayagraj,
Uttar Pradesh

Drishti IAS, Tonk Road,
Vasundhra Colony,
Jaipur, Rajasthan

e-mail: englishsupport@groupdrishti.com, Website: www.drishtias.com
Contact: Inquiry (English): 8010440440, Inquiry (Hindi): 8750187501

Contents

1. India and It's Neighbourhood	1
● India-Bangladesh Relations	1
● Free Movement Regime	2
● Ongoing Issues in Myanmar	3
● Civil War in Myanmar	4
● Strengthening India-Nepal Cooperation	5
● India-Nepal Power Pact	6
● India Sri Lanka Relations	7
● Sri Lanka's Debt Crisis and Paris Club	8
● China's 'Xiaokang' Border Defence Villages along the LAC	9
● South China Sea	12
● China's Export Controls on Gallium and Germanium	13
● India China Partnership for Global Harmony.....	14
● Chinese Dual-Use Facilities Raise Security Concerns in India	15
● The China-Tibet Issue	16
● China's Stapled Visas	17
● China Releases a Map Asserting Territorial Claims.....	18
● China Builds New Dam in Tibet	20
● China and Bhutan Meet to Delimit Boundary	20
● India-Maldives Relations	23
● Regional Dialogue of Secretaries of Security Councils on Afghanistan	24
● Oslo Forum and Afghan Peace Talks	25
● CPEC's Extension to Afghanistan	25
● Iran, Pakistan, and the Baloch Militancy	26
● PCA Asserts Competence in India-Pakistan Hydroelectric Projects Dispute	29
● India-Bhutan Relations	30
● Gelephu Smart City Project	31
2. India - Asia Relations	32
● Red Sea Disruptions and India's Oil Import Dynamics.....	32
● Indian Navy Helps Hijacked Ship in Arabian Sea.....	34
● Ben Gurion Canal Project	35
● Strengthening India-Saudi Arabia Strategic Partnership	37
● India-Israel Relations	38
● Israeli Military Operation in Jenin Refugee Camp	39
● One Year of India- UAE CEPA.....	40
● India-Oman Bilateral Meet	42

● Israel-Palestine Conflict	43
● Gaza Strip	45
● India-Thailand Relations	46
● India-Singapore Ties	47
● Japan’s Asia Energy Transition Initiative.....	48
● India-UAE Food Security Partnership	49
3. India - North America Relations	50
● India-US Relations	50
● INDUS-X Summit 2024.....	51
● India-US 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue	52
● India US Strategic Partnership	54
● India-US Trade Policy Forum	57
● India’s Jet Engine Deal with the US	57
● U.S.-India initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology	58
● Indo-US Cooperation in Agriculture	59
● 6th India-Canada Ministerial Dialogue on Trade and Investment	60
4. India- Africa Relations.....	61
● India-Africa Partnership: Achievements, Challenges, and Roadmap 2030	61
● 19 th NAM Summit and India-Uganda Relations	63
● Economic Community of West African States.....	64
● India’s Interests in Africa’s RE Potential	65
● India-Egypt Relations.....	66
● India Offers Agricultural Line of Credit to Kenya	67
● Coup Attempt in Sierra Leone	68
● Displacement in Democratic Republic of Congo	69
● Coup in Niger.....	70
● 6 th Session of India-Ethiopia Joint Trade Committee	70
● Second Anti-Piracy Patrol in the Gulf of Guinea.....	71
● Sudan Crisis and Operation Kaveri	73
5. India- South America Relations	75
● India and Argentina Signs Social Security Agreement.....	75
● Indian Pharmacopoeia Recognition in Suriname.....	76
● 6. International Institutions	78
● 18 th G20 Summit in New Delhi.....	79
● India’s Socio Economic Performance in Comparison to G20 Nations	83
● G20 Countries and Disaster Risk Reduction	85
● 10th ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting-Plus	86
● 20 th ASEAN-India Summit and the 18 th East Asia Summit	88
● 20 th ASEAN-India Economic Ministers’ Meeting.....	89

● SCO Summit 2023	90
● IBSA and Digital Governance Reform	92
● IPEF Ministerial Meeting	93
● Reforming UNSC and Bretton Woods	94
● Third FIPIC Summit	95
● G7 Summit: Climate Goals, Gandhi Statue & Quad Climate Initiatives	96
● Rasht-Astara Railway and INSTC	97
● 6 th Indian Ocean Conference	98
● Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Leaders' Summit 2023	99
● 6 th India-OPEC Energy Dialogue	100
● Indian Ocean Rim Association	100
● CJJ Urges SCO Member States to Strive for Judicial Cooperation.....	101
● G20 Culture Ministerial Meeting and B20 Summit 2023	102
● NATO Suspends CFE Treaty Amid Russian Withdrawal	104
● Finland Joins NATO.....	106
● International Court of Justice and Climate Change	107
● OPEC+ Announces Additional Production Cuts	108
● 15 th BRICS Summit	109
● Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty	111
● Notices of Interpol.....	112
● Third South Summit.....	113
● G7's Commitment Towards Carbon-free Electricity Production	115
● UN High Seas Treaty	116
● UN Specialised Agencies: FAO, UNIDO and ICAO	117
● UN Specialised Agencies - UNWTO, IFAD and UPU (Part-2)	118
● BIMSTEC	119
● SAARC	120
● UN Specialised Agencies: ILO, WHO and ITU.....	121
● UN Specialised Agencies: WIPO, WMO and IMO	122
● World Happiness Report 2023	123
● Vienna Convention	124
● India Joins Artemis Accords	124
● India, US, UAE and Saudi Arabia Discuss Infrastructure Initiatives	125
● Arab League	126
● International Religious Freedom Report 2023	127
● WTO Needs to Relook at Farm Subsidies	128
● India's Commitment to UN Peacekeeping	130
● UN Concerns Over Eritrean Deportations from Israel.....	131
● India's Interest Arctic Region and the Northern Sea Route.....	133
● Artificial Intelligence Safety Summit 2023.....	134
● Paris Club.....	135

6. India Europe Relations.....	136
● India- EU Trade and Technology Council	136
● India and EFTA	137
● India-France Relations	138
● India and Greece Relations.....	140
● Schengen Zone	142
● Northern Ireland Conflict	144
● India-Italy Migration and Mobility Agreement.....	145
● Italy Withdraws from China’s BRI	146
● India-Germany Cooperation on Innovation.....	147
● Kosovo-Serbia Conflict	148
● India Denmark Cooperation	149
● 2 nd CII India Nordic-Baltic Business Conclave 2023.....	150
● Global DPI Summit	151
● Call for a New Treaty for Outer Space	152
● India-Romania Defense Agreement	154
● NET Zero Innovation Virtual Centre.....	154
● Third Employment Working Group Meet	155
● Atlantic Declaration	156
● India-Russia Bilateral Meeting.....	156
● Wagner Mutiny in Russia	158
● Russia-India Bilateral Trade	158
● Challenges in Major Defence Deals with Russia.....	158
● Russia Suspends New START	160
● Negotiations to Revive Black Sea Grain Deal.....	161
● India-Lithuania Relations	162
7. India Australia Relations.....	163
● India-Australia 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue	163
● Aviation Cooperation Between India and New Zealand.....	164
● India New Zealand Round Table Meeting	166
8. Foreign Policy of India	166
● Gujral Doctrine of Foreign Policy.....	166
● India’s Act East Policy	167
● Raisina Dialogue 2024	169
● Goa Maritime Conclave 2023	170
● Role of UPI in Shaping Foreign Policy	171
9. The Indian Diaspora.....	172
10. News in Short	174
● Order of the Druk Gyalpo	174

● India’s Push for Security Council Reform: The G4 Model	175
● France Considers Legalising Assisted Dying	177
● Belgium Recognises Ecocide as a Crime	177
● UN General Assembly Adopts Landmark AI Resolution	178
● Concern Over Gibraltar Strait Subduction Zone	178
● JLOTS Project	179
● Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)	180
● India and Dominican Republic to Strengthen Economic Ties with JETCO Protocol	181
● Haiti	181
● Italian Court Ruling Against Returning Sea Migrants	182
● Yaounde Declaration	182
● Argentina Withdraws from BRICS Plan	182
● EU Fines Apple for Antitrust Violations in App Store	184
● Blue Line	184
● India-China Border Affairs	185
● Alliance for Global Good – Gender Equity and Equality	185

1. India and It's Neighbourhood

India-Bangladesh Relations

Why in News?

Recently, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina returned to power in Bangladesh for a **historic fourth straight term**. India was among the first countries to congratulate, **illustrating the close bilateral relationship** between the two countries.

How Have the Ties Between India-Bangladesh Flourished?

➤ Historical Ties:

- The foundation of India's relationship with Bangladesh **was laid in the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War**. India provided critical military and material support to assist Bangladesh in its fight for independence from Pakistan.
- Despite this, relations soured within a few years as military regimes took control. There was a rise in **anti-India sentiment in the mid-1970s** over issues ranging from boundary disputes and insurgency to the sharing of water.
- The instability continued for a few decades until **Sheikh Hasina came to power in 1996** and scripted a new chapter in bilateral ties with a **treaty on the sharing of Ganga waters**.
- Since then, India and Bangladesh have built cooperation in **Trade, Energy, Infrastructure, Connectivity and Defence**.

➤ Economic Cooperation:

- Bilateral trade between India and Bangladesh has grown steadily over the last decade.
- Bangladesh has emerged as **India's largest trade partner in South Asia**, with bilateral trade reaching USD 18 billion in 2021-2022 from USD 10.8 billion in 2020-21, though there was a dip in 2022-23 due to the **Covid-19 pandemic** and the **Russia-Ukraine War**.
- **India is also the second biggest trade partner of Bangladesh**, with exports amounting to USD 2 billion in Indian markets.

- In 2022, both nations concluded a joint feasibility study on a **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)**. The CEPA gains additional significance as Bangladesh is set to lose its **Least Developed Country (LDC) status after 2026**, thereby losing its duty-free and quota-free market access in India.
- Bangladesh will be eager to finalize a **Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** with India, and also pursue the China-backed **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)**. This dual approach raises concerns for India.

➤ Infrastructure:

- Since 2010, India has extended **Lines of Credit** to Bangladesh worth over USD 7 billion.
- India and Bangladesh have **successfully resolved long-pending issues**, like the **Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) in 2015** and a maritime dispute over territorial waters.
- India and Bangladesh in 2023 inaugurated the **Akhaura-Agartala Rail Link** that connects Bangladesh and the northeast through Tripura.
- The link has given **India access to Chattogram and Mongla ports** in Bangladesh for the movement of cargo.
 - It is likely to boost small-scale industries and development in Assam and Tripura.
- The **BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport Connectivity** focuses on connecting major transport projects in India, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Thailand, thereby establishing a shipping network.
 - India will focus on the Matarbari Port, 100 km from Tripura, being built by Bangladesh. This port will create a vital industrial corridor connecting Dhaka and Northeast India.

➤ Energy:

- In the energy sector, Bangladesh imports **nearly 2,000 megawatts (MW) of electricity from India**.
- **In 2018, Russia, Bangladesh and India** signed a memorandum on cooperation in the implementation of the **Rooppur Nuclear power plant project, Bangladesh's first nuclear power reactor**.

➤ Defence Cooperation:

- India and Bangladesh share 4096.7 km of border; **the longest land boundary that India shares with any of its neighbors**.

Note:

- Assam, West Bengal, Mizoram, Meghalaya, and Tripura share borders with Bangladesh.
- The two also conduct Joint Exercises - Army (**Exercise Sampriti**) and Navy (**Exercise Bongo Sagar**).

➤ Multilateral Cooperation:

- India and Bangladesh are also engaged in regional cooperation through multilateral forums such as **SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation)**, **BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation)** and **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)**.



Free Movement Regime

Why in News?

India's recent plans to **review the Free Movement Regime (FMR) agreement with Myanmar** and fence the India-Myanmar border have initiated discussions, especially in the northeastern states.

- The decision aims to address a complex intersection of **historical, cultural, and security considerations**.

What is the Free Movement Regime?

➤ Historical Context:

- Much of India's northeast region was under Burmese occupation until the **Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826** established the current India-Myanmar boundary.
 - The Treaty of Yandaboo was signed by **General Sir Archibald Campbell on behalf of the British** and Governor of Legaing Maha Min Hla Kyaw Htin on behalf of the Burmese.
 - It ended the **First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-1826)**.
- However, the border separated communities with shared ethnicity and culture, including the **Nagas**

in Nagaland and Manipur, as well as the **Kuki-Chin-Mizo communities** in Manipur and Mizoram, without their agreement.

- Currently, India and Myanmar share a 1,643 km border across **Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh**, of which only 10 km is fenced, in Manipur.
- **Free Movement Regime:**
 - The FMR was established in **2018** as part of **India's Act East policy**, promoting cross-border movement up to **16 km** without a visa.
 - Individuals residing at the **border need a one-year border pass for stays lasting up to two weeks** in the neighbouring country.
 - It aimed to facilitate **local border trade**, improve access to education and healthcare for border residents, and strengthen diplomatic ties.
- **Potential Reasons for Reconsidering the FMR:**
 - **Security Concerns:**
 - **Increased Infiltration:** Concerns have arisen about the influx of illegal immigrants, particularly the **Chin, Naga communities and Rohingyas from Myanmar**, potentially straining resources and impacting local demographics.
 - **Drug Trafficking and Arms Smuggling:** The porous border facilitates the **illegal movement of drugs and weapons**, posing a threat to internal security to India and fueling crime.
 - In 2022, Manipur witnessed 500 cases filed and 625 individuals arrested under the **Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act**, as per data from the Chief Minister's Office.
 - **Insurgency Activities:** The FMR has been misused by **insurgent groups operating in northeastern India**, allowing them to cross the border easily and evade capture.
 - E.g. **Kuki National Organisation (KNO)** and Kangleipak Communist Party-Lamphel (KCP-Lamphel) in Manipur.
 - **Socio-economic and Regional Issues:**
 - **Impact on cultural identity:** Concerns exist about the preservation of indigenous culture and traditions in border areas, potentially **threatened by increased migration**.

Note:

- **Environmental Degradation:** Deforestation and illegal resource extraction along the border are attributed to unregulated cross-border movement.
- **Regional Dynamics:** China's growing influence in Myanmar and its potential impact on border security add another layer of complexity to the situation.

What are the Major Aspects of India-Myanmar Relations?



- **Historical and Cultural Ties:** India and Myanmar share a long history dating back centuries, with cultural and religious connections deeply rooted in **Buddhism**.
 - Treaty of Friendship, 1951 forms the foundation of their diplomatic relations.
- **Economic Cooperation:** India is Myanmar's **4th largest trading partner** and a major source of investment.
 - The projects in which India has been involved in Myanmar include the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project, the Trilateral Highway Project and restoration and conservation of Ananda Temple in Bagan (completed in 2018).
- **Disaster Relief:** India has responded promptly and effectively in rendering assistance following natural calamities in Myanmar like **Cyclone Mora (2017)**, earthquake in Shan State (2010) and the outbreak of influenza virus in Yangon in July-August 2017.

Ongoing Issues in Myanmar

Why in News?

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) recently rejected Myanmar junta's appeal for a 10-month reprieve

to file a counter-memorial in response to the case accusing Myanmar of breaching the International Genocide Convention.

- The case pertains to the **atrocities committed by the Myanmar military during the "clearing" operations in 2017 in Rakhine state**, resulting in displacement of Rohingya people.

What Led to Instability in Myanmar?

- **Background - The country gained independence from Britain in 1948.** It was ruled by the armed forces from 1962 until 2011, when a new government began ushering in a return to civilian rule.
 - In the 2010s, the **military regime decided to transition the country towards democracy**. Although the armed forces remained powerful, political opponents were freed and elections were allowed to be held.
 - The **National League for Democracy** won the 2015 election, the country's first free and fair election participated by multiple parties, and **formed the government, raising hopes that the country is on its way to full transition to democracy**.
- **Military Coup:**
 - In the **November 2020 parliamentary election**, NLD secured the majority of the seats.
 - In the Myanmar's Parliament, the **military holds 25% of the total seats according to the 2008 military-drafted constitution** and several key ministerial positions are also reserved for military appointees.
 - When the **newly elected Myanmar lawmakers were to hold the first session of Parliament in 2021**, the military imposed a state of emergency for one year citing massive voting fraud in the parliamentary elections.
- **Associated Issues Highlighted by UN:**
 - Despite clear legal obligations for the military to protect civilians in the conduct of hostilities, there has been **consistent disregard for the related rules of international law**.
 - **Myanmar's economy has collapsed** with nearly half of the population now living below the poverty line.
 - Since the coup was launched, the military has **imprisoned the democratically elected leadership of the country** and, in subsequent months, detained over 16,000 others.

Note:

➤ The Rohingya Issue:

- On August 25, 2017, an outbreak of **violence in Myanmar's Rakhine State** forced hundreds of thousands of Rohingya people to flee their homes.
- The **Rohingya community** has also been cut off from the **pro-democracy movement in Myanmar**.
 - **Over the years**, the pro-democracy movement in Myanmar has faced various challenges, including **restrictions on freedom of speech** and assembly, arbitrary arrests and detentions, censorship, and violence.
 - In January 2020, the **UN's top court (ICJ)** ordered the **Myanmar to take measures to protect members of its Rohingya community** from genocide.

What is India's Stand on Myanmar Issue?

- In recent years, India has expressed concerns over the **human rights situation** in Myanmar, particularly with regards to the **Rohingya crisis**.
 - India has called for **peaceful resolution of the issue**, respect for human rights, and **accountability for those responsible for human rights violations**.
- Though India has expressed deep concern over recent developments in Myanmar, **cutting off from the Myanmar military is not a viable option** as India has significant **economic and strategic interests in Myanmar** and its neighbourhood.
 - **India's stance on the issue of Myanmar** may evolve based on the evolving situation and **geopolitical dynamics** in the region.

Note: Genocide is an **internationally recognized crime** where acts are committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group.

What is International Genocide Convention?

- The **International Genocide Convention**, also known as the **Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide**, is a treaty adopted by the **United Nations General Assembly** on December 9, 1948.
 - According to this Convention, genocide is a crime that can take place both in time of war as well as in time of peace.
 - The Convention requires **states to prevent and punish genocide, including enacting domestic legislation**.

- The definition of the crime of genocide, as set out in the Convention, has been widely adopted at both national and international levels, including in the 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC).
- **India is a signatory to this convention.**

Civil War in Myanmar

Why in News?

Recently, due to the ongoing Civil War in Myanmar, 1,500 nationals of Myanmar took refuge in Mizoram's Champhai district following an intense gunfight between the **Myanmar Army, and pro-democracy militias** in the country's western Chin State abutting Mizoram.



What is a Civil War?

- A civil war is a **prolonged conflict between organized groups** within the same country or nation.
- It involves armed confrontations between **factions or groups with distinct social, political, or ideological differences**, all vying for control or dominance over the nation's governance, territory, or resources.

What is Background of the Current Civil War in Myanmar?

- **2020 Elections and Military Coup:**
 - In the November 2020 elections, Aung San Suu Kyi's party National League for Democracy (NLD) won the election. However, the **military junta, known as the Tatmadaw**, claimed electoral fraud

Note:

without substantial evidence and rejected the election results.

- In February, 2021, the military **staged a coup, detaining Aung San Suu Kyi** and other elected leaders, declaring a **state of emergency, and seizing control of the government.**

➤ **Protests and Resistance:**

- The coup triggered widespread protests across Myanmar, with citizens demanding the **restoration of democracy and the release of detained leaders.**
- Civil servants, activists, and various groups joined the civil disobedience movement, **staging strikes and demonstrations.**

➤ **Formation of Resistance Forces:**

- As the Tatmadaw intensified its crackdown on dissent, opposition groups, including **Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs)** and armed civilians, formed the **People's Defence Forces (PDFs)** to resist the military junta.
- These groups aligned themselves with the **National Unity Government (NUG)**, established by ousted lawmakers, aiming to challenge the military's authority.

➤ **Current Scenario:**

- Fighting has also broken out elsewhere in the country, led by various local resistance forces — in the Rakhine State, Kayin State, Sagaing region bordering Manipur, and Chin State bordering Mizoram.

What does Ongoing Civil War in Myanmar Mean for India?

➤ **Balanced Stance:**

- India has so far walked a fine line between expressing concern at the "interruption" of democracy in Myanmar, and **engaging with the junta to protect its "vital interests".**

➤ **Immediate Concern for India:**

- The influx of Myanmarese nationals in the border states of the Northeast.
- This too at a time when the situation in Manipur remains volatile.

➤ **Capturing of Two Important Towns by Rebels:**

- The anti-junta forces have captured two important towns close to the only two border crossing points between Myanmar and India. These are:

- Rikhawdar, close to Zokhawthar in Mizoram, and
- Khampat in Sagaing region, around 60 km from Moreh in Manipur.
- The latter (Khampat in Sagaing region) is also part of the proposed India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway project.

What is the Current Legislative Framework in India to Handle Refugees?

- India treats all foreigners whether **illegal immigrants, refugees/asylum seekers** or those overstaying visa permits under
 - **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)** are 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 to Hindu, Christian, Jain, Parsi, Sikh, and Buddhist immigrants persecuted in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.
- **India issued a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)** to be followed by all concerned agencies while dealing with foreign nationals who claim to be refugees.

Strengthening India-Nepal Cooperation

Why in News?

India and Nepal have recently unveiled **several initiatives and agreements** during the 4-day visit of the Prime Minister of Nepal to India to boost their bilateral cooperation in the fields of energy and transport development, **aiming to strengthen ties and facilitate regional connectivity.**

Note:



What are the Major Highlights of Recent Agreement?

➤ Power Sector Cooperation:

- **Long-Term Power Trade Agreement:** India and Nepal signed a long-term Power Trade Agreement, targeting the import of **10,000 MW of electricity from Nepal in the coming years.**
 - **Hydropower Projects:** Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) were signed between **National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC), India and Vidyut Utpadan Company Ltd, Nepal** for the development of the **Phukot Karnali Hydroelectric Project** and the **Lower Arun Hydroelectric Project.**
- **Also,** the two Prime Ministers expressed their commitment to achieving tangible and time-bound progress on the **Pancheshwar multipurpose project,** which aims to enhance **cooperation in harnessing the shared water resources of the Mahakali River.**

Note: Phukot Karnali Hydro Electric Project aims to generate **480 MW of power using the flow from the Karnali River,** with an average annual generation of about 2448 GWh. It includes a high **RCC (Reinforced Concrete Cement) dam and an underground power house.**

➤ Transport Development:

- **Transmission Line and Rail Link:** The groundbreaking ceremony for the **Gorakhpur-Bhutwal Transmission Line** and the inauguration of the **Indian Railway cargo train from Bathnaha to Nepal Customs Yard** highlighted the focus on enhancing connectivity between the two countries.
- **Integrated Checkposts (ICPs):** ICPs were inaugurated at **Nepalgunj (Nepal) and Rupaidiha (India),** promoting smoother cross-border trade and facilitating the movement of goods and people.

➤ Other Initiatives:

- A plan to **extend South Asia's first cross-border petroleum pipeline from Motihari in India to Amlekhgunj in Nepal** by another 69 km up to Chitwan in Nepal.
 - Also, a second cross-border petroleum pipeline **from Siliguri in India to Jhapa in eastern Nepal.**
- A **revised Treaty of Transit signed on June 1, 2023,** that will give **Nepal access to India's inland waterways.**

- This will **enable Nepal to use Indian ports such as Haldia, Kolkata, Paradip and Visakhapatnam** for its third-country trade.
- It will also reduce transportation costs and time for Nepalese exporters and importers.
- India is also cooperating with Nepal to set up a **fertiliser plant,** emphasising the **importance of collaboration in the agricultural sector.**

India-Nepal Power Pact

Why in News?

India and Nepal recently signed a long-term agreement for the **export of power.** The agreement was inked during the **7th meeting of the Nepal-India Joint Commission,** highlighting the strengthening ties between the two nations.

What are the Key Takeaways From the 7th Meeting of the Nepal-India Joint Commission?

- **Power Export Agreement:** India and Nepal signed a bilateral agreement for the export of **10,000 MW of power in the next 10 years.**
- **Cross-Border Transmission Lines Inauguration:** Three cross-border transmission lines were jointly inaugurated including the 132 kV **Raxaul-Parwanipur,** 132 kV **Kushaha-Kataiya,** and **New Nautanwa-Mainahiya** lines.
- **Renewable Energy Cooperation:** A **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** was signed between the **Nepal Electricity Authority and India's National Thermal Power Corporation Limited** for cooperation in renewable energy.
- **Agreement for Satellite Service :** The Service Agreement for **Munal Satellite** developed by Nepal Academy of Science and Technology between **Nepal Academy of Science and Technology and NewSpace India Limited** was launched.
 - This satellite developed by Nepali students shall be launched on a gratis basis on an Indian launch rocket.

What are the Major Areas of Cooperation Between India and Nepal?

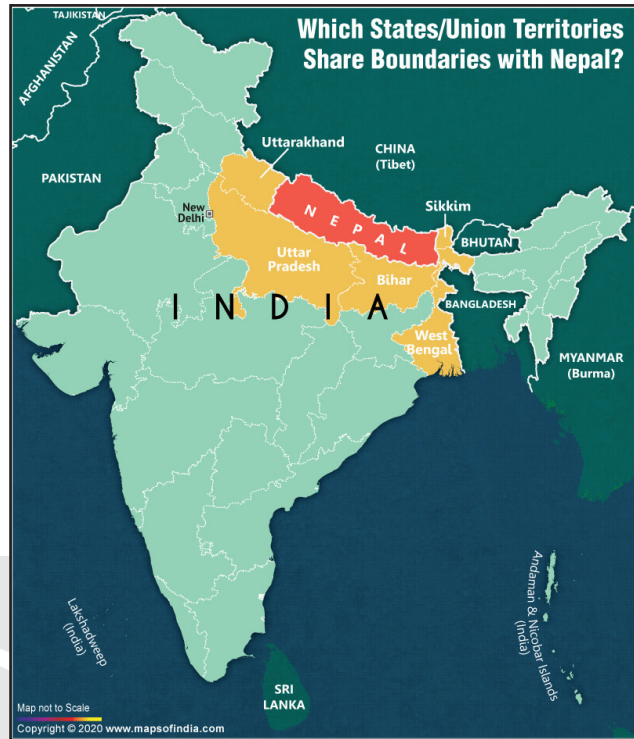
➤ About:

- India and Nepal, **being immediate neighbors,** enjoy special bonds of friendship and collaboration marked by an **open border and strong people-to-people connections** rooted in kinship and culture.

Note:

- Nepal shares a border of over 1850 km with five Indian states – **Sikkim, West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand.**
 - The **India-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1950** forms the bedrock of the special relations that exist between India and Nepal.
- **Economic Cooperation:** India is **Nepal's largest trade partner** and the **largest source of foreign investments**, besides providing transit for almost the entire third country trade of Nepal.
 - India accounts for about **two-third of Nepal's merchandise trade** and **about one-third of trade in services.**
 - Recently, India and Nepal agreed to review the **Treaty of Transit** and the **Treaty of Trade**, proposed amendments to existing agreements, strategies for enhancing investment, the harmonization of standards and the synchronized development of trade infrastructure.
- **Defense Cooperation:** India has been aiding the modernization efforts of the Nepal Army through equipment supply and training provisions.
 - The joint military exercise, '**Surya Kiran**,' at the battalion level, is conducted in both India and Nepal on a rotational basis. In 2023, it was held in **Pithoragarh, Uttarakhand.**
- **Cultural Cooperation:**
 - The **Embassy of India in Nepal**, in collaboration with **Lumbini Development Trust and Lumbini Buddhist University** organized the inaugural **India-Nepal Cultural Festival** in Lumbini in December 2023.
 - The festival showcased the rich cultural heritage and traditions of India and Nepal, with a **focus on Buddhism.**
- **Water Sharing:** The **Koshi Agreement (1954, revised in 1966)** and **Gandak Agreement (1959, revised in 1964)** were the initial significant agreements fostering India-Nepal cooperation in the water resources sector.
 - Another pivotal pact, the **Mahakali Treaty (1996)**, ensures the fair utilization of Mahakali river, waters for both countries.
- **Connectivity:** India is assisting Nepal by upgrading **10 roads in the Terai area**, establishing cross-border rail links at **Jogbani-Biratnagar** and **Jaynagar-Bardibas**, and setting up Integrated Check Posts at key locations such as **Birgunj, Biratnagar, Bhairahawa, and Nepalgunj.**

- Also, India exported about 2200 MUs of electricity to Nepal in 2021.



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.**
- 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.

Note:

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**.

Sri Lanka's Debt Crisis and Paris Club

Why in News?

Recently, Sri Lanka has reached a preliminary debt restructuring deal with India and the **Paris Club Group**, paving the way for it to revive a stalled **IMF (International Monetary Fund)** loan programme.

- It will help Sri Lanka, which defaulted on its debts in 2022, to **secure the next tranche of a USD 3 billion IMF lending package** agreed in March 2023.
- When a country defaults on its debt, it means that the **government is unable to meet its financial obligations** to its creditors. This failure can manifest in various ways and has significant implications.

What is Sri Lanka's Debt Scenario?

- Sri Lanka has foreign debts of about USD 46 bn, the largest share of which is owed to Chinese lenders, with Japan, India and commercial bondholders also large creditors.
- Sri Lanka has yet to reach a deal with the commercial bondholders, which could yet slow down progress on the country's economic recovery.
- Sri Lanka in May 2022 became the first country in the **Asia-Pacific to default on its debts in two decades**, the result of domestic economic mismanagement and a surge in global inflation following the coronavirus pandemic and **Russia's invasion of Ukraine**.
- A sharp drop in foreign currency reserves led to **shortages of imported food, fuel and medicine**, devastating living standards on the island and triggering mass protests in 2022.

What is the Paris Club?

➤ About:

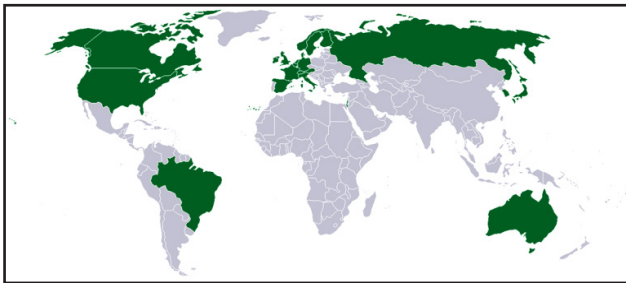
- The Paris Club is a group of **mostly western creditor countries that grew from a 1956 meeting** in which Argentina agreed to meet its public creditors in Paris.

Note:

- 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.**

How is India Helping Sri Lanka with Debt Management and Economic Development?

➤ **Role in Debt Restructuring:**

- India has played a role in collaborating with the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** and creditors to help Sri Lanka in restructuring its debt.

- India became the first country to hand over its letter of support for financing and debt restructuring of Sri Lanka.

➤ **Connectivity and Renewable Energy:**

- Both countries have agreed on a joint vision that emphasises comprehensive connectivity, including People to People connectivity, **renewable energy**.
- Indian companies are developing renewable energy projects in the northeast of Sri Lanka, indicating growing collaboration in the **energy sector**.

➤ **Economic and Technology Cooperation Agreement (ETCA):**

- Both countries are exploring the possibility of an **ETCA** to integrate their economies and foster development.

➤ **Agreement on a Multi-Project Petroleum Pipeline:**

- Both India and Sri Lanka have agreed to establish a multi-product petroleum pipeline from the southern part of India to Sri Lanka.
- This pipeline aims to ensure an affordable and reliable supply of energy resources to Sri Lanka. Recognition of energy's critical role in economic development and progress is driving the focus on establishing the petroleum pipeline.

➤ **Adoption of India's UPI:**

- Sri Lanka has also adopted India's UPI service, which is a significant step towards enhancing fintech connectivity between the two countries.
- The **use of rupee for trade settlement** is further helping Sri Lanka's economy. These are concrete steps to help Sri Lanka's economic recovery and growth.

China's 'Xiaokang' Border Defence Villages along the LAC

Why in News?

In recent developments along the **Line of Actual Control (LAC) between India and China**, Chinese nationals have begun occupying previously vacant **"Xiaokang" border defence villages**.

- These villages, constructed by China in 2019, have raised concerns for the Indian Army, particularly regarding their occupants' nature and strategic implications.

Note:



What are India's Initiatives along the LAC?

In response to China's infrastructure development, India has intensified efforts to enhance its border infrastructure since 2019.

➤ Vibrant Villages Program:

- The **Vibrant Villages program** aims to modernise 663 border villages, with 17 selected for development along the China-India border in regions like Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh.

➤ Border Roads Organization (BRO):

- The **BRO** has completed **90 infrastructure projects along the India–China border**, worth Rs 2,941 crore.
 - As of September 2023, 36 of these projects are in Arunachal Pradesh, 26 in Ladakh, and 11 in Jammu and Kashmir.
- BRO is involved in major highways, including the **Trans-Arunachal Highway, Frontier Highway, and East-West Industrial Corridor Highway**, which are under construction to improve connectivity, particularly in the eastern part of **Arunachal Pradesh** and the Tawang region.

➤ Border Area Development Programme (BADP):

- The **BADP** is a centrally sponsored scheme that aims to meet the special **developmental needs of the people living** in remote and inaccessible areas situated near the international border.
- The funds can be used for projects relating to Infrastructure, Livelihood, Education, Health, Agriculture, Allied sectors.

➤ Railways:

- Indian Railways is constructing strategic rail lines in the Northeast region to facilitate the swift mobilization of the Indian army.

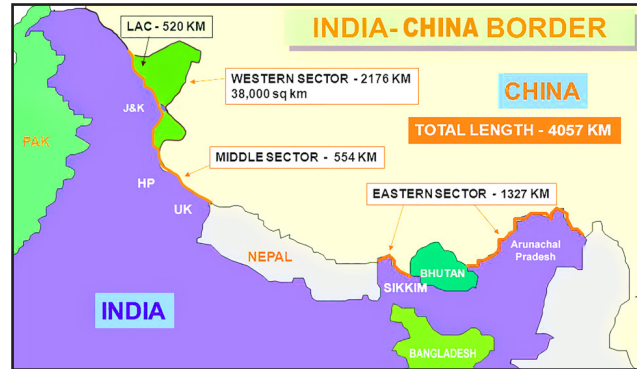
What is the Line of Actual Control (LAC)?

➤ About:

- The LAC serves as the **boundary separating Indian-controlled territory from Chinese-controlled territory**.
 - India asserts the length of the LAC to be 3,488 km, whereas China contends it to be approximately 2,000 km.

- This demarcation is categorized into **three sectors**:

- **Eastern sector** encompassing Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim.
- **Middle sector** spanning Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh.
- **Western sector** located in Ladakh.



➤ Disagreements Surrounding the LAC:

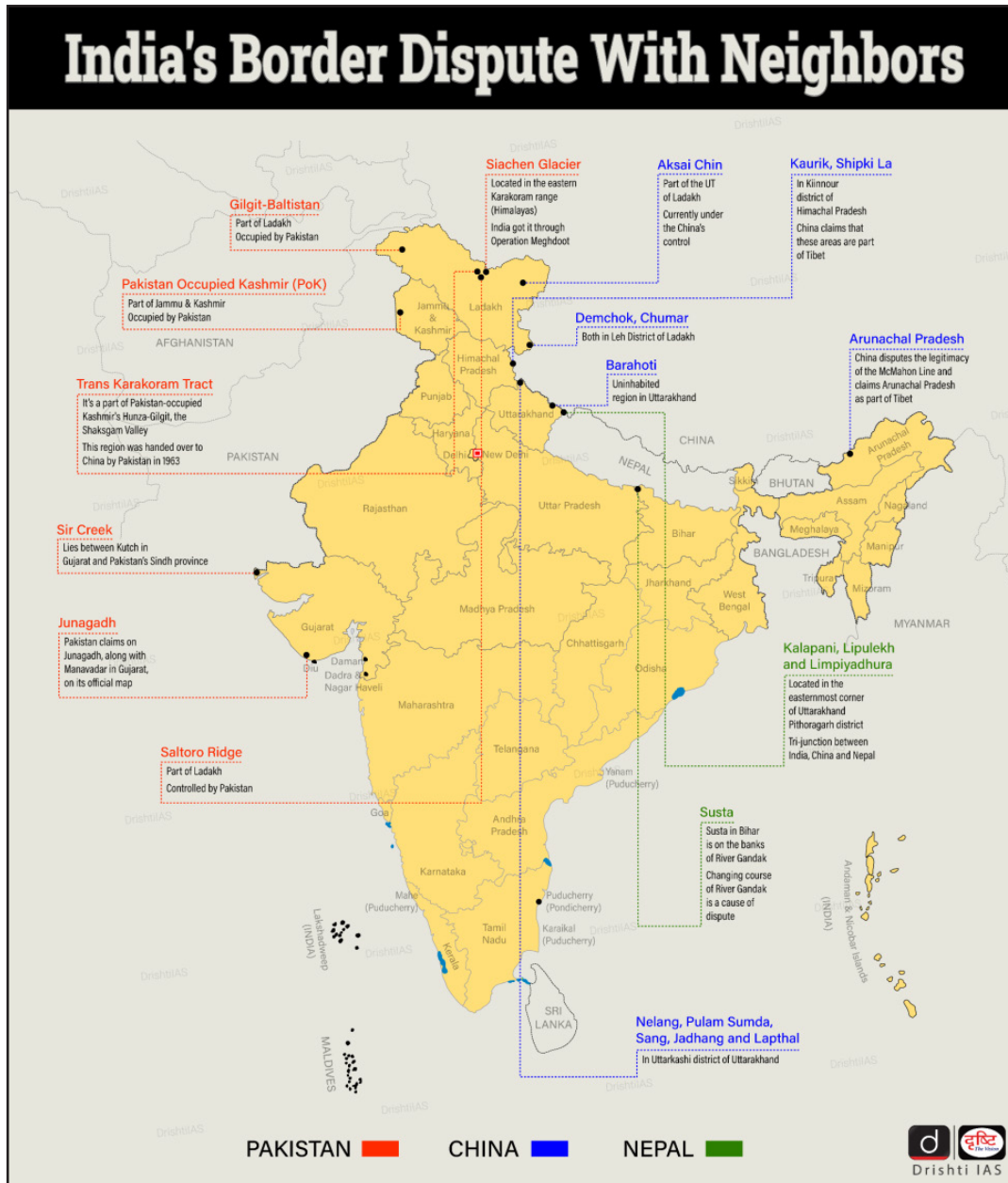
- The primary dispute regarding the LAC arises from its alignment in different sectors. The LAC in the eastern sector follows the **1914 McMahon Line** with minor disputes about ground positions.
- Major disagreements exist in the Western sector, originating from letters written by Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai to PM Jawaharlal Nehru in 1959.
 - The LAC was described only in general terms on maps not to scale by the Chinese.
 - The Chinese claimed to have **withdrawn to 20 km behind the LAC in November 1959 after the 1962 War**.
 - During the Doklam crisis in 2017, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson urged India to abide by the “1959 LAC”.
- Despite subsequent clarifications, ambiguity persisted, leading to contrasting interpretations by both nations.

➤ India's Response to China's LAC Designation:

- India initially rejected the concept of the LAC in 1959 and 1962, citing **concerns over its vague definition and potential exploitation by China** to alter ground realities through military force.
 - India's shift in the LAC approach started in the mid-1980s due to increased border encounters, prompting a review of patrolling boundaries.

Note:

- India formally accepted the concept of the LAC in 1993 and the two sides signed the **Agreement to Maintain Peace and Tranquility at the LAC**.
 - India and China have only exchanged maps for the middle sector of the LAC. Maps were “shared” for the Western sector but never formally exchanged, and the process of clarifying the LAC has effectively stalled since 2002.
 - The most serious recent episodes of conflict were in **Galwan Valley in Ladakh in 2020** and in **Tawang** in Arunachal Pradesh in 2022.
 - Observers on both sides of the LAC agree that the number of serious military confrontations has increased since 2013.
- **LAC vs Line of Control with Pakistan:**
- The **Line of Control (LoC)** was established in 1972 after the Kashmir War, based on the ceasefire line negotiated by the **UN** in 1948. It has **international legal validity** and is delineated on a map signed by both countries.
 - On the other hand, the **LAC is not agreed upon by both countries and is not delineated on a map or demarcated on the ground.**



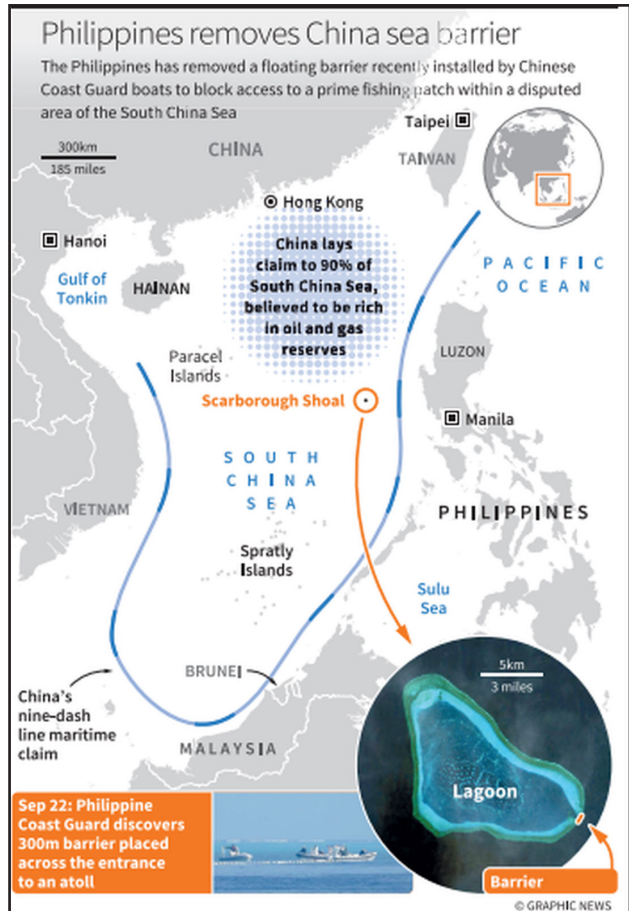
Note:

South China Sea

Why in News?

Recently, the **Philippines Coast Guard** removed barriers placed by **Chinese vessels** at the entrance to a lagoon off the **Scarborough Shoal**.

- This incident came after Chinese Coast Guard ships placed a 300-meter-long barrier to **prevent boats from the Philippines from entering**, adding to the **long-running tensions in the South China Sea**.



What is the Significance of the South China Sea?

- **Strategic Location:** The South China Sea is **bordered by China and Taiwan to the north**, the **Indo-Chinese peninsula** (including **Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore**) to the west, **Indonesia and Brunei** to the south, and the **Philippines to the east** (referred to as the West Philippine Sea).
 - It is connected by the **Taiwan Strait with the East China Sea** and by the **Luzon Strait with the Philippine Sea** (both marginal seas of the Pacific Ocean).

- **Trade Importance:** Approximately **USD 3.37 trillion worth of trade passed through the South China Sea in 2016**, making it a crucial global trade route.
 - According to the **Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)**, **80% of global trade by volume** and 70% by value is transported by sea, with **60% of it passing through Asia** and **one-third of global shipping moving through the South China Sea**.
 - **China, the world's second-largest economy**, relies heavily on the South China Sea, with an estimated **64% of its trade passing through the region**. In contrast, only **14% of U.S. trade** traverses these waters.
 - India relies on the region for approximately **55% of its trade**.
- **Fishing Ground:** The South China Sea is also a **rich fishing ground**, providing a vital source of **livelihood and food security** for millions of people in the region.

What are the Major Disputes in the South China Sea?

- **Dispute:**
 - The heart of the South China Sea dispute revolves around **territorial claims to land features (islands and reefs)** and their associated territorial waters.
 - The major island and reef formations in the South China Sea are the **Spratly Islands, Paracel Islands, Pratas, the Natuna Islands and Scarborough Shoal**.
 - As many as **70 disputed reefs and islets** are under contention, with **China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Taiwan** all building more than 90 outposts on these disputed features.
 - China claims up to **90% of the sea with its "nine-dash line" map** and has physically expanded islands and constructed military installations to assert control.
 - China has been particularly active in the **Paracel and Spratly Islands**, engaging in extensive dredging and artificial island-building, creating 3,200 acres of new land since 2013.
 - China also controls the **Scarborough Shoal through a constant Coast Guard presence**.

Note:

➤ Efforts to Resolve the Dispute:

- **Code of Conduct (CoC):** Talks between **China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)** have aimed at establishing a CoC to manage the situation, but progress has been slow due to internal ASEAN disputes and the magnitude of China's claims.
- **Declaration on the Conduct of Parties (DoC):** In 2002, ASEAN and China adopted the DoC, affirming their commitment to peaceful dispute resolution in accordance with international law.
 - The DoC was meant to pave the way for a CoC, which remains elusive.
- **Arbitral Proceedings:** In 2013, the **Philippines initiated arbitral proceedings against China under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).**
 - In 2016, the **Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) ruled against China's "nine-dash line" claim**, stating it was inconsistent with UNCLOS.
 - China rejected the arbitration ruling and asserted its sovereignty and historical rights, challenging the PCA's authority.

Note: Under the **UNCLOS**, each state can establish a **territorial sea** of up to **12 nautical miles** and an **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)** extending up to **200 nautical miles** from the territorial sea baseline.

China's Export Controls on Gallium and Germanium

Why in News?

China has recently announced that it will **impose export controls on gallium and germanium, which are essential for semiconductor manufacturing, starting from August 1, 2023.**

- This action is seen as a response **to export controls implemented by the United States, Japan, and the Netherlands**, who express national security concerns and accuse China of military use and human rights violations.
- China denies these allegations, asserting that its export controls **aim to safeguard global industrial and supply chain stability**, without singling out any country.

What are Gallium and Germanium?

➤ Gallium:

- It is a **soft, silvery-white metal** that is liquid near room temperature.
- It is not found as a free element and is only present in small quantities in certain minerals, such as **zinc ores and bauxite.**
- Gallium is used to make **gallium arsenide**, which is a **core substrate for semiconductors.**
- It is utilized in the production of **semiconductor wafers, integrated circuits, mobile and satellite communications (in chipsets), and LEDs (in displays).**
- Gallium also finds applications in automotive and lighting industries, as well as in **sensors for avionic, space, and defense systems.**

➤ Germanium:

- It is a **lustrous, hard, silvery-white semi-metal** with a **crystal structure similar to a diamond.**
- Germanium is used in **various electronic and optical applications.**
- It is commonly used in **fiber-optic cables and infrared imaging devices.**
- Germanium enhances the ability to **operate weapon systems in harsh conditions.**
- It is also used in **solar cells due to its heat resistance and higher energy conversion efficiency.**

Note:

- Gallium and germanium, both listed on **India's recently released critical mineral list** by the **Ministry of Mines**, are also included in the **European Union's list of critical raw materials**, which are recognized as crucial to Europe's economy.
 - Additionally, these elements are considered strategic resources by the United States and Japan.

How does China Dominate the Global Supply of these Raw Materials?

- China is the **world's largest producer and exporter of gallium and germanium.**
- According to the European industry body, Critical Raw Materials Alliance (CRMA), China accounted for **80% of global gallium production and 60% of global germanium production.**
- Abundant reserves of gallium and germanium in China contribute to its dominant position in the market.

Note:



- China imports gallium and germanium from countries like **Kazakhstan, Russia, and Canada to supplement its domestic supply.**
- China has a strong **industrial base for processing and refining** gallium and germanium into high-purity products.
- The country benefits from low **labor costs, favorable policies, and a large domestic market**, giving it a competitive advantage in the global supply chain.

How will China's Export Controls Affect the Market?

- **India:**
 - The Chinese export controls on gallium and germanium are expected to have a short-term impact on India and its industries.
 - India currently imports all chips, and the market is estimated to touch USD100 billion by 2025 from USD 24 billion now. Disruption in immediate supply chains may result in **increased prices and limited availability of these raw materials** in India.
 - India's chip-making plans could be affected due to the dependence on imports of gallium and germanium.
 - Long-term consequences for **India's semiconductor industry** depend on alternative supply sources and domestic production capabilities.
 - Strategic partnerships like the **India-U.S. Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET)** may play a role in ensuring a reliable supply chain.
 - Deloitte India suggests **exploring waste recovery from zinc and alumina production as a potential source of gallium and germanium.**
 - India has an opportunity to develop domestic capabilities and diversify its supply chain by focusing on **substitutes such as indium and silicon.**
- **Global:**
 - The restrictions may lead to an increase in **prices of gallium and germanium in the global market** as supply becomes limited.
 - Countries and companies heavily dependent on Chinese supply may seek to **diversify their sources** of gallium and germanium to **reduce their vulnerability** to such export controls.

- Export controls by China could **present opportunities for other countries or regions to increase their production** and supply of gallium and germanium, potentially creating a more diversified market.

India China Partnership for Global Harmony

Why in News?

Recently, China released a white paper "A Global Community of Shared Future: China's Proposals and Actions", to address the common challenges and opportunities faced by humanity in the 21st century.

- Amidst global turmoil, with **Russia- Ukraine crisis and issues in West Asia**, attention turns to the **historically linked civilizations of India and China**. Their shared visions for the future could provide hope for global harmony.

What are the Key Vision Points for the Global Community of Shared Future?

- **Economic Globalization and Inclusivity:** Uphold the **correct path of economic globalization**. Jointly build an open world economy that represents the **interests of developing nations, rejecting unilateralism, protectionism, and zero-sum games.**
- **Peace, Cooperation, and Development:** Embrace **peace, development, cooperation, and win-win results**, steering clear of **colonialism and hegemony**, fostering joint efforts for global peace and contribution.
- **Global Community of Shared Destiny:** Construct a global community of **shared destiny to evade conflict between emerging and established powers**, emphasizing mutual respect, equity, and beneficial cooperation for deeper global partnerships.
- **Genuine Multilateralism and Fair International System:** **Rejecting bloc politics and unilateral thinking**, advocating for a fair, UN-centered international system. Upholding international law as the basis for global norms and order and promoting **true multilateralism.**
- **Promotion of Common Human Values:** Promoting **equity, justice, democracy, and freedom without imposing a singular model of democracy.**
 - Embrace harmony amidst diversity, respecting each nation's right to choose its social systems and development paths.

Note:

Chinese Dual-Use Facilities Raise Security Concerns in India

Why in News?

Recent satellite images showing the construction of a **military facility on Coco Islands in Myanmar and a proposed remote satellite receiving ground station system in Sri Lanka**, both coming up with Chinese help, have raised concerns in India of possible surveillance across the region.

What are the Causes of Concern?

- **Coco Islands of Myanmar** located very close to India's Andaman and Nicobar Island chain are strategically important for India.
 - China, which has been eyeing to encircle India in the Indian Ocean Region with its aggressive '**String of Pearls**' policy is developing a military facility on the islands.
 - The island is being connected to the southern landmass using a new bridge which can anytime be used by the Chinese military.
- Because of its critical location, the proposed remote satellite receiving ground station in Sri Lanka **can be used to spy on Indian assets and intercept sensitive information** across the region.
 - **Satellite tracking facilities are inherently dual-use in nature** which means they can be used for both civil and military activities.
 - It's also apprehended that **India's satellite launch facilities in Sriharikota and the missile test range in Odisha could come under the scanner of the ground station** and launches from there could be tracked to obtain sensitive data.
 - Ground stations are surface-based facilities which are designed to provide real-time communication with satellites.
- Recently, a Chinese ship was seen docking at **Hambantota port in Sri Lanka**, the forementioned stations are likely to work in coordination with such vessels to gather vital information in the region.

What are the Other Instances that Raise Doubts on China's Intentions?

- In August 2022, the docking of Chinese spy ship '**Yuan Wang-5**' at Hambantota created a major diplomatic showdown between India and Sri Lanka.

- Later in November, another vessel 'Yuan Wang-6' had entered the **Indian Ocean Region**, coinciding with a planned Indian long-range missile launch.
 - At that time, the launch was deferred, and the vessel had re-entered the IOR in December when the missile test was rescheduled.

Where are the Coco Islands located?

The Coco Islands are in the **north-eastern Bay of Bengal**. They are part of Yangon region of Myanmar. These islands are situated very close to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

What is China's "String of Pearls" Strategy?

- The "**String of Pearls**" is a geopolitical theory that refers to China's increasing efforts to develop and expand its ports and naval bases throughout the Indian Ocean region, from the Strait of Malacca to the Horn of Africa.
- The **theory suggests that China is seeking to establish a series of strategic naval bases and commercial ports along key sea-lanes in the Indian Ocean**, to protect its vital energy imports and enhance its maritime influence.
- These "pearls" include ports such as Gwadar in Pakistan, Hambantota in Sri Lanka, and Djibouti in Africa, which provide China with greater access and influence in the region.
- Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), sometimes referred to as the New Silk Road is another infrastructure project by China. It is also seen as part of China's **debt trap diplomacy**.

What is India doing to Counter China?

- "**Necklace of Diamonds**" Strategy: This strategy aims at garlanding China or in simple words, the counter encirclement strategy. India is expanding its naval bases and is also improving relations with strategically placed countries to counter China's strategies. India's strategic bases are:
 - **Chabahar port** – Iran
 - Sabang port – Indonesia
 - **Sittwe port** – Myanmar
 - Mongla port – Bangladesh
 - Changi naval base – Singapore
- **Forming groups with Like-minded Nations:** India has made agreements for military cooperation in the

Note:

region with Japan, Australia and the USA. The four countries carry out joint military exercises in the IOR region and are known as the 'Quad'.

- **Building Coastal Radar Networks:** India is installing coastal systems in the countries in Indian Ocean region such as Sri Lanka, Mauritius, Maldives, Seychelles and Bangladesh. These radars will relay live images, videos, and location information of Ships moving in the Indian Ocean Region.
 - The project is implemented by **Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL)**.
- **Act East Policy:** This was launched as an effort to integrate India's economy with South-East Asian nations. It has been used to make important military and strategic agreements with Japan, South Korea, Singapore, and Thailand helping India to counter China.
- **Military and Naval Relationships:** To upgrade and train its navy, India has developed a strategic naval relationship with Myanmar which gives India an increased footprint in the area.
- **Strategic Investments:** India has invested a lot diplomatically in countries like Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Mongolia - all surrounding China. It also has recently extended over USD 1.75 billion in grants and credit to Myanmar.

The China-Tibet Issue

Why in News?

During a recent discussion with reporters in Dharamshala, the **Dalai Lama** reaffirmed his stance that **Tibetans seek greater autonomy within China**, emphasizing their desire for **self-governance** while remaining part of the People's Republic of China.

What is the China-Tibet Issue?

- **Tibet's Independence:**
 - Tibet is a region on the Tibetan Plateau in Asia, spanning about 2.4 million km²— nearly a quarter of China's territory.
 - It is the traditional homeland of the Tibetan people as well as some other ethnic groups.
 - **Tibet is the highest region on Earth**, with an average elevation of 4,900 meters. The **highest elevation in Tibet is Mount Everest**, Earth's highest mountain, rising 8,848 m above sea level.

- The **13th Dalai Lama, Thubten Gyatso**, announced de facto Tibetan independence in early 1913.
 - China did not recognize Tibet's independence and continued to claim sovereignty over the region.



- **Chinese Invasion and Seventeen Point Agreement:**
 - From 1912 until the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, no Chinese government exercised control over what is today **China's Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR)**.
 - The Dalai Lama's government alone ruled the land until 1951. **Tibet was not "Chinese" until Mao Zedong's People's Liberation Army (PLA) marched in and invaded Tibet.**
 - In 1951 Tibetan leaders were forced to sign a treaty dictated by China. The treaty, known as the **"Seventeen Point Agreement"**, professes to guarantee Tibetan autonomy and to respect the Buddhist religion but also allows the establishment of Chinese civil and military headquarters at Lhasa (Tibet's capital).
 - However, the Tibetan people, including the Dalai Lama consider it invalid.
 - This has often been described by the **Tibetan people and third party commentators as "a cultural genocide"**.
- **1959 Tibetan Uprising:**
 - Escalating tensions between Tibet and China led to a critical turning point in 1959 when the Dalai Lama, along with a group of followers, fled to India, seeking asylum.
 - Tibetans who followed the Dalai Lama formed an exiled government based in Dharamshala, India, known as the **Central Tibetan Administration (CTA)**.

Note:

- **Aftermath of the 1959 Tibetan Uprising:**
 - Since the 1959 Uprising, the central government of China has been steadily tightening its grip on Tibet.
 - In Tibet today, there is **no freedom of speech, religion, or press and arbitrary detainments continue.**
 - Forced abortion, sterilization of Tibetan women, and the transfer of low-income Chinese citizens threaten the survival of Tibetan culture.
 - Although China has invested in infrastructure improvements for the region, particularly in **Lhasa itself**, it has also encouraged thousands of ethnic Han Chinese to move to Tibet resulting in demographic shift.

Dalai Lama

➤ About:

- The Dalai Lama belongs to the **Gelugpa tradition of Tibetan Buddhism**, which is the **largest and most influential tradition in Tibet.**
- There have been only **14 Dalai Lamas** in the history of Tibetan Buddhism, and the **first and second Dalai Lamas were given the title posthumously.**
 - The 14th and current Dalai Lama is Tenzin Gyatso.
- The Dalai Lamas are believed to be manifestations of **Avalokiteshvara or Chenrezig, the Bodhisattva of Compassion and the patron saint of Tibet.**
 - Bodhisattvas are realized beings inspired by a wish to attain **Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings**, who have vowed to be reborn in the world to help humanity.

➤ Process to Choose Dalai Lama:

- The process to choose the Dalai Lama traditionally involves identifying the **reincarnation of the previous Dalai Lama**, who is considered the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism.
- The search for the Dalai Lama's reincarnation typically begins after the **previous Dalai Lama's passing.**
 - According to Buddhist scholars, it is the responsibility of the High Lamas of the Gelugpa tradition and the Tibetan government to seek out and find the next Dalai Lama following the death of the incumbent.

- **If more than one candidate** is identified, the true successor is found by officials and **monks drawing lots in a public ceremony.**
- The **selected child, usually very young**, is then recognized as the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama and undergoes a rigorous spiritual and educational training.
- The Dalai Lama's role encompasses both **spiritual and political leadership** in Tibetan Buddhism, and the selection process plays a crucial role in Tibetan cultural and religious traditions.
- This process can take several years: it took four years to find the 14th (current) Dalai Lama.
 - The search is generally limited to Tibet, although the current Dalai Lama has said that there is a chance that he will not be reborn, and that if he is, it will not be in a country under Chinese rule.

China's Stapled Visas

Why in News?

Recently, India withdrew its **eight-athlete 'Wushu' martial arts athletes contingent from the Summer World University Games** in Chengdu, China. The move came in response to **China's issuance of stapled visas to three athletes from the Indian team**, all of whom were from **Arunachal Pradesh.**

- The practice of issuing **stapled visas started around 2005**, and China has consistently issued such visas to residents of Arunachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir.

What are Stapled Visas?

- A stapled visa is an **unstamped piece of paper attached to a passport** with staples or a pin.
- Unlike regular visas that are **affixed and stamped directly on the passport**, stapled visas are detachable.
- The issuance of stapled visas is part of **China's ongoing territorial disputes with India** over **Arunachal Pradesh.**
- The **stapled visas are considered valid by China**, but **India refuses to accept** them as legitimate travel documents.

Note:



Note:

- Passports and visas enable authorized, secure international travel, reflecting nation-state sovereignty and control over borders.
 - Passports signify identity and citizenship, while **visas grant entry permissions to specific destinations**.
 - A passport is issued by the **birth country or current country of residence**. A visa is issued by an **Embassy/Consulate representing a foreign country**.

Why did China Issue Stapled Visas?

- **Dispute Over Sovereignty:**
 - China disputes India's sovereignty over Arunachal Pradesh and challenges the **legitimacy of the McMahon Line**, the boundary **between Tibet and British India**, agreed upon in the **Simla Convention of 1914**.
 - The disagreement over the **Line of Actual Control (LAC)** lies at the heart of Chinese claims on the disputed territory and leads to repeated transgressions into Indian territory.
- **Unilateral Claim to Indian Territory:**
 - China claims approximately **90,000 sq km of Arunachal Pradesh** as part of its territory, **referring to it as "Zangnan" or "South Tibet"** in Chinese maps.
 - It issues lists of **Chinese names for places in Arunachal Pradesh** and periodically underlines its unilateral claim to Indian territory.
- **Undermining India's Sovereignty:**
 - Issuing stapled visas to Indian nationals from Arunachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir is part of **China's efforts to undermine India's sovereignty over these regions**.
 - China's actions are seen as **attempts to challenge India's control** and authority over parts of its own territory.

What are the Impacts and Concerns Regarding Stapled Visas?

- Stapled visas create confusion and uncertainty for travelers, as their validity and acceptance vary.
- India consistently rejects the validity of stapled visas and protests against their issuance.

- These actions by China contribute to diplomatic tensions between the two nations and complicate bilateral relations.

China Releases a Map Asserting Territorial Claims**Why in News?**

- China's government recently unveiled the **"2023 edition of the standard map of China,"** reaffirming its territorial claims over disputed regions.
- The release of the map coincides with **China's "National Mapping Awareness Publicity Week,"** which emphasizes the significance of accurate and consistent mapping.

What are China's Claims in the New Map?

- **Territorial Claims:**
 - The map incorporates **China's territorial claims**, encompassing Arunachal Pradesh and the **Aksai Chin Region**.
 - These claims have long been points of contention between China and India.
 - The map also features the **"Nine-Dash Line,"** a contentious demarcation that covers the entire South China Sea and underscores Beijing's claims over this strategic maritime region.
 - The map also **shows the tenth dash line** which underlines **Beijing's claims over Taiwan island**.
- **Renaming of Places:**
 - China's release of the **new map aligns with its previous actions**, such as standardizing the **names of places in Arunachal Pradesh**, including areas close to the state capital.
- **Digital Mapping:**
 - Apart from the physical map, China is set to release **digital maps for various applications**, including location-based services, precision agriculture, platform economy, and intelligent connected vehicles.

What is the Point of Contention Between India-China Border?

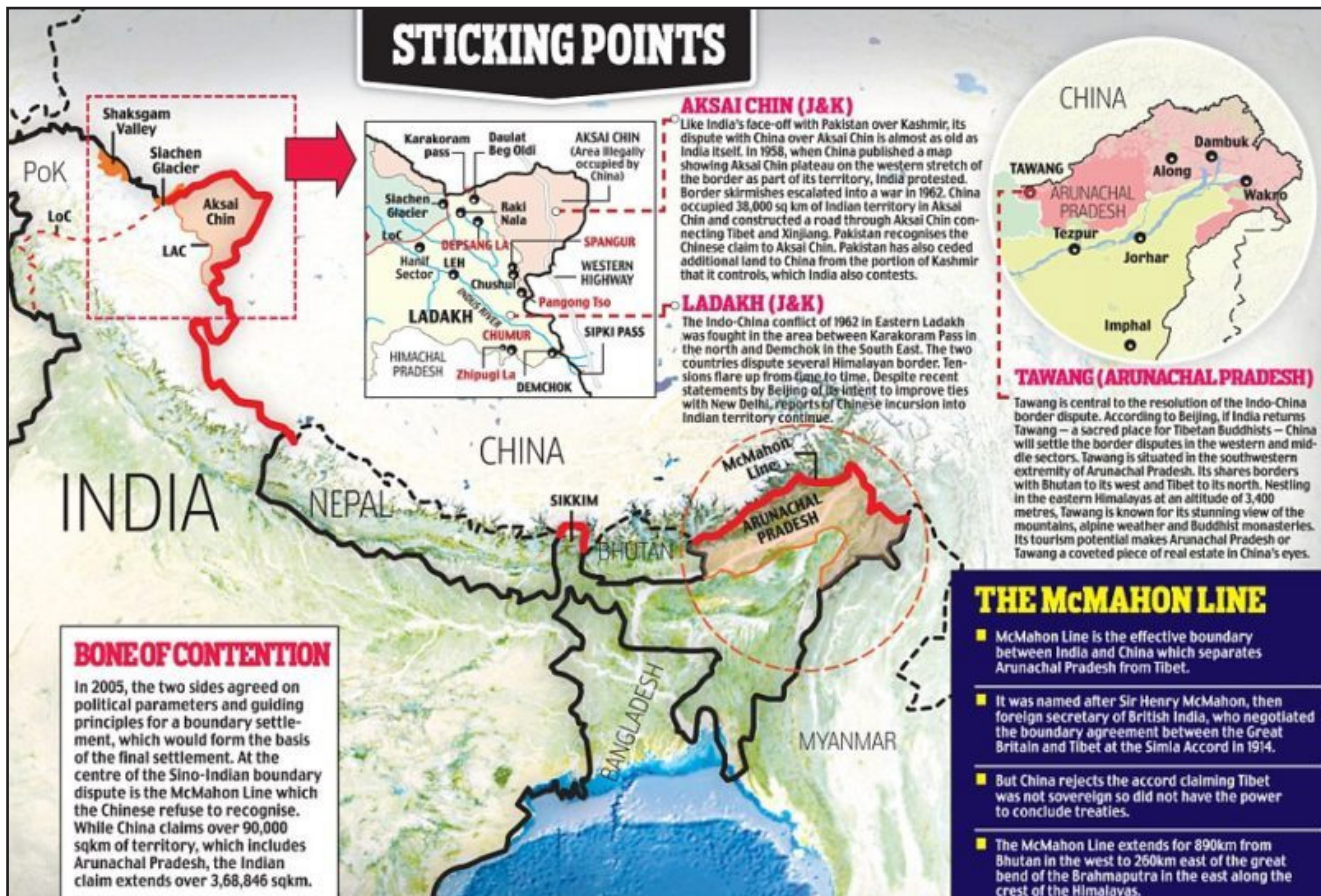
- **Background:**
 - The India-China border dispute **refers to the long-standing and complex territorial disputes** along their shared border of **3,488 kilometers**.

Note:

- The main areas of dispute are **Aksai Chin**, located in the western sector, and Arunachal Pradesh, in the eastern sector.
- **Aksai Chin:** China administers Aksai Chin as part of its Xinjiang region, while India considers it part of its union territory of Ladakh. The region holds strategic significance due to its proximity to the **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)** and its potential as a military route.
- **Arunachal Pradesh:** China claims the entire state of Arunachal Pradesh, referring to it as “South Tibet.” India administers this region as

a northeastern state and considers it an integral part of its territory.

- **No Clear Demarcation:** The border between India and China is not clearly demarcated throughout and there is no mutually agreed **Line of Actual Control (LAC)** along certain stretches.
 - LAC came into existence after the 1962 Indo-China war.
 - The India-China border is divided into three sectors.
 - **Western Sector:** Ladakh
 - **Middle Sector:** Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand
 - **Eastern Sector:** Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim



➤ Military Standoffs:

- **1962 Sino-Indian War:** The border dispute has led to a number of military standoffs and clashes, including the **1962 Sino-Indian War**. Both countries have made efforts to manage the tensions, with various agreements and protocols aimed at **maintaining peace along the border**.

- **Recent Faceoffs:** The most serious recent episodes of conflict were in **Galwan Valley in Ladakh in 2020** and in **Tawang** in Arunachal Pradesh in 2022.
 - Observers on both sides of the border—the Line of Actual Control (LAC)—agree that the number of serious military **confrontations has increased since 2013**.

Note:

What have been the Border Dispute Settlement Mechanisms?

- **Shimla agreement of 1914:** To demarcate the boundary between Tibet and North East India, a convention was held at Shimla in 1914, representatives of all three i.e. Tibet, China, and British India.
 - After the discussion, the agreement was **signed by British India and Tibet but not by the Chinese officials**. Presently **India recognizes but China rejected both the Shimla agreement and the McMahon line**.
- **Panchsheel Agreement of 1954:** The Panchsheel doctrine clearly indicated the willingness to **'Respect each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity'**.
- **The Agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquility:**
 - It was signed in 1993, which called for a renunciation of the use of force, recognition of the LAC, and the resolution of the border issue through negotiations.
- **The Agreement on Confidence Building Measures in the Military Field along the LAC:**
 - It was signed in 1996, which laid down pledges on non-aggression, prior notification of large troop movements, and exchange of maps to resolve disagreements over the LAC.
- **The Border Defence Co-operation Agreement:**
 - It was signed in 2013 following the Depsang Valley incident.

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

China and Bhutan Meet to Delimit Boundary

Why in News?

Recently, **China and Bhutan held the 13th Expert Group Meeting (EGM)** in Beijing, focusing on boundary delimitation. The meeting marked the establishment of a **Joint Technical Team on the Delimitation of the China-Bhutan Boundary**.

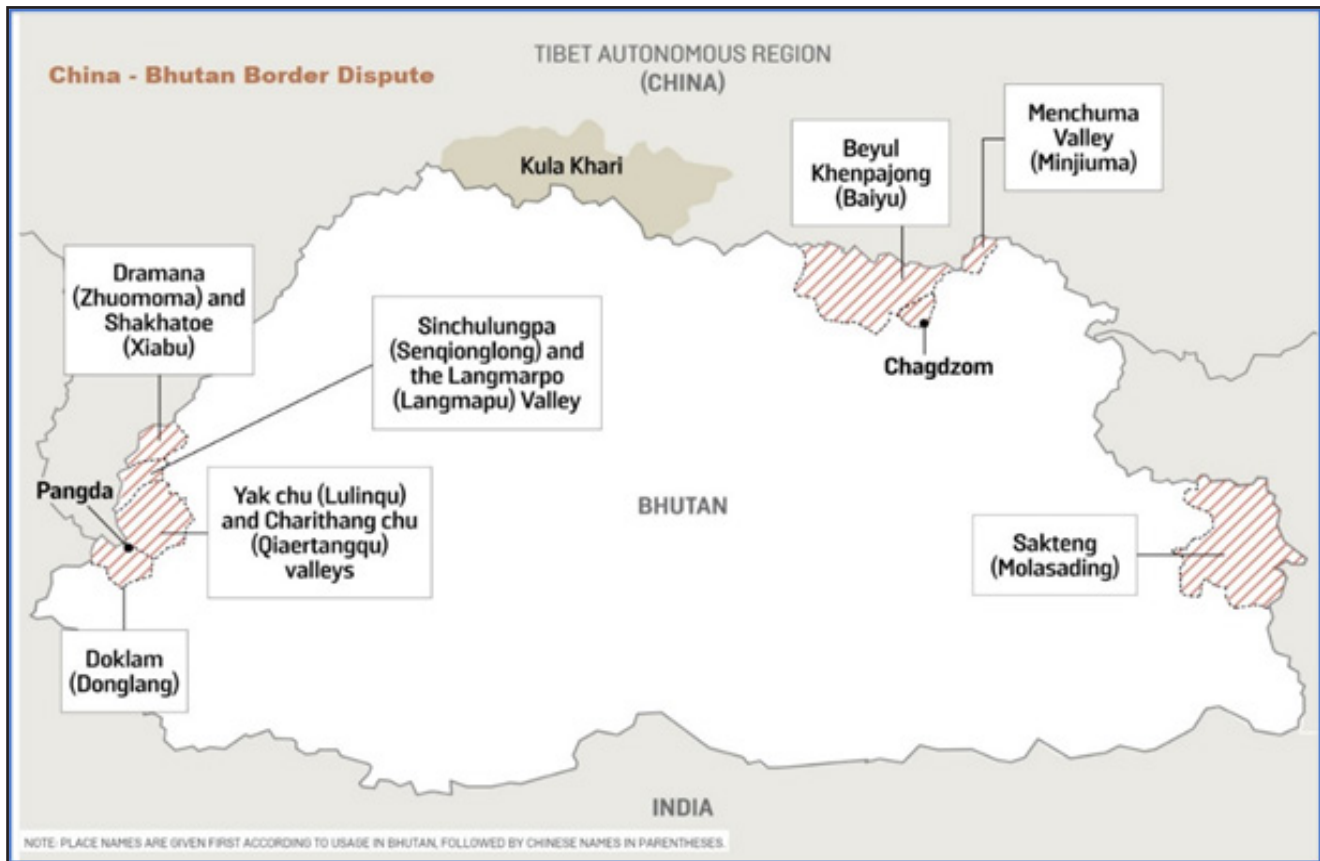
- As both nations aim to expedite boundary resolution, this move holds implications for the broader regional context, including India.

What are the Key Highlights of the 13th Expert Group Meeting Meeting?

- Both nations expressed their commitment to **expedite efforts towards achieving a resolution on the disputed boundary**.
- Plans were laid out for the upcoming **14th round of boundary talks to maintain the encouraging pace**.
- The meeting addressed the implementation of the **Three-Step Road Map**, reflecting the commitment to follow the **outlined strategy for expediting boundary negotiations**.

Note:





How Recent Developments in China-Bhutan Relations Concerning India?

- Recent developments of China and Bhutan could affect India's strategic interests, especially in the **Doklam tri-junction, where India, Bhutan, and China meet.**
- China has also revived its claim to the eastern region of Bhutan, known as **Sakteng (Wildlife Sanctuary)**, which borders the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh.
 - **China considers Arunachal Pradesh as part of its territory** and calls it "**South Tibet**". China's claim to Sakteng could be seen as a pressure tactic to force Bhutan to accept its terms on the boundary issue, as well as to challenge India's sovereignty over Arunachal Pradesh.
- **Bhutan is one of India's closest allies** in the region, and India has long provided economic and military support to Bhutan. However, in recent years, China has been increasing its economic and diplomatic ties with Bhutan, which could potentially weaken India's influence in the region.

Dividing line

A brief overview of the boundary dispute between China and Bhutan

- Bhutan and China have no formal diplomatic relations but have held 24 rounds of boundary talks between 1984 and 2016
- Talks concentrated on north and west Bhutan regions
- Eastern Bhutan not part of the talks
- so far, say officials
- Sakteng sanctuary is situated close to the border with Arunachal Pradesh
- In June 2020, China attempted to stop UNDP-GEF funding for Sakteng by claiming it was disputed, but was overruled



How have been India's Relations with Bhutan?

- Historical and Cultural Ties:
 - India and Bhutan share a common cultural heritage, rooted in **Buddhism, Hinduism, and other traditions.**
 - A number of **Bhutanese pilgrims travel to Bodh Gaya, Rajgir, Nalanda, Sikkim, Udayagiri, and other Buddhist sites in India.**
 - Bhutan was one of the first countries to recognize India's sovereignty and independence in 1947 and has supported its development and modernization ever since.

Note:

➤ Strategic and Security Cooperation

- India and Bhutan signed a **Treaty of Friendship in 1949**, which was revised in 2007, to establish **peace and non-interference in each other's internal affairs**.
- India has provided Bhutan with assistance in areas such as defence, infrastructure, and communication, which has helped to maintain Bhutan's sovereignty and territorial integrity.
 - In 2017, during the **Doklam standoff between India and China**, Bhutan played a crucial role in allowing Indian troops to enter its territory to resist Chinese incursions.

➤ Economic and Development Partnership:

- The **India-Bhutan Agreement on Trade, Commerce, and Transit** (signed in 1972 and revised in 2016) establishes a **free trade regime between the two countries**.
- **India is Bhutan's largest trading partner**. India also provides economic aid and assistance to Bhutan's socio-economic development, especially in the sectors of agriculture, irrigation, infrastructure, energy, health, education, and culture.
- **India's top exports to Bhutan are petrol & diesel, passenger cars, rice, wood charcoal, cellphones, soya-bean oil, excavators, electric generators and motors, parts for turbines, and transport vehicles.**
- **India's top imports from Bhutan are electricity, betel nut, oranges, semi-finished products of iron or non-alloy steel, boulders, etc.**
- **India is the leading source of investments in Bhutan, comprising 50% of the country's total FDI.**

➤ Hydropower Cooperation:

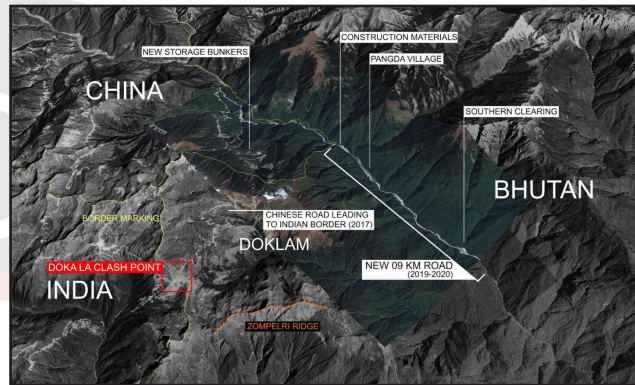
- This hydropower cooperation comes under the 2006 Agreement on Cooperation in Hydropower.
 - **India has agreed to assist Bhutan in the development of a minimum of 10,000 MW of hydropower and import of surplus electricity from the same by 2020.**
- **Four hydroelectric projects (HEPs)- Chhukha, Kurichu, Tala, and Mangdechhu** totaling 2136 MW are already operational in Bhutan and are supplying electricity to India.
 - Two HEPs **Punatsangchhu-I and Punatsangchhu-II** in **Inter-Governmental mode** are under various stages of implementation

➤ Multilateral Partnership:

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

➤ People-to-People Contacts:

- **About 50,000 Indian citizens are working in Bhutan**, mainly in the construction sector, education and technical consultants involved in infrastructure projects.
- India is the most popular educational destination for Bhutanese students.
- **India and Bhutan also exchange cultural delegations, artists, scholars, exhibitions, festivals, etc. to promote cultural understanding and appreciation.**



What are the Challenges in the India-Bhutan Relations?

- China's increased presence in Bhutan, especially along the **disputed border, raises alarms in India due to strategic implications.**
- India and Bhutan share a 699 km border, **mostly peaceful, but recent Chinese border incursions, like the 2017 Doklam standoff**, have caused tensions among India, China, and Bhutan, potentially affecting India-Bhutan relations.
- Bhutan's economy relies heavily on hydropower, with India playing a crucial role in its development. Concerns in Bhutan about terms of **some projects favoring India have led to public opposition.**
- India is Bhutan's largest trading partner and source of tourists. However, there have been some frictions over trade and tourism policies between the two countries.

Note:

- For instance, **Bhutan has expressed concerns over the environmental impact of trade and tourism on its fragile ecology and culture** and proposed to **levy entry charges on Indian tourists**.
- According to **All India Surveys of Higher Education (AISHE)**, the **number of Bhutanese students receiving tertiary education in India declined** to just 3.8% of all international students from 7% a decade ago.

India-Maldives Relations

Why in News?

Maldives, located to the south of India, in the **Indian Ocean**, saw the election of a Pro-China candidate as the next president of the nation, which allegedly raises concern for India in recent times.

- Historically, Maldives had an Executive Presidency system since 1968, transitioning to a multi-party democracy in 2008. **No incumbent president has been re-elected since then**, which is concerning for India this time.



Note: Maldives' electoral system is similar to France, where the winner has to secure more than 50% of votes. If no one crosses the mark in the first round, in the second round, the top two candidates go head to head.

How has India's Relations with Maldives been?

- **Security Partnership:**
 - Defense 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 defense training requirements.
- **Rehabilitation Centre:**
 - Signing of 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 emerged as Maldives' 3rd largest trade partner in 2021.
 - A Bilateral USD Currency Swap Agreement between RBI and Maldives Monetary Authority was signed on 22nd July 2019.
 - The India-Maldives relationship suffered a setback when Maldives entered into a **Free-Trade Agreement (FTA)** with China in 2017.
- **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 (NCPL) was inaugurated by India's External Affairs Minister.
 - NCPL is the largest grant **project executed by India in Maldives**.
- **Greater Male Connectivity Project:**
 - It will consist of a 6.74 km-long bridge and causeway link between Male and nearby islands of Villingli, Gulhifalhu and Thilafushi. It will use renewable energy.
 - **The project is funded by a grant of USD 100 million and a Line of Credit (LOC) of USD 400 million from India.**
 - It is not only the biggest project India is doing in the Maldives but also the biggest infrastructure project in the Maldives overall.

Note:

Different Operations in Maldives:

- **Operation Cactus 1988:** Under **Operation Cactus** the Indian Armed Forces have helped the government of Maldives in the neutralization of the coup attempt.
- **Operation Neer 2014:** Under **Operation Neer** India supplied drinking water to Maldives to deal with the drinking water crisis.
- **Operation Sanjeevani:** India supplied **6.2 tonnes of essential medicines to Maldives**, under **Operation Sanjeevani** as assistance in the fight against **COVID 19**.

Geography of Maldives:

- **Maldives, a Toll Gate in the Indian Ocean:** Located at the southern and northern parts of this island chain lies the **two important sea lanes of communication (SLOCs)**.
 - These SLOCs are critical for maritime **trade flow between the Gulf of Aden and Gulf of Hormuz in West Asia and the Strait of Malacca in Southeast Asia**.
- **Physical geography primarily consists of Coral Reefs and Atolls** and most of the area is under **Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs)**
 - Maldives primarily consists of an archipelago of low lying islands, which has been threatened due to rising sea rise.
- **Eight Degree Channel** separates Indian Minicoy (part of Lakshadweep Islands) from that of Maldives.

Regional Dialogue of Secretaries of Security Councils on Afghanistan**Why in News?**

Recently, the **6th Regional Dialogue of Secretaries of Security Councils/National Security Advisers (NSA)** on Afghanistan was held in **Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan**.

- India reiterated its collective approach to combating terrorism as stated in the **United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR 2593)**.

What is the Regional Security Dialogue on Afghanistan?

- The **Regional Security Dialogue on Afghanistan** is a series of high-level meetings involving **National Security Advisers (NSA)** or **senior security officials** from countries in the region, including **Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, China, Russia, India**, and other **Central Asian states**.

- These dialogues are platforms for discussing and coordinating regional approaches to address security challenges and promote **stability in Afghanistan** and the broader region.
- Regional Security Dialogue on Afghanistan follows the objective of **UNSCR 2593**.
 - The resolution, passed by the **15-member organ (UNSC)**, calls for the prevention of **Afghan territory** from being used to pose threats or launch attacks against any nation.
 - The adoption of the resolution is a strong signal from the Security Council and the international community on its expectations in respect of Afghanistan.
- It underscores the critical necessity of combating terrorism within Afghanistan.

What are India's Efforts for the People of Afghanistan?

- The **Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)** has taken significant strides in promoting education, granting admission to over **3,000 students**, including **600 Afghan girls**, since August 2021.
- In a bid to provide essential support, a **Humanitarian Air Corridor** has been established between **Delhi and Kabul**.
 - This corridor facilitates **critical travel and aid delivery**, demonstrating India's proactive response to humanitarian needs.
- India has supplied several shipments of humanitarian assistance consisting of **50,000 MTs of wheat**, **250 tons of medical aid** and **28 tons of earthquake relief aid**.
- India has partnered with the **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in Afghanistan** to provide assistance for the welfare of the Afghan drug user population, especially women.
 - Under this partnership, India has, since **2022**, supplied **11,000 units of hygiene kits, baby food, blankets, clothing, medical aid** and other miscellaneous items to **UNODC, Kabul**.
- Trade and commerce between **India and Afghanistan** is ongoing, including through the **Chabahar port**.

Note:

What is the Indian Council for Cultural Relations?

- The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), is an **autonomous organization** of the Government of India, involved in India's external cultural relations (cultural diplomacy), through cultural exchange with other countries and their peoples.
- It was founded in **1950 by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad**, independent India's first Education Minister.
- ICCR has been assigned the responsibility of facilitating the celebration of the **International Day of Yoga** by Indian Missions/Posts abroad since **2015**.

Oslo Forum and Afghan Peace Talks

Why in News?

Recently, for the first time, India participated in Norway's Oslo forum organized for peace talks on Afghanistan.

- Oslo Forum is the leading series of retreats for international mediators and peacemakers.
- Earlier India had participated in the **Moscow Format dialogue (2022)** and in **Doha dialogue (2020)** for the peace talks.

What is OSLO Forum?

- The Oslo Forum (started in 2003) is a series of retreats for international conflict mediators, high-level decision-makers, and other peace process actors.
- It provides a discreet and informal space to reflect on current mediation practice, collaborate across institutional and conceptual divides and advance negotiations.
- The Forum is **co-hosted by the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD)**.
 - The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) is a private diplomacy organization that specializes in mediation and dialogue processes to prevent and resolve armed conflicts.
 - **HD was Established in 1999, based in Geneva, Switzerland, and operates globally.**
- All discussions take place under the **Chatham House Rule. Participation is by invitation only.**
 - Chatham House (UK) is an independent policy institute and a forum for debate and dialogue.

- When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.



CPEC's Extension to Afghanistan

Why in News?

Recently, China and Pakistan have held the 4th round of the **Foreign Minister-level Pakistan-China Strategic Dialogue** Islamabad, Pakistan, where they agreed to extend the **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)** into Afghanistan.

- Alongside, the 5th **China-Pakistan-Afghanistan Trilateral Foreign Ministers Dialogue** was also held where they agreed to combat terrorism and enhance cooperation in different economic fields.
- In 2021, China proposed construction of the **Peshawar-Kabul motorway** as an extension of CPEC in Afghanistan.

What is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor?

- 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**

Note:



drishti

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 stabilizing 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.

Why does Afghanistan seem Significant for Both Pakistan and China?

- **Access to Rare Minerals:** Afghanistan has a large amount of **Rare Earth Minerals (1.4 million tonnes)** that are important for **making electronics and military equipment**. However, since the Taliban took over, the country has been **facing economic difficulties because foreign aid** has been withdrawn.
- **Energy and Other Resources:** Afghan participation in CPEC will allow **Islamabad and Beijing to harness energy and other resources**, as well as gain access to Afghanistan's **vast wealth of untapped natural resources**, ranging from copper, gold, uranium, and lithium, which are critical components for a variety of advanced electronic technologies and high-tech missile guidance systems.

What can be the Implications for India on CPEC's Extension to Afghanistan?

- **Reduces India's Scope in Central Asia:**
 - Afghanistan's involvement in CPEC can reduce the scope of **India's investment in Iran's Chabahar port**. India intends to project the port as a **gateway to lucrative prospects for commerce between India, Iran, and Afghanistan** with Central Asian countries.
 - Pakistan is also hoping to undermine India's influence in Central Asia and CPEC might provide the perfect platform for this.
- **China can take Lead from India in Development Aid:**
 - In terms of development aid, **India has been the largest regional lender to Afghanistan**, investing more than USD 3 Billion for projects such as

- Road construction, power plant construction, dam construction, parliament building, rural development, education, infrastructure, and much more.

- With the extension of CPEC, China is projected to **displace India and take the lead in Afghanistan's development sphere**.

➤ **Security Concerns:**

- China may control Afghanistan's **Bagram air force base**.
- The Bagram airport is the biggest airport and technically well-equipped as the Americans kept it for their use till the end, instead of the Kabul airport.

➤ **Undermining India's Sovereignty:**

- The CPEC passes through PoK, which **undermines India's sovereignty**. India has repeatedly raised concerns over this issue as a violation of its sovereignty and territorial integrity.
- By extending the CPEC to Afghanistan, China and Pakistan are further consolidating their economic and strategic ties, which India sees as a **threat to its security and regional interests**.

➤ **Terrorism and Strategic Concerns:**

- If Afghanistan becomes a part of the CPEC, it will boost economic development but **may also give Pakistan a strategic advantage in the region**, which could be a threat to India's interests.
- It may lead to an **increase in terrorism from Pakistan against India**, as it seeks to gain the upper hand in the region.

➤ **Exploitation of Rare Earth Minerals:**

- With the extension of CPEC, China is also looking to exploit Afghanistan's rich minerals and **highly lucrative rare-earth mines**.
- Rare-earth metals, which are key components for a host of advanced electronic technologies and hi-tech missile guidance systems.

Iran, Pakistan, and the Baloch Militancy

Why in News?

Recently, the relationship between **Iran and Pakistan has taken serious hits** over Iranian missiles and drones that struck two alleged bases of the **Jaish al-Adl (JAA), an anti-Iran Baloch militant group**, in Pakistan's Balochistan province.

Note:

- Pakistan reacted strongly to the “blatant breach” of its sovereignty and carried out its own cross-border missile strikes on **alleged terrorist sanctuaries in Iran**.
- **The JAA came under the scanner of Indian security agencies** following the abduction of an Indian, **Kulbhushan Jadhav**. The group allegedly traded Jadhav to Pakistan’s Inter Services Intelligence (ISI).



Who is Jaish al-Adl?

- Jaish al-Adl, or the Army of Justice, is a **Sunni Militant group that emerged in 2012**. It is primarily composed of **members from the ethnic Baluch community**, residing on both sides of the Iran-Pakistan border.
- The group is considered an **offshoot of the Jundullah organisation**, which saw its strength diminish after Iran arrested many of its members.
- Jaish al-Adl’s main objectives include **seeking independence for Iran’s eastern Sistan province and Pakistan’s southwestern Baluchistan province**. These goals, advocating for the **rights of the Baluch people**, make the group a **common target for both the Iranian and Pakistani governments**.
- The ethnic Baluch community faces discrimination in both Iran and Pakistan, with concerns about a lack of fair distribution of resources and wealth in their respective provinces. Baluch separatists and nationalists demand a more equitable share and often resort to insurgency as a means of expressing their grievances.
- The group’s presence in Balochistan, particularly in the border regions, has been a source of tension between Iran and Pakistan.
 - Both countries have a history of suspicion and accusations regarding each other’s involvement in supporting militant activities.

How has been the Relationship Between Pakistan and Iran?

➤ Pre-1979 Alliance:

- Before the **1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran**, both countries were firmly allied to the **United States** and had, in 1955, joined the **Baghdad Pact**, later known as the **Central Treaty Organization (CENTO)**, a military alliance modeled on **NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization)**.
- Iran provided material and weapons support to **Pakistan during its wars against India in 1965 and 1971**.
- The Shah of Iran expressed concern about the **“disintegration” of Pakistan after the Liberation of Bangladesh**.

➤ Post-1979 Shift:

- The Islamic Revolution in Iran led to the **rise of an ultra-conservative Shiite regime under Ayatollah Khomeini**. This was concurrent with Pakistan’s own Islamization under military dictator **General Zia-ul-Haq**.
- The two countries found themselves on opposite ends of the sectarian divide.

➤ Geopolitical Differences:

- Iran went **from being an ally to a sworn enemy** of the United States almost overnight, the Americans embraced Pakistan closer.
- Since 1979, has been a major reason for the Iranian distrust of Pakistan, which increased after **09/11 as Islamabad extended unqualified support to the US “War on Terror”**.
- Iran’s post-1979 foreign policy, which focused on exporting the revolution, made its Arab neighbours nervous.
 - Each of these oil-rich kingdoms was **effectively controlled by a small group of families**, not unlike the Shah’s regime in pre-revolution Iran. Pakistan’s continued strategic ties with these Arab kingdoms **added rough edges to its relationship with Iran**.

➤ Afghanistan Conflict:

- Iran and Pakistan found themselves on **opposite sides in Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal**.
- Iran backed the **Northern Alliance against the Taliban**, a group initially supported by Pakistan.

Note:



- Tensions escalated after the Taliban **massacred Persian-speaking Shia Hazaras** and Iranian diplomats in **Mazar-i-Sharif in 1998**.
- **Attempts at Reconciliation:**
 - Despite historical tensions, both countries **made attempts to improve ties**. Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto expressed regret over tightening U.S. sanctions against Iran in 1995, and Pakistan **imported gas from Iran during her government**.
 - However, relations soured after General Pervez Musharraf took power in 1999.

What is the Balochistan Dynamics between Iran and Pakistan?

- **Geographical and Demographic Context:**
 - The Iran-Pakistan border, known as the **Goldsmith Line**, spans approximately 909 kilometres from a tripoint with Afghanistan to the northern **Arabian Sea**.
 - Roughly 9 million ethnic **Baloch people inhabit both sides of the border**, residing in the **Pakistani province of Balochistan, the Iranian province of Sistan and Baluchestan**, and neighbouring areas of Afghanistan.
- **Shared Baloch Identity:**
 - Baloch people share a **common cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious identity** that transcends the modern borders imposed on the region.
 - Despite living in different countries, the **Balochs maintain strong ties based on historical and cultural connections**.
- **Marginalisation and Grievances:**
 - The Baloch in both **Iran and Pakistan have experienced marginalization**, feeling politically and economically distant from the dominant regimes in each country.
 - **In Pakistan**, the Baloch face **challenges as an ethnic minority** within a Punjabi-dominated political structure.
 - **In Iran**, they are not only an **ethnic minority but also a religious minority**, with the majority being Sunni in a predominantly Shia country.
- **Economic Disparities:**
 - The Baloch homeland is **rich in natural resources**, but economic disparities persist. In Iran, a significant portion of the **Baloch population lives under the poverty line**.

- In Pakistan, despite massive investments in projects like **China's Belt and Road Initiative**, **improvements in their lives have been limited**.
- **Nationalist Movements:**
 - Baloch nationalism has **historical roots dating back to the early 20th century** when new international borders were drawn in the region.
 - The marginalisation of the Baloch people in both Iran and Pakistan has fueled separatist **movements seeking a "Greater Balochistan" nation-state**.
- **Insurgency and Cross-Border Movements:**
 - Baloch insurgents operate on both sides of the Iran-Pakistan border, attacking military and occasionally civilian targets.
 - Insurgents, affiliated with groups like the **Baloch Liberation Army (BLA)** and the **Baloch Liberation Front (BLF)**, have been involved in armed struggles against the respective states.

What are the Implications of Escalating Tensions Between Pakistan and Iran?

- **Regional Stability:**
 - Escalating tensions between Pakistan and Iran **could contribute to regional instability**, especially given the complex geopolitical landscape of the Middle East and South Asia.
 - The relationship between Pakistan and Iran **may further strain, impacting diplomatic, economic, and cultural ties**.
- **Proxy Dynamics:**
 - Both Pakistan and Iran have been accused of **supporting proxies in regional conflicts**. Escalations may heighten proxy dynamics, with each country trying to exert influence in the other's internal affairs or supporting certain factions in ongoing regional conflicts.
- **Impact on Balochistan:**
 - Balochistan could witness increased unrest. **The Baloch nationalist movements might gain momentum**, and there could be repercussions for the local populations.
 - The situation might draw in **other regional actors, such as India, the United States, Saudi Arabia, or Israel**, further complicating the geopolitical landscape and potentially leading to a broader regional conflict.

Note:



- **Security Concerns:**
 - Escalating tensions may raise security concerns for neighbouring countries, particularly Afghanistan. The region is already grappling with **security challenges, and heightened tensions could exacerbate the situation.**
- **Implications for India:**
 - The tensions **may impact India's relations with Iran**, especially considering India's involvement in projects like the Chabahar port. India may find itself in a delicate diplomatic position, balancing its ties with both Iran and the United States.

What is India's Stance over the Faceoff Between Pakistan and Iran?

- **Zero Tolerance Towards Terrorism:**
 - India emphasised its **"uncompromising position of zero tolerance towards Terrorism."** This statement underscores India's consistent stance against terrorism, aligning with its long-standing concerns regarding cross-border terrorism emanating from Pakistan.
- **Understanding Actions in Self-Defense:**
 - India acknowledged and **expressed an understanding of "actions that countries take in their self-defence."** It suggests a recognition of the complex security dynamics in the region and a cautious approach to the actions taken by countries to address their security concerns.

PCA Asserts Competence in India-Pakistan Hydroelectric Projects Dispute

Why in News?

The Hague-based **Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA)** recently ruled that it has the **competence to hear Pakistan's objections to India's Kishenganga and Ratle hydroelectric projects** in Jammu and Kashmir.

- India, however, rejects the constitution of the **"Court of Arbitration,"** asserting that it goes against the provisions of the **Indus Waters Treaty(IWT).**

What is the Hydroelectric Project Dispute Between India and Pakistan?

- **Hydroelectric Projects:**
 - The case involves a dispute between India and Pakistan over the **Kishenganga hydroelectric project**

(on the **Kishanganga River**, a tributary of the **Jhelum River**), and the **Ratle hydroelectric project (on the Chenab River)** in Jammu and Kashmir.

- The two countries disagree over **whether the technical design features of these two hydroelectric plants** contravene the IWT.

➤ **Pakistan's Objections:**

- Pakistan objects to the hydroelectric projects, **citing violations of the IWT**, concerns about **reduced water flow, environmental impact, and differing treaty interpretations.**
- In 2016, Pakistan **retracted its request for a Neutral Expert** and proposed a **CoA** instead.
- India requested the **appointment of a Neutral Expert in 2016**, emphasizing its importance in the process, which Pakistan sought to bypass.

➤ **World Bank Intervention:**

- World Bank **paused the process due to separate requests** from India and Pakistan, urging resolution through the **PIC.**
- Pakistan refused to discuss the issue during PIC meetings, leading the World Bank to initiate actions on Neutral Expert and Court of Arbitration.
 - The Treaty does not empower the World Bank to decide **whether one procedure should take precedence over the other.**
 - The World Bank sought to fulfill its procedural obligations with respect to both the CoA and the Neutral Expert.

➤ **India's Opposition:**

- **India opposes the constitution of the CoA**, citing contravention of Indus Waters Treaty provisions.
- India also **questioned the jurisdiction and competence of the CoA**, stating that it was not properly constituted as per the treaty.
- India has **not appointed arbitrators or attended the court's proceedings**, emphasizing the **need for a single dispute resolution process.**

What is the Ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration?

➤ **Ruling:**

- The PCA ruled that the Court of Arbitration (CoA) has the **competence to consider Pakistan's objections** to India's hydroelectric projects in Jammu and Kashmir.

Note:



- The ruling was based on a unanimous decision, binding on both parties and without any possibility of appeal.
- The PCA rejected **India's objections to the competence of the CoA**, as raised through its communications with the World Bank.

➤ India's Response:

- India has been maintaining that **it will not join the Pakistan-initiated proceedings at the PCA** as the dispute is being already examined by a neutral expert under the framework of the IWT.

➤ Implications:

- The PCA's ruling adds **complexity and uncertainty to the ongoing dispute** between India and Pakistan regarding the hydroelectric projects.
- The ruling challenges India's position and raises questions about the **effectiveness and interpretation** of the IWT.
- The implications of the ruling extend beyond the specific dispute, potentially impacting **bilateral relations between India and Pakistan**, particularly concerning **water-sharing and cooperation**.

What is Permanent Court of Arbitration?

- It was **established in 1899** and is **headquartered in The Hague, Netherlands**.
- **Purpose:** It is an **intergovernmental organization** dedicated to serve the international community in the field of dispute resolution and to facilitate arbitration and other forms of dispute resolution between States.
- It has a **three-part organizational structure** consisting of:
 - **Administrative Council** - to oversee its policies and budgets,
 - **Members of the Court** - a panel of independent potential arbitrators, and
 - **International Bureau** - its Secretariat, headed by the Secretary-General.
- **Funds:** It has a **Financial Assistance Fund** which aims at helping developing countries meet part of the costs involved in international arbitration or other means of dispute settlement offered by the PCA.

India-Bhutan Relations

Why in News?

Recently, **India and Bhutan** agreed to discuss **new routes of Regional Connectivity**, and upgrade border and immigration posts, in order to enhance trade and partnership during Bhutan King's India visit.



What are the Key Highlights of the Discussion?

➤ Regional Connectivity:

- India and Bhutan have **agreed to discuss new routes of regional connectivity**, which includes the development of a cross-border rail link between Gelephu in **Bhutan** and Kokrajhar in **Assam**, spanning **58 km**.
- Additionally, there is a plan to explore a second rail link of approximately **18 km between Samtse in Bhutan and Banarhat** in the tea gardens area of West Bengal.
- Both sides discussed **upgrading border and immigration posts** to support this project, and it could be a significant development in the border area.

➤ Trade and Connectivity:

- The two countries agreed to facilitate trade by allowing Bhutanese trade items to be carried further from **Haldibari in West Bengal to Chilahati in Bangladesh**, aiming to enhance trade opportunities and ease the **movement of goods between Bhutan and Bangladesh** through Indian territory.

➤ Immigration Check Post:

- The Darranga-SamdrupJongkhar border **crossing between Assam and Bhutan's SouthEastern** district will be designated as an **immigration check post**.

Note:

- This will allow not only Indian and Bhutanese nationals but **also third country nationals to enter and exit the area**, promoting tourism and enhancing connectivity.
- **Support for Bhutanese SEZ Project:**
 - The two sides agreed to strengthen trade infrastructure with the upgradation of an existing land customs station at **Dadgiri (Assam) to a modernised “Integrated Check Post” (ICP)** along with “development of facilities on the Bhutanese side at Gelephu”, indicating India’s support to the Bhutanese SEZ project.
- **Development Assistance:**
 - India has committed to continue its support for **Bhutan’s socio-economic development**, with a particular focus on the **13th Five-Year Plan**. This underscores the enduring commitment to their strong bilateral ties.
 - For the **12th Five Year Plan**, India’s contribution of Rs 4,500 crore constituted 73% of Bhutan’s total external grant component.
- **Lauds India’s Support for Global South:**
 - Bhutan lauded **India’s successful organization of the recent G20 Summit**, praising India for fostering consensus and constructive decisions outlined in the Delhi Declaration.
 - Bhutan commended **India’s dedication to integrating the interests and priorities of Global South countries in G20 deliberations**.
- **India-Bhutan Energy Partnership:**
 - Progress on the construction of the 1020 MW **Punatsangchhu-II hydropower project** was noted with satisfaction, with its early commissioning expected in 2024.
 - An agreement was **reached to expand the existing India-Bhutan energy Partnership** from hydro to non-hydro renewables, including solar energy, as well as green initiatives related to hydrogen and e-mobility.

- India assured essential technical and financial support for projects in these areas.

➤ **Recalling Operation All Clear:**

- Bhutan King recalled Operation All Clear which was **a military operation conducted by the Royal Bhutan Army** in 2003 against Assam separatist insurgent groups in the southern regions of Bhutan.

What are the Key Facts Related to Bhutan?

➤ **About:**

- Bhutan is nestled between India and China and is a landlocked country. Mountains and valleys dominate the landscape of Bhutan.
 - Thimphu is the Capital City of Butan.
- Bhutan became a democracy in 2008 after the first democratic elections were held in the country. The King of Bhutan is the Head of State.
- It is named ‘Kingdom of Bhutan’. The Bhutanese name is **Druk Gyalkhap**, which means the ‘Land of the Thunder Dragon’.

➤ **River:**

- The longest river in Bhutan is the Manas River with over 376 km in length.
 - The Manas River is a transboundary river in **the Himalayan foothills between southern Bhutan and India**.

➤ **Government:**

- Parliamentary monarchy.

➤ **Border:**

- Bhutan borders only two countries: India and Tibet, an autonomous region of China.
- Thimphu is located in the country’s eastern part.

Gelephu Smart City Project

Why In News?

Recently, Bhutan’s King has announced plans to build a massive **“international city”** in an area of over **1,000 sq. km.** on its **border with Assam**. This project is known as the **Gelephu Project**.

Note:





What are the Key Highlights of the Gelephu Smart City Project?

- The project is expected to be an “**economic corridor connecting South Asia with Southeast Asia via India’s northeastern States**”.
- The city is expected to follow **environmental standards and sustainability** as a goal, and will aim to attract “**quality investment**” from “**pecially screened**” international companies.
- The project is expected to include “**zero emission**” industries, a “**mindfulness city**” that plays to **Bhutan’s strength** in tourism and wellness, as well as infrastructure companies.
- The project is expected to be a “**Special Administrative Region**” that would be run under different laws to facilitate more international investment.
- The project is expected to be a “**point of inflection**” and “**transformation**” for **Bhutan and South Asia**.
- The Government of India agrees to construct the first **India-Bhutan railway line to Gelephu**.
 - The railway will also connect with **roadways and border trading points** into **Assam and West Bengal**, eventually providing **Bhutan** access to **Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, and Singapore**.

What are the Key Facts Related to Bhutan?

- **About:**
 - Bhutan is nestled between **India and Tibet**, an **autonomous region of China**.
 - and is a **landlocked country**.
 - **Thimphu** is the Capital City of Butan.
 - Bhutan became a democratic country in 2008 after the first democratic elections were held in the country. The **King of Bhutan** is the **Head of State**.
- **River:**
 - The main rivers from west to east are the Torsa (Amo), Wong (Raidak), Sankosh (Mo), and Manas. All the rivers flow southward from the Great Himalayas and join the Brahmaputra River in India.
 - The longest river in Bhutan is the **Manas River**.
 - The **Manas River** is a **transboundary river** in the Himalayan foothills between **southern Bhutan and India**.
- **Government:**
 - Constitutional monarchy.

2. India - Asia Relations

Red Sea Disruptions and India’s Oil Import Dynamics

Why in News?

The recent turmoil in the **Red Sea** has sent ripples through **India’s oil import dynamics**, triggering notable changes in its reliance on conventional suppliers like the US.

Why is India Moving its Oil Imports Away from the US?

- **Red Sea troubles** escalated **freight rates**, rendering US crude economically unviable for Indian refiners. Consequently, Indian refiners reverted to traditional suppliers in the **Persian Gulf (West Asia)**.

Note:

- Recently, Chemical tanker MV Chem Pluto was struck by a drone attack, approximately 200 nautical miles off Gujarat's coast.
- MV Chem Pluto is a Liberia-flagged, Japanese-owned, and Netherlands-operated chemical tanker.

- It had started its journey carrying crude from Al Jubail, Saudi Arabia and was expected to arrive in **New Mangalore, India**.
- It is believed to have been carried out by **Houthi rebels based in Yemen**, citing protest against Israel's actions in Gaza.



Who are the Top Crude-Oil Suppliers for India?

- **Status of Oil Imports:** India currently is the 3rd largest consumer of oil behind the US and China. It imports **85% of its oil needs** and this dependence is likely to rise as domestic production falls.
 - **India will overtake China** as the biggest driver of global oil demand in 2027. Diesel will be the single largest source of demand growth, accounting for almost half of the rise in the nation's demand (**International Energy Agency**).
- **Major Oil Suppliers:**
 - **Russia:** Russia is currently **India's largest supplier of oil**. Russian oil imports to India surged to 1.53 million barrels per day (bpd) in **January, 2024**.
 - India capitalised on discounted Russian offers

following Western sanctions on Russia (due to **Russia-Ukraine Conflict**), displacing traditional suppliers.

- The **Urals crude oil grade of Russia** has become a cornerstone of India's energy diversification efforts.
- **Iraq:** Iraq is the **second-largest** source of crude supplier to India, with imports reaching 1.19 million bpd in January 2024, the highest since April 2022.
 - India's efforts to diversify oil procurement channels aim to mitigate geopolitical risks and ensure a stable energy supply.
- **Saudi Arabia:** Saudi Arabia is India's **third-largest** oil supplier and exported approximately 690,172 bpd of crude oil to India in January, 2024 maintaining

Note:

its position as a key player in India's energy security landscape.

- **UAE:** Oil imports from the UAE surged by 81% in January, 2024 reaching around 326,500 bpd.
 - Abu Dhabi is India's **fourth-largest supplier of crude oil**.

What are Government's Recent Initiatives to Control Surging Oil Demands?

- **Managing Demand:**
 - **Promoting Energy Efficiency:** Schemes like **PAT (Perform, Achieve and Trade)** incentivize industries to reduce energy consumption.
 - Star labelling for appliances helps consumers choose efficient options.
 - **Fuel Diversification:** Initiatives like the **Ethanol Blending Program (EBP)** aim to blend **20% ethanol with petrol by 2025**, reducing gasoline dependence.
 - Similarly, **Compressed Natural Gas (CNG)** is promoted for vehicles.
 - **Electric Mobility:** **FAME scheme** is a subsidy programme aims to support electrification of public and shared transportation
 - By 2030, the government intends to have an electric vehicle (EV) sales penetration of 30% for private cars, 70% for commercial vehicles and 80% for two and three-wheelers.
- **Boosting Domestic Production:**
 - **Attractive Exploration Policies:** Production Sharing Contract (PSC) regime, Discovered Small Field Policy, and Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy (HELP) aim to attract investments in oil and gas exploration.
 - **Technological advancements:** ONGC is investing in **Enhanced Oil Recovery (EOR)** techniques aimed to extract more oil from existing fields.

Indian Navy Helps Hijacked Ship in Arabian Sea

Why in News?

In a recent maritime incident, the Malta-flagged Vessel MV Ruen fell victim to pirates in the **Arabian Sea**.

Responding swiftly, the **Indian Navy**, strategically based in the **piracy-prone Gulf of Aden**, intercepted the hijacked vessel, closely monitoring its trajectory toward the **Somali coast**.

- The **European Union Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) Operation Atalanta**, a maritime security operation in the western Indian Ocean, joined the anti-piracy effort.

What is Maritime Piracy?

- **About:**
 - Article 101 of the **1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)** outlines acts constituting piracy.
 - These acts include **violence, detention, or depredation** committed for private ends on the high seas or outside the jurisdiction of any state.
 - These acts are carried out with the intent of personal gain and may include the seizure of another ship, its cargo, or the kidnapping of its passengers or crew.
 - It is considered a serious maritime crime and is subject to international laws and conventions.
- **Strongest Zones of Pirate Activity:**
 - Northwest Africa, the **Gulf of Guinea**, Red Sea, Somalia, **Horn of Africa**, Gulf of Aden, **Indian Ocean**, Indian subcontinent and **Southeast Asia**.



- **Global Initiatives Related to Maritime Piracy:**
 - **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS):**
 - It establishes the legal framework for combating piracy, as outlined in. The **UN Security Council** and **General Assembly** have consistently

Note:

emphasized the importance of international cooperation in addressing piracy and armed robbery at sea, stressing the applicability of UNCLOS in combating maritime threats.

- **Operation Prosperity Guardian:**
 - The United States has initiated **Operation Prosperity Guardian**, a multinational security initiative to ensure security in the Red Sea.
- **Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the safety of Maritime Navigation (1988):**
 - It is a multilateral treaty. The main purpose of the treaty is to ensure that appropriate action is taken against people who commit unlawful acts against ships.
 - It was adopted in 1988 at the **Suppression of Unlawful Acts(SUA) Convention in Rome.**
- **Combined Maritime Forces (CMF):**
 - The **CMF** is a multinational naval partnership with primary focus areas aimed at defeating terrorism, preventing piracy, fostering regional cooperation, and promoting a secure maritime environment.
 - **CMF has 39 member nations including India.**
- **India's Initiatives Related to Maritime Piracy:**
 - [SAGAR policy.](#)
 - [India reiterated its support for the UN Convention on Law of Sea \(UNCLOS\).](#)
 - [International Fusion Centre \(IFC\).](#)
 - [Indian Ocean Rim Association \(IORA\).](#)
 - Enhanced Technical Surveillance of Coastal and Offshore Areas:
 - [Coastal Surveillance Network.](#)
 - [National Command Control Communication and Intelligence Network.](#)
 - [National Automatic Identification System.](#)
 - [National Maritime Domain Awareness Project.](#)
 - [National Committee for Strengthening Maritime and Coastal Security.](#)

What are the Key Facts About the Gulf of Aden?



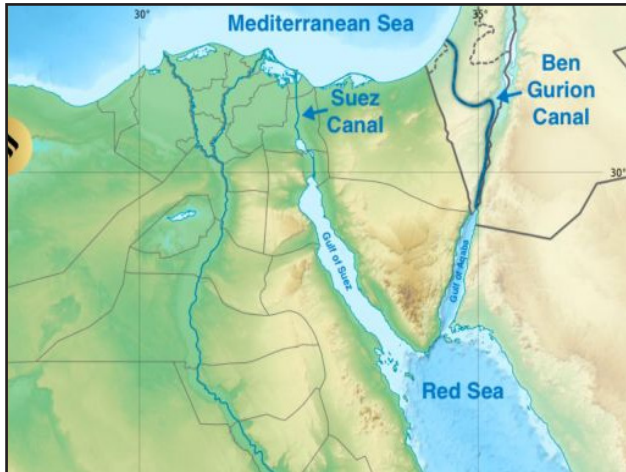
- The Gulf of Aden, an arm of the Indian Ocean is situated between **Yemen on the south coast of the Arabian Peninsula and Somalia in Africa.**
 - It is bounded to the south by Somalia and the Socotra Islands, north by Yemen, east by the Arabian Sea, and west by Djibouti.
- The gulf – roughly 900 kilometers long and 500 kilometers wide is an important **waterway for transporting Persian Gulf oil.**
 - The gulf connects the **Red Sea to the Arabian Sea via the Strait of Bab el Mandeb.** It forms an essential oil transport route between Europe and the Far East.
- Its marine life is rich in quantity and variety. Its coastline lacks large-scale fishing facilities but supports many fishing towns, as well as the major ports **Aden and Djibouti.**
- In recent years, the gulf has received a lot of attention due to **piracy, terrorism and refugee smuggling.**

Ben Gurion Canal Project

Why in News?

Recently, there has been renewed interest in the **Ben Gurion Canal Project**, a proposed 160-mile-long sea-level canal that would connect the **Mediterranean Sea with the Gulf of Aqaba**, bypassing the **Suez Canal.**

Note:



What is the Ben Gurion Canal Project?

- **Historical Roots:**
 - Originating in the 1960s, the Ben Gurion Canal Project was conceptualized as a transformative infrastructure initiative.
 - Named after **Israel's founding father, David Ben-Gurion (1886-1973)**, reflecting its historical significance.
- **Strategic Objective:**
 - Aims to create an alternative maritime route connecting the Red Sea with the Mediterranean, bypassing the Suez Canal.
 - Envisions reshaping global maritime dynamics by **challenging Egypt's monopoly** on the shortest Europe-Asia route.
- **Gulf of Aqaba to Mediterranean Coast:**
 - Proposes cutting a canal through the Negev Desert (Israel), starting from the Gulf of Aqaba (eastern arm of the Red Sea).
 - Extends to the Eastern Mediterranean coast, providing an alternative trade route.
 - The Gulf of Aqaba has a coastline shared by four countries: Egypt, Israel, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia.
- **Economic Implications:**
 - Speculations suggest that **Israel's desire to control Gaza and eliminate Hamas** is linked to unlocking economic opportunities tied to the canal.
 - If completed, the Ben Gurion Canal Project would have a significant impact on global trade and geopolitics. It would create a new shipping route

between **Europe and Asia**, bypassing the Suez Canal and reducing Egypt's control over global shipping.

➤ Challenges and Viability:

- Gigantic **logistical, political, and funding challenges** pose substantial obstacles.
 - High complexity and prohibitive costs estimated to be as much as USD 100 billion.
- The imperative of **political stability and the constant military threat** as significant security concerns.
 - Another challenge is the **security situation in the region**. The Gaza Strip is a potential security threat, and any canal would need to be protected from attack.

Suez Canal

- The Suez Canal is a **man-made waterway that opened in 1869** running north to south across the Isthmus of Suez in Egypt, that connects the **Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea**, allowing a shorter route for shipping between Europe and Asia.
 - The canal separates the African continent from Asia.
- The 150-year-old canal was controlled by British and French interests in its initial years, but was nationalised in 1956 by Egypt.
 - The Suez Canal now is controlled by Egypt, which collects toll revenues from the vessels that use it.
 - In 2021, the canal generated a record of USD 9.4 billion for Egypt, accounting for nearly 2% of its GDP.
- The Suez Canal is a vital trade route that accounts for approximately **12% of global trade** passes through the Suez Canal, representing **30% of all global container traffic**, and over USD 1 trillion worth of goods per annum.
- The canal enables India to access the markets of Europe, Africa, and the Middle East more easily and economically.
 - India imports most of its **oil and gas from the Gulf countries**, and the canal facilitates the smooth flow of energy supplies to India.
 - The canal also helps India export its products, such as textiles, chemicals, and agricultural goods, to the global markets.

Note:

Strengthening India-Saudi Arabia Strategic Partnership

Why in News?

Recently, after the launch of the **India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor**, the Prime Minister (PM) of India welcomed the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia on a state visit.

- During this significant visit, the two nations discussed various aspects of their strategic partnership and agreed to set up a **joint task force to expedite the West Coast refinery project**.



What were the Outcomes and Agreements Resulting From the Visit?

- **Strategic Partnership Acknowledgment:**
 - The PM of India highlighted Saudi Arabia's pivotal role as **"one of the most important strategic partners of India."**
 - Both leaders emphasized the importance of their partnership, particularly as two rapidly growing nations contributing to regional stability.
- **India-Saudi Strategic Partnership Council (SPC):**
 - The PM of India and the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia co-chaired the inaugural meeting of the **India-Saudi Strategic Partnership Council (SPC)**.
 - Discussions covered a wide range of areas, including **defence, energy, security, education, technology, transportation, healthcare, tourism, culture, space, and semiconductors**.
 - This reflects the comprehensive nature of the economic cooperation between India and Saudi Arabia.

- **West Coast Refinery Project Acceleration:**
 - This trilateral project, involving ARAMCO (oil company of Saudi Arabia), ADNOC (oil company of the United Arab Emirates) and **Indian Companies**, is set to receive a USD 50 billion investment.
 - A **joint task force** was established to expedite the West Coast refinery project.
 - The task force will work on channeling the promised USD 100 billion investment from Saudi Arabia for this project.
 - The West Coast refinery project is **India's first and largest greenfield refinery**.
 - The project is located in **Ratnagiri, Maharashtra** and is expected to have a production capacity of **60 million tonnes per annum**. **When completed, it will be one of the world's largest refineries.**
 - The project encompasses various critical facilities, including marine storage and port infrastructure, crude oil terminals, storage and blending plants, desalination plants, utilities, and more.
- **Bilateral Agreements and Cooperation:**
 - Eight agreements were signed during the visit, strengthening cooperation across various sectors.
 - Notable agreements include **collaboration between the Central Vigilance Commission of India** and the **Saudi Oversight and Anti-Corruption Authority**, as well as cooperation in technology, education, and agriculture.
 - An agreement was signed between the **National Institute of Technology of India** and the **Saline Water Conversion Corporation of Saudi Arabia**.
- **Assurance of Crude Oil Supply:**
 - Saudi Arabia affirmed its commitment to being a **"reliable partner and exporter of crude oil supplies" to India**, ensuring energy security.
- **Defence and Anti-Terror Cooperation:**
 - Both nations pledged to enhance cooperation in **defence and anti-terrorism efforts**.
 - A special emphasis was placed on preventing access to **"missiles and drones" for terrorist activities**.
 - Plans were discussed to strengthen the tourism segment of bilateral relations, aligning with Saudi Arabia's ongoing reforms.

Note:

- **Geopolitical Significance:**
 - The visit holds geopolitical significance as it occurred after Saudi Arabia ended hostilities with Iran through a deal negotiated by China.
 - **Saudi Arabia's recent membership in the BRICS** (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) further underscores its global engagement.

What is the India-Saudi Strategic Partnership Council (SPC)?

- **About:**
 - The SPC is a **high-level mechanism established between India and Saudi Arabia in 2019**, to guide and enhance their bilateral relationship.
 - It consists of two sub-committees, addressing various aspects of cooperation:
 - Committee on Political, Security, Social, and Cultural Cooperation.
 - 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.
- **Operation:**
 - The SPC operates at four functional levels:
 - Summit level, involving the Prime Minister and Crown Prince.
 - Ministerial-level engagements.
 - Senior Officials Meetings.
 - Joint Working Groups (JWGs) to facilitate detailed discussions and action plans.
- **Key Functions:**
 - The SPC serves as a **comprehensive platform to foster collaboration across a wide range of sectors**.
 - It facilitates in-depth discussions, policy formulation, and coordination at various levels to implement joint initiatives effectively.
 - JWGs under each committee focus on specific areas of cooperation, ensuring a well-structured approach to bilateral relations.

How has India's Relations with Saudi Arabia been?

- **Oil and Gas:**
 - Saudi Arabia is currently **India's second-largest supplier of crude oil** (Iraq has been India's top supplier).

- **India imports more than 18% of its crude oil requirement** and India imports most of its **Liquefied petroleum gas** from Saudi Arabia

- **Bilateral Trade:**
 - Saudi Arabia is **India's fourth largest trade partner** (after the USA, China and UAE).
 - Bilateral trade in FY22 was valued at USD 29.28 billion, with significant imports and exports.
- **Cultural Linkages:**
 - **Hajj pilgrimage** and digitization of Hajj processes reflect the significant cultural ties.
 - India participated as the '**Guest of Honour**' at the Saudi National Festival of Heritage and Culture in 2018.
- **Naval Exercise:**
 - In 2021, India and Saudi Arabia started their first-ever Naval joint exercise called the **Al-Mohed Al-Hindi Exercise**.
- **Indian Community in Saudi Arabia:**
 - The 2.6 million-strong Indian community in Saudi Arabia is the largest expatriate community in the Kingdom and is highly respected for its contributions to Saudi Arabia's development.

India-Israel Relations

Why in News?

Recently, India's **Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR)** and Israel's Defense Research and Development (DDR&D) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on **Industrial Research and Development Cooperation**.

What are the Key Highlights of the MoU?

- It aims to work together on **research and development projects in various fields** such as **Artificial Intelligence (AI), Quantum** and **semiconductors, synthetic biology, Sustainable Energy, Healthcare**, and **Agriculture**. They will focus on implementing specific projects in mutually agreeable areas.
- The collaboration will include important industrial sectors such as **aerospace, chemicals, and infrastructure**.
- The MoU will be monitored by a **Joint Steering Committee** led by the heads of the CSIR and DDR&D for taking forward mutually benefiting Industrial and technology cooperation.

Note:

How has the India-Israel Relations been So Far?

➤ Diplomatic:

- Though India officially **recognized Israel in 1950**, both 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:

- Trade between India and Israel has increased from USD 5 billion before the **Covid-19 pandemic** to about USD 7.5 billion till 2023 January.
 - 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 one of the **largest importers of weapons from Israel**, contributing to about 40% of its annual arms exports.
- 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.
 - 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.

➤ 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:

- In recent years, multiple MoUs have been signed between Israel's Start-Up National Central and Indian entrepreneurship centres like **Create and TiE (Technology Business Incubators)**.
- In 2022, the two countries recently widened the scope of the **India-Israel Industrial R&D and Innovation Fund (I4F)** to include sectors like renewable energy and **ICT (Information and Communication Technology)** through increased participation of academia and business entities.
 - I4F is a cooperation between the two countries to promote, **facilitate and support joint industrial R&D projects** between companies from India and Israel to address the challenges in the agreed 'Focus Sectors'.

➤ Others:

- Israel is also joining the India-led **International Solar Alliance (ISA)**, which aligns very well with the objectives of both countries to scale up their cooperation in **renewable energy** and partner in clean energy.

Israeli Military Operation in Jenin Refugee Camp

Why In News?

Recently, Israel launched a military operation in the **Jenin Refugee Camp** in the occupied West Bank, resembling **wide-scale operations carried out during the second Palestinian uprising (2000-2005)**.

- The operation aimed to **destroy and confiscate weapons** and targeted specific militant groups. It involved around 2,000 soldiers and utilized military drones for strikes.
- The **Jenin camp** has historically been a **stronghold for armed struggle** against Israeli occupation and a focal point for violence.

What are the Key Points related to Jenin Refugee Camp?

- Jenin Refugee Camp is a **Palestinian refugee camp** located in the northern West Bank, specifically in the city of Jenin.

Note:



- Established in 1953, the camp was created to accommodate **Palestinian refugees who were displaced during the 1948 Arab Israeli war**, also known as the Nakba (“catastrophe” in Arabic).
- The camp has also been a **site of frequent clashes between Palestinian militants and Israeli forces** over the years.
 - It gained particular attention during the second Palestinian uprising, also known as the **Al-Aqsa Intifada (2000-2005)**, when it became a stronghold for armed resistance against Israeli occupation.
- Jenin Refugee Camp remains a **symbol of the Palestinian refugee issue** and the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

What are the Other Important Places Linked to Israel Palestine Conflict?

- **Al Aqsa Mosque:**
 - It is one of the **holiest structures in the Islamic faith known by Muslims as Haram al-Sharif**, or the Noble Sanctuary, and by Jews as the Temple Mount.
 - The site is part of the Old City of Jerusalem, sacred to Christians, Jews and Muslims.
- **Sheikh Jarrah:**
 - Sheikh Jarrah is a neighborhood located north of the **Old City in East Jerusalem**.
 - Hundreds of thousands of **Palestinians were forced out of their homes** when the **State of Israel was created** in historical Palestine in 1948.
 - Twenty-eight of those Palestinian families moved to Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem to settle there.
- **West Bank:**
 - West Bank is a **landlocked territory in West Asia**. It also contains a significant section of the **western Dead Sea**.
 - It was captured by Jordan after the **Arab-Israeli War (1948)** but Israel snatched it back **during the Six-Day War of 1967** and has occupied it ever since.
 - The West Bank is sandwiched between Israel and Jordan.
- **Gaza Strip:**
 - The Gaza Strip is located **between Israel and Egypt**. Israel occupied the strip after 1967, but

relinquished control of Gaza City and day-to-day administration in most of the territory during the **Oslo peace process**.

- In 2005, Israel unilaterally removed **Jewish settlements from the territory**, though it continues to control international access to it.
- **Golan Heights:**
 - The Golan Heights is a **strategic plateau that Israel captured from Syria** in the 1967 war. Israel effectively **annexed the territory in 1981**.
 - In 2017, the USA officially recognized Jerusalem and Golan Heights a part of Israel

One Year of India- UAE CEPA

Why in News?

Recently, the **India-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)** completed one year of implementation.

What is CEPA?

- It is a kind of free trade pact that **covers negotiation on the trade in services and investment, and other areas of economic partnership**.
- It may even consider negotiation in areas such as **trade facilitation and customs cooperation, competition, and IPR**.
- Partnership agreements or cooperation agreements are more comprehensive than **Free Trade Agreements**.
- CEPA also looks into the regulatory aspect of trade and encompasses an agreement covering the regulatory issues.

What is the India-UAE CEPA?

- **About:**
 - The India-UAE CEPA is a landmark **free trade agreement (FTA)** between the two countries. It covers **trade in goods, services, investment, and other areas of economic cooperation**.
 - The CEPA entered into force on **May 1, 2022** and is expected to increase the **total value of bilateral trade in goods to over USD 100 billion** and trade in services to over USD 15 billion **within five years**.
 - The **CEPA is the first deep and full-fledged FTA signed by India** with any country in the past decade.

Note:

➤ Salient Features:

○ Trade in Goods:

- The CEPA provides for preferential market access for over **80% of products traded between India and the UAE**.
- India will benefit from the **reduction or elimination of tariffs on its exports to the UAE**, especially in sectors such as gems and jewellery, textiles, leather, footwear, sports goods, plastics, furniture, agricultural and wood products, engineering products, medical devices and automobiles.

○ Trade in Services:

- The CEPA covers **11 broad service sectors and more than 100 sub-sectors**, such as business services, communication services, construction and related engineering services, distribution services, educational services, environmental services, financial services, health related and social services, **tourism and travel related services, recreational cultural and sporting services and transport services**.
- Both countries have offered enhanced market access for each other's service providers across these sectors.

○ Investment:

- The CEPA provides for a **liberal and non-discriminatory regime for cross-border investment between India and the UAE**.
- It also includes provisions on, dispute settlement and cooperation on investment facilitation.

○ Some Other Areas of Cooperation:

- Protection and promotion of investments
- Technical barriers to trade (TBT)
- **Sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures**
- Dispute settlement
- Movement of natural persons
- Pharmaceutical products
- **Intellectual property rights (IPR)**
- Digital trade

How are India-UAE Trade Relations?

➤ Trade:

- **UAE is India's 3rd largest trading partner (after US, China)**. Bilateral trade turnover between the two was US\$ 68.4 billion in 2021.

➤ FDI:

- UAE is the **7th largest investor in India** with cumulative **FDI inflows** of US\$ 15,179 million from **April 2000 – September 2022**.

➤ Exports:

- Major Indian exports to UAE are **petroleum products, gems and jewellery, machinery and instruments, chemicals, iron and steel, textiles and garments, cereals, meat and meat products**, etc.

➤ Imports:

- Major Indian imports from UAE are **crude oil, gold, pearls and precious stones, metal ores and metal scrap, chemicals, electrical machinery**, etc.

➤ Impact of India-UAE CEPA on Trade Ties:

○ Bilateral Trade:

- Bilateral trade between India and the UAE **reached historic highs during FY 2022-23**; increased from USD 72.9 billion (FY 22) to USD 84.5 billion (FY 23), **registering an increase of 16%**.

○ Indian Exports to the UAE:

- Indian exports to the UAE increased from USD 28 bn to USD 31.3 bn (same period as above); **an 11.8% year-on-year growth in percentage terms**.
- During the same period, growth in India's global exports was 5.3%, excluding the UAE, India's global exports grew at 4.8%.

○ Sectors that Witnessed Significant Export Growth:

- Mineral Fuels
- Electrical Machinery (particularly telephone equipment)
- Gems & Jewellery
- Automobiles (Transport vehicles segment)
- Essential Oils/Perfumes/Cosmetics (Beauty/Skin care products)
- Other Machinery
- Cereals (Rice)
- Coffee/Tea/Spices
- Chemical Products

Note:



India-Oman Bilateral Meet

Why in News?

Recently, India and Oman have adopted the **India Oman Joint Vision Partnership For the Future**, setting the stage for bilateral cooperation and charting pathways for **future collaboration between the two countries**.

- This Vision Document focuses on building partnerships in broadly 8 to 10 areas. These include maritime cooperation and connectivity, energy security, space, digital payments, health, tourism, hospitality, agriculture and food security.

What are the Key Highlights of the Bilateral Meet?

- **Bilateral Agreements:**
 - Both countries have signed agreements on cooperation in the field of information technology, combating financial crimes, culture, and the establishment of a Hindi chair of the **Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR)** in Oman.
- **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA):**
 - Both nations are engaged in discussions to finalize a **CEPA**. Substantial progress has been made, and leaders from both sides emphasized concluding this agreement at the earliest to boost economic ties.
- **Oman-India investment Fund:**
 - The two sides announced the **third tranche of Oman-India investment fund** worth USD 300 million that would be used for channelising investment into the fastest growing sectors of the Indian economy.
 - The fund was started as a **50:50 joint venture between the SBI and the Oman investment authority**, with the first tranche of USD 100 million followed by USD 200 million.
- **Digital Payments and Trade:**
 - Discussions revolved around the possibility of using India's digital payment system, **UPI (Unified Payments Interface)**, in collaboration with an Omani platform.
 - Additionally, exploring the potential of conducting trade in Rupees was considered, although it's still in the exploratory stage.

Regional and International Issues:

- Leaders exchanged perspectives on regional and global matters, including the ongoing conflict between **Hamas and Israel**.
- They discussed the challenge of terrorism and advocated for a two-state solution to address the Palestine issue.

How have Been India-Oman Relationships so Far?

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.
- 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**.

Defense 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.

Note:

- 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 (OIJF)**, 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.

What is Oman's Strategic Significance for India?

- Oman is at the **gateway of Strait of Hormuz** through which India imports one-fifth of its oil imports.
- Defence cooperation has emerged as a key pillar for the robust India-Oman strategic partnership. Defence exchanges are guided by a **Framework MOU which was recently renewed in 2021**.
- Oman is the only country in the Gulf region with which all three services of the Indian armed forces conduct regular bilateral exercises and staff talks, enabling close cooperation and trust at the professional level.
- Oman also actively participates in the **Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS)**.
- In a strategic move to expand its footprint in the Indian Ocean region, India has secured access to the key Port of **Duqm** in Oman for military use and logistical support. This is part of India's maritime strategy to counter Chinese influence and activities in the region.
 - The Port of Duqm is situated on the southeastern seaboard of Oman, overlooking the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean.
 - It is strategically located, in close proximity to the **Chabahar port in Iran**. With the **Assumption Island** being developed in Seychelles and **Agalega in Mauritius**, Duqm fits into India's proactive maritime security roadmap.

Key Facts About Oman

➤ Border Countries:



- United Arab Emirates (UAE) to the northwest.
- Saudi Arabia to the west and southwest.
- Yemen to the southwest.

➤ Deserts:

- The largest desert in Oman is the **Rub' al Khali or the "Empty Quarter,"** one of the largest continuous sand deserts in the world.

➤ River:

- Oman doesn't have perennial rivers; however, during seasonal rains, wadis (seasonal riverbeds) flow with water.
- The most notable is **Wadi Bani Khalid, known for its natural pools** and stunning scenery.

➤ Highest Mountain:

- Jebel Shams, situated within the Al Hajar mountain range, is the highest mountain in Oman.

➤ Geography:

- Oman is located on the southeastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula, bordering the Arabian Sea, the Gulf of Oman, and the Persian Gulf.

Israel-Palestine Conflict

Why in News?

Recently, the **Hamas**, the militant group ruling the **Gaza Strip**, have mounted a scathing attack on Israel from the land, air and water leading to multiple casualties. This has revived the century-old dispute between **Israel-Palestine Conflict** once again, necessitating the intervention by global and regional powers.

Note:

- Israel, in the recent times, has cemented many **peace agreements with neighboring countries such as UAE, Saudi Arabia** etc which is set to feel a jolt due to the recent attack.

What is the Israel-Palestine Conflict?

➤ Balfour Declaration:

- The seeds of the conflict were laid in **1917** when the then British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour expressed official support of Britain for a Jewish “national home” in Palestine under the **Balfour Declaration**.

➤ Creation Of Palestine:

- Unable to contain Arab and Jewish violence, **Britain withdrew its forces from Palestine** in 1948, leaving responsibility for resolving the competing claims to the newly created **United Nations**.
 - The UN presented a partition plan to create independent Jewish and Arab states in Palestine which was not accepted by most of Arab nations.

➤ Arab Israel War (1948):

- In **1948**, the Jewish declaration of Israel’s independence prompted surrounding Arab states to attack. At the end of the **war**, Israel controlled about 50% more territory than originally envisioned by the **UN partition plan**.

➤ UN Partition Plan:

- As per the Plan, **Jordan controlled the West Bank and Jerusalem’s holy sites, and Egypt controlled the Gaza Strip**. But it fell short of solving the Palestinian crisis which led to the formation of **Palestinian Liberation Organisation in 1964**.

➤ Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO):

- PLO was founded, with the aim of freeing Palestine from clutches of Israel and Jewish domination and setting up the dominance of Muslim Brotherhood in the Arab world.
 - The **United Nations granted the PLO observer status in 1975** and recognizes Palestinians’ right to self-determination.

- **Six-Day War:** In **1967 war**, Israeli forces seized the Golan Heights from Syria, the West Bank & East Jerusalem from Jordan and Sinai Peninsula & Gaza strip from Egypt.

➤ Camp David Accords (1978):

- “Framework for Peace in the Middle East” brokered by the U.S. set the stage for peace talks between Israel and its neighbors and a resolution to the “Palestinian problem”. This however remained unfulfilled.

➤ Emergence of Hamas:

- **1987: Founding of Hamas**, a violent offshoot of Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood seeking to fulfill its agenda through violent jihad.
 - **Hamas**- It is regarded as a terrorist organization by the U.S. government. In 2006, Hamas won the Palestinian Authority’s legislative elections. It ejected Fatah from Gaza in 2007, splitting the Palestinian movement geographically, as well
- **1987:** Tensions in the occupied territories of West Bank and Gaza reached boiling point resulting in the First **Intifada** (Palestinian Uprising). It grew into a small war between Palestinian militants and the Israeli army.

➤ Oslo Accords:

- **1993:** Under the **Oslo Accords** Israel and the PLO agree to officially recognize each other and renounce the use of violence. The Oslo Accords also established the **Palestinian Authority**, which received limited autonomy in the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank.
- **2005:** Israel begins a unilateral withdrawal of Jews from settlements in Gaza. However, Israel kept tight control over all border crossings (blockade).
- **2012-** UN upgrades Palestinian representation to that of “**non-member observer state**”.

➤ Territorial Disputes of Israel with Neighboring Countries:

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

Note:

removed Jewish settlements from the territory, though it continues to control international access to it.

- **Golan Heights:** The Golan Heights is a strategic plateau that Israel captured from Syria in the **1967 war**. Israel effectively annexed the territory in 1981. Recently, the USA has **officially recognized** Jerusalem and Golan Heights as a part of Israel.



How has the Relationship of India with Israel Evolved over the Years?

- **India's Stand on the Israel-Palestine Conflict:**
 - India was one of the few countries to oppose the UN's partition plan in 1947, echoing its own experience during independence a few months earlier.
 - India recognised Israel in 1950 but it is also the first non-Arab country to recognise **Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO)** as the sole representative of the Palestinian. India is also one of the first countries to recognise the statehood of Palestine in 1988.
 - In recent times, India is being seen shifted towards a **Dehyphenation of Policy**.
 - **Dehyphenation of Policy:**
 - 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 recent years, **India's position has also been perceived as pro-Israel.**

- Further, India believes in a **Two-State Solution** with respect to **Israel-Palestine conflict**, and proposes the right to self-determination to both the countries in a peaceful manner.

Gaza Strip

Why in News?

The recent escalation of conflict between **Israel and Hamas militants** has thrust the **Gaza Strip** into the global spotlight.

- Amidst this turmoil, Israel's defense minister, declared a **"complete siege" of the Gaza Strip**, cutting off essential resources. This move has highlighted the long-standing and contentious issue of the **Gaza blockade**, which has been in place **since 2007**.



What are the Significant Aspects Regarding the Gaza Strip?

- **About:** The **Gaza Strip** is situated in the **eastern Mediterranean basin**, sharing borders with **Egypt in the southwest** and **Israel to the north and east**. To the west, it is bounded by the **Mediterranean Sea**.
 - It is one of the **most densely populated areas globally**, with over **2 million residents living in a tiny area**.
 - The term **"open air prison"** has been widely used by academics, activists, and journalists to characterize the **conditions in Gaza**.
- **Historical Significance:**
 - The **Six-Day War of 1967** resulted in **Israel capturing Gaza from Egypt** and initiating its military occupation of the region.
 - Israel withdrew its settlements from Gaza in **2005**, but this period also saw **intermittent blockades on the movement of people and goods**.

Note:



- In 2007, after **Hamas assumed power in Gaza**, **Israel and Egypt** enforced a **permanent blockade**, justifying it as necessary for security.
 - The **United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)** reported that the blockade has severely impacted Gaza's economy, resulting in high unemployment, food insecurity, and aid dependency.

➤ Related Border Areas:

- **Gaza is encircled by walls on three sides**, and its **western border is controlled by Israel**, restricting access by sea.
 - Three functional border crossings exist - **Karem Abu Salem Crossing** and **Erez Crossing controlled by Israel**, and **Rafah Crossing controlled by Egypt**.
 - These crossings have been sealed in response to recent hostilities.

➤ Associated Places in Spotlight:



India-Thailand Relations

Why in News?

The **8th India-Thailand Defence Dialogue** was held in Bangkok, Thailand, during which both sides expressed satisfaction at the ongoing bilateral defence cooperation.

What are the Key Highlights of the Dialogue?

- The progress on various bilateral defence cooperation initiatives was reviewed.
- The co-chairs identified **means to enhance existing areas of collaboration**, especially in the field of defence industry, maritime security and **multinational cooperation**.
- Thailand expressed confidence in the capability of the Indian defence industry.

- The two chairs also articulated **steps in the direction of emerging areas of cooperation** and issues pertaining to global commons.

How have India's Relations been with Thailand?

➤ Diplomatic Relations:

- Thailand and India have a **longstanding diplomatic relationship that dates back to 1947**.
- The relationship is built on a foundation of **economic and cultural ties that have existed for more than 2000 years**.
- India's '**Look East**' policy (since 1993) and Thailand's '**Look West**' policy (since 1996) which has now metamorphosed into **India's 'Act East'** and **Thailand's 'Act West'** are strongly contributing to consolidating bilateral relations including economic & commercial linkages.

➤ Economic And Commercial Relations:

- Bilateral trade was USD 12.12 billion in 2019 and it reached USD 9.76 billion in 2020 despite the pandemic situation.
 - Thailand exports to India amounted to USD 7.60 billion, while Indian exports to Thailand were worth **USD 4.86 billion in 2018**.
- Bilateral trade between India and Thailand reached an all-time high of around **USD 15 billion in 2021-22**.
- In the **ASEAN region**, Thailand ranks as **India's 5th largest trading partner** after Singapore, Vietnam, Indonesia and Malaysia.
 - Currently, **Thai goods have benefited from tax reduction** under **ASEAN-India FTA** in Goods, which came into effect in January 2010.

➤ Defence Cooperation:

- The bilateral defence engagements have expanded over time and include Defence Dialogue meetings, military-to-military exchanges, high-level visits, capacity-building and training programs, and the annual joint military exercises.
- **Defence Exercises:**
 - **Exercise MAITREE** (Army).
 - **Exercise SIAM BHARAT** (Air Force).
 - **India-Thailand Coordinated Patrol** (Navy).

➤ Connectivity:

- In 2019, approximately 1.9 million Indian tourists visited Thailand, while around 160,000 Thai tourists visited India mainly for **Buddhist pilgrimage sites**.

Note:

- India and Thailand are working together to improve regional connectivity also under the [Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation \(BIMSTEC\)](#) framework.
- The most awaited **India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway** is expected to expand land connectivity through Northeast India and Southeast Asia, becoming the first-ever cross border facilitation agreement between South and Southeast Asia.
- **Cultural Cooperation:**
 - India and Thailand have a strong cultural exchange program with regular visits of Indian cultural troupes, festivals, and events.
 - An Indian Cultural Centre, now known as the **Swami Vivekananda Culture Centre**, was established in Bangkok in 2009.
 - The 550th birth anniversary of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji was also celebrated in Thailand with various events and a grand Nagar Kirtan procession in Bangkok.
 - The Thai language translation of the Constitution of India was launched in Thailand.

India-Singapore Ties

Why in News?

The **Union Education Minister of India** recently embarked on a three-day visit to Singapore with the aim of **strengthening existing ties and exploring opportunities** for widening bilateral engagement in education and skill development.



What are the Key Highlights of the Meeting?

- The **Union Education Minister** met various key Ministers of the Singaporean Government and visited Spectra Secondary School.
 - It includes a constructive meeting with **DPM & Minister for Finance, Singapore**, on **strengthening cooperation and focusing on skill development**.
 - The meeting emphasized **creating opportunities for lifelong learning, building a future-ready workforce, and making knowledge and skill development a key pillar of strategic partnership**.
- The minister highlighted the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** and its focus on **vocational education, market relevance of training**, and integration of skills qualifications framework with higher education qualification framework.
- The Minister stressed **on learning from the best practices of Singapore, collaborate and customize it to meet Indian needs**.

How are India's Relations with Singapore?

- **Background:**
 - The close ties between [India and Singapore](#) have a history rooted in strong **commercial, cultural and people-to-people links across a millennium**.
 - The more modern relationship is attributed to **Sir Stamford Raffles who, in 1819, established a trading station in Singapore on the route of the Straits of Malacca** which later became a **crown colony and governed from Kolkata till 1867**.
 - After independence, **India was one of the first countries to recognize Singapore in 1965**.
- **Trade and Economic Cooperation:**
 - **Singapore is among India's largest trade and investment partners in ASEAN** and accounted for **27.3 % of our overall trade with ASEAN in 2021-22**.
 - Singapore is also the leading source of **Foreign Direct Investment** into India.
 - Over the last 20 years the total investment into India from Singapore is almost **136.653 billion** and accounts for nearly **23% of the total FDI inflows**.
 - The **Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA)** between India and Singapore was signed in 2005.

Note:

- India and Singapore have also collaborated on several initiatives to promote trade and investment, such as the **India-Singapore Business Forum and the India-Singapore CEOs Forum**.
- Recently, India's **Unified Payments Interface (UPI)** and Singapore's PayNow have been integrated in **February 2023** to **enable faster Remittances between the two countries**.
- **Defence and Security Cooperation:**
 - Both countries share common concerns about regional stability and maritime security in the **Indo-Pacific region**.
 - In 2015, they elevated their relationship to a **Strategic Partnership on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations**.
 - They have also signed several agreements to enhance their defence ties, such as the **Defence Cooperation Agreement (2003)** and the **Naval Cooperation Agreement (2017)**.
- **Military Exercises:**
 - **Navy: SIMBEX**
 - **Air Force: SINDEX**
 - **Army: Bold Kurukshetra**
- **Education, Science and Technology Cooperation:**
 - The **28th edition of the DST-CII India-Singapore Technology Summit** was held in February 2022.
 - It highlighted collaboration of India and Singapore in **AI, IoT, fintech, healthcare, biotech, smart manufacturing, green mobility, logistic and supply chain solutions, smart manufacturing, and sustainable urban development**.
 - **ISRO** also launched Singapore's first indigenously built micro-satellite in **2011**.
 - Singapore is looking at collaborating with India in the area of digital public infrastructure on the lines of a **national identity system like Aadhaar**.
 - Another potential opportunity could be the **integration of Singapore's 'Proxtera' (global digital hub of MSME ecosystems) with India's Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC)**
- **Cultural and People-to-People Ties:** Both countries share a rich heritage of cultural diversity, linguistic affinity and religious harmony.
 - Ethnic Indians constitute about 9.1% or around 3.5 lakhs of the resident population of 3.9 million in Singapore. They have contributed significantly to

Singapore's economic development, social fabric and cultural diversity.

- **ASEAN-India PravasiBharatiya Divas (PBD)** was held in Singapore on 6-7 January 2018 as part of commemoration of 25 years of ASEAN-India Partnership, with the theme, **"Ancient Route, New Journey"**.
- **Cooperation in Infrastructure Development:**
 - Singapore's expertise in infrastructure development, smart cities, and urban planning aligns with **India's goals of sustainable development and building smart cities**.
 - Singaporean companies have been actively involved in infrastructure projects in India, including the development of **industrial parks, airports, and urban infrastructure**.

Japan's Asia Energy Transition Initiative

Why in News?

Japan looks forward to supporting India's clean energy transition by including India in the **Asia Energy Transition Initiative (AETI)**.

- **Japan's AETI**, launched in 2021, initially supported the **Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries** towards achieving **net zero emissions**, including financial assistance of USD 10 billion for **renewable energy**.

What is Asia Energy Transition Initiative?

The Government of Japan announced the "Asia Energy Transition Initiative (AETI)", which includes a variety of support for realising energy transitions in Asia.

1. **Support drawing roadmaps for energy transitions**
2. **Asian version of transition finance**
3. **US\$10 billion finance support**
(e.g.) renewable energy, energy efficiency, LNG etc.
4. **Technology development and deployment, utilizing the achievement of 2 trillion yen fund**
(e.g.) Offshore wind power generation, Fuel-ammonia, Hydrogen etc.
5. **Capacity building of decarbonisation technologies, and knowledge sharing through Asia CCUS network**
 - Capacity building of decarbonisation technologies for 1,000 people in Asian countries
 - Workshops and Seminars on energy transitions

What are the Major Highlights of India Japan Clean Energy Cooperation?

- The **Clean Energy Partnership** between India and Japan was published in **March 2022**.
 - It would work on the agenda covered in the **India-Japan Energy Dialogue 2007** and will subsequently expand into areas of mutual benefit.

Note:

- **India and Japan** have taken over the presidency of **G20 and G7**, respectively.
 - In the context of **environmental sustainability**, **India's Lifestyle for Environment (LiFE)** is one of the most important priorities during the **G20 presidency**.
 - Also, the **Feed-in Premium (FiP) scheme** by the government of Japan was implemented in **April 2022** and is expected to **improve the country's energy transition**.
- Japan has set a goal of **becoming net-zero by 2050**, and the government issued an interim report on **Clean Energy Strategy in May 2022**.
 - India has also set an ambitious target of achieving **net-zero emissions by 2070**.
- The Indian subcontinent's massive **renewable energy potential** can **boost green hydrogen (GH2) production** and immense potential for a **GH2 economy**.
 - **Nepal and Bhutan** also have surplus **hydropower potential**, and **green hydrogen electrolyzers** can tap this in countries like **India and Bangladesh**.
- Events like the **India-Japan Environment week** would help create a roadmap to integrate variable renewable energy into the system through **technological, institutional, and personnel cooperation**.

What is Clean Energy Transition?

- **About:**
 - Clean energy transition refers to the **shift from traditional, fossil fuel-based energy sources** (such as coal, oil, and natural gas) to cleaner, more **sustainable sources of energy** that have a lower impact on the environment.
 - This transition is driven by the **need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions**, mitigate the **effects of climate change**, and address other environmental and **public health concerns** associated with the use of fossil fuels.
- **Clean Energy Sources:**
 - Clean energy sources include **renewable energy sources like solar, wind, hydro, geothermal, and biomass energy**, as well as energy storage technologies like batteries and hydrogen fuel cells.

What is the Status of India -Japan Bilateral Relations?

- **Defense Ties: India-Japan Defence and Security partnership** has evolved over the years from bilateral and multilateral exercises including **Dharma Guardian** and **Malabar** respectively. And welcoming the participation of Japan for the first time in the **MILAN** exercise.
- **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** under **Special terms for economic partnership (STEP)**.

India-UAE Food Security Partnership

Why in News?

The **United Arab Emirates (UAE)**, whose **food security** has been **built on imports from global markets**, is now focusing on the twin objectives of **food access and readiness to confront supply chain crises**.

- India, the **world's second-largest food producer**, is an essential partner in the **UAE's ambition to strengthen food security**.
- The **India-UAE food security partnership** stands to benefit from multiple points of convergence.

How is India Strengthening its Global Food Security Partnership with UAE?

- **India's Capabilities:**
 - **Strong Hold on Agri-exports:**
 - India has a **strong position as a global agri-export powerhouse** due to its **abundant arable land, favourable climate, and growing food production and processing sector**.
 - **Humanitarian Assistance:**
 - India has also been involved in **humanitarian food aid to developing countries**, demonstrating

Note:



its commitment to **regional and global food security**.

- **Food Parks and Supply Chain Management:**
 - India has made significant investments in **food parks and modern supply chain management** to benefit from bilateral trade agreements, showcasing its intent to excel in the global food marketplace.
- **Government Initiatives:**
 - India runs the **world's largest food subsidy program**, the **Public Distribution System**, providing affordable grains to nearly 800 million citizens, ensuring access to daily meals.
 - India's **POSHAN Abhiyaan** is the **world's largest nutrition program** for children and women, emphasising the importance of nutrition in food security.

➤ **UAE's Contribution:**

- **Investment:**
 - The UAE has committed **USD 2 billion in investment towards constructing food parks in India** during the **I2U2 Summit 2022**.
- **Food Security Corridor:**
 - The UAE has signed a **food security corridor on the sidelines of the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)**, enhancing India's presence on the global food value chain.
- **Agriota:**
 - The **Dubai Multi Commodities Centre** has launched **Agriota**, an agri-trading and commodity platform, **connecting Indian farmers to the UAE's food ecosystem** and enabling **direct access to Emirati markets**.
- **Significance:**
 - **Gateway to New Markets for India:**
 - The UAE's strategic location between Asia and Europe can serve as **India's food export gateway to West Asia and Africa**, offering benefits beyond maintaining and diversifying its food reserves.
 - India stands to gain from the UAE's private sector projects, **generating non-farm agri-jobs** and providing better prices for farmers' products.
- **Template for Global Food Security Partnership:**
 - India's **G-20 presidency** provides an opportune moment to **showcase successful strategies and**

frameworks for food security in the Global South.

- India can leverage and strengthen trade pathways with the UAE to build a **sustainable, inclusive, efficient, and resilient future** of food as it sets the **global developmental agenda**.

3. India - North America Relations

India-US Relations

Why in News?

Recently, the Prime Minister (PM) of India has stated that, despite occasional issues, **India and the US have been on a positive trajectory in relations**.

- The PM emphasized a deepening engagement, understanding, and friendship between the two nations, driven by national interest.



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.

Note:

- Both have shared interests in promoting global security, stability, and economic prosperity through trade, investment, and connectivity.
- **Economic Relations:**
 - The U.S. has emerged as India's biggest trading partner in 2022-23 on account of increasing economic ties between the two countries.
 - The bilateral trade between India and the U.S. has increased by 7.65% to USD 128.55 in 2022-23 as against **USD 119.5 billion in 2021-22.**
 - Exports to the U.S. rose by 2.81% to USD 78.31 billion in 2022-23 as against USD 76.18 billion in 2021-22, while imports grew by about 16% to USD 50.24 billion.
- **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.
 - 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).**
- **Defence Cooperation:**
 - India has now signed all **four foundational agreements with the US.**
 - The **Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA)** in 2016,
 - the **Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA)** in 2018,
 - The **Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-Spatial cooperation (BECA)** in 2020.
 - While the **General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA)** was signed a long time ago, an extension to it, the Industrial Security Annex (ISA), was signed in 2019
- India, which could not access **US weapons during the Cold War**, has bought USD 20 billion worth of arms over the last two decades.
 - However, the incentive for the US is helping India reduce its historical dependence on Russia for its military supplies.
- The armed forces of India and the US engage in extensive bilateral military exercises (**Yuddha Aabyas, Vajra Prahar**) and unilateral ones with the four partners in the **Quad Forum (Malabar).**
- Another grouping in the Middle East - I2U2 involving India, Israel, UAE and the US is being termed as the **new Quad.**
- **Space and Science and Technology:**
 - **Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO)** and US National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) are developing a microwave remote sensing satellite for Earth observation, **NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR).**
 - In June 2023 ISRO signed with NASA the **Artemis Accords** to participate in peaceful and sustainable civil exploration of outer space.
 - **iCET** is a joint initiative by the National Security Advisors of the US and India to foster cooperation and innovation in key technology domains such as **AI, quantum, telecom, space, biotech, semiconductors**, and defence. It was launched in January 2023.

INDUS-X Summit 2024

Why in News?

Recently, the United States Department of Defense (DoD) and the Indian Ministry of Defense (MoD) participated in the **second India-U.S. Defense Acceleration Ecosystem (INDUS-X) Summit** in New Delhi, India.

- The summit was jointly organized by **Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX)**, MoD, and the DoD, and coordinated by the **US-India Business Council (USIBC)** and **Society of India Defense Manufacturers (SIDM).**

Note:

What are the Key Highlights of the Second INDUS-X Summit?

- **Focus on Indo-Pacific Security:** The summit emphasised the critical role India and the US play as key partners in ensuring a **free and open Indo-Pacific region**.
- **Promoting Innovation and Collaboration:** Emphasis was placed on fostering innovation in defence technologies through collaborative efforts between Indian and American industries.
- **Defence Partnership Between India and the United States:** The summit highlighted the strong defence partnership between India and the US, citing initiatives like **Initiatives on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET)** aimed at fostering innovation across key sectors, including defence.
- **Emphasis on Technological Innovation:** The Summit emphasised the crucial role of technological innovation in defence within the broader context of the U.S.-India Strategic Partnership, fostering collective progress for defence industries across borders.
- **Joint IMPACT Challenges:** The Summit highlighted the introduction of **Joint IMPACT Challenges**, aiming to advance defence and aerospace co-development and co-production collaboratively, involving startups in pioneering solutions.

Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX):

- Launched in 2018, iDEX is the flagship scheme of the **Ministry of Defence**. It is funded and managed by the **Defence Innovation Organization (DIO)**, established as a 'not-for-profit' company under Section 8 of the Companies Act 2013.
- iDEX, aims to foster **innovation and technology development in the Defence and Aerospace sector**.
 - It provides grants, funding, and other support to carry out research and development projects with potential for future adoption in Indian defence and aerospace needs.
- It is currently engaged with around 400+ Startups and MSMEs. Recognized as a game-changer in the defence ecosystem, iDEX has received the **PM Award for Innovation in the defence sector**.

The US-India Business Council:

- It aims to **foster bilateral trade between India and the US**, bridging industry and government for long-term commercial partnerships, job creation, and global economic growth.

Society of India Defense Manufacturers:

- SIDM is India's leading Defence Industry association, advocating policy reforms and facilitating collaboration with the government and Armed Forces.

India-US 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue

Why in News?

Recently, **5th Edition of the India-US 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue** took place, where both countries highlighted progress in various areas of bilateral cooperation including defense, semiconductors, emerging technology, space, health etc.

- The 2+2 meetings have been held annually with the US leaders since 2018.



What is a 2+2 Meeting?

- **About:**
 - The 2+2 meetings signify the **participation of two high-level representatives**, Ministers holding Foreign and Defence portfolios, from each of the two countries who aim to **enhance the scope of dialogue between them**.

Note:



drishti

- Having such a mechanism enables the **partners to better understand and appreciate each other's strategic concerns** and sensitivities taking into account political factors on both sides, in order to build a stronger, more integrated strategic relationship in a rapidly changing global environment.
- **India's 2+2 Partners:**
 - The US is India's oldest and most important 2+2 talks partner.
 - Additionally, India has held **2+2 meetings with ministers from Australia, Japan, the United Kingdom and Russia.**

What are the Key Highlights of the India-US 2+2 Dialogue?

- **Defense Deals:**
 - Both nations aimed to collaboratively **co-develop and co-produce defence systems**, fostering a deeper partnership in defence technologies.
 - India and the U.S. are currently negotiating deals for the purchase of MQ-9B unmanned aerial vehicles and the licensed manufacturer of General Electric's F-414 jet engine in India.
 - These deals align with India's goal of enhancing its defence capabilities.
 - The Ministers **looked forward to the finalisation of a Security of Supply Arrangement (SOSA)**, a key priority in the Roadmap, which will further integrate the defence industrial ecosystems of both countries while strengthening supply chain resilience
 - **Infantry Combat Vehicles and Future Plans:**
 - Both sides **discussed infantry combat vehicles**, particularly the Stryker, as part of the defence industry cooperation roadmap.
 - Cooperation in infantry combat systems will be formalized once the Indian military's needs are finalized, and a concrete production plan is established through collaboration between Indian and U.S. industry and military teams.
 - **Advancements in Defence Technology Cooperation:**
 - Both sides reviewed the progress of the **India-U.S. Defence Industrial Ecosystem, INDUS-X**, launched
- in June 2023, aimed at expanding the strategic technology partnership and defence industrial cooperation.
 - **Membership in Combined Maritime Forces:**
 - India's decision to become a full member of the **Combined Maritime Forces**, a multilateral construct headquartered in Bahrain, was welcomed by the Defense Secretary of the US.
 - This move signifies **India's commitment to regional maritime security.**
 - **Maritime Security:**
 - Both nations **shared a focus on maritime security** in the **Indo-Pacific** region, acknowledging the **importance of safeguarding vital sea lanes** and promoting stability.
 - **Space and Semiconductor Collaboration:**
 - The Ministers welcomed the rapid progress made under the India-US Initiative on **Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET)** to build science and technology and critical technology value chain collaborations in both the commercial and defence sectors.
 - They called on the respective governments, academic, research, and corporate sectors to continue to proactively build these strategic partnerships in emerging technologies **like quantum, telecom, biotechnology, Artificial Intelligence**, and semiconductors to accelerate global innovation and benefit the economies of both countries.
 - They welcomed the early meeting of the Strategic Trade Dialogue Monitoring Mechanism.
 - **Discussion on Chinese Aggression:**
 - The US emphasized that the bilateral **relationship extends beyond addressing the challenges** posed by China.
 - **India-Canada Row:**
 - The ongoing row between India and Canada, particularly concerning security concerns related to a **Khalistan separatist based in the US and Canada**, was addressed.
 - India communicated its position on core security concerns to its partners.
 - **Israel-Hamas War:**
 - India reiterated its stance on the **Israel-Hamas Conflict**, advocating for a **two-state solution (Two countries officially demarcated and Internationally Recognised)** and the early resumption of dialogue.

Note:

- Humanitarian assistance has been provided, emphasizing adherence to international humanitarian law and the condemnation of civilian casualties.

India US Strategic Partnership

Why in News?

The **Indian Prime Minister** was on a significant visit to the **United States of America**.

- The visit aimed to **strengthen the strategic partnership between the two countries** and focused on **addressing common challenges, taking a stand on global issues, collaborating in critical emerging technologies, promoting sustainable development, and transitioning towards clean energy.**

What are the Areas of Cooperation Highlighted During the Visit?

- **Strengthening Semiconductor Supply Chains: Micron Technology**, with support from the **India Semiconductor Mission**, will invest in a **new semiconductor assembly and test facility in India**.
 - Applied Materials will establish a **Semiconductor Centre for Commercialization and Innovation in India** to enhance the diversification of the semiconductor supply chain.
 - Lam Research will train **60,000 Indian engineers through its "Semiverse Solution"** to accelerate India's semiconductor education and workforce development goals.
- **Advanced Telecommunications: India and the US have established public-private Joint Task Forces** on the development and deployment of **Open RAN systems and advanced telecoms research and development**.
 - **Bharat 6G** from India and the **US Next G Alliance** will co-lead the public-private research, aiming to reduce costs, enhance security, and improve the resiliency of telecommunication networks.

Note: Open RAN, also known as **Open Radio Access Network**, is a concept and approach to **designing and implementing radio access networks in telecommunications**. It aims to introduce greater **openness, flexibility, and interoperability into traditional RAN architectures** by **decoupling hardware and software components and promoting multi-vendor integration**.

- **NASA-ISRO Collaboration in Space:** India has signed the **Artemis Accords**, joining 26 other countries committed to **peaceful, sustainable, and transparent cooperation for space exploration**.
 - NASA will provide **advanced training to Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) astronauts**, with the goal of a joint effort to the **International Space Station in 2024**.
 - A strategic framework for human spaceflight cooperation between **NASA and ISRO is being developed by the end of 2023**.
- **Quantum, Advanced Computing, and Artificial Intelligence:** The **Joint Indo-US Quantum Coordination Mechanism** has been established to facilitate joint research on **quantum technology, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and advanced wireless technologies**.
 - Joint collaboration on trustworthy and responsible AI, including **generative AI**, will promote AI education, workforce initiatives, and commercial opportunities.
 - India's leadership as **Chair of the Global Partnership on AI** was commended, and **Google's investment in Indian startups and AI research centre** was appreciated.
- **Fibre Optics Investments: Sterlite Technologies Limited from India** has invested USD 100 million in constructing a **optical fibre cable manufacturing unit near Columbia, South Carolina**, facilitating **USD 150 million in annual exports of optical fiber from India**.
- **Cutting-edge Research:** The **US National Science Foundation** has **joint research collaborations** with India's Department of Science and Technology.
 - A cooperative arrangement has been signed with **India's Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology** to promote emerging technologies.
- **Innovation Handshake:** The **US-India Commercial Dialogue** will launch an **"Innovation Handshake"** to connect the startup ecosystems of both countries, supporting the **US-India Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET)**.
- **Critical Minerals Partnership:** India has become the **newest partner of the US-led Minerals Security Partnership (MSP)**, focused on developing diverse and sustainable critical energy minerals supply chains globally.
 - **Epsilon Carbon Limited**, an Indian company, will invest in a greenfield **electric vehicle battery component factory in the US**.

Note:

- **Defense Partnership:** A groundbreaking proposal has been welcomed to co-produce
 - **GE's F414 combat aircraft engines in India**, allowing for greater transfer of US jet engine technology.
 - India intends to procure **armed MQ-9B SeaGuardian UAVs** from General Atomics to enhance intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities.
 - Agreements have been reached for **service and repair of US Navy ships at Indian shipyards, fostering closer cooperation.**
 - **Master Ship Repair Agreements** with Indian shipyards will expedite contracting processes for mid-voyage and emergent repair.
 - The **India-US Defence Acceleration Ecosystem (INDUS-X)** has been inaugurated, fostering **joint innovation on defence technologies** and integrating India's private sector defence industry with the US defence sector.
 - The adoption of a **Defense Industrial Cooperation Roadmap** will provide policy direction for defence industries.
 - The roadmap aims to enable co-production of advanced defence systems and collaborative research, testing, and prototyping.
- Note:**

 - 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).**
- **Fighting Terror and Drugs:** The US and India stand united in countering **global terrorism**, condemning terrorism and violent extremism in all forms.
 - Emphasis is placed on **taking action against UN-listed terrorist groups** and **urging Pakistan to prevent the use of its territory for launching attacks.**
 - A **counternarcotics framework** will be developed to disrupt the production and trafficking of illicit drugs, including synthetic drugs and precursors.
 - **Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific:** The US will join the **Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative**, promoting a **safe, secure, and stable maritime domain and regional coordination.**
 - India will continue to participate as an **observer in the Partners in the Blue Pacific.**
 - A **Indian Ocean Dialogue** will be held, bringing together experts and stakeholders to enhance regional coordination.
 - **Strengthening and Reforming the Multilateral System:** Both countries supported a **comprehensive UN reform agenda**, including expansion of the **UN Security Council's permanent and non-permanent membership.**
 - The US endorsed **India's permanent membership on a reformed UN Security Council** and India's **candidature as a non-permanent member for the 2028-29 term.**
 - **Initiatives on Healthcare:** Collaboration between US and Indian scientists will be fostered through grants to develop **AI-enabled digital pathology platforms and AI-based automated radiotherapy treatment for cancer.**
 - Agreements will be signed to further research on diabetes, and a **US-India Cancer Dialogue** will be hosted to accelerate progress against cancer.
 - **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) for Inclusive Development:**
 - Recognizing the potential of **DPI approaches**, both countries aim to provide **global leadership in promoting inclusive development, competitive markets, and protecting individual rights.**
 - Collaboration will be pursued to develop and deploy robust DPIs, with safeguards for privacy, data security, and intellectual property.
 - Exploring the **establishment of an India-US Global Digital Development Partnership** to enable DPI development and deployment in developing countries.
 - **Strengthening India-US Trade and Investment Partnership:**
 - Bilateral trade exceeds **USD 191 billion in 2022**, with a focus on greater engagement and technical cooperation in emerging technologies, clean energy, and pharmaceuticals.

Note:



- Harmonisation of standards and regulations, lowering barriers to trade and investment, and promoting an innovative digital economy.
 - Resolution of outstanding **WTO** disputes and market access issues, with further engagement through the India-US Trade Policy Forum.
 - Exploring restoration of India's status under the **US Generalised System of Preferences** program and recognition as a **Trade Agreements Act**-designated country.
- **Sustainable Development:** Collaborative efforts between India and the US will continue to achieve national climate and energy goals, including co-leading the **Hydrogen Breakthrough Agenda**.
- Innovative investment platforms will be created to attract international private finance for renewable energy, battery storage, and emerging green technology projects in India.
 - The US Agency for International Development will support Indian Railways' target to become a **"net-zero" carbon emitter by 2030**.
- Initiatives are in place to **decarbonize the transportation sector and promote biofuels**.
- **People-Centric Efforts:**
- Initiatives have been taken to **simplify visa renewals for certain petition-based temporary work visas**, benefiting Indian nationals and reducing the need to leave the country for renewal.
 - Plans are underway to **open new consulates in Bengaluru and Ahmedabad**, fostering closer diplomatic ties.
 - Student exchanges and scholarships have been enhanced, with a record **number of visas issued to Indian students**, and increased opportunities for US undergraduate students to study or intern in India.
 - The Leaders welcomed the **establishment of the Tamil Studies Chair at the University of Houston and reinstating the Vivekananda Chair at the University of Chicago** to further research and teaching of India's history and culture.

INDIA-US PARTNERSHIP

Economic Relations

- US became India's biggest trading partner in 2022-23 followed by China and UAE
- The bilateral trade has increased by 7.65% in 2022-23 (compared to 2021-22)

Defence Cooperation

- India-US Defence Acceleration Ecosystem (INDUS-XI), 2023: Start-ups and tech companies to collaborate on the co-development and co-production of advanced technologies
- Fighter Jet Deal, 2023: GE's F414 engine technology and manufacturing will be transferred for India's Tejas Mk2 jet, enhancing its indigenous capabilities
- Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI), 2012: To facilitate collaboration in defence manufacturing, research and development, and technology transfer
- New Framework for India-US Defence Relations, 2005: Updated for 10 years in 2015

India intends to procure armed MQ-9B SeaGuardian UAVs

Science & Technology

- Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (ICET), 2022: Cooperation on CETs in areas including AI, quantum computing, semiconductors and wireless telecommunications
- Critical Minerals Partnership: Recently, India joined the US-Led Minerals Security Partnership (MSP) to boost global critical energy and minerals supply chains
- Collaboration in Space: NASA to train ISRO astronauts, aiming for a joint International Space Station (ISS) mission in 2024
- Artemis Accord: A US-led alliance seeking to facilitate international collaboration in planetary exploration and research; signed by India
- NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR): For understanding changes in Earth's ecosystems and other environmental changes

Civil Nuclear Deal

- Civil Nuclear Cooperation: Bilateral civil nuclear cooperation agreement signed in October 2008

Energy & Climate Change

- Joint Clean Energy Research and Development Centre (JCERDC), 2010: To promote clean energy innovations by teams of scientists from India and the United States
- Clean Energy Agenda 2030 Partnership: Launched at the Leaders climate summit 2021
- Global Biofuel Alliance (India, Brazil and US), 2023: Aimed at facilitating cooperation and intensifying the use of sustainable biofuels, including in the transportation sector

Security

- Counter-Terrorism Cooperation Initiative, 2010: To expand collaboration on counter-terrorism, information sharing and capacity building

Four Foundational Agreements:

- General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), 2002: Allows militaries to share intelligence gathered by them
 - Industrial Security Annex, 2019 is a part of GSOMIA
- Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), 2016: Both countries gain access to designated military facilities for refuelling and replenishment.
- Communication Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), 2018: A legal framework for the transfer of highly sensitive communication security equipment from the US to India
- Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geospatial Intelligence (BECA), 2020: Allow both countries to share geospatial and satellite data with each other

In 2015, both countries issued Delhi Declaration of Friendship and adopted a Joint Strategic Vision for Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean Region

Popular Visa Among Indians include H-1B. L. Indian citizens set to become largest foreign student community in the US (20% growth in 2022)

Drishi IAS

Note:

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.**

India's Jet Engine Deal with the US

Why in News?

Recently, India has announced a significant agreement between the American multinational corporation **General Electric (GE)** and **Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL)**, during Indian PM's state visit to the US. The deal involves the transfer of critical jet engine technologies and the manufacturing of **GE's F414 engine** for India's **indigenous Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas Mk2.**

- This development marks a crucial milestone in **India's pursuit of advanced combat jet engine technology.**

Note:

- The **India-US Defence Acceleration Ecosystem (INDUS-X)** was also launched during the ongoing visit of the PM.
- INDUS-X is meant as a platform for Indian and U.S. **start-ups and tech companies** to collaborate for the co-development and co-production of advanced technologies.

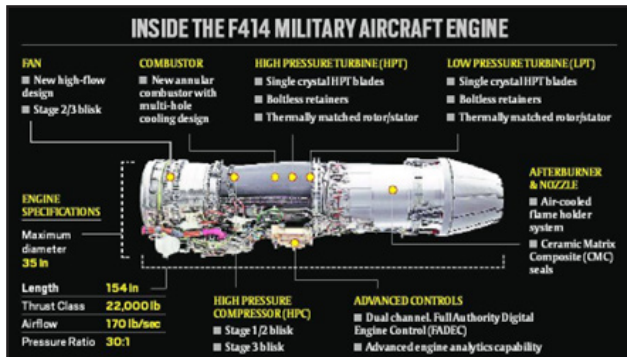
What is GE's F414 engine?

➤ About:

- GE's F414 engine is a turbofan engine used by the US Navy for over 30 years.
 - It is equipped with a **dual-channel full authority digital engine control (FADEC)**, a **six-stage high-pressure compressor**, an advanced **high-pressure turbine**, and a "fueldraulic" system for nozzle area control.

Note:

- It offers exceptional throttle response, excellent afterburner light and stability, and unrestricted engine performance when required.
- The F414 engine has powered military aircraft in eight nations, making it a **trusted choice for modern fighter jets**.



- **India's Engine Requirements:**
 - For India, the F414 engine holds great significance, particularly in the context of the **LCA Tejas Mk2**.
 - The **Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA)** of the **DRDO** has selected the India-specific version of the engine, known as **F414-INS6**, for the **LCA Tejas Mk2**.
 - This strategic decision reflects **India's aim to bolster its indigenous defence capabilities** and reduce dependence on foreign suppliers.
 - Furthermore, there are prospects of utilizing F414 engines for the **Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA)**, India's ambitious **fifth-generation fighter aircraft**.

What is LCA Tejas Mk2?

- The LCA Tejas Mk2 is an upgraded version of the indigenous fighter aircraft developed in India.
- It has the capability to carry **eight Beyond-Visual-Range (BVR) missiles** simultaneously and integrate both **native and advanced weapons** from other countries.
- The LCA Mk2 offers improved range and mission endurance compared to its predecessor, with a **mission endurance of 120 minutes, as opposed to 57 minutes for the LCA Tejas Mk1**.
- It is intended to serve as a replacement for the Jaguars, MiG-29s, and Mirage 2000s as they retire in the coming decade. Manufacturing has already begun, and the aircraft is expected to be rolled out by 2024.

U.S.-India initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology

Why in News?

Recently, **India and the United States** have taken a significant step towards strengthening their strategic partnership and driving **technology and defense cooperation**. Under the **Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET)**, the two nations have unveiled a **roadmap for enhanced collaboration in high-technology areas**.

- The initiative focuses on addressing regulatory barriers, aligning export controls, and fostering deeper cooperation in critical and emerging fields.

What is the iCET ?

➤ About:

- The iCET was announced by India and the US in May 2022 and was officially launched in **January 2023** and is being run by the **National Security Council of both countries**.
- Under iCET, both countries have identified six areas of cooperation which would include co-development and co-production, that would **gradually be expanded to QUAD, then to NATO**, followed by Europe and the rest of the world.
- Under iCET, India is ready to **share its core technologies** with the US and expects Washington to do the same.
- It aims to promote collaboration in critical and emerging technology areas, **including AI, quantum computing, semiconductors, and wireless telecommunication**.

➤ Focus Areas of the Initiative:

- AI research agency partnership.
- Defense industrial cooperation, defense technological cooperation, and defense startups.
- Innovation Ecosystems.
- Semiconductor ecosystem development.
- Cooperation on human spaceflight.
- Advancement in **5G and 6G technologies**, and adoption of **OpenRAN network technology** in India.

➤ Progress Made So Far:

- Key achievements include the **Quantum Coordination Mechanism**, public-private dialogue

Note:

on telecommunication, important exchanges on AI and space, MoU on establishing a **semiconductor supply chain**, and conclusion of a roadmap for defense industrial cooperation.

- The two countries are close to finalizing a **mega jet engine deal**, and a new initiative called the **India-U.S. Defence Acceleration Ecosystem (INDUS-X)** is set to be launched.
- Strategic Trade Dialogue has been established to address regulatory barriers and review export control norms.

What is OpenRAN Network Technology?

➤ About:

- It is a non-proprietary version of the **Radio Access Network (RAN)** system.
 - A RAN is a major component of a wireless telecommunications system that **connects individual devices to other parts of a network** through a radio link.
- Allows interoperability between cellular network equipment from different vendors.

➤ Advantages of OpenRAN Network Technology:

- Creates a more open and flexible RAN architecture.
- Based on open interfaces and virtualization.
- Supported by industry-wide standards.
- Cost reduction.
- Increased competition.
- Faster innovation.

➤ Applications of OpenRAN Network Technology:

- Supporting 5G and 6G networks.
- Enhancing network performance and security.
- Enabling new services and capabilities.
- Bridging the digital divide.

Indo-US Cooperation in Agriculture

Why in News?

Examining the historical involvement of the **United States** in the agricultural progress of independent India holds significance within the framework of Prime Minister of India's imminent visit to the US.

- Like, **Soviet Union's** role in independent India's early industrialization through supply of capital equipment and technology, the United States (the institutions like **Rockefeller and Ford Foundation**) played in India's

agricultural development through the establishment of agricultural universities and the **Green Revolution**.

What is the Role of the US in the Agricultural Development of India?

➤ Development of Universities:

- Govind Ballabh Pant established the **first agricultural university in Pantnagar, Uttarakhand, based on the US land-grant model**.
- This university integrated teaching, research, and extension services, aiming to **provide an ideal environment for learning, problem-solving research, and knowledge dissemination to farmers**.
 - The university, later named G.B. Pant University of Agriculture & Technology, was inaugurated by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru on November 17, 1960.
- Hannah's blueprint published by **Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)** led to the **establishment of eight agricultural universities in India**.
- The US Agency for International Development supported these universities with faculty training, equipment, and books. Each university had research farms, regional stations, sub-stations, and seed production facilities.

➤ Green Revolution's Seeds:

- The **Green Revolution (started by Norman Borlough of US)** entailed breeding semi-dwarf varieties with strong stems that didn't lodge. These could "tolerate" high fertilizer application. The more the inputs (nutrients and water), the more the output (grain) produced.
- '**Norin-10**', a short (grew to only 2-2.5 feet, as against the 4.5-5 feet height of traditional tall varieties) wheat variety, give 25% higher grain yields. Norman Borlaug crossed these with the spring wheats grown in Mexico.
 - Traditional **wheat and rice varieties were tall and slender**. They grew vertically on application of fertilizers and water, while "lodging" (bending over or even falling) when their ear-heads were heavy with well-filled grains.
- M.S. Swaminathan, (scientist at the **Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI)** in New Delhi, got in touch with Borlaug who came to India only in March 1963.

Note:



- Borlaug sent the seeds of four Mexican wheat varieties bred by him, which were first sown in the trial fields of IARI and the new agricultural universities at Pantnagar and Ludhiana.
- By 1966-67, farmers were planting these in large scale and India, from being an importer, turned self-sufficient in wheat.
 - Much of its wheat imports earlier, ironically, came from the US under its **Public Law 480 food aid programme**.

6th India-Canada Ministerial Dialogue on Trade and Investment

Why in News?

Recently, the 6th India-Canada Ministerial Dialogue on Trade and Investment (MDTI) was held in Ottawa, Canada.

What are the Major Outcomes of the MDTI?

- **Support for India as G20 Chair:**
 - The Canadian Minister expressed her support for India as the **G20 Chair** and its priorities in the **G20 Trade and Investment Working Group**.
 - She expressed her intention to participate in the **upcoming G-20 Trade and Investment Ministerial meeting in India** scheduled for August 2023.
- **Enhanced Cooperation:**
 - The Ministers highlighted the importance of cooperation in sectors such as **clean technologies for infrastructure development, critical minerals, electric vehicles and batteries**, renewable energy/hydrogen, and **artificial intelligence (AI)**.
- **Critical Mineral Supply Chain Resiliency:**
 - The Ministers emphasised the importance of **government-to-government coordination** to promote critical mineral supply chain resiliency.
 - They committed to an annual dialogue at the official level during the **Prospectors and Developers Association Conference (PDAC)** in Toronto to discuss mutual interests.
- **Canada-India CEO Forum:**
 - The Ministers agreed to **rework and relaunch the Canada-India CEO Forum** with renewed focus and priorities.

- The CEO Forum would serve as a **platform to enhance business-to-business engagement** and could be announced at an agreed-upon early date.

➤ Trade Mission and Delegation:

- The Canadian Minister announced her leadership of a **Team Canada trade mission to India in October 2023**.
 - This mission aims to strengthen trade and investment ties, with a significant business delegation.



What are the Areas of Cooperation Between India and Canada?

- **About:**
 - India established **diplomatic relations with Canada in 1947**. India and Canada have a long-standing bilateral relationship based on shared democratic values, the **multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi religious nature of two societies** and strong people-to-people contacts.
- **Political:**
 - India and Canada share **commonalities in Parliamentary structure and procedures**.
 - 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**.
- **Commerce:**
 - India-Canada bilateral trade in goods reached approximately **USD 8.2 billion in 2022**, showing a **25% growth compared to 2021**.
 - The services sector was emphasised as a significant contributor to the bilateral relationship, with bilateral services trade valued at around **USD 6.6 billion in 2022**.

Note:

- **Canadian Pension Funds** have cumulatively invested around **USD 55 billion in India** and are increasingly viewing India as a favourable destination for investments.
 - More than **600 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**.
 - The **India-Canada Free Trade Agreement** is also under negotiation.
 - An **Early Progress Trade Agreement (EPTA)** is expected to be signed in **2023 between India and Canada**.
 - The agreement will cover a wide range of areas including **goods, services, investment, rules of origin, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, technical barriers to trade, and dispute settlement**.
- **Science and Technology:**
- India's **Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB)** signed an Arrangement with the **Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC)** on September 16, 2015 to exchange experiences in **nuclear safety and regulatory issues**.
 - Indo-Canadian S&T cooperation has been primarily focussed on promoting Industrial R&D which has potential for application through development of **new IP, processes, prototypes or products**.
 - Canada was a **partner country for the Technology Summit** held in New Delhi in November 2017.
 - The **Department of Earth Science and Polar Canada** have started a programme for exchange of knowledge and scientific research on **Cold Climate (Arctic) Studies**.
 - Under the "Mission Innovation" program, India is collaborating with Canada in various activities in the areas of **Sustainable Biofuels (IC4)**.
 - **ANTRIX, the Commercial arm of ISRO**, has launched several nanosatellites from Canada.
 - ISRO in its 100th Satellite PSLV launched on January 12, 2018, also **flew Canadian first LEO satellite**, from Indian spaceport **Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh**.

- **Education and Culture:**
- The **Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute (SICI)** is a unique bi-national organisation fostering, since 1968, **education and cultural cooperation and collaboration between India and Canada**.
 - Canada was the **Country of Focus at the 48th International Film Festival** of India held in Goa in November 2017.
 - **Canada Post and India Post** joined hands to issue a commemorative stamp on Diwali in 2017.
 - Canada Post issued Diwali Stamps again in 2020 and 2021.
 - In October 2020, **Canada announced the voluntary repatriation of the ancient Annapurna statue** which was illegally acquired by a Canadian collector and had been kept at **University of Regina**.
 - The statue has since been handed over to India and has been placed inside **Kashi Vishwanath temple** in Varanasi in November 2021.

4. India- Africa Relations

India-Africa Partnership: Achievements, Challenges, and Roadmap 2030

Why in News?

Recently, the 20-member **Africa Expert Group (AEG)**, established by the Vivekananda International Foundation, presented a Report titled '**India-Africa Partnership: Achievements, Challenges and Roadmap 2030**'.

- The report highlights **India's significant partnership with Africa and emphasizes the importance** of regular policy review and implementation to strengthen the relationship.
- With Africa accounting for around 17% of the global population and projected to reach 25% by 2050, **India recognizes its crucial role in the partnership** as a rising global power.

What are the Key Highlights of the Report?

- **Changes in Africa:**
 - Africa is undergoing significant changes in its **demographics, economy, politics, and society**. It is gradually moving towards regional integration and is committed to promoting **democracy, peace, and progress**.

Note:

- However, some countries like Ethiopia, Sudan, and the Central African Republic are still grappling with challenges posed by insurgency, ethnic violence, and terrorism.

➤ Competition and External Players:

- Several external partners, including **China, Russia, the United States**, the **European Union**, Japan, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates, are actively **competing to strengthen their relations with different parts** of Africa.
- They aim to secure market access, energy and mineral resources, and enhance their political and economic influence in the region.

➤ China's Involvement:

- China has stood out as **Africa's largest economic partner** since 2000. It plays a significant role as an infrastructure developer, resource provider, and financier in Africa.
- China has made substantial investments in terms of **finances, materials, and diplomatic efforts**.

What are the Recommendations to Strengthen India- Africa Ties?

➤ Strengthen Political and Diplomatic Cooperation:

- Restore periodic leaders' summits through the **India-Africa Forum Summit**.
 - Indo Africa Forum Summit is a programme fully sponsored by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) with a view to develop **Indo-Africa cooperation by helping African countries to develop their own potential** for development in human resource and agriculture etc.
- Seek consensus among **G-20 members on the AU's (African Union) full membership**.
- Establish a dedicated secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) for African affairs.

➤ Enhance Defence and Security Cooperation:

- Increase the number of defence attachés in Africa and **expand dialogue on defence issues**.
- Strengthen maritime **collaboration and extend Lines of Credit** to facilitate defence exports.
- Expand cooperation in counterterrorism, cyber security, and emerging technologies.

➤ Deepen Economic and Development Cooperation:

- Promote **India-Africa trade** through the creation of an **Africa Growth Fund (AGF)** to enhance access to finance.

- Implement measures to improve project exports and enhance cooperation in the shipping domain.
- Focus on trilateral cooperation and deepen science and technology collaboration.

➤ Increase Socio-Cultural Cooperation:

- Facilitate greater interaction between **Indian and African universities**, think tanks, civil society, and media organizations.
- Establish a National Centre for African Studies.
- Rename **Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC)** and **Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)** scholarships after famous African figures.
- Liberalize visa measures for African students pursuing higher education in India and provide short-term work visas.

➤ Implementing the 'Roadmap 2030':

- Establish a special mechanism for implementing the 'Roadmap 2030' through collaboration between the **MEA and the National Security Council Secretariat**.
- Create a team of officials led jointly by the Secretary, Africa in the MEA, and a designated Deputy National Security Adviser.
- By following this roadmap and implementing the recommended measures, **India can further strengthen its partnership with Africa, leveraging the continent's potential** and contributing to its own global stature.

What are the Achievements of India-Africa Relations?

➤ Economic Cooperation:

- For Indian businesses, Africa presents a massive **untapped market for manufacturing goods such as textiles, pharmaceuticals, automobiles and light machinery**.
- From 2011–2022, shows an increase in India's total goods trade with Africa from USD 68.54 billion to USD 90.52 billion. Also, **in 2022, for the first time, India reached a positive trade balance**.

➤ Development Assistance:

- The ITEC program offers training and capacity building programs to African professionals. India has **also extended lines of credit and grants for infrastructure projects**, agricultural development, and capacity building.

Note:

- **Health Collaboration:**
 - Indian pharmaceutical companies have **provided affordable generic medicines to African countries**, contributing to improved healthcare access. India has also deployed medical teams and offered technical assistance to combat diseases like HIV/AIDS, malaria, and Ebola.
- **Defence Cooperation:**
 - India has signed MoUs with **all African nations on the Indian Ocean Rim (IOR) is evidence of increased defence engagement with African countries.**
 - The hosting of **two India-Africa Defence Dialogue (IADD)** at the defense ministers' level, on the sidelines of the Defence Expo at Lucknow (2020) and Gandhinagar (2022), also underlines the growing importance of the defence domain in India-Africa engagement.
 - In 2022, India started the **first edition of the Trilateral Maritime Exercise with Tanzania and Mozambique** to enhance maritime cooperation in the region
- **Technology and Digital Cooperation:**
 - Under the Pan African e-Network Project (initiated in 2009), India has set up a **fibre-optic network to provide satellite connectivity, tele-medicine and tele-education to countries of Africa.**
 - The subsequent phase, **e-VidyaBharti and e-ArogyaBharti (e-VBAB)**, introduced in 2019, focused on providing free **tele-education to African students** and continuing medical education for healthcare professionals.

What is the Importance of Africa for India?

- Africa is home to over half a dozen of the **fastest growing countries of this decade** such as Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania, etc. making it one of the growth poles of the world.
- Real GDP in Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa in the **past decade has grown by more than twice the rate in the 1980s and 90's.**
- The African continent has a population of over one billion with a combined **GDP of 2.5 trillion dollars making it a huge potential market.**
- Africa is a resource **rich nation dominated by commodities like crude oil, gas, pulses** and lentils, leather, gold and other metals, all of which India lacks in sufficient quantities.

- **Namibia and Niger** are among the top ten global producers of uranium.
- **South Africa is the world's largest producer of platinum and chromium.**
- India is seeking diversification of **its oil supplies away from the Middle East** and Africa can play an important role in India's energy matrix.

19th NAM Summit and India-Uganda Relations

Why in News?

Recently, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, who hosted the **19th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement in Kampala**, expressed his regret over the **expulsion of Indians by Idi Amin in the 1970s.**

- He praised the achievements of the **Indian diaspora in Uganda** and lauded India's role in the global south.

What are the Key Highlights of the 19th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement?

- The 19th Summit of the **NAM** was held in Kampala, Uganda, with the **theme of "Deepening Cooperation for Shared Global Affluence"**.
 - Uganda has taken over as chair from Azerbaijan, to run until 2027.
- The summit adopted the **Kampala Declaration**, slamming Israeli military aggression and calling for the **implementation of the UN Security Council resolution** to allow humanitarian aid into the besieged **Gaza Strip.**
- The External Affairs Minister (EAM) of India led the Indian delegation at the 19th NAM Summit, calling for a **sustainable solution to the Gaza crisis.** He emphasised the need for **immediate relief in the humanitarian crisis** and urged the prevention of the conflict's spread in the West Asian region.
- The **NAM was established in 1961 in Belgrade, Yugoslavia**, through the initiative of five leaders of newly independent countries: Josip Broz Tito of Yugoslavia, Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, **Jawaharlal Nehru of India**, Sukarno of Indonesia, and Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana.
 - It was formed during the **Cold War** as an **organisation of States that did not seek to formally align themselves with either the United States or the Soviet Union but sought to remain independent or neutral.**

Note:

- At present, the **Movement has 120 Member States**, 17 Observer Countries and 10 Observer organizations.
- **NAM does not have a permanent secretariat** or a formal founding charter, act, or treaty.
- The **summit usually takes place every three years**.

Economic Community of West African States

Why in News?

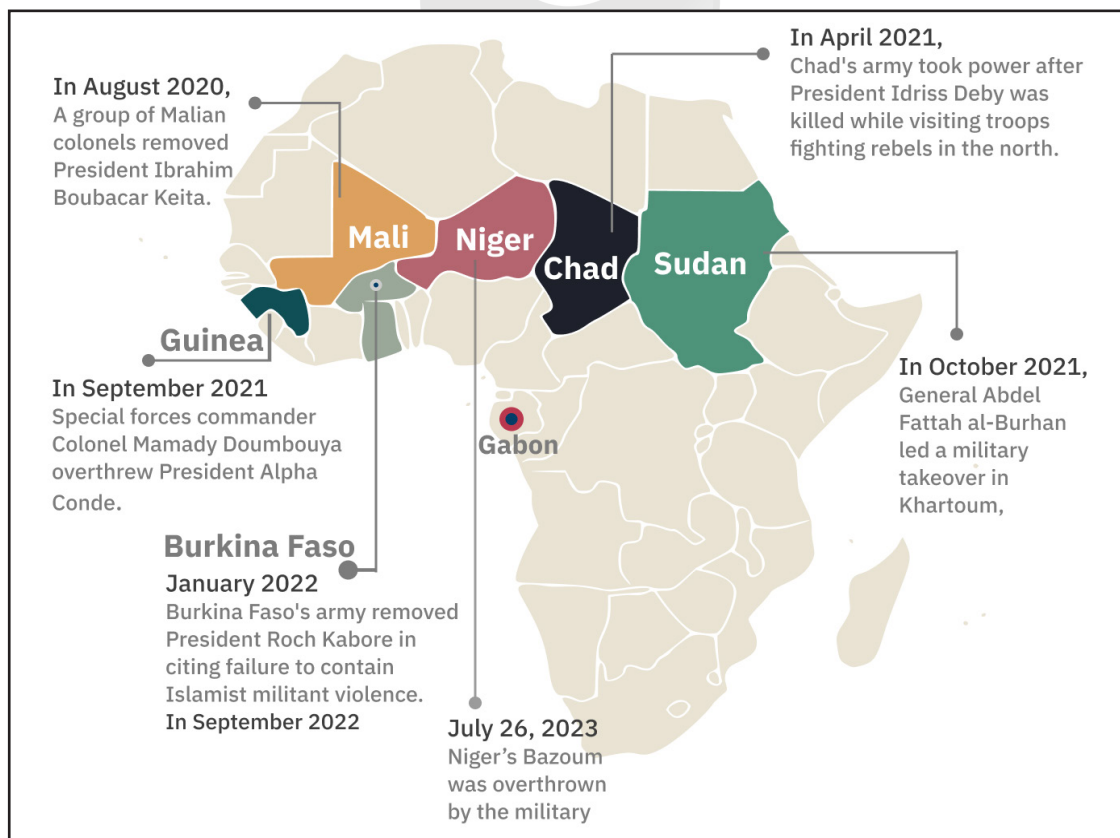
Recently, the military regimes in **Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger** announced their immediate withdrawal from the **West African bloc Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)**.

What is ECOWAS?

- **About:** ECOWAS is a regional grouping aimed to promote economic integration and shared development of the **West African sub-region**.
 - It was established in May 1975 by 15 West African countries in **Lagos, Nigeria**.
- **Founding members:** Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau,

Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Sénégal, and Togo.

- **Headquarters:** Abuja, Nigeria.
- **Major Initiatives:** ECOWAS established its **free trade area in 1990** and adopted a common external tariff in January 2015.
 - It has also worked to address some security issues by developing a **peacekeeping force** for conflicts in the region.
 - Troops were initially sent to **Liberia in 1990** during its civil war and to **Sierra Leone in 1997** following the overthrow of a democratically elected government.
- **India-ECOWAS Relation:**
 - India has a long-standing relationship with ECOWAS and was given the **status of observer to the body in 2004**.
 - In 2006, India gave the grouping a line of credit (LoC) worth **USD 250 million**.
 - ECOWAS has also supported India's bid for a permanent seat in the **United Nations Security Council**.



Note:

Note: Recently the **French military pullout from the Sahel region** has raised concerns about the potential spread of conflicts to **Gulf of Guinea states** such as Ghana, Togo, Benin, and Ivory Coast

Key Points About Sahel Region:

- **Sahel** is a **semiarid region** of western and north-central Africa extending from **Senegal eastward to Sudan**.
- It forms a transitional zone between the **arid Sahara (desert) to the north and the belt of humid savannas to the south**.
- It is one of the world's richest, gifted with vast energy and mineral resources such as **oil, gold and uranium**.
 - However, political instability hinder development progress.
- **United Nations (UN)** limits the Sahel to ten (10) countries: **Burkina Faso, Cameroon, The Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Chad**.

India's Interests in Africa's RE Potential

Why in News?

Recently, the **International Solar Alliance (ISA)** held its **5th regional meeting** in Kigali, Rwanda. **Nine solar power demonstration projects** across three countries: 4 in Uganda, 2 in Comoros and 3 in Mali, were virtually inaugurated in the meeting.

- During the meeting, a **report titled "Roadmap of Solar Energy for Universal Energy Access"**, was unveiled.

What are the Key Highlights of the Report?

- The report outlines a strategic approach to effectively and economically tackle the **global energy access challenge using solar-powered solutions**. It encompasses **case studies, real-world examples, and innovative policies** aimed at bringing about a transformative shift in the implementation of solar mini-grids.
- The report's **conclusions hold significant relevance for Africa**, especially the **Sub-Saharan region** and rural areas. It identifies a range of electrification strategies centred on **solar energy**, particularly focusing on solar mini-grids and **Decentralised Renewable Energy solutions**.
 - These approaches **offer effective solutions to address diverse energy access challenges**.

- Promoting these solutions could **encourage the emergence of local innovations and business models**, thereby advancing the adoption of solar energy generation within the country.

Note:

- A decentralised energy system is characterised by **locating energy production facilities closer to the site of energy consumption**.
 - This allows for **more optimal use of renewable energy (RE)** as well as combined heat and power, reduces **fossil fuel** use and increases **eco-efficiency**.

What is Africa's Potential in Global RE Transition?



- **Africa holds the potential to emerge as a prominent force in renewable energy generation and innovation** on a global scale.
- Despite facing various obstacles, **the continent is endowed with a rich array of renewable energy sources**, including substantial solar capacity, wind resources, **geothermal areas, hydro energy**, and **green hydrogen** prospects.
- Furthermore, **Africa possesses over 40% of the world's crucial mineral reserves** crucial for renewable and low-carbon technologies.
- Leveraging these resources offers the opportunity for Africa to not only fulfil its energy requirements but also **establish itself as a significant player in RE production and advancements worldwide**.

Note:

- However, there is a **need for collaboration among governments, private sector entities, and international organisations** to fully unlock the potential of solar energy across the continent.

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; 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.

Note:

➤ Difficult Time for Egypt:

- Egypt's economy has been in chaos over the past few years due to the pandemic and the **Russia-Ukraine war** which impacted its supply of food as almost 80% of Egypt's grain imported from Russia and Ukraine and impacted Egypt's **foreign exchange reserves**.
 - In 2022, despite **restrictions on the export of wheat**, India allowed shipments of 61,500 metric tonnes to Egypt.
- From India, Egypt is seeking investments in infrastructure including Metro projects, a **Suez Canal** economic zone, a second channel of the Suez Canal, and a new administrative capital in Egypt.
 - More than 50 Indian companies have invested more than USD 3.15 billion in Egypt.

➤ 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**.

India Offers Agricultural Line of Credit to Kenya

Why in news?

Recently, India has announced a **USD 250 million line of credit** to Kenya for modernisation of its **agricultural sector** during the recent visit of **Kenya's President to India**.

- A **line of credit (LOC)** is a predetermined **borrowing limit** that is accessible whenever necessary. The borrower can withdraw funds as required until reaching the established limit, and once repaid, the funds can be borrowed again in the case of an open line of credit.

What are the Key Highlights of the Recent Visit of Kenya's President?

- India and Kenya signed **five pacts** providing for cooperation in a **range of areas** including **sports, education** and **digital solution**, and unveiled a joint vision document to scale up **maritime engagement** in the **Indian Ocean region**.
- India also raised the issue of two Indian nationals who **went missing in the east African country** last year.
- Both sides agreed to strengthen **bilateral ties** in the field of **defense, trade, energy, digital public infrastructure** and **healthcare**.
- Both sides deliberated on defense cooperation and emphasized on **military exercises, capacity building** as well as linking the **defense industries** of both the countries.
- Kenya invited Indian companies to take advantage of the conducive and attractive environment to invest in Kenya, especially in **agriculture, manufacturing, pharmaceutical, health, green energy** and **green mobility sectors**.
- Terrorism is the most serious challenge and both sides have decided to increase **counter-terror cooperation**.

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 center.
- Kenya's location between the **Indian Ocean** and **Lake Victoria** means that people from all over **Africa** and the **Middle East** have traveled and traded across it for centuries.
 - This has created a diverse culture with many ethnic groups and languages.
- 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**.

Note:



Coup Attempt in Sierra Leone

Why in News?

In the wake of an unsuccessful coup attempt in Sierra Leone, the West African nation finds itself at the crossroads of political turmoil and economic crisis.

- Sierra Leone is a member country of the **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)** and hence if any security concern arises in the future, ECOWAS and the member countries will step in to maintain constitutional order.

What are the Factors Contributing to Unrest in Sierra Leone?

- **Political Instability:** The President's re-election in June 2023 triggered political unrest. The opposing party contested the results, alleging manipulation. Opposition contestation led to a **parliamentary boycott** until October 2023.
- **Economic Instability:** High cost of living and **severe poverty** contribute to the crisis.
 - The President's economic policies worsened the situation, leading to protests and demands for the resignation of the President.

Note:

- **Police Aggression:** The government's use of force, including live ammunition, in handling protests and prison riots has fueled resentment.

What are the Key Facts About Sierra Leone?



- Sierra Leone is located between **Liberia and Guinea**, bordering the **North Atlantic Ocean**. The country is situated on the **southwest coast of West Africa**.
- **Capital:** Freetown.
- **Languages:** English, Krio.
- **Mount Bintumani** (also known as Loma Mansa) is the highest peak in Sierra Leone.
- A **tropical climate** is found in Sierra Leone.
- Sierra Leone's terrain is characterized by mountains in the eastern region, an upland plateau, a wooded hill country, and a coastal belt of mangrove swamps.
- Sierra Leone is one of the members of the **International Solar Alliance**.
- India was among the first countries to contribute to the **UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL)** with the deployment of 4000 strong Indian Military contingent.

Other Recent Upheavals in Africa

- **Coup in Niger (2023).**
- Crisis in Sudan (**2023** and **2021**).
- **Burkina Faso Coup (2022).**
- **Military Coup in Mali (2021, 2020).**

Displacement in Democratic Republic of Congo

Why in News?

The **UN International Organization of Migration (IOM)** recently reported a surge in internal displacement

in the **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)**, reaching a staggering 6.9 million.

- In the eastern province of **North Kivu**, nearly a million people have been displaced due to the ongoing conflict with the rebel group, **Mouvement du 23 Mars (M23)**.

What Factors Contribute to the Widespread Displacement in Congo?

- **Conflict in the DRC:**
 - Originating in the 1990s with **civil wars in 1996 and 1998**, the DRC conflict was exacerbated by the aftermath of the **1994 Rwandan genocide**, where ethnic **Hutu extremists killed around one million minority ethnic Tutsis** and non-extremist Hutus.
 - The **eastern DRC**, bordering Rwanda, has since faced insurgency from over **120 rebel groups (as per UN Report)**, leading to heightened tensions and violence.
 - Territorial disputes and resource competition fuel the conflict, resulting in substantial casualties.
 - Recent resurgence of the **Tutsi-led M23 rebel campaign** from November 2021 has further intensified security challenges, with M23 making notable advances since **January 2023**.
- **Major Stakeholders in the Conflict:**
 - Noteworthy rebel groups, in addition to M23, encompass the **Allied Democratic Forces (ADF)** and the **Cooperative for Development of the Congo (CODECO)**.
 - ADF, an insurgent group based in **Uganda since 1999**, pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in 2019.
 - CODECO asserts its mission to safeguard the **interests of the ethnic Lendu** against the **Hemas** and the **Congolese army**.
- **Causes of Displacement:**
 - **Ethnic Intolerance and Insurgency:** Post-Rwandan genocide, **two million Hutu refugees migrated to North and South Kivu**, sparking ethnic militias and escalating tensions.
 - **Political Uncertainty and Governance Issues:** The current President of DRC faces election challenges amid ongoing insecurity, risking the integrity of a **"free, democratic, and transparent" vote**.
 - **Regional Tensions:** Armed groups, backed by **Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi**, act as proxies,

Note:

heightening conflict dynamics and regional instability.

- **Humanitarian Crisis:** Kivu Security Tractor reports **1,400 fatalities and 600+ attacks in 2023.**
 - Over 1.1 million people in North Kivu, Ituri, and South Kivu need food support, as international response, particularly in funding, remains insufficient.

What are the Major Facts Related to DRC?

➤ Geography:

- The DRC is the **second largest country in Africa** and the 11th largest in the world.
- It has 37 kilometers of coastline and more than half of the country is covered by dense tropical rainforest.

➤ Capital:

- **Kinshasa** is the capital of the DRC and is located on the **Congo River**.

➤ Bordering Countries:



➤ Languages:

- The official language is **French**, but other languages include **Kituba, Lingala, Swahili, and Tshiluba**.

➤ Currency:

- Congolese franc (CDF).

➤ Natural Resources:

- It is rich in natural resources. This includes **timber, oil and gas, gold and diamonds**, as well as minerals critical to the energy transition, **like cobalt and copper**.

➤ Major Species:

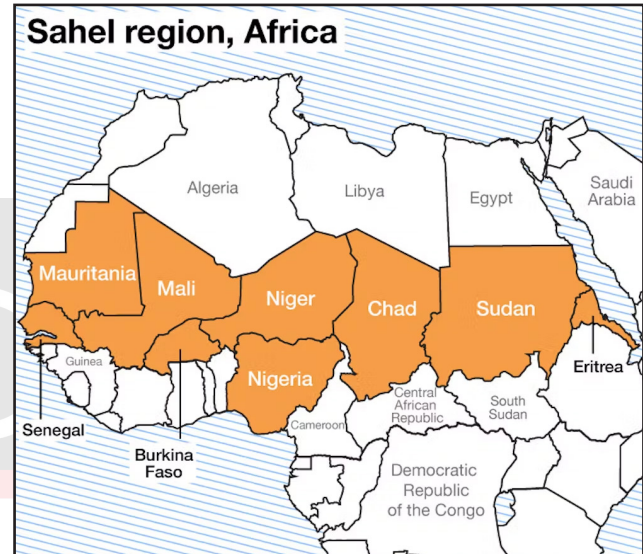
- Great apes such as **bonobos and eastern lowland gorillas** can only be found in Congo.

Coup in Niger

Why in News?

Niger is currently in the midst of a political upheaval as a **military coup** has taken control, ousting the democratically elected President.

- The **Sahel region**, home to **Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Senegal**, has witnessed political instability and ethnic tensions.
 - **Weak governance, corruption, and ethnic clashes** led to military interventions under the pretext of restoring stability.



6th Session of India-Ethiopia Joint Trade Committee

Why in News?

The **6th Session of the India-Ethiopia Joint Trade Committee (JTC)** recently concluded in **Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**, bringing together officials from both countries to strengthen economic ties.

What is the India-Ethiopia JTC?

- The India-Ethiopia JTC is a **bilateral forum** that meets periodically to review and enhance trade and investment relations between the two countries.
- The JTC is co-chaired by senior officials from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry of India and the Ministry of Trade and Regional Integration of Ethiopia.
- The JTC discusses various issues and opportunities related to trade, investment, cooperation, and policy matters.

Note:

What are the Key Highlights of the JTC meeting?

- India invited Ethiopia to collaborate on integrating the **Unified Payment Interface (UPI)** with Ethiopia's Ethswitch.
 - Ethswitch is a payment platform infrastructure in Ethiopia.
- India urged Ethiopia to explore settling **trade transactions in the local currency** for enhanced bilateral trade and conservation of foreign exchange.
- Health and pharmaceuticals, automobiles, textiles, infrastructure projects, food, and agro-processing are identified as key sectors for mutual investments.
- Both sides also reviewed the progress of ongoing discussions for **Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs)** in the field of **Standardization and quality assurance** and Customs procedure and agreed to conclude them expeditiously.

How have been the India-Ethiopia Trade Relations?

- India is one of the **largest sources of long-term concessional credit to Ethiopia**, with over USD 1 billion for sectors such as rural electrification, sugar industry and railways
- Bilateral trade between India and Ethiopia reached **USD 642.59 million in 2022-23**.
 - Ethiopia's economy grew by an estimated 6.4% in 2021-22.
- India is the **second-largest exporter to Ethiopia**.
- Indian companies rank among the **top three foreign investors in Ethiopia** with existing investments totalling USD 5 billion.
- India and Ethiopia have exchanged several high-level visits, including those of presidents, prime ministers and ministers.

Key Facts About Ethiopia

- It is a landlocked country located in the **Horn of Africa**, officially known as the **Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia**.
 - The capital is Addis Ababa.
- Ethiopia is located from Sudan to the southeast, Eritrea to the south, Djibouti and Somalia to the west, Kenya to the north, and South Sudan to the east.

- Ethiopia is one of the oldest countries in the world that managed to remain **uncolonized by European powers** even though 90% of Africa was colonized by European nations.
- The Ethiopian Calendar has 12 months of 30 days each, plus five or six additional days (sometimes known as the 13th month).
- **Ras Dejen (or Dashen)**, the highest peak in Ethiopia.
- The largest lake in Ethiopia is **Lake Tana**, and is the source of the **Blue Nile river**.



Second Anti-Piracy Patrol in the Gulf of Guinea

Why in News?

The **Indian Navy** recently completed its **second anti-piracy patrol in the Gulf of Guinea (GoG)** in the **Atlantic Ocean**, with the Offshore **Patrol Vessel INS Sumedha** playing a pivotal role in this mission.

- The maiden GoG anti-piracy patrol was undertaken by **INS Tarkash** in September/October 2022.

What are the Key Highlights of the Second GoG Anti-Piracy Patrol?

- INS Sumedha operated in the GoG undertaking a 31-day anti-piracy patrol, which is on an extended-range operational deployment in the Atlantic Ocean along the West Coast of Africa.
 - Sumedha's deployment also ensured enhancing **Navy to Navy connection** with regional navies

Note:

including Senegal, Ghana, Togo, Nigeria, Angola and Namibia.

- INS Sumedha's deployment aimed to **boost regional partners' capabilities** through joint training, emphasizing India's commitment to the philosophy of '**Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam**'-The World is One Family.
- The objective of the patrol was to **deter and prevent piracy and armed robbery at sea**, protect the Indian and international merchant vessels, and enhance maritime security and stability in the region.

What are the Key Facts About the Gulf of Guinea (GoG)?

- The GoG is an inlet of the **Atlantic Ocean** on the **western African coast**, extending westward from **Cape Lopez in Gabon** to **Cape Palmas in Liberia**.
 - A gulf is defined as a **portion of the ocean that penetrates the land**. They are formed as a result of plate tectonics and are often connected to the ocean by narrow water passages known as straits.
- It is found at the junction of the **Prime Meridian and the Equator at 0°0'N and 0°0'E**.

- Major rivers that drain into the Gulf of Guinea include the **Volta and Niger rivers**.
- The GoG is one of the world's most dangerous gulfs because of the **widespread piracy** that has severely affected many countries in West Africa along with other international countries.
 - The number of vessels attacked by pirates in the gulf is about 100 every year.
- The GoG region accounts for **more than 35% of the world's total petroleum reserves**.
 - Several minerals including diamonds, uranium, copper, etc., are found here.
- The principal economic activities of the Gulf of Guinea region are petroleum exploration, mining and gas flaring, port operations, and fishing.
- The **16 coastal countries** that are situated along the Gulf of Guinea are Angola, Benin, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Gabon, Nigeria, Ghana, São Tomé and Príncipe, Togo and Sierra Leone.



Note:

What Strategic Significance Does the Gulf of Guinea Hold for India?

- The Gulf of Guinea holds immense strategic importance for India's national interests, being a significant source of the **country's energy requirements**.
 - In recent years, Nigeria has been one of the main sources of crude for India lies in GoG, the country emerged as the **fourth-largest supplier of crude oil and Liquefied natural gas (LNG) to India in 2020**.
- The GoG is also a region of security concern for India, as it faces the challenges of piracy, armed robbery, terrorism, and transnational crime.
 - **India has been a victim of piracy incidents in the GoG**, as several Indian nationals have been held hostage by pirates in the past.

INS Sumedha

- INS Sumedha is the **third of the indigenously developed Naval Offshore Patrol Vessel (NOPV)** of the **Saryu class** deployed for multiple roles independently and in support of Fleet Operations.
 - The ship is equipped with several weapon systems, sensors, state-of-the-art navigation and communication systems and an Electronic Warfare system.
- INS Sumedha is aimed at meeting the **increasing ocean surveillance** and patrolling requirements of the Indian Navy.
 - The primary role of the ship is to undertake **exclusive economic zone (EEZ)** surveillance, anti-piracy patrols, fleet support operations, provide maritime security to offshore assets and carry out escort operations for high-value assets.
- Participated in the maiden **India-EU Joint Exercise** in the Gulf of Guinea, showcasing international collaboration in maritime security.
- Played a crucial role in **Operation Kaveri**, contributing to the evacuation of the Indian diaspora from war-hit Sudan in April 2023.

What are India's Initiatives Related to Maritime Security?

- **SAGAR policy**.
- **India reiterated its support for the UN Convention on Law of Sea (UNCLOS)**.
- **International Fusion Centre (IFC)**.

Sudan Crisis and Operation Kaveri

Why in News?

India has started '**Operation Kaveri**' to evacuate its **nationals owing to the Current Crisis in Sudan**.

- Around 3,000 Indians are stuck in various parts of Sudan, including capital Khartoum and in distant provinces like Darfur.

What is Operation Kaveri?

- Operation Kaveri is a codename for India's evacuation effort to bring back its citizens stranded in Sudan amid intense fighting between the army and a rival paramilitary force there.
- The operation involves the deployment of **Indian Navy's INS Sumedha**, a stealth offshore patrol vessel, and **two Indian Air Force C-130J special operations aircraft** on standby in Jeddah.
- There are about 2,800 Indian nationals in Sudan, and there is also a **settled Indian community of about 1,200 in the country**.

What is the Current Crisis in Sudan?

➤ Background:

- The conflict in Sudan has its roots in the overthrowing of long-serving President Omar al-Bashir by **military generals in April 2019**, following widespread protests.
- This led to an agreement between the **military and protesters, under which a power-sharing body called the Sovereignty Council** was established to lead Sudan to elections at the end of 2023.
- However, the military overthrew the transitional government led by Abdalla Hamdok in October 2021, with Burhan becoming the de-facto leader of the country and Dagalo his second-in-command.

➤ Tussle between Army and RSF:

- Soon after the 2021 coup, a **power struggle between two military (SAF) and paramilitary (RSF) generals** arose, interrupting a **plan to transition to elections**.
 - A preliminary deal was reached in December 2021 for a political transition, but negotiations hit a roadblock over the integration of the paramilitary **Rapid Support Forces (RSF)** with the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), due to **disagreements over the timetable and security sector reforms**.

Note:



- Tensions escalated over the **control of resources and RSF integration**, leading to clashes.
 - There was disagreement over how the 10,000-strong RSF should be integrated into the army, and which authority should oversee that process.
- Also, Dagalo (RSF general) wanted to delay the integration for 10 years but the army said it would take place in the next two years.

How are India-Sudan Relations?

- **Strategic Significance of Sudan:**
 - Sudan is located in Northeast Africa and is the **third largest African Nation**.
 - Owing to its strategic location on the **Red Sea**, **access to the Nile River**, the **vast swath of gold reserves** and **agriculture potential**, it has long been coveted by the outside powers, including its neighbours, the Gulf countries, Russia and the Western nations.
- **Bilateral Projects:**
 - It had already implemented **49 bilateral projects through concessional lines** of credit worth USD 612 million in areas such as energy, transport, and agribusiness industry in Sudan in 2021.
- **Support in Juba Peace Agreement:**
 - India supported Sudan's efforts to form a transitional government and also supported the Juba Peace Agreement signed by the government in October 2020.
 - Chad, UAE and **Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)** were the guarantors, while Egypt and Qatar were witnesses to the peace deal.
 - The agreement covered various areas such as governance, security, and justice and was important for future constitutional negotiations.
 - India also supported including armed movements from outside in the negotiation process and a national plan for civilian protection with 1,200 personnel.
- **Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation:**
 - Under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) India offered 290 scholarships to Sudan towards **capacity building**. Besides, India had offered humanitarian assistance including food supplies to Sudan in 2020.

➤ Bilateral Trade:

- Over the years, the bilateral trade between India and Sudan has grown from USD 327.27 million in 2005-06 to USD 1663.7 million in 2018-19.
- India's investments in Sudan and South Sudan were roughly USD 3 billion, out of which USD 2.4 billion was invested in the petroleum sector from ONGC Videsh, a public sector undertaking.

What are the Evacuation Operations carried out by India?

<u>Operation Ganga (2022):</u>	It is an evacuation mission to bring back all the Indian nationals who are currently stranded in Ukraine .
Operation Devi Shakti (2021):	Operation Devi Shakti was India's complex mission to evacuate its citizens and Afghan partners from Kabul after its swift takeover by the Taliban .
<u>Vande Bharat (2020):</u>	When the Covid-19 pandemic hit the world, the Centre launched the Vande Bharat Mission to bring back Indian citizens stranded in foreign countries.
Operation Samudra Setu (2020):	It was a naval operation as part of the national effort to bring home Indian citizens from overseas during the Covid-19 pandemic .
Evacuation from Brussels (2016):	In March 2016, Belgium was hit by terrorist strikes at Brussels Airport in Zaventem, and one at Maalbeek Metro station in central Brussels.
Operation Raahat (2015):	In 2015, a conflict raged between the Yemeni government and Houthi rebels . Under Operation Raahat, India evacuated nearly 5,600 people from Yemen .
Operation Maitri (2015):	It is the joint relief and rescue operation by the Indian government and the Indian Armed forces in the aftershock of the 2015 Nepal earthquake.

Note:



Operation Safe Homecoming (2011):	India launched 'Operation Homecoming' to bring back Indian citizens stranded in conflict-torn Libya.
Operation Sukoon (2006):	As Israel and Lebanon broke into military conflict in July 2006, India rescued its stranded citizens by launching this operation, which is now famously known as the 'Beirut Sealift' .
1990 Kuwait Airlift (1990):	In 1990, when 1,00,000 Iraqi soldiers armed with 700 tanks marched into Kuwait, the royals and VIPs had fled to Saudi Arabia.

5. India- South America Relations

India and Argentina Signs Social Security Agreement

Why in News?

India and Argentina recently signed a **'Social Security Agreement(SSA)'** aimed at safeguarding the legal rights of professionals in each other's domains. This agreement is expected to facilitate **risk-free international mobility for professionals from both countries.**

What is the Social Security Agreement?

➤ About:

- It ensures that the rights of professionals and workers in both countries are protected against the **loss of social security benefits or contributions.**

➤ Need:

- The growing number of Indian professionals working in Argentina and Argentine nationals seeking employment in India necessitated this legal framework.

➤ Key Highlights:

- The **SSA applies to legislation in both India and Argentina** concerning various aspects of social

security, including **old age, survivor's pension**, and permanent, **total disability pension for employed persons.**

- The agreement **provides rights and benefits to detached workers**, i.e., employees working in another country on a temporary basis, and their family members.
 - These benefits include **cash allowances for retirement or pension**, rent, subsidy, or lump sum payments, all as per local legislation, without any reduction, modification, suspension, suppression, or retention.
- The SSA establishes the legal framework for regulating the **insurance period**, which includes the period of services credited with contributions, contributory benefits, and their export for detached workers.
 - This framework also covers crew members of airlines and ships.
- The agreement addresses legislation concerning contributory benefits of the **Social Security System in Argentina.**
- The agreement would protect the rights of professionals and workers against loss of benefits or contributions made towards social security in both countries and thus **facilitate greater movement of professionals** and the labour force.

How are India-Argentina Relations?

➤ Political Relations:

- India-Argentina relations were elevated to the level of **Strategic Partnership in February 2019.**
- India opened a Trade Commission in Buenos Aires in 1943, which was later converted into one of the first embassies of India in South America in 1949.
- Argentina had established a Consulate in Calcutta in the 1920s, which was transferred to Delhi as an Embassy in 1950.

➤ Economic Relations:

- India is the **4th largest trading partner of Argentina**, with bilateral trade touching a historic peak of **USD 6.4 billion in 2022**, recording a growth rate of 12% over 2021.

Note:



- Major items of India's exports to Argentina include petroleum oils, agrochemicals, **yarn-fabric-made ups, organic chemicals, bulk drugs and two-wheelers.**
- Major items of India's imports from Argentina include **vegetable oils (soya bean and sunflower), finished leather, cereals, residual chemicals and allied products and pulses.**

➤ Cultural Relations:

- India and Argentina have historical and literary ties, such as the visit of **Rabindranath Tagore to Argentina in 1924** and the award of an honorary doctorate to Victoria Ocampo by Visva Bharati University in 1968.

➤ Counter-Terrorism

- India and Argentina issued a **separate joint declaration to fight terrorism.**
- Argentina condemned the recent terrorist attack in **Pulwama, Jammu and Kashmir in the strongest terms.**
- Both countries reiterated their commitment to **combat terrorism** in all its forms and manifestations and gave a call that any country must not allow their territory to be used to launch terrorist attacks on other countries.

Argentina

- **Capital:** Buenos Aires.
- **Official Language:** Spanish.
- Argentina is the **eighth largest country in the world.**
 - The country is bounded by **Chile to the south and west, Bolivia and Paraguay to the north, and Brazil, Uruguay, and the Atlantic Ocean to the east.**
- The highest mountain in the Andes range is the **Cerro Aconcagua.**
- Argentina is rich in resources, has a well-educated workforce, and is **one of South America's largest economies.**
- **The country is divided into four regions:** The **Andes**, the North, the Pampas, and Patagonia. The Pampas is the agricultural heartland.



Indian Pharmacopoeia Recognition in Suriname

Why in News?

Recently, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been signed between the **Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission (IPC)** and the Ministry of Health of Suriname, aiming to recognize the **Indian Pharmacopoeia (IP)** as a standard for medicines in Suriname.

- The signed MoU exemplifies the **mutual commitment of India and Suriname** to collaborate closely in the **realm of medicine regulation.**
- This collaboration is rooted in the recognition of the importance of adhering to respective laws and regulations **while ensuring the quality of medicines in both countries.**

What is the Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission (IPC)?

- IPC is an **Autonomous Institution** of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- IPC is created to **set standards of drugs in India.** Its basic function is to regularly **update the standards of drugs** commonly required for treatment of diseases prevailing in this region.
- It publishes **official documents for improving Quality of Medicines** by way of adding new and updating existing monographs in the form of **Indian Pharmacopoeia (IP).**
- It further **promotes rational use of generic medicines** by publishing **National Formulary of India.**

Note:

- IP prescribes standards for identity, purity and strength of drugs essentially required from the health care perspective of human beings and animals.
- IPC also provides **IP Reference Substances (IPRS)** which act as a fingerprint for identification of an article under test and its purity as prescribed in IP.

What are the Key Highlights of the MoU?

- **Acceptance of Indian Pharmacopoeia (IP):**
 - The MoU solidifies the **acceptance of the IP as a comprehensive** book of standards for medicines in Suriname.
- **Streamlined Quality Control:**
 - The requirement for duplicate testing of medicines **within Suriname is eliminated through the acceptance of the Certificate of Analysis** issued by **Indian Manufacturers** adhering to the IP standards.
 - This streamlining reduces **redundancy, saving time and resources.**
- **Cost-effective Standards:**
 - The MoU facilitates access to **IP Reference Substances (IPRS)** and Impurity standards from the IPC at reasonable costs.
 - This provision benefits **Suriname by enhancing its quality control** analysis procedures.

What is the Significance of the MoU?

- **Affordable Medicines:**
 - The recognition of IP opens **doors for the development of generic medicines in Suriname.** This translates to increased availability of cost-effective medicines for the citizens of Suriname, aligning with the goal of enhancing public health.
- **Economic Advantages:**
 - For India, the recognition of the Indian Pharmacopoeia in Suriname is a step towards an **'Atmanirbhar Bharat' (self-reliant India).** This recognition facilitates the export of Indian medical products, generating foreign exchange earnings and reinforcing India's pharmaceutical industry on the global stage.
- **Boosting Indian Pharmaceutical Exports:**
 - The recognition of IP by Suriname removes the need for duplicative testing and checks, giving Indian drug exporters a competitive edge. The reduction in regulatory hurdles leads to more remunerative trade for the Indian pharmaceutical sector.

➤ Wider International Recognition:

- The Indian Pharmacopoeia's official recognition has already extended to **Afghanistan, Ghana, Nepal, Mauritius, and now, Suriname.** This expansion reflects India's efforts to enhance its influence and cooperation in the global pharmaceutical landscape.

What are the Key Facts about Suriname?

➤ About:

- Suriname is located on the **northeastern coast of South America.** It is bordered by the **Atlantic Ocean to the north, French Guiana to the east, Brazil to the south, and Guyana to the west.**
- The capital city of **Suriname is Paramaribo,** which is situated on the banks of the Suriname River.
- Suriname is a democratic republic with a **president as the head of state and government.** The country has a multi-party political system.



➤ Official Language:

- The official language is Dutch, reflecting the **country's colonial history.** However, several other languages are spoken, including **Sranan Tongo (Surinamese Creole), Hindustani, Javanese, and English.**
 - Formerly a Dutch colony known as Dutch Guiana, Suriname gained independence from the Netherlands on November 25, 1975.

➤ Economy:

- The economy of Suriname is diverse, **with key sectors including mining** (gold, bauxite, oil), agriculture (rice, bananas, timber), and services.
- Suriname is rich in **natural resources, particularly gold, bauxite,** and recently discovered oil reserves.

Note:

6. International Institutions



भारत 2023 INDIA

वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्

ONE EARTH • ONE FAMILY • ONE FUTURE



Invitee Countries

- Bangladesh, Egypt, Mauritius, Netherlands, Nigeria, Oman, Singapore, Spain and UAE

India's Cultural Showcase

- Bharat Mandapam (inspired from Anubhav Mandapam)
- Bronze statue of Lord Nataraja (Chola style)
- Konark Chakra of Odisha's Sun Temple and Image of Nalanda University (used as iconic backdrops)
- Thanjavur Paintings and Dhokra art
- Brass statue of Lord Buddha sitting under Bodhi tree
- Diverse musical heritage (Hindustani, Folk, Carnatic, Devotional)

G20 Leaders' New Delhi Declaration

100% consensus on the Declaration

- Overcoming major differences on **Russia-Ukraine war**
 - ◆ Call for full implementation of **Black Sea Grain Initiative**
- Action Plan against **Fugitive Economic Offenders**
- Countering **terrorism** and **money laundering**
- Globally fair, sustainable, and modern **international tax system**
- Accelerating Progress on **SDGs**
- **Multilateral Institutions** (UNSC, Multilateral Development Banks etc)
- **Digital Public Infrastructure** (crypto, AI etc)
- **Gender equality** and women empowerment
- G20 Deccan **High-Level Principles on Food Security and Nutrition 2023**
- **Global Biofuel Alliance** formally launched

Other Major Outcomes

India- Middle East- Europe Economic Corridor

- Shipping & railway connectivity corridor (**India, UAE, Saudi, EU, France, Italy, Germany and US**) - part of Partnership for Global Infrastructure Investment

G20 now G21

- Permanent membership of **African Union** in G20 (in line with India as the 'Voice of the Global South')

Global Biofuel Alliance

- Led by **India, Brazil and US**
- Other Initiating Members - **Argentina, Bangladesh, Italy, Mauritius, S. Africa and UAE** (Canada and Singapore - observers)
- 19 countries and 12 int'l orgs agreed to join

Climate

- G20 **High-Level Principles on Lifestyles for Sustainable Development**
- Pledge to **3x RE capacity globally** by 2030
- **UK committed USD 2 bn** to Green Climate Fund



Drishti IAS

Note:

18th G20 Summit in New Delhi

Why in News?

The 18th **G20 Summit** was held in **New Delhi, India** on September 9th and 10th, 2023. The summit was the **first time India hosted the G20 Leaders' Summit**.

- The theme of the summit was "**Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam**", which means "**The world is one family**".
- G20 Leaders' **New Delhi Declaration** achieved **unanimous consensus**, addressing diverse global issues, from **Russia-Ukraine** tensions to sustainable development, food security, and launching the Global Biofuel Alliance.

What are the Major Outcomes of G20 Summit 2023?

- **Admittance of the African Union (G20 now G21):**
 - The G20 leaders agreed to **admit the African Union as a permanent member** of the G20, which is a major step towards increasing the representation of developing countries in the forum.
 - The Impact of AU's Inclusion in G20:
 - The AU's membership in the G20 offers an opportunity to reshape global trade, finance, and investment and would provide a greater voice to the Global South within the G20.
 - It allows African interests and perspectives to be heard and recognized within the G20.
- **Global Biofuels Alliance (GBA):**
 - **About:**
 - GBA is an **India-led initiative** that aims to develop an alliance of governments, international organizations, and industry to **promote the adoption of biofuels**.
 - The initiative seeks to position biofuels as a key component of the **energy transition and contribute to job creation and economic growth**.
 - It will help accelerate India's existing biofuels programs such as **PM-JIVANYojna, SATAT, and GOBARdhan scheme**.
 - As per IEA, there will be 3.5-5x biofuels growth potential by 2050 due to **Net Zero targets**, creating a huge opportunity for India.
 - **Formation and Founding Members:**
 - The alliance was launched with nine initiating members: **India, the US, Brazil, Argentina,**

Bangladesh, Italy, Mauritius, South Africa, and the United Arab Emirates.

- GBA Members constitute major producers and consumers of biofuels. **USA (52%), Brazil (30%) and India (3%)**, contribute about 85% share in production and about 81% in consumption of ethanol.
- 19 countries and 12 international organizations have already agreed to join.
- **G20 Invited Countries supporting GBA:**
 - Bangladesh, Singapore, Mauritius, UAE
- **Non-G20 supporting GBA:**
 - Iceland, Kenya, Guyana, Paraguay, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, Uganda, and Finland
- **International Organizations:**
 - World Bank, Asian Development Bank, World Economic Forum, World LPG Organization, UN-Energy for All, UNIDO, Biofutures Platform, International Civil Aviation Organization, International Energy Agency, International Energy Forum, International Renewable Energy Agency, World Biogas Association.
- **India – Middle East – Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC):**
 - A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the Governments of India, the US, Saudi Arabia, the European Union, the UAE, France, Germany and Italy to establish the IMEC.
 - IMEC is part of a broader initiative called the **Partnership for Global Infrastructure Investment (PGII)**.
 - The PGII was initially introduced during the **G7 summit in the UK in June 2021**.
 - PGII aims to **finance infrastructure projects in developing countries** through a combination of public and private investments.
 - IMEC is a significant infrastructure **project connecting India, the Middle East, and Europe**.
 - The project aims to **establish a network of transport corridors, including railways and sea lanes**.
 - IMEC is seen as a response to **China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**, providing an alternative infrastructure network.

Note:

➤ **G20 Global Partnership for Financial Inclusion Document:**

- The G20 Global Partnership for **Financial Inclusion document** prepared by the **World Bank** has lauded the transformative **impact of [India's Digital Public Infrastructure \(DPI\)](#)** over the past decade under the Central Government.
- The document emphasizes the following initiatives that played a greater role in shaping the DPI landscape:
 - **Rapid Financial Inclusion:**
 - India's DPI approach achieved **47 years' worth of financial inclusion progress in just 6 years.**
 - **[Jan Dhan-Aadhar-Mobile \(JAM\) Trinity](#)** boosted the financial inclusion rate from **25% in 2008 to over 80% within 6 years.**
 - Regulatory frameworks, national policies, and **Aadhaar-based verification complemented DPIs.**
 - **[Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojna \(PMJDY\)](#) Success:**
 - PMJDY accounts **tripled from 147.2 million (March 2015) to 462 million (June 2022).**
 - Women own 56% of these accounts, exceeding 260 million.
 - PMJDY drove savings among low-income women, attracting over 12 million customers by April 2023.
 - **Government to Person (G2P) Payments:**
 - India's digital G2P architecture facilitated **USD 361 billion transfers to beneficiaries from 53 ministries via 312 schemes.**
 - Achieved total savings of **USD 33 billion by March 2022, equivalent to 1.14% of GDP.**
 - **Unified Payments Interface (UPI) Dominance:**
 - May 2023 witnessed over **9.41 billion UPI transactions, valued at Rs 14.89 trillion.**
 - UPI transactions in FY 2022–23 neared **50% of India's nominal GDP.**
 - **Private Sector Efficiency:**
 - DPI streamlined private organizations' operations, reducing complexity, costs, and time.

- Some NBFCs achieved 8% higher SME lending conversion rates, 65% savings in depreciation costs, and 66% cost reduction in fraud detection.
- Banks' customer onboarding costs in India dropped from USD 23 to USD 0.1 with DPI use.
- **Lower Compliance Costs for KYC:**
 - Reduced compliance costs from USD 0.12 to USD 0.06, making lower-income clients more attractive.
- **Cross-Border Payments:**
 - UPI-PayNow linkage enables faster and cheaper cross-border payments with Singapore.
- **Account Aggregator Framework:**
 - Enabled 1.13 billion accounts for data sharing with 13.46 million consents raised.
- **[Data Empowerment and Protection Architecture \(DEPA\)](#):**
 - Provides individuals control over their data, fostering innovation and competition.

What are the Other Key Highlights of G20 Summit 2023?

- **Tripling the Global Renewable Energy Capacity By 2030:**
 - G20 countries promised to work towards **tripling the global [renewable energy](#) capacity by 2030.**
 - If met, this single step could avoid **carbon dioxide emissions by seven billion tonnes between now and 2030**, according to an assessment by the **[International Energy Agency \(IEA\)](#).**
 - Aligns with **global efforts to [limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius.](#)**
 - Represents a significant shift away from **[fossil fuels](#) towards cleaner energy alternatives.**
 - The declaration acknowledges that current climate action is insufficient and highlights the need for trillions of dollars in financial resources to achieve the **objectives of the [Paris Agreement](#).**
 - Expanding renewable energy capacity on this scale could avoid about 7 billion tonnes of CO2 emissions between 2023 and 2030.

Note:

➤ **Commitment to Global Food Security and Nutrition:**

- The G20 leaders recognize the importance of **addressing rising commodity prices, including food and energy prices**, which contribute to **cost-of-living pressures**.
- They aim to **eliminate hunger and malnutrition**, acknowledging that global challenges like **poverty, climate change, pandemics, and conflicts disproportionately** affect vulnerable populations, particularly women and children.
- The G20 declaration highlights the human suffering and impacts of the war in **Ukraine on global food and energy security**, supply chains, inflation, and economic stability.
- G20 leaders called for the full, timely **implementation of the Black Sea grain initiative**.
- The agriculture working group during the G20 Presidency reached a historic consensus on two aspects: **Deccan G20 High-level principles on Food Security and Nutrition and the Millet initiative called MAHARISHI**.
 - The seven principles under the high-level principles on food security and nutrition include **humanitarian assistance, increasing food production and food security net programs, climate-smart approaches, inclusivity of agriculture food systems, one health approach, digitalization of the agriculture sector, and scaling responsible public and private investment in agriculture**.
 - MAHARISHI (Millets And OtHer Ancient Grains International ReSearch Initiative) aims at advancing research collaborations and generating awareness about millets and other ancient grains during International Years of Millets 2023 and after.
- The G20 committed to promoting transparent, fair, and rule-based trade in agriculture, food, and fertilizer. They pledged not to impose export restrictions, reduce market distortions, and align with WTO rules.
- The G20 leaders emphasize the importance of strengthening the **Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS)** and the **Group on Earth Observations Global Agricultural Monitoring (GEOGLAM)** for greater transparency.

- This includes expanding AMIS to include vegetable oils and enhancing collaboration with early warning systems to avoid food price volatility.

Note:

- AMIS is an inter-agency platform to **enhance food market transparency and policy response for food security**.
 - It was launched in **2011 by the G20 Ministers of Agriculture following the global food price hikes in 2007/08 and 2010**.
- GEOGLAM enhances **market transparency and food security by providing timely agricultural information worldwide**.
 - The GEOGLAM policy mandate initially came from the Group of Twenty (G20) Agriculture Ministers during the French G20 Presidency in 2011.

➤ **Small Arms and Terrorist Safe Havens:**

- The 2023 New Delhi Declaration builds upon previous G20 declarations, especially the **2015 Turkiye declaration**, which strongly denounced terrorism. Unlike the **2022 G20 Bali Leaders Declaration**, which primarily focused on the financing of terrorism and the strengthening of the **Financial Action Task Force (FATF)**, the New Delhi Declaration **encompasses a wider range of concerns**.
- The G20 leaders, in the **New Delhi Declaration**, **clearly condemn terrorism in all its forms and manifestations**.
- The declaration supports the FATF's efforts to enhance global asset recovery networks and recover criminal proceeds.

➤ **Healthcare Resilience and Research:**

- The G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration places significant emphasis on healthcare and prioritizes the need to build a **resilient healthcare system**.
- It commits to strengthening the global health architecture to create more **resilient, equitable, sustainable, and inclusive health systems**. The **World Health Organization (WHO)** is at the core of this effort.
- The goal is to enhance primary healthcare, the health workforce, and essential health services to levels better than **pre-pandemic within the next two to three years**.

Note:



- In addition to addressing ongoing epidemics like tuberculosis and AIDS, the G20 recognizes the **importance of research on long Covid.**
- India's G20 presidency also pushed for the integration of evidence-based **traditional medicine practices with modern medicine.**
- There is an emphasis on adopting a **one-health approach**, which tracks **diseases in animals, plants, and humans within the same mechanism**, with a particular focus on tackling antimicrobial resistance.
- **Finance Track Agreements:**
 - India's G-20 presidency has laid the foundation for a **coordinated and comprehensive policy and regulatory framework for cryptocurrencies.**
 - The emergence of global consensus on **crypto asset regulation was emphasized.**
 - G-20 leaders have recognized the pressing need for **more robust and effective Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs)** to address the high developmental demands globally.
 - The **India Stack model of digital public infrastructure** for financial inclusion is acknowledged as a promising approach.
 - The G-20 leaders' New Delhi Declaration underscores the **monitoring of risks associated with the rapid developments in the crypto-asset ecosystem.**
- **India-Mercosur Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA):**
 - India and Brazil agreed to work together for the expansion of **India-Mercosur PTA** to promote economic ties.
 - Mercosur is a trading bloc in **Latin America, comprising Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay.**
 - The India-Mercosur PTA came into effect on **June 1, 2009, aimed to eliminate customs duties on a limited number of goods agreed between India and the Mercosur bloc.**
- **Climate Financing Commitment:**
 - The declaration emphasizes a **substantial increase in climate financing, calling for a "quantum jump" from billions of dollars to trillions of dollars.**
 - It underscores the need for significant financial resources, including USD. 5.8-5.9 trillion in the

- pre-2030 period for developing countries and USD 4 trillion per year for **clean energy technologies by 2030** to achieve **net-zero emissions by 2050.**
- **India's Cultural Showcase:**
 - **Bharat Mandapam** (inspired from **Anubhav Mandapam**).
 - Bronze statue of **Lord Nataraja (Chola style)**.
 - **Konark Chakra of Odisha's Sun Temple** and Image of **Nalanda University** (used as iconic backdrops).
 - **Thanjavur Paintings** and **Dhokra art .**
 - Brass statue of **Lord Buddha** sitting under Bodhi tree.
 - Diverse **musical heritage (Hindustani, Folk, Carnatic, Devotional).**
- **Transition of G20 Presidency:**
 - Prime Minister of India handed over the customary gavel of the **G20 chair to Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva**, who will officially take over the presidency on December 1, 2023.

What are the Latest India-US Collaboration at G20 Summit 2023?

- India and the United States are strengthening their technology partnership, focusing on **resilient semiconductor supply chains, and telecom infrastructure.**
- India supports the US '**Rip and Replace**' pilot project, aligning with the removal of Chinese telecom equipment.
- India and the US reaffirmed their commitment to **deepen and diversify the India-US Major Defence Partnership** through expanded cooperation in new and emerging domains such as **space and artificial intelligence (AI).**
- **GE F-414 Jet Engine Agreement:**
 - The US recently completed the notification process for a commercial agreement between **General Electric Aerospace and Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. (HAL)** to manufacture **GE F-414 jet engines** in India.
 - This agreement marks a significant step in defence cooperation between the U.S. and India, highlighting India's commitment to enhancing its domestic defence manufacturing capabilities.

Note:

India's Socio Economic Performance in Comparison to G20 Nations

Why in News?

Recently, India hosted the **18th G20 Summit** in New Delhi under the theme 'One Earth, One Family, One Future.'

- As India handed over the G20 Presidency of 2024 to Brazil, it was essential to evaluate its socioeconomic performance in comparison to fellow G20 nations. Unfortunately, India's recent performance in key socioeconomic indicators lagged behind its G20 counterparts.

What is the Status of India's Progress on Various Metrics in Comparison to G20 Members?

- **Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita:**
 - **GDP per capita** is the sum of gross value added by all resident producers in the economy divided by mid-year population.
 - In 1970, India ranked 18th out of 19 regions analysed (Russia excluded), with a GDP per capita of USD 111.97.
 - By 2022, India's GDP per capita had increased to USD 2,388.62 but remained at the bottom among the 19 regions.
- **Human Development Index (HDI):**
 - **HDI** is a composite index that measures average achievement in human development taking into account four indicators:
 - Life expectancy at birth ([Sustainable Development Goal 3](#)),
 - Expected years of schooling (Sustainable Development Goal 4.3),
 - Mean years of schooling (Sustainable Development Goal 4.4),
 - Gross national income (GNI) (Sustainable Development Goal 8.5).
 - HDI is measured on a scale of 0 (worst) to 1 (best). The HDI of 19 countries ([European Union \(EU\) excluded](#)) between 1990 and 2021 is compared

and India's HDI improved from 0.43 in 1990 to 0.63 in 2021, reflecting progress in life expectancy, education, and living standards.

- However, despite its progress in absolute terms, India ranked at the bottom of the list.

➤ Health Metrics:

○ Life Expectancy:

- India's average life expectancy increased from 45.22 years in 1990 to 67.24 years in 2021, surpassing South Africa but still lagging behind China.

○ Infant Mortality:

- In 1990, India ranked last with an infant mortality rate of 88.8. By 2021, the rate improved to 25.5, but India ranked 19th out of 20 regions.

➤ Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR):

- The **(LFPR)** above 15 years of age in the 20 regions was compared between 1990 and 2021-22.

- In 1990, with an LFPR of 54.2%, India ranked 18, above Italy (49.7%) and Saudi Arabia (53.3%).
- However, by 2021-22, India's LFPR slipped to 19th place, only ahead of Italy, with a reduced LFPR of 49.5%.

➤ Women in Parliament:

- The share of women in the Parliament of 19 regions (Saudi Arabia excluded) was compared between 1998 and 2022.

- India's share of women in Parliament increased from 8.1% in 1998 to 14.9% in 2022.
- However, compared to other G20 countries and the EU, India's rank declined from 15th in 1998 to 18th in 2022, just ahead of Japan.

➤ Environmental Performance:

- India has effectively curbed **carbon emissions** over the past three decades, consistently ranking as the lowest emitter among the 20 regions.

- However, India's progress in adopting eco-friendly energy sources has been relatively slow, with just 5.36% of electricity generated from renewables in 2015, ranking 13th among the 20 regions.

Note:



Falling behind

The charts are based on data collated from the World Bank Open Data and Our World in Data

The G20 comprises India (●); Australia, China, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea [East Asia and Pacific (●)]; France, Germany, Italy, Russia, Turkey, U.K., EU [Europe and Central Asia (●)]; Argentina, Brazil, Mexico [Latin America and the Caribbean (●)]; Canada, U.S. [North America (●)]; South Africa [Sub-Saharan Africa (●)]; and Saudi Arabia [West Asia and North Africa (●)].



Chart 1: The chart compares the GDP per capita (in \$) of 19 regions (18 countries plus the EU) between 1970 and 2022

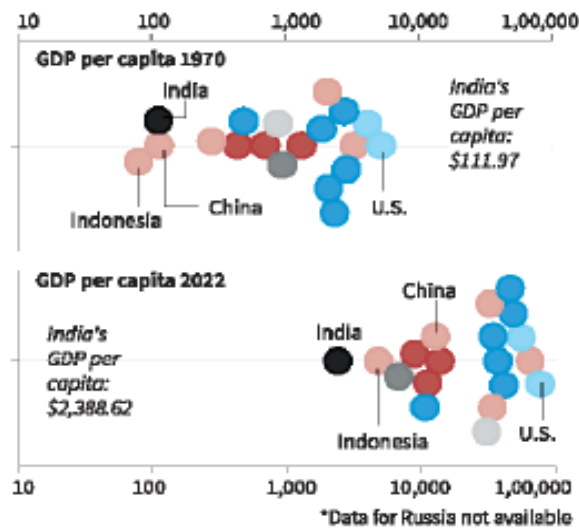


Chart 2: The chart compares the Human Development Index (HDI) of 19 countries between 1990 and 2021

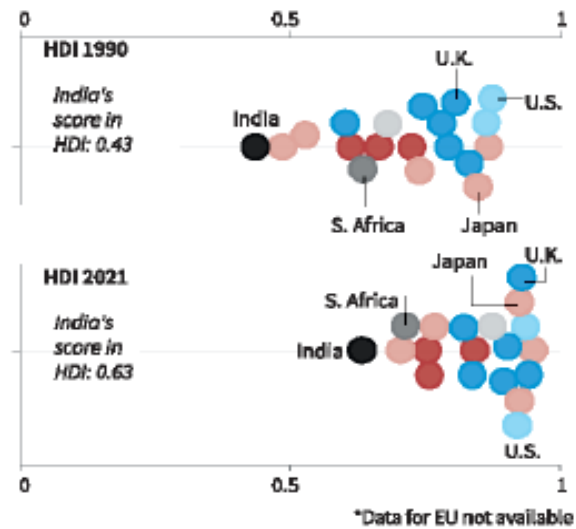


Chart 3: The chart compares LFPR in 20 regions between 1990 and 2021-22

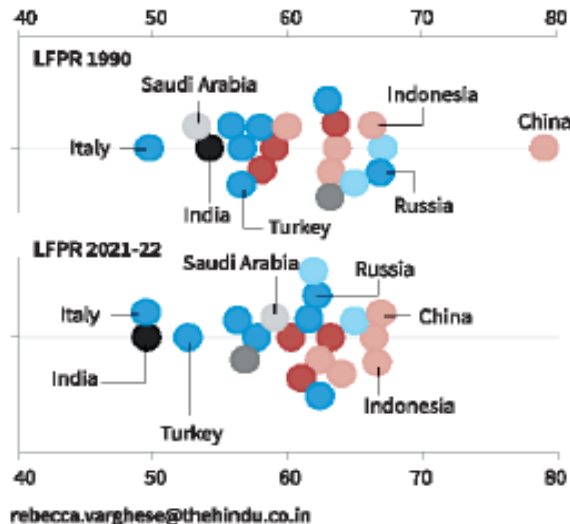
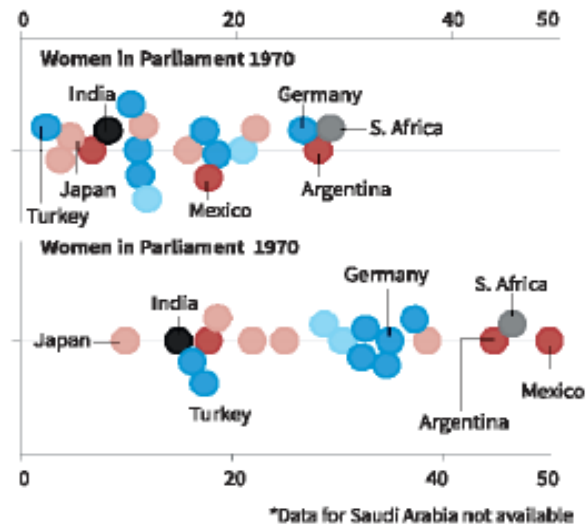


Chart 4: The chart compares the share of women in Parliament of 19 regions (18 countries + EU) between 1998 and 2022



Note:

G20 Countries and Disaster Risk Reduction

Why in News?

Recently, the First **G20** Disaster Risk Reduction Working Group (DRR WG) meeting under India's G20 Presidency took place, where India highlighted the importance of **Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)**.

What are the Highlights of the Meeting?

- The G20 Disaster Risk Resilience Working Group has called upon governments to build a **social protection system** with an effective and preferred instrument for disaster risk financing.
- It emphasised the **need for new-age Social Protection Systems** that **invest in local risk resilience** to mitigate, prepare and recover from disasters.
- The five **priorities outlined**:
 - Global coverage of **Early Warning Systems**
 - Increased commitment towards making infrastructure systems disaster resilient
 - Stronger **national financial frameworks** for DRR
 - Strengthened national and global disaster response system
 - Increased application of ecosystems-based approaches to DRR
- The G20 DRR WG intended to include considerations for the **Sendai Framework's mid-term review**, renew multilateral cooperation at all levels, and inform future global policies and initiatives related to DRR.

What is the Need for Creating a Collective G20 Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction?

- The G20 nations, with a population of 4.7 billion, have large exposure, **risk from asset concentration, and vulnerability to natural disasters**.
- In the World Risk Index 2022, four out of the top 10 vulnerable countries are G20 nations.
- The combined estimated annual average loss in the G20 countries alone is USD 218 billion, equivalent to **9% of the average annual investment in infrastructure** made by them.
- Disaster risk reduction measures can play an important role in preventing such losses.

What can be the key Strategies for Reducing Disaster Risk?

- **Better Economic and Urban Development:**
 - Reducing risk can be achieved mainly by reducing vulnerability and exposure to risk through measures such as **better economic and urban development choices** and practices, protection of the environment, reduction of poverty and inequality, etc.
 - For example, in India, effective implementation of flood risk management strategies can **help in reducing and managing Extreme Weather Conditions**.
- **Financing:**
 - There is a need to re-imagine **financing disaster risk reduction**. The financing requirements flowing through government budgets are not independent of a country's fiscal position and hence may be limited.
 - Innovative financing tools including creating **reserve funds, dedicated lines of credit and tapping resources globally** should be explored.
- **Infrastructure:**
 - Infrastructure, such as roads, rails, airports, and electricity lines created through public revenues **need to be resilient to disasters and may require more funds incrementally**.
 - There is a need to finance this additionality using **options that are reflective of the social benefits** of such disaster-resilient infrastructure.
- **Dealing with Extensive and Intensive Risk:**
 - Differential strategies to deal with extensive risk (risk of losses from frequent but moderate impacts) and intensive risk (from low frequency and high impact events), should be worked out.
 - A large portion of the losses accumulate from extensive events.
 - Cumulatively, dispersed events such as **Heatwaves**, lightning, local floods, and landslides cause enormous losses. Implementing targeted approaches to reducing losses from extensive risk events can have an impact in the short to medium-term horizon.
- **Multi-tiered, Multi-sectoral Effort:**
 - There is a need to view disaster risk reduction as a multi-tiered, multi-sectoral effort.

Note:

- If efforts are integrated vertically from **local to sub-national to national to global**, and horizontally across sectors, the level of readiness to manage unknown risks will be enhanced.
- The world is interlinked and interdependent, and the **G20 can help develop such strategies**.

What are the Initiatives for Disaster Risk Reduction?

- **Global:**
 - [Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030](#)
 - [The Climate Risk and Early Warning Systems \(CREWS\)](#)
 - [International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction - 13th October](#)
 - Green Climate Fund's Sectoral Guide on Climate Information & Early Warning Systems
- **India's Initiatives:**
 - [Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure Society \(CDRIS\)](#)
 - [National Disaster Management Plan \(NDMP\)](#)

10th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus

Why in News?

Recently, the Defence Minister of India has participated in the 10th [Association of SouthEast Asian Nations \(ASEAN\) Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus \(ADMM-Plus\)](#) in Jakarta, Indonesia.

What are the Key Highlights of the Indian Address in ADMM-Plus Meeting?

- **ASEAN Centrality:**
 - India affirmed the importance of **ASEAN's central role** and commended its efforts in fostering dialogue and consensus in the region.
- **Commitment to International Laws:**
 - India reiterated its commitment to freedom of navigation, overflight, and lawful commerce in international waters, aligning with international laws, notably the [United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea \(UNCLOS\) 1982](#).

- **Regional Security Initiatives:**
 - India advocated for consultative and **development-oriented security initiatives** that reflect consensus among stakeholders, aiming for practical, forward-looking cooperation within **ADMM-Plus to enhance Maritime Security** in the region.
- **Dialogue and Diplomacy:**
 - India stressed the significance of dialogue and diplomacy for enduring peace and global stability, emphasizing moving away from an **"us versus them" mindset, asserting that this is not an era of war**.
- **Collaborative Initiatives:**
 - India appreciated ASEAN Member States' participation in joint initiatives like the Initiative for [Women in UN Peacekeeping Operations](#), Initiative for Marine Plastic Pollution Response, ASEAN-India Maritime Exercise, and Expert Working Group (EWG) on [Humanitarian Assistance & Disaster Relief \(HADR\)](#).
 - India proposed to **co-chair the EWG on Counter-Terrorism**, a concern endorsed by ADMM-Plus due to terrorism's serious threat in the ASEAN region.
 - In the present cycle from 2021-2024, **India is co-chairing EWG on HADR along with Indonesia**.

What is ADMM-Plus?

- **About:**
 - The ADMM-Plus is a platform for **ASEAN** (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam) **and its eight Dialogue Partners** Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Russia and the United States (collectively referred to as the "Plus Countries"), to strengthen **security and defence cooperation for peace, stability, and development** in the region.
 - The ADMM is **the highest defence consultative and cooperative mechanism** in ASEAN.
- **Establishment:**
 - The Inaugural ADMM-Plus was convened in **Ha Noi, Viet Nam**, in 2010.
 - Since 2017, the ADMM-Plus meets annually, to allow enhanced dialogue and cooperation among **ASEAN and the Plus Countries** in the midst of an increasingly challenging regional security environment.


Note:

➤ Objectives:

- To benefit ASEAN Member States in building **capacity to address shared security challenges**, while cognisant of the differing capacities of various ASEAN Member States.
- To promote mutual trust and confidence between defence establishments through greater dialogue and transparency;
- To enhance regional peace and stability through cooperation in defence and security, in view of the transnational security challenges the region faces;
- To facilitate the implementation of the Vientiane Action Programme, which calls for ASEAN to build a peaceful, secure and prosperous ASEAN, and to adopt greater outward-looking external relation strategies with our friends and Dialogue Partners.

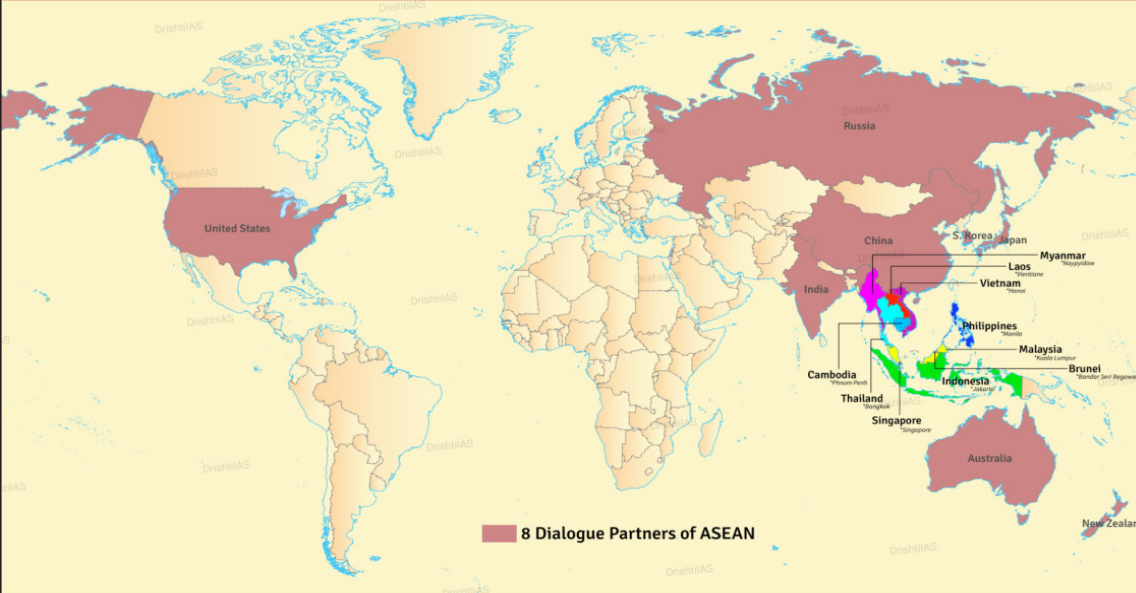
➤ Achievements:

- The ADMM-Plus has become an effective platform for practical cooperation among the participating countries' defence establishments.
- The ADMM-Plus currently focuses on **seven areas of practical cooperation**, namely maritime security (MS), counter-terrorism (CT), humanitarian assistance and disaster management (HADR), peacekeeping operations (PKO), military medicine (MM), humanitarian mine action (HMA) and cyber security (CS).
- Experts' Working Groups (EWGs) have been established to facilitate cooperation in these areas.
- The EWGs are each co-chaired by one **ASEAN Member States and one Plus Country**, operating in a three-year cycle.



ASEAN

Association of Southeast Asian Nations



8 Dialogue Partners of ASEAN

Founded: By signing ASEAN Declaration (Bangkok Declaration) (1967)

Founding Members: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand

Secretariat: Indonesia, Jakarta

Chairmanship: Rotates annually


ASEAN Summit Meetings: Occur biannually

ASEAN Economy:

- Combined GDP: ~ USD 3.66 trillion (2022)
- Total Exports: USD 1.73 trillion (8.24% of global exports in 2021)
- Major Export Item: Monolithic Integrated Circuit, Palm Oil, Data Processing Equipment

ADMM+ Meeting: Platform for ASEAN and its 8 Dialogue Partners (India, Australia, US, Japan, S. Korea, China, Russia and New Zealand)

- First Convened in: Hanoi, Vietnam (2010)



Note:

20th ASEAN-India Summit and the 18th East Asia Summit

Why in News?

Recently, the Prime Minister (PM) of India attended the 20th [Association of Southeast Asian Nations \(ASEAN\)-India Summit](#) and the 18th [East Asia Summit \(EAS\)](#) in Jakarta, Indonesia.

- The two summits were an opportunity for India to strengthen its relationships with ASEAN countries and reaffirm its commitment to a free, open, and rules-based [Indo-Pacific](#).

What are the Key Highlights of the 20th ASEAN-India Summit?

- The PM of India presented a **12-point proposal for strengthening India – ASEAN cooperation** covering connectivity, digital transformation, trade and economic engagement, addressing contemporary challenges, people-to-people contacts, and deepening strategic engagement.
- **The 12-point proposal included the following:**
 - Establishing **multi-modal connectivity and economic corridor that links South-East Asia-India-West Asia-Europe**.
 - Offered to share **India's Digital Public Infrastructure Stack with ASEAN partners**.
 - Announced an ASEAN-India fund for **Digital Future focusing on cooperation in digital transformation and financial connectivity**.
 - Announced renewal of support to the **Economic and Research Institute of ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA)** to act as a knowledge partner for enhancing our engagement.
 - Called for collectively raising issues being faced by **Global South in multilateral fora**
 - Invited ASEAN countries to join the **Global Centre for Traditional Medicine being established by WHO in India**.
 - Called for **working together on Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for the Environment)**.
 - Offered to share India's experience in providing affordable and quality medicines to people through **Jan-Aushadhi Kendras**.
 - Called for a collective fight **against terrorism, terror financing, and cyber-disinformation**.

- Invited ASEAN countries to join the **Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure**. Called for cooperation in disaster management.
- Called for enhanced cooperation on **maritime safety, security, and domain awareness**.

What are the Key Highlights of the 18th East Asia Summit?

- **Reaffirming Commitment to East Asia Summit:**
 - The PM of India emphasized the significance of the EAS mechanism and reaffirmed **India's support for further strengthening it**.
 - India's strong support for ASEAN centrality and called for ensuring a free, **open and rules-based Indo-Pacific**.
- **Quad's Vision and Global Challenges:**
 - Insights into the PM's discussion on the **Quad's vision** and the cooperative approach to address global challenges like terrorism, climate change, and resilient supply chains.
- **India's Initiatives in Climate Change:**
 - India's initiatives in climate change, including **ISA (International Solar Alliance)**, **CDRI (Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure)**, **LiFE (Mission LiFE)**, and **OSOWOG (One Sun One World One Grid)** was highlighted.

East Asia Summit

- **About:**
 - The EAS was established in **2005** as an **Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)**-led initiative.
 - The EAS is the **only leader-led forum in the Indo-Pacific** that brings together all key partners to discuss political, security and economic issues of strategic importance.
 - The EAS operates on the principles of **openness, inclusiveness, respect for international law, ASEAN centrality, and ASEAN's role as the driving force**.
 - The idea of an East Asia Grouping was first proposed by then **Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad in 1991**.
 - The first summit was held in **Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 14 December 2005**.

Note:

- **Members:**
 - The EAS comprises **18 members**: the **10 ASEAN countries** (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam) and **eight dialogue partners** (Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Russia and the United States).
- **Six Priority Areas of Cooperation:**
 - Environment and energy, education, finance, global health issues and pandemic diseases, natural disaster management, and ASEAN Connectivity.
- **India and East Asia Summit:**
 - **India has been a founding member of the EAS since 2005** and has actively participated in all its meetings and activities.
 - India views the EAS as a key platform for enhancing its **Act East Policy** and strengthening its strategic partnership with ASEAN and other regional countries.
 - At the **East Asia Summit** in Bangkok in **November 2019**, India had unveiled India's **Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)**, which is aimed at forging partnerships to create a secure and stable maritime domain.
 - India has contributed to the EAS cooperation in various fields, such as disaster management, renewable energy, education, health, connectivity, maritime security and counterterrorism.

20th ASEAN-India Economic Ministers' Meeting

Why in News?

Recently, the 20th **ASEAN-India Economic Ministers' meeting was held** in Semarang, Indonesia, marking a significant step in **enhancing economic cooperation** between **India and the ASEAN member countries**.

What are the Key Highlights of the Meeting?

- **Strengthening Economic Partnership:**
 - The meeting underscored the shared commitment to fortify the **ASEAN-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership**, ensuring substantial benefits for both sides.

- The ministers highlighted the importance of fostering **economic collaboration** amid the challenges posed by the **Pandemic**.
 - The bilateral trade between India and ASEAN in **2022-23 amounted to USD 131.5 billion**, constituting 11.3% of India's global trade for the same period.
- **ASEAN-India Business Council (AIBC):**
 - The ministers acknowledged **AIBC's** endeavors throughout 2023, including the 5th ASEAN-India Business Summit held in Kuala Lumpur in March, 2023.
 - AIBC is an organization formed by the Governments of **ASEAN and India in 2005** with the aim to foster **closer business linkages and provide an industry perspective** to the broadening and deepening of economic linkages between ASEAN and India.
 - Recognition was given to the **concerns raised by businesses regarding Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs)**, highlighting the growing exchanges and interactions among stakeholders from both sides.
 - NTB refers to any obstacle or restriction that hinders international trade **but does not involve the imposition of a direct tariff or customs duty** on imported goods. Some examples of NTB are General or product-specific quotas, Quality conditions imposed by the importing country on the exporting countries, Unjustified Sanitary and Phyto-sanitary conditions etc.
- **Addressing Regional and Global Challenges:**
 - Amidst the intricate landscape of regional and global challenges, the ministers engaged in discussions about the **multi-dimensional effects of the Covid-19 pandemic**, climate change, financial market volatility, inflation, and geopolitical tensions.
 - Key areas for cooperation were identified, such as **robust Supply Chains, Food Security**, energy security, health, and financial stability.
- **AITIGA Review - A Key Agenda:**
 - A pivotal point of this year's meeting was the thorough review of the **ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA)**, originally signed in 2009.
 - The discussions were preceded by a **meeting of the AITIGA Joint Committee, which deliberated on the review's roadmap**.

Note:



- The Term of Reference and Work Plan for AITIGA Review Negotiations were **finalized during this process.**
- **Endorsement and Commencement of Review:**
 - The ministers officially endorsed the review documents for AITIGA, paving the way for the **formal commencement of negotiations with predefined modalities.**
 - The initiation of the AITIGA review addresses a longstanding demand from Indian businesses and promises to make the **Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** more conducive to trade and mutually beneficial.
 - A quarterly schedule of negotiations was agreed upon, with the aim of concluding the AITIGA review by 2025.
 - This review process is anticipated to **bring about enhancements in trade diversification** while also addressing existing trade imbalances.

What is the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)?

- **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 members 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 an estimated 666.19 million people and a combined **Gross Domestic Product (GDP)** of USD USD 3.2 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.



SCO Summit 2023

Why in News?

Recently, India has chaired the **Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)** virtual Summit, leaders called for the formation of a “more representative” and multipolar world order in the global interest.

- During this 23rd Summit, **Iran** officially joined the SCO as the **Ninth Member Country.**
- The **theme of India's chairpersonship of SCO is 'Towards a SECURE SCO'**, which is derived from the acronym coined by the Indian PM at the 2018 SCO Qingdao Summit.
 - **It stands for:** S: Security, E: Economic development, C: Connectivity, U: Unity, R: Respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, E: Environmental protection.

Note: India, which was admitted as a **full member of the SCO at the Astana Summit in 2017**, holds the rotating presidency of the grouping for the first time in 2023. The SCO grouping now comprises **China, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.**

What are the Key Highlights of the 23rd SCO Summit?

- **New Delhi Declaration:**
 - The **New Delhi Declaration** was signed by the member nations, which states that the international community must come together to “**counter the activities of terrorist, separatist and extremist groups**”, paying special attention to preventing

Note:

the spread of religious intolerance, aggressive nationalism, ethnic and racial discrimination, xenophobia, ideas of fascism and chauvinism.”

➤ Joint Statements:

- The leaders adopted **two thematic joint statements** - one on cooperation in countering the radicalisation leading to separatism, extremism, and terrorism & the second one cooperation in the field of digital transformation.

➤ New Pillars of Cooperation:

- India has created five new pillars and focus area for cooperation in the SCO, which include,
 - Startups and Innovation
 - Traditional Medicine
 - Youth Empowerment
 - Digital Inclusion
 - Shared Buddhist Heritage

➤ India's Reservations on BRI:

- India refused to be part of the **BRI (Belt and Road Initiative)** of the SCO members' economic strategy statement, mentioning “**interested member states**”.
- India's opposition to the BRI stems from its **inclusion of projects in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (POK)**, which India considers a violation of its sovereignty.

➤ Indian Prime Minister's Address:

- The Indian PM highlighted the **significance of connectivity for enhancing mutual trade** and trust among SCO member states.
- However, he stressed the **need to uphold the fundamental principles of the SCO charter**, specifically respecting member **states' sovereignty and regional integrity**.

➤ Other Perspectives:

- The Indian PM criticized countries that employ **Cross-Border Terrorism** as an instrument of their policies and provide shelter to terrorists, urging the SCO not to hesitate in **condemning such nations and emphasized** the importance of consistency in addressing these critical issues.
- The **Chinese President**, while celebrating the **ten-year anniversary of the BRI**, mentioned his new **Global Security Initiative (GSI)**, calling for **political resolutions** to international and regional conflicts to establish a solid security shield in the region.

- He urged SCO members to **formulate foreign policies independently** and remain vigilant against external attempts to instigate a new **Cold War or camp-based confrontation**.

- The **Russian President**, attending his first multilateral gathering since the failed rebellion by the **Wagner Group**, indirectly attributed **Ukraine's anti-Russian sentiment to external forces** supplying weapons to the country.

- He emphasized **Russia's resilience against external pressures**, sanctions, and provocations, citing the unity of Russian political circles and society against attempted armed rebellions.

What is Shanghai Cooperation Organization?

➤ About:

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

➤ Objectives:

- Strengthening **mutual trust and neighborliness** among the member states.
- Promoting effective cooperation in -politics, trade & economy, research & technology and culture.
- Enhancing ties in **education, energy, transport, tourism, environmental protection**, etc.
- Maintain and ensure **peace, security and stability** in the region.
- Establishment of a democratic, fair and rational new international political & economic order.

➤ Structure:

- **Heads of State Council:** The supreme SCO body which decides its internal functioning and its interaction with other States & international organisations, and considers international issues.
- **Heads of Government Council:** Approves the budget, considers and decides upon issues related to economic spheres of interaction within SCO.
- **Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs:** Considers issues related to day-to-day activities.

Note:



- **Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS):**
Established to combat terrorism, separatism and extremism.
- **SCO Secretariat:**
 - Based in Beijing to provide informational, analytical & organizational support.
- **Official language:**
 - The official working language of the SCO Secretariat is Russian and Chinese.

IBSA and Digital Governance Reform

Why in News?

According to the **Geneva-based DiploFoundation**, **India, Brazil, and South Africa**, which have together formed the tripartite **IBSA Forum**, may play a prominent role in the **process of reforming digital governance**.

What is IBSA?

- **About:**
 - The IBSA is a trilateral, developmental initiative between **India, Brazil and South Africa** to promote **South-South cooperation** and exchange.
- **Formation:**
 - The grouping was formalised and named the **IBSA Dialogue Forum** when the Foreign Ministers of the three countries met in **Brasilia (Brazil) on 6th June 2003** and issued the **Brasilia Declaration**.
- **Collaboration:**
 - **Joint Naval Exercise:**
 - **IBSAMAR (IBSA Maritime Exercise)** is an important part of IBSA trilateral defence cooperation.
 - **IBSA Fund:**
 - Established in 2004, **IBSA Fund (India, Brazil and South Africa Facility for Poverty and Hunger Alleviation)** is a unique Fund through which development projects are executed with IBSA funding in fellow developing countries.
 - The fund is managed by the **United Nations (UN) Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC)**.

How can IBSA Contribute to Global Digital Governance?

- **Potential of IBSA:**
 - **Digital inclusion:**
 - **Digitalisation** is driving growth in the IBSA economies.
 - The **three countries have spearheaded digital inclusion by prioritising affordable access to citizens**, supporting training for digital skills, and creating a legal framework for the growth of small digital enterprises. India leads the way, with a vibrant digital economy.
 - **Data Governance:**
 - **India's G-20 presidency** aims to take strategic leadership with practical initiatives, such as a **self-evaluation of nations' data governance architecture**, modernisation of national data systems to regularly incorporate citizen voices and preferences, and transparency principles for governing data.
 - With a big population, **IBSA countries** also see data as a **national resource**.
- **Issues:**
 - **Geopolitical Rivalry:**
 - **Satellite collisions, cyber-resilience and security of space services, exploration of space resources** has increased competition between countries with a potential of **weaponization of outer space**.
 - Also, **semiconductors** are at the centre of the geopolitical battle between the US and China.
 - **Sovereignty vs Integration:**
 - The Foundation observes that **many countries will have to balance data sovereignty and integration** in the global economy.
 - Free flow of data will be **essential for small and export-oriented economies**.

What is India's Progress in Digital Governance?

- **Aadhar: India's Aadhaar biometric ID system** is seen by many as a leading digital identity initiative, inspiring similar systems in other countries.

Note:

- **MyGov Platform:** It has laid the **robust foundation for citizen engagement and participatory governance in the country** by providing a **common digital platform**, where citizens can share their views on government programmes and schemes.
- **Unified Payments Interface (UPI):** Launched in 2016, **UPI is a real-time payment system** that enables instant money transfers between bank accounts using a mobile device.
 - UPI has **transformed the way payments are made in India**, making it faster, more convenient, and more secure. **UPI's success has inspired other countries** to tie up with India and adopt similar payment systems.
- **Digital India Act:** Government of India has proposed to come up with **Digital India Act 2023** that envisages to act as **catalysts for Indian economy by enabling more innovation, more startups**, and at the same time protecting the citizens of India in terms of safety, trust, and accountability.

IPEF Ministerial Meeting

Why in News?

Recently, the second **Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF)** Ministerial Meeting took place, showcasing the significant strides made in fostering economic engagement among partner countries in the **Indo-Pacific region**.

- Hosted by the **United States**, this virtual gathering convened high-level officials to delve into discussions regarding the **four pillars of the framework** and the ongoing negotiations associated with each pillar.

What are the Key Highlights of the Meeting?

- The meeting announced the substantial conclusion of the negotiations of a first-of-its-kind international IPEF Supply Chain Agreement under Pillar II of the framework, which aims to increase the **resilience, efficiency, productivity, sustainability, transparency, diversification, security, fairness, and inclusivity of their supply chains**.
- The meeting also reported good progress under the other IPEF Pillars, namely **Fair and Resilient Trade (Pillar I)**, **Infrastructure, Clean Energy, and Decarbonization (Pillar III)**, and **Tax and Anti-Corruption (Pillar IV)**.

- The meeting witnessed the introduction of a **regional hydrogen initiative** by some IPEF partners to encourage widespread **deployment of renewable and low-carbon hydrogen** and its derivatives in the region under Pillar III.

What is 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**.
 - IPEF was launched jointly by the **USA and other partner countries of the Indo-Pacific region on 23rd May 2022**, at Tokyo.
- **Members:**
 - Australia, Brunei, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, United States, and Vietnam.
- **Pillar:**
 - **Trade (Pillar I):**
 - Focuses on **enhancing trade engagement among IPEF partner countries**.
 - Aims to promote **economic growth, peace, and prosperity in the region**.
 - India had joined **Pillars II to IV of IPEF** while it has an **observer status in Pillar-I**.
 - **Supply-chain resilience (Pillar II):**
 - Seeks to make supply chains more **resilient, robust, and well-integrated**.
 - Emphasizes crisis response **measures and cooperation to mitigate disruptions**.
 - Focuses on **improving logistics, connectivity, and investments** in critical sectors.
 - Aims to enhance worker roles through upskilling and reskilling initiatives.
 - **Clean Economy (Pillar III):**
 - Aims to **advance cooperation on clean energy and climate-friendly technologies**.
 - Focuses on **research, development, commercialization, and deployment of clean energy**.
 - Encourages investment in **climate-related projects** in the Indo-Pacific region.

Note:



- **Fair Economy (Pillar IV):**
 - Focuses on implementing effective **anti-corruption and tax measures**.
 - Highlights India's strong steps in improving legislative and administrative frameworks to combat corruption.
 - Reaffirms commitment to implementing **UNCAC (United Nations Convention against Corruption)** and **FATF (Financial Action Task Force) standards**.

Reforming UNSC and Bretton Woods

Why in News?

Recently, at a press conference in Hiroshima, Japan, the **UN Secretary-General** has called for reforms in **UNSC (United Nations Security Council)** and **Bretton Woods Institutions**, citing that the current order is outdated, dysfunctional and unfair.

- In the face of the economic shocks from the Covid-19 pandemic and the **Russia-Ukraine Conflict**, the said institutions have **failed to fulfil their core function as global safety nets**.

What is the Bretton Woods System?

- **About:**
 - The Bretton Woods system was a monetary framework created in **1944 by representatives of 44 nations** at the Bretton Woods Conference in New Hampshire, USA. It aimed to establish **stability and cooperation in international Monetary** after **World War II**.
 - The Bretton Woods Agreement created two important organizations—the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** and the **World Bank**.
 - While the Bretton Woods System was dissolved in the 1970s, both the IMF and World Bank (**Bretton Woods institutions**) have remained strong pillars for the exchange of **International Currencies**.
- **Need for Reforming Bretton Woods Institutions:**
 - While these institutions performed well over their first 50 years – they have been struggling in **more recent times as problems of rising inequality, financial instability** and **Protectionism** have re-emerged.

- The threat of **Climate Change** and ecological stress, rising disasters and a more interconnected world with new threats like cyber-security and pandemics require a **new International Financial Architecture**.
- There has been biases in fund allocation and unregulated **Special Drawing Rights (SDRs)**, the IMF allocated USD 650 billion in **SDRs** during the pandemic.
 - The G7 countries, with a population of 772 million people, received USD 280 billion. The African continent, with 1.3 billion people, received only USD 34 billion.

What can be done to Address these Issues?

➤ **Bretton Woods:**

- There is a need to reshape and revitalize three global institutions -the IMF, WBG and the **WTO (World Trade Organization)** where:
 - The IMF will focus on macroeconomic policy and financial stability, with **stricter surveillance of advanced economies** and their impact on global crises.
 - The restructured WBG will prioritize **sustainability, shared prosperity, and leveraging private capital** effectively. It should work with others to address global challenges and act as a wholesaler of finance.
 - A stronger WTO is needed for **fair trade, faster dispute resolution**, and the ability to respond swiftly to emergencies.
- The system needs **more automatic and rule-based financing mechanisms** to avoid delays and political influences.
- There needs to be **regular calibrated SDR issues, global pollution taxes, and financial transaction taxes**.
 - A well-structured G-20 could provide overarching guidance to the Bretton Woods system and its interactions with other institutions.

➤ **UNSC:**

- There is a need to ensure equal representation for all regions, including Africa, along with decentralization of power and authority, which will allow nations from all regions to **voice concerns related to peace and democracy** in their countries, making **decision-making more representative and democratic**.

Note:

- The focus should be on addressing global issues rather than **preserving the privileges of the P5 nations**.
- Urgent correction is needed to balance power between the P5 and the rest of the world, **ensuring a more democratic and legitimate governance of the UNSC** for international peace and security.
- The **IGN (Intergovernmental Negotiation) process**, which discusses UNSC reform, should be revised and re-energized, avoiding procedural tactics that hinder progress.

Third FIPIC Summit

Why in News?

The 3rd **Forum for India–Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC) Summit** was held in **Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea** on May 22, 2023. It was **co-chaired by Indian and Papua New Guinea’s Prime Minister** and attended by **14 Pacific Island Countries (PICs)**.

- The Indian Prime Minister was honored with the **Grand Companion of the Order of Logohu (GCL)** - the highest civilian award of Papua New Guinea.

What are the Major Highlights of the Third FIPIC Summit?

- **India Stands with PICs:**
 - India supports the **sovereignty and integrity of all countries** and emphasised the **shared priority of reforming international institutions to amplify the voice of the Global South**.
 - The Prime Minister mentioned discussions with **Australia, the US, and Japan as part of the Quad during the G7 summit**, focusing on the Indo-Pacific region.
- In line, leaders from the Quad nations have announced plans to implement Open **Radio Access Networks (RAN) beginning with Palau in the Pacific Region**.
- The Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea also urged India to be an advocate for the PICs in the **G-7 and the G-20 summits**.

➤ 12-Point Formula:

- India also unveiled a **12-point development programme** in areas of **healthcare, cyberspace, clean energy, water and small and medium enterprises in PIC**, according to which:
 - India will establish a **super-specialty cardiology hospital in Fiji**, introduce **dialysis units and sea ambulances in all 14 PICs**, and establish **Jan Aushadhi Centres** to provide affordable medicines.
 - India will support the development of the **small- and medium-scale enterprise sector in each Pacific Island nation**.
 - India also pledged to **provide desalination units to address water scarcity issues**.

➤ ‘Thirukkural Book:

- **Also, the Indian Prime Minister along with his Papua New Guinea counterpart** also released the Tamil classic ‘**Thirukkural**’ in Tok Pisin (official language of Papua New Guinea) to **bring the Indian thought and culture closer to the people of this southwestern Pacific nation**.

What is FIPIC?

➤ About:

- India’s engagement with the **PICs** is part of **India’s Act East Policy**.
 - A major initiative launched under the rubric of the Act East Policy for the PICs is the **Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC)**.
- FIPIC is a **multinational grouping developed for cooperation between India and 14 PICs**, namely **Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu**.
- It was launched in November 2014 and the **first FIPIC summit was held in Suva, Fiji in 2014** and the **second one was held in Jaipur, India in 2015**.

➤ Objective:

- To **enhance India’s relations with the PICs** in various fields such as trade, investment, tourism, education, health, agriculture, renewable energy, disaster management and climate change.
- FIPIC also provides a **platform for dialogue and consultation on regional and global issues of mutual interest**.

Note:



G7 Summit: Climate Goals, Gandhi Statue & Quad Climate Initiatives

Why in News?

During the recent 49th **G7 summit**, **member countries** had outlined key milestones in their **climate Wishlist** in response to ongoing studies and reports that continue to raise alarms about the **worsening state of climate change, urging immediate action.**

- Furthermore, at the same summit, the **Prime Minister of India** unveiled a bust of **Mahatma Gandhi in Hiroshima, Japan.**
- Additionally, the **Quad Leaders' Summit** also took place on the sidelines of the G7 summit, emphasizing shared democratic values, strategic interests, and initiatives for the **Indo-Pacific region.**

What are the Main Climate Wishlist of the G7?

- **Global Peak in Emissions by 2025:**
 - The G7 emphasized the need for a **global peak in emissions by 2025.**
 - While this is not mandated under the **Paris Agreement**, achieving it is not implausible.
 - Developed countries are witnessing a **decline in emissions**, although not at the required pace while developing countries' emissions are still increasing.
 - If all countries only fulfill their existing commitments, emissions in 2030 would be about **11% higher than 2010 levels.**
- **Ending Fossil Fuel Use:**
 - The G7 does not set a specific deadline for **ending fossil fuel** use but commits to accelerating the **phase-out of "unabated fossil fuels"** in line with **1.5 degree Celsius** trajectories.
 - They aim to eliminate **"inefficient fossil fuel subsidies"** by 2025 or earlier without specifying the definition of **"inefficient subsidies."**
 - The G7 countries claim to have stopped financing new fossil fuel-based energy projects, except in limited circumstances.
- **Net-Zero Targets:**
 - The G7 reiterates its commitment to achieve **net-zero status by 2050** and urges other major economies to do the same.
 - The world as a whole must become **net-zero by mid-century to meet the 1.5-degree Celsius target.**

- China aims for **net-zero by 2060, while India has set 2070** as its target.
- Post-2050 targets of major developing countries may change with evolving technologies and cleaner energy adoption.

Why did the PM of India Unveil Gandhi's Bust in Hiroshima?

- Mahatma Gandhi was one of the most influential leaders of the twentieth century, who championed the principles of **non-violence, peace, justice and human dignity.** His statue was unveiled at Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park, as a tribute to his legacy and a reminder of his relevance in today's world.
- The symbolic gesture was meant to highlight the shared commitment of the **G7 and its partners to prevent another nuclear catastrophe** and to pursue **nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.**
- It was also meant to **acknowledge the suffering and resilience of the Hibakusha, the survivors of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945.**
- The statue was also seen as a recognition of **India's role and contribution to global peace and security**, as well as its **partnership with Japan on various issues, including climate change.**
- The unveiling ceremony was attended by the **G7 leaders**, as well as the **Prime Minister of India**, who was invited as a guest to the summit along with other leaders from Australia, South Korea, and South Africa.

What Were the Outcomes of the Quad Leaders' Summit?

- The Quad Leaders' Summit was held on May 23, 2023, on the sidelines of the G7 summit. It was attended by the **Prime Minister of India, President Joe Biden of the US, Prime Minister Scott Morrison of Australia and Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga of Japan.**
- The Quad is an informal strategic dialogue among four democracies that share common interests and values in the **Indo-Pacific region.**
- One of the key areas of cooperation among the Quad members is **climate change.** The leaders issued a joint statement that reaffirmed their **commitment to the Paris Agreement and its full implementation.**
- They also announced several initiatives to enhance collaboration on clean energy transition, innovation, adaptation, and resilience. Some of these initiatives are:

Note:

- Launching a **new Quad Climate Working Group** to coordinate their efforts on domestic and international climate policies.
- Establishing a **Quad Clean Energy Partnership** to support the deployment of clean energy technologies in Indo-Pacific countries through technical assistance, capacity building, and financing mechanisms.
- Supporting a **Quad Green Shipping Network** to promote **decarbonization** of maritime transport through information sharing, best practices, and standards development.
- Expanding cooperation on **disaster risk reduction** and management through **joint exercises**, training, and information sharing.
- Supporting nature-based solutions for **climate mitigation** and adaptation through the conservation and restoration of **ecosystems** such as forests, **wetlands**, and **mangroves**.

What is the Group of Seven (G7)?

- It is an **intergovernmental organization** 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.**
- The **49th G7 summit** was held in **Hiroshima, Japan**.

Rasht-Astara Railway and INSTC

Why in News?

Recently, **Russia and Iran** have signed a deal to build an Iranian railway line, the **Rasht-Astara railway** as part of an **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)**.

- The Rasht-Astara railway is seen as an important link in the corridor, **intended to connect India, Iran, Russia, Azerbaijan** and other countries via railways and sea – a route that Russia says can rival the **Suez Canal** as a major global trade route.

What is Rash Astra Railway?

- It is a 162-kilometer railway that will connect the city of **Rasht (Iran) near the Caspian Sea**, to Astara (Azerbaijan) **on the border with Azerbaijan**. The new connection will shave four days off that traveling time frame.
- The unique **North-South transport artery**, of which the Rasht-Astara railway will become a part, will **help to significantly diversify global traffic flows**. Transportation along the new corridor will have significant competitive advantages and will substantially cut travel times and costs and help develop new logistics chains.
- The railway along the Caspian Sea coast would **help to connect Russian ports on the Baltic Sea with Iranian ports in the Indian Ocean** and the Gulf.

What is the International North-South Transport Corridor?

➤ About:

- It is a 7,200-kilometer **Multi-Mode Transit System** that connects ship, rail, and road routes for moving cargo between India, Iran, Azerbaijan, Russia, Central Asia, and Europe.
- It was launched on **12th September 2000** in St. Petersburg, by Iran, Russia and India for the purpose of promoting transportation cooperation among the Member States.
- Since then, INSTC membership has expanded to include 10 more countries – Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Ukraine, Syria, Belarus, and Oman.
 - Bulgaria has been included as an observer state. The Baltic countries like **Latvia and Estonia** have **also expressed willingness** to join.

➤ Routes and Modes:

- **Central Corridor:** It begins from the Jawaharlal Nehru Port in Mumbai and connects to the **Bandar Abbas port (Iran) on the Strait of Hormuz**. It then passes through the Iranian territory via Nowshahr, Amirabad, and Bandar-e-Anzali, runs along the Caspian Sea to reach the Olya and Astrakhan Ports in Russia.

Note:



- **Western Corridor:** It connects the railway network of Azerbaijan to that of Iran via the cross-border nodal points of Astara (Azerbaijan) and Astara (Iran) and further to Jawaharlal Nehru port in India via sea route.
- **Eastern Corridor:** It connects Russia to India through the Central Asian countries of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan.

6th Indian Ocean Conference

Why in News?

Improving and enhancing connectivity in the **Indian Ocean region** emerged as a top priority during the **6th Indian Ocean Conference held in Dhaka, Bangladesh.**

- The conference, with the theme “**Peace Prosperity and Partnership for a Resilient Future,**” brought together delegates from over 25 countries to discuss ways to promote **economic development while maintaining peace and stability in the region.**

What are the Major Highlights of the Conference?

- **Connectivity:** India, being a significant player in the **Indian Ocean region**, faces distinct challenges in achieving enhanced connectivity.
- **Establishing a land connection with Southeast Asia** poses unique difficulties for India. Despite the challenges, there is a call for collective efforts to overcome obstacles and improve connectivity.
 - The Indian Foreign Minister emphasized the potential game-changing impact of establishing an effective and efficient connectivity with the **Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).**
 - India also aspires to develop **multi-model connectivity to the Gulf and Central Asia.**
- To tackle the connectivity challenges and promote regional development, countries in the Indian Ocean region need to embrace cooperation and adopt a **long-term perspective:**
 - Examples like the **Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)** demonstrate the significance of deeper cooperation and shared efforts.
- **Upholding Legal Obligations and Agreements:** Disregarding legal obligations or violating long-standing agreements can **undermine trust and confidence**

among member nations. Taking a long-term view of cooperation is essential to ensure sustained progress.

- Adherence to international law, norms, and rules is vital for building a stable international order.
- **Sustainable Projects and Debt:** Unsustainable debt generated by unviable projects is a concern for countries in the region. (**Example-Sri Lanka**).
- **Encouraging transparent lending practices** and considering market realities are necessary to avoid future complications.
- **Shared Responsibility and Focus:** The Indian Ocean region requires shared responsibility and focused efforts to ensure its stability and prosperity:
 - **Ensuring maritime security is a collective responsibility** that should not be compromised for individual dominance. Practical action is needed, complementing diplomatic positions.
 - The conference also highlighted the **importance of climate action and counter-terrorism initiatives.** Nations must also address the threats posed by **extremism and fundamentalism, safeguarding their social fabrics.**

What is Indian Ocean Conference?

- Indian Ocean Conference is a flagship consultative forum of the Indian Ocean countries to deliberate upon the prospects of regional cooperation for **Security and Growth for All in Region (SAGAR).**
- The first edition of the Indian Ocean conference was held in Singapore in 2016 and fifth in 2021 in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

What are the Major Challenges Related to the Indian Ocean Region?

- **Geopolitical Competition:** The Indian Ocean region is a hotspot for geopolitical competition among **major powers and regional actors.** The competition involves **strategic interests, influence, and access to resources, leading to tensions and potential conflicts.**
 - The **Indian Ocean** occupies a central position between the major global powers, including **India, China, the United States,** and countries of the Middle East and Africa.
 - Its location allows for power projection and influence over regional affairs. The presence of key chokepoints such as the **Strait of Hormuz, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, and the Malacca Strait** further enhances its strategic significance.

Note:



- **China's Militarization Move:** China has been a challenge to India's interests and stability in the Indian Ocean.
 - India's neighbors are receiving **military and infrastructural assistance from China**, including submarines for Myanmar, frigates for Sri Lanka, and its overseas military base in Djibouti (Horn of Africa).
 - Also, **China has a hold over Hambantota port (Sri Lanka)**, which is just a few hundred miles off the shores of India.
- **Maritime Security Threats:** The IOR is vulnerable to various maritime security threats, including **piracy, smuggling, illegal fishing, and terrorism**.
 - Also, the vastness of the Indian Ocean makes it challenging to **monitor and secure its maritime domain effectively**.
- **Environmental Challenges:** **Climate change, rising sea levels, coral reef degradation, and marine pollution** are significant environmental challenges in the IOR.
 - These issues affect **coastal communities, marine ecosystems**, and the livelihoods of millions of people.

Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Leaders' Summit 2023

Why in News?

Recently, the **Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders' Summit 2023** took place in **San Francisco, United States**.

What are the Key Highlights of the APEC Leaders' Summit 2023?

- The APEC 2023 summit's theme is **"Creating a Resilient and Sustainable Future for All"**.
- APEC reaffirmed their commitment to free, fair, and open trade and investment, and to advancing inclusive and sustainable growth in the region.
- The summit concluded with the adoption of the **Golden Gate Declaration**.
 - The declaration underscores the commitment to creating a resilient and sustainable future for all member economies.
- The APEC leaders endorsed the APEC Action Agenda on Climate Change and Energy Security, which outlined a set of concrete actions and targets to enhance

cooperation and coordination on addressing the climate crisis and ensuring energy security.

What is Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation?

- **About:**
 - The APEC is a regional economic forum established in 1989 to leverage the **growing interdependence of the Asia-Pacific**.
 - APEC aims to create greater prosperity for the people of the region by promoting **balanced, inclusive, sustainable, innovative and secure growth** and by accelerating regional economic integration.
 - The APEC process is supported by a **permanent secretariat based in Singapore**.
- **Members:**
 - Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Philippines, Russia, Singapore, Chinese Taipei, Thailand, Vietnam and the United States.
 - India currently has the 'observer' status.



- **Significance:**
 - APEC accounts for approximately **62% of world GDP** and **48% of world trade in 2021**.
 - It is one of the oldest and most influential multilateral platforms in the Asia-Pacific region.
 - APEC operates based on **no binding commitments or treaty obligations**. Commitments are undertaken voluntarily and capacity-building projects help members implement APEC initiatives.
 - APEC's main goals are to support economic growth and prosperity, enhance regional economic integration, strengthen human security, and address common challenges such as climate change, health, and food security.

Note:

➤ India- APEC:

- India wanted to join APEC in 1991, it was the same year when **liberalisation** was introduced in the Indian economy which opened up its economy and trade more with other countries.
 - Some APEC members liked the idea of having India in the group. But some APEC members did not like the idea, because they thought **India still had too many rules and restrictions** that made it hard for them to do business with India.
- Another reason why India could not join APEC was that the **group decided to stop accepting new members in 1997**, to focus on improving the existing cooperation among the current members.
 - This decision was supposed to last until 2012, but it was not changed after that, so India still could not join APEC.

6th India-OPEC Energy Dialogue

Why in News?

The 6th High-Level Meeting of the **India- Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) Energy Dialogue** brought together key representatives at the **OPEC Secretariat in Vienna, Austria**.

- The meeting delved into critical aspects of **oil and energy markets**.

What are the Key Highlights of India-OPEC Energy Dialogue?

- The Meeting focused on key issues related to oil and energy markets with a specific emphasis on **ensuring availability, affordability and sustainability**, which are necessary to ensure the stability of energy markets.
- The meeting concluded with both parties underscoring the importance of fostering enhanced **cooperation between OPEC and India** moving forward.
- **World Oil Outlook 2023**, which forecasted that **India would be the fastest-growing major developing economy**, averaging long-term growth of **6.1% between 2022-2045** and accounting for **over 28% of incremental global energy demand** during the same period.
 - Both sides have recognized the importance of **India as the third-largest energy consumer, crude oil importer and the fourth-largest global refiner**, in global economic growth and energy demand.

- The meeting also acknowledged the achievements and initiatives of India in the fields of **renewable energy**, energy efficiency, **hydrogen economy**, and **climate change mitigation**.
- It was agreed to hold the next High-Level Meeting of the India-OPEC Energy Dialogue in 2024 in India.

What is the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)?

➤ About:

- The OPEC is a permanent, intergovernmental Organization, created at the Baghdad Conference in 1960, by Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela.
 - It is **headquartered in Vienna, Austria**.

➤ Objective:

- OPEC's objective is to **coordinate and unify petroleum policies among Member Countries**, to secure **fair and stable prices** for petroleum producers; an efficient, economic and regular supply of petroleum to consuming nations; and a fair return on capital to those investing in the industry.

➤ Members:

- Algeria, Angola, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Venezuela.
- OPEC nations produce about 30% of the world's crude oil.
 - **Saudi Arabia is the biggest single oil supplier within the group**, producing more than 10 million barrels a day.

Indian Ocean Rim Association

Why in News?

Sri Lanka is set to take over the chairmanship of the **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)** during the **23rd Council of Ministers' Meeting** scheduled for **11th October, 2023**, in Colombo, Sri Lanka. It will hold the chairmanship of the association from 2023 to 2025.

- Bangladesh held the chairmanship from **November 2021 - November 2023**.

Note:

What is the Indian Ocean Rim Association?

➤ About:

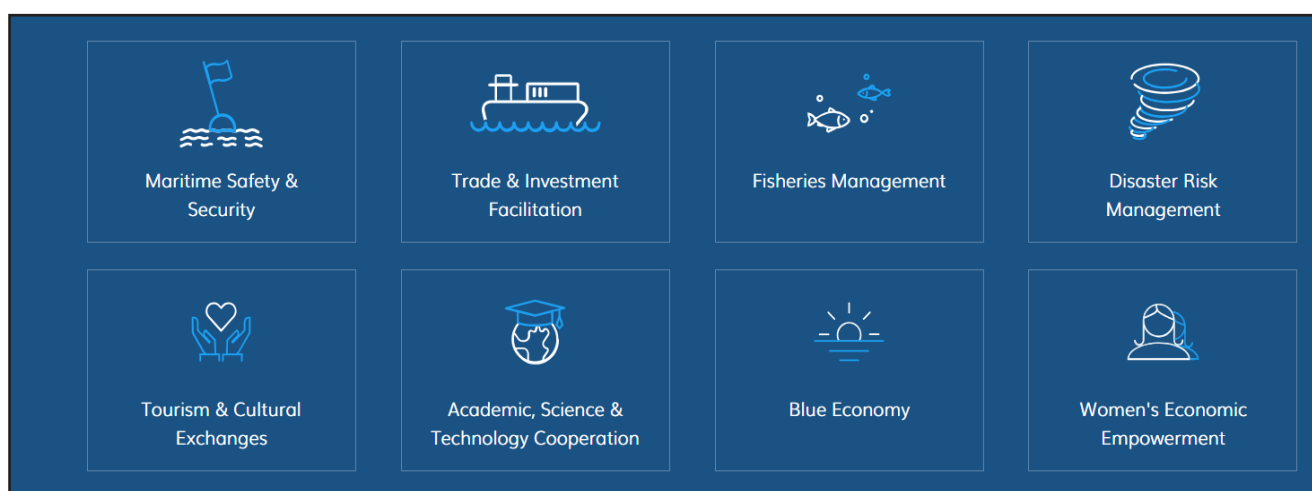
- The vision for IORA originated during a visit by the then **President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela** of South Africa to India in **1995**, where he said: **“the natural urge of the facts of history and geography should broaden itself to include the concept of an Indian Ocean rim for socio-economic co-operation.”**
- It underpinned the **Indian Ocean Rim Initiative in March 1995**, and the creation of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (then known as the **Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation**) in March 1997.

➤ Members:

- Currently, IORA has **23 Member States** and 11 Dialogue Partners.
 - **Members:** Australia, Bangladesh, Comoros, France, **India**, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Oman, Seychelles, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, Yemen.
 - **Dialogue Partners:** China, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Germany, Italy, Japan, South Korea, **Russia**, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the **United States of America**.

➤ Secretariat: Mauritius.

➤ Six Priority and Two Focus Areas:



➤ Indian Ocean:

- As the **third largest ocean woven together by trade routes**, commands control of major sea-lanes carrying **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**, the Indian Ocean remains an important lifeline to international trade and transport.

CJI Urges SCO Member States to Strive for Judicial Cooperation

Why in News?

The **Chief Justice of India (CJI)** recently addressed the **18th meeting of the Chief Justices/Chairpersons of the Supreme Courts** of the **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)** member states.

- The conference provided an opportunity for member and observer states to reflect upon the **challenges that are common to their jurisdictions** and emphasised the need for **mutual cooperation and sharing of experiences** and wisdom gathered.

What are the Major Highlights of the Meeting?

➤ Smart and Accessible Judiciary:

- The CJI highlighted the **need for judicial cooperation** and adoption of new mechanisms to simplify and **make the court processes more smart and accessible** to the common people.

➤ Importance of Technology in Judiciary:

- The CJI also stressed the **importance of technology in bridging the gap between citizens and the justice system**.

Note:



- The CJI shared recent endeavours made by the **Supreme Court of India**, such as **launching an e-version of Supreme Court reports, artificial intelligence-based live transcription of court proceedings**, and translation of judgments in **multiple regional languages**, among others.
- **Issues Highlighted:**
 - Also, various issues such as the **overly populated prisons**, access to quality legal representation, **modern public judicial services**, court work overload, **limited judicial resources**, **high pendency** of cases, and the need for adequate infrastructure facilities were highlighted.

What is SCO?

- **About:**
 - The **SCO** is a regional **intergovernmental organisation** that promotes cooperation between its member states in the areas of **security, economy, and culture**.
- **Genesis:**
 - Prior to the creation of SCO in 2001, **Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan** were members of the **Shanghai Five**.
 - Following the **accession of Uzbekistan to the organisation in 2001**, the **Shanghai Five was renamed the SCO**.
 - **India and Pakistan** became members in **2017**.
 - **Observer States:** Iran and Belarus
 - Iran will be the **newest member of the largest regional organisation**- the **SCO**, when it joins the forum in **April 2023** under the chairmanship of India.
- **Structure:**
 - **Heads of State Council:** The Supreme SCO body which decides its internal functioning and its interaction with other States & international organisations, and considers international issues.
 - **Heads of Government Council:** Approves the budget, considers and decides upon issues related to **economic spheres of interaction** within SCO.
 - **Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs:** Considers issues related to day-to-day activities.

- **Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS):** Established to **combat terrorism, separatism and extremism**.
- **Official language:**
 - The official working language of the SCO Secretariat is **Russian and Chinese**.

G20 Culture Ministerial Meeting and B20 Summit 2023

Why in News?

Recently, the Prime Minister (PM) of India concluded the **G20** Culture Ministerial Meeting in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, with a consensus on safeguarding **cultural heritage highlighting** repatriation and addressing threats to assets.

- Additionally, the PM also addressed the **Business 20 (B20) India 2023 summit** in New Delhi.

What are the Key Highlights of the G20 Culture Meet?

- **Acknowledgment of Threats to Cultural Heritage:**
 - The “**Kashi Culture Pathway**” document identified **various threats to cultural heritage**, including looting, illicit trafficking of cultural property, destruction of cultural sites, desecration of relics, and more.
- **Impact of Cultural Threats:**
 - These threats can lead to the irreversible loss of cultural assets, disrupt socio-cultural practices, and affect the cultural, human, economic, and social rights of people and communities.
- **Concern Over Illicit Online Trade:**
 - Culture ministers from G20 countries expressed concerns about the **rise of online platforms enabling illicit trafficking of cultural property** and emphasized the need for potential regulations to address this issue.
- **Link Between Cultural Property and Organized Crime:**
 - Ministers highlighted the connection between the destruction and trafficking of cultural property and **organized crimes** like **money laundering, corruption, tax evasion, and terrorist financing, especially in conflict situations**.

Note:

- **Unity Against Cultural Destruction:**
 - All participating nations united against intentional or collateral destruction of cultural heritage, particularly in conflict scenarios that hinder peace and sustainable development.
- **Commitment to Living Heritage for Development:**
 - The G-20 nations also reaffirmed their commitment to **strengthen institutional and policy frameworks to harness living heritage** (inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants) for sustainable development.
- **Prime Ministers' Museum:**
 - The PM of India highlighted the **"Prime Ministers' Museum" in New Delhi**, which showcases India's democratic heritage and emphasized the development of the **"Yuge Yugeen Bharat" National Museum, set to become the world's largest museum showcasing India's history and culture spanning over 5,000 years.**

What is Business 20 (B20)?

- **About:**
 - The B20 is the **official G20 dialogue forum involving the global business community.**
 - B20 plays a leading role in mobilizing global business leaders' perspectives on global economic and trade governance.
 - It represents the **unified voice of the entire G20 business community.**
 - Each year, a **B20 Chair is appointed by the G20 Presidency**, supported by a B20 Sherpa and secretariat.
 - B20's goal is to provide **actionable policy recommendations aligned with rotating presidency priorities to foster economic growth.**
 - B20 operates through **Task Forces (TFs) and Action Councils (ACs) responsible for consensus-based policy recommendations.**
 - These recommendations are directed towards the G20 and international organizations.
- **B20 India 2023 Theme:**
 - The theme for the B20 India is **R.A.I.S.E. This stands for Responsible, Accelerated, Innovative, Sustainable, Equitable Businesses.**
 - The vision is to collaborate with global partners in areas such as inclusive global value chains

(GVCs), energy and climate change, digital transformation, financial inclusion, and the future of work.

- **B20 India Members:**
 - Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, European Union, United States, United Kingdom, Türkiye, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Russia, and Mexico.
- **Highlights of B20 India Summit:**
 - **Caution Against Treating Countries as Markets:**
 - The PM of India cautioned global businesses to move beyond treating countries solely as markets.
 - Stressed the importance of **balancing the interests of both producers and consumers for sustaining a profitable market.**
 - **Global Supply Chain Disruptions and India's Solution:**
 - Pointed to **irreversible disruptions in global supply chains post-Covid-19 pandemic.**
 - Questioned the efficiency of such supply chains during critical times.
 - Presented India as a trustworthy solution to address disruptions in global supply chains.
 - Highlighted India's technological prowess, indicating its capacity to adopt innovative solutions and digital tools to manage and optimize supply chains.
 - **Rethinking Business Approach:**
 - Advocated for a reboot of the **traditional "brand and sales" approach.**
 - Emphasised the need to **improve the purchasing power of people.**
 - Highlighted **India's success in lifting 13.5 crore people out of poverty in five years, creating a new consumer base.**
 - **International Consumer Care Day:**
 - Suggested an annual **"International Consumer Care Day" to enhance trust between producers and buyers.**
 - Proposed businesses globally come together to pledge commitment towards consumers' well-being and market integrity.

Note:

- **Cryptocurrencies and AI Ethical Considerations:**
 - Addressed the emerging challenges posed by **cryptocurrencies and artificial intelligence (AI)**.
 - Highlighted the need for an integrated global framework to address concerns from all stakeholders.
 - Discussed **ethical considerations associated with AI, including algorithm bias and societal impact**.
 - Advocated for collaboration between **global business communities and governments to ensure the expansion of ethical AI**.
- **Challenges and Opportunities:**
 - Urged businesses and society to analyze decisions' impact on the planet.
 - Stressed that answers to challenges like **climate change, energy crisis, food supply chain imbalance, and cybersecurity will shape business and humanity's future**.
- **B20 Task force Recommendations:**
 - The Task Force has made four key recommendations they are
 - Global **Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Acceleration**.
 - **Fund for financing of 'Global Public Goods'** (with initial thrust on geographically fungible SDG projects in climate, energy, biodiversity, and ocean pollution)
 - **Capacity building of domestic financial sectors** for SDGs financing
 - Improving **MSME access to finance and reducing cost of capital to foster inclusive growth**.
 - Financing **sustainable and resilient infrastructure with enhanced focus on healthcare, energy, and digital infrastructure**.

Ethical AI:

- AI that adheres to well-defined ethical guidelines regarding fundamental values, including such things as individual rights, privacy, non-discrimination, and non-manipulation.

NATO Suspends CFE Treaty Amid Russian Withdrawal

Why in News?

Recently, **NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization)** has announced the formal suspension of the **Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE)**, a key **Cold War-Era Security Treaty** in response to **Russia's pullout from the deal**.

What is the Background of Russia's Pullout from CFE?

➤ About CFE Treaty:

- The CFE Treaty, signed in **1990 and fully ratified in 1992**, aimed to prevent **massing of conventional armed forces by NATO and Warsaw Pact** countries near mutual borders during the Cold War.
- It placed **limits on the deployment of conventional military forces** in Europe and played a significant role in **reducing tensions and arms build-up in the region**.
 - This treaty was **one of several Cold War-era agreements** involving Russia and the United States.

➤ Russia's Withdrawal:

- Russia had suspended its participation in the CFE Treaty in 2007 and formally announced **its intention to withdraw in 2015**.
- The recent move to finalise the withdrawal came after the Russian President signed a bill **denouncing the treaty in May 2023**.
- Russia has blamed the US and its allies for the withdrawal, **citing their "destructive position" on the treaty**.

➤ Ukraine Conflict's Impact:

- **Russia's invasion of Ukraine** in February 2022, which led to a **significant military presence in Ukraine**, influenced its decision to **withdraw from the treaty**.
- The conflict has **direct implications for NATO member states** that share borders with Ukraine, such as Poland, Slovakia, Romania, and Hungary.

Note:

What are Russia's Concerns and NATO's Position?

- Russia claims CFE is no longer serves its interests because it was signed to restrict the use of conventional weapons and equipment and not other advanced weapons.
- Russia cited that preserving the CFE Treaty has become unacceptable from the standpoint of its **fundamental security interests**, citing developments in Ukraine and NATO's expansion.
- NATO underlines its commitment to reducing military risk, preventing misperceptions, and maintaining security.
- The suspension of the CFE Treaty underscores the ongoing tensions between Russia and NATO, which have significant implications for **global security and regional stability**, particularly in **Eastern Europe**.

What is the Cold War?

- The Cold War was a **period (1945-1991) of geopolitical tension** between the Soviet Union and its satellite states (the Eastern European countries), and the United States with its allies (the Western European countries) after **World War II**.
- Post World War II, the world **got divided into two power blocs** dominated by two superpowers viz. the Soviet Union and the US.
 - The two superpowers were primarily engaged in an ideological war between the capitalist USA and the communist Soviet Union.
- The term "Cold" is used because there **was no large-scale fighting directly between the two sides**.



What are Other Cold-War Era NATO and USSR Treaties?

- **The North Atlantic Treaty (1949):**
 - The North Atlantic Treaty, also known as the **Washington Treaty**, established NATO on 4th April, 1949.
 - It was a **collective defence alliance formed by Western nations**, including the US, Canada, and various European countries.
- **The Warsaw Pact (1955):**
 - The Warsaw Pact, formally known as the **Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance**, was signed on 14th May, 1955.
 - It was a response to NATO and established a similar mutual **defence alliance among the Eastern Bloc countries**, led by the Soviet Union.
 - The Warsaw Pact included the **Soviet Union, East Germany, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania**, among others.
- **The Four Power Agreement on Berlin (1971):**
 - This agreement, signed on 3rd September, 1971, between the **United States, the United Kingdom, France, and the Soviet Union**, addressed the **status of Berlin during the Cold War**.
 - It aimed to **improve relations and ease tensions** in the divided city.
- **The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty (1987):**
 - It was signed on 8th December, 1987, by the U.S. President and Soviet General Secretary, the INF Treaty eliminated an **entire class of intermediate-range nuclear missiles from Europe**.
 - The treaty marked a significant step in **reducing Cold War tensions** and nuclear arms.
- **The Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) and START Treaties:**
 - **SALT** were a **series of bilateral conferences and international treaties** signed between the United States and the Soviet Union.
 - These treaties had the goal of **reducing the number of long-range ballistic missiles (strategic arms)** that each side could possess and manufacture.

Note:



- First treaty, known as SALT I, was signed in 1972.
 - By signing SALT I, the US and the USSR agreed to a limited number of ballistic missiles, as well as a limited number of missile deployment sites.

Note: In February 2023, Russia had announced to **suspend its participation in the New START Treaty**, the last remaining major military agreement with the United States.

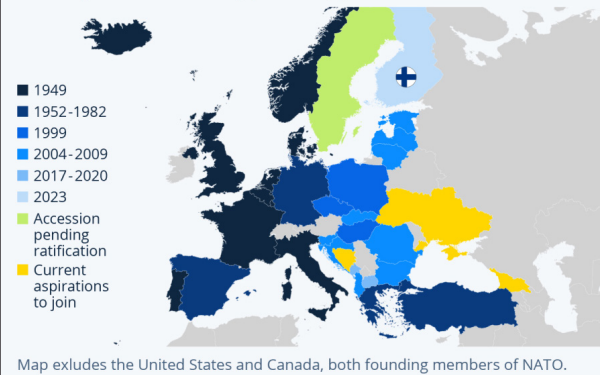
- The New START Treaty came into force in February, 2011 between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on measures for the **further reduction and limitation of strategic offensive arms.**
- **The Helsinki Accords (1975):**
 - The Helsinki Final Act, signed in August, 1975, was not a treaty but a **declaration of principles agreed upon by 35 countries**, including NATO members and Warsaw Pact countries.
 - It aimed to improve **relations between East and West** and included commitments to respect human rights and territorial integrity.

What is NATO?

- **About:**
 - **NATO, or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization**, is a political and military alliance consisting of 31 member countries.
 - It was formed in 1949 to promote mutual defence and collective security among its members.
- **Members:**
 - **In 1949, there were 12 founding members of the Alliance:** Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom and the United States.
 - **Since then, 19 more countries have joined the Alliance:** Greece and Turkey (1952); Germany (1955); Spain (1982); Czechia, Hungary and Poland (1999); Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia (2004); Albania and Croatia (2009); Montenegro (2017); North Macedonia (2020); and Finland (2023).

Finland Becomes 31st Member of NATO

European countries by year they joined NATO



- **Headquarters: Brussels, Belgium:**
 - Headquarters of Allied Command Operations: **Mons, Belgium.**
- **Special Provision:**
 - **Article 5:** Article 5 of the NATO treaty is a key provision that states that an attack on one member is an attack on all members.
 - This provision has only been invoked once, **after the 9/11 terrorist attacks** in the United States.
 - However, NATO's protection **does not extend to members' civil wars or internal coups.**
- **Alliances of NATO:**
 - [Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council \(EAPC\)](#)
 - [Mediterranean Dialogue](#)
 - [Istanbul Cooperation Initiative \(ICI\)](#)

Finland Joins NATO

Why in News?

Finland has officially joined **NATO** after its application was ratified in record time. This move was **supported by the majority of NATO members**, who believed that Finland's membership would enhance the **alliance's strength in the Baltic area.**

- However, Sweden's path to NATO membership remains **blocked by Turkey and Hungary.**

Note:



What is the Background and Impact of Finland Joining NATO?

- **Background:**
 - Finland has joined NATO due to **Russia's invasion of Ukraine**, which has made its smaller neighbors feel the need for the powerful military backing that NATO provides. Finland and Sweden applied for NATO membership after the invasion.
 - Finland which shares a 1,340-km border with Russia, has ended more than 70 years of military non-alignment — in fact, in the Cold War years, **a policy of neutrality between the Soviet Union and the West was known as 'Finlandisation'**, and Finlandisation had been one of the options discussed for Ukraine before Russia invaded it.
- **Impacts of Joining NATO:**
 - Finland has **gained better security, but it is losing out on significant trade and tourism revenue it was making from Russia**, and its status as a confidence-building presence in the Baltic Sea and Europe at large is being threatened.
 - For NATO, the **addition of Finland brings in a military trained to repel an attack from Russia and strengthens its position to station weapons closer to Russia.**
 - However, Russia sees this as a dangerous historical mistake that could escalate the Ukraine conflict and has said it **will strengthen its military capacity in its west and northwest.**

What is NATO?

- **About:**
 - **NATO, or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization**, is a political and military alliance consisting of **31 member countries**.
 - It was formed in **1949** to promote **mutual defence and collective security among its members**.
- **Members:**
 - In 1949, there were 12 founding members of the Alliance: **Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom and the United States**.
 - Since then, **19 more countries** have joined the Alliance: Greece and Turkey (1952); Germany (1955); Spain (1982); Czechia, Hungary and Poland (1999); Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania,

Slovakia and Slovenia (2004); Albania and Croatia (2009); Montenegro (2017); North Macedonia (2020); and **Finland (2023)**.

- **Headquarters:** Brussels, Belgium.
 - **Headquarters of Allied Command Operations: Mons, Belgium.**
- **Special Provision:**
 - **Article 5:** Article 5 of the NATO treaty is a key provision that **states that an attack on one member is an attack on all members.**
 - This provision has **only been invoked once, after the 9/11 terrorist attacks** in the United States.
 - However, NATO's protection does not extend to members' **civil wars or internal coups**.
- **Alliances of NATO:**
 - **Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC)**
 - **Mediterranean Dialogue**
 - **Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI)**

International Court of Justice and Climate Change

Why in News?

The **United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)** has asked the **International Court of Justice (ICJ)** by passing a **Resolution** to give its opinion on countries' obligations towards Climate Change based on the **U.N. Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC)**.

- The resolution was pushed through by **one of the smallest countries** in the world, the Pacific Island of Vanuatu, an island that was devastated in **2015** by the effects of **Cyclone Pam**, believed to have been spurred by climate change, that wiped out 95% of its crops and affected two-thirds of its population.

What does the Resolution Seek?

- The UNGA asked the ICJ to answer two questions,
 - What are the obligations of states under international law to ensure the protection of the climate system for present and future generations?
 - What are the **legal consequences under these obligations** for states where they, by their acts and omissions, have caused significant harm to the climate system, particularly for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and for people who are harmed.

Note:



- The resolution refers to international agreements like the **Paris Agreement** and the **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)**.
- The ICJ will take around **18 months to give its opinion**.

What is India's Position?

- India has not taken a clear stance on the UN resolution, but it **generally supports climate justice** and accountability for **Global Warming**.
- The Indian government has referred the resolution to legal authorities to assess its implications and international ramifications.
- India has updated its **NDC (Nationally Determined Contributions)** commitments and plans to source half its electricity from renewable sources by 2030, but it did not co-sponsor the draft resolution.
- India is closely watching how major powers like the **U.S. and China respond to the resolution**, as their support is crucial for its implementation.
- India has emphasized that the ICJ process can only address climate change issues broadly and cannot **name or profile any one country**, also stressing that any attempt to impose an opinion in a **"top-down" manner would be resisted**.

Is the Advisory Opinion of the ICJ Binding?

- The advisory opinion of the ICJ would not be **legally binding as a judgment**, but it would carry **legal weight and moral authority**.
- It could provide important clarification on international environmental laws and **streamline the process for issues related to climate finance**, climate justice, and the loss and damages fund at the COP process.
- Past advisory opinions given by the ICJ, such as those on the Palestinian issue and the dispute between the U.K. and Mauritius over the **Chagos Islands, have been respected**.

What is the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change?

- UNFCCC was signed in 1992 at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development also known as the Earth Summit, the Rio Summit or the Rio Conference.
 - India is among the select few countries to have hosted the COP of all three Rio conventions on climate change (UNFCCC), biodiversity (CBD) and land (**United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification**).

- The UNFCCC entered into force in 1994 and has been ratified by 197 countries.
- It is the parent treaty of the **2015 Paris Agreement**. It is also the parent treaty of the **1997 Kyoto Protocol**.
- The UNFCCC secretariat (UN Climate Change) is the United Nations entity tasked with supporting the global response to the threat of climate change. It is located in **Bonn, Germany**.
- Its objective is to achieve **stabilisation of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere** at a level that would prevent dangerous repercussions within a time frame so as to allow ecosystems to adapt naturally and enable sustainable development.

OPEC+ Announces Additional Production Cuts

Why in News?

The **Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)** and its allies, collectively known as **OPEC+**, announced a **surprise reduction of 1.16 million barrels per day (bpd) in their oil production** to support market stability.

What is the Background of Voluntary Cut in Oil Production?

- **Background:**
 - Oil prices skyrocketed after the **Russia-Ukraine Conflict** and have been fluctuating in recent months, with a drop towards **USD 70 per barrel** in March 2023 due to concerns of a **global banking crisis** that could hit demand.
- **Countries Involved:**
 - **Till yet, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, UAE, Kuwait, Oman, Algeria, Kazakhstan, Russia and Gabon** announced a voluntary oil output cut.
 - However, not all OPEC+ members are joining the voluntary cuts, as some are already pumping well below agreed levels due to a **lack of production capacity**.

What will be the Major Impacts of Voluntary Cut in Oil Production?

- **Impact on the U.S:** The move is likely to be highly detrimental to the US, which has repeatedly asked the organisation to increase oil production.

Note:

- **Impact on Non-OPEC Countries:** The production cuts could have an impact on non-OPEC countries that rely on oil exports, as they may face **increased competition in the market.**
- **Impact on India:** India imports nearly **85% of its crude requirement**, the oil import bill will rise on account of the rise in prices due to decreased production.
 - The rise in import bills will not only lead to inflation and a rise in the **Current Account Deficit (CAD)** and **fiscal deficit** but also weaken the rupee against the dollar and hurt stock market sentiment.
 - As per **Investment Information and Credit Rating Agency (ICRA)**, for every USD 10 per barrel increase in the price of the Indian crude oil basket, the CAD could widen by **USD 14-USD 15 billion, or 0.4% of GDP.**

What is OPEC+?

- **OPEC:** Established in 1960 by founding members **Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela**, OPEC has since expanded and now has **13 member states.**
 - Member countries are: **Algeria, Angola, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Venezuela.**
 - **Headquarter:** Vienna, Austria.
 - OPEC produces about **40% of the world's crude oil** and its members' exports make up around **60% of global petroleum trade.**
- **OPEC+:** In 2016, with the addition of another **10 allied major oil-producing countries**, the OPEC is known as OPEC+.
 - OPEC+ countries include 13 OPEC member countries and **Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Brunei, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Mexico, Oman, Russia, South Sudan and Sudan.**
- **Objective:**
 - The objective of the organisation is to **“coordinate and unify the petroleum policies of its Member Countries** and ensure the **stabilisation of oil markets in order to secure an efficient, economic and regular supply** of petroleum to consumers, a steady income to producers and a fair return on capital for those investing in the petroleum industry.

15th BRICS Summit

Why in News?

The 15th **BRICS summit** hosted by South Africa in Johannesburg, holds significant importance against the backdrop of **geopolitical changes and global economic dynamics.**

- Notably, this summit marks the first in-person gathering since 2019 due to the **Covid -19 pandemic.**
- The theme for the 15th BRICS Summit is **“BRICS and Africa: Partnership for Mutually Accelerated Growth, Sustainable Development and Inclusive Multilateralism”.**

What are the Key Highlights of the 15th BRICS Summit?

- **BRICS Expansion:**
 - BRICS marked its 15th summit by **expanding its membership from five to eleven countries**, reflecting a concerted effort to enhance its global standing.
 - **Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Ethiopia, and Argentina** joined the BRICS fold, amplifying the group's representation **across the Middle East, Africa, and South America.**
 - Full membership will take effect on **January 1, 2024.**
 - The original BRIC members had two things in common: **large economies, and high potential growth rates.**
 - The expanded BRICS-11 is a less coherent group; some are going through **crises, and others are thriving.** This could signal an expansion of the **agenda beyond economics.**
- **India's Stakes in the BRICS Summit:**
 - The summit is important for India, as it is the first in-person meeting since the **India-China military standoff at the Line of Actual Control.**
 - After the bilateral talks between the **Prime Minister (PM) of India and President of China**, both nations have agreed to step up efforts for the **disengagement of troops and de-escalation of tensions along the LAC.**
 - India played a key role in **drafting membership criteria and promoting strategic partnerships among new entrants.**
 - India leverages BRICS to expand its network of allies and enhance its geopolitical influence.

Note:



- India sees BRICS as a “non-western” rather than an “anti-western” group, emphasizing the platform’s diversity of perspectives.
 - India aims to enhance **cooperation with China and Russia for the Leader’s declaration.**
- The Indian PM proposed to establish a **BRICS space exploration consortium** to advance cooperation in the field of space technology and research.
- India called for BRICS collaboration under the **International Big Cat Alliance** in protecting the endangered big cats that live in their countries .
- **Geopolitical Context and Significance:**
 - The summit gains new importance as it follows the **Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, impacting global stability and security.**
 - BRICS discussions are perceived to carry a “counter-western” perspective.
 - Amidst attempts to “isolate” Russia over the Ukraine conflict, **BRICS deliberations gain importance.**
- **United Nations Reform:**
 - India and other BRICS members support comprehensive **reform of the United Nations**, including the Security Council, to make it more democratic, representative, effective and efficient.
- **Climate Change:**
 - BRICS members agreed to **address the challenges posed by climate change while also ensuring a just, affordable and sustainable transition to a low-carbon and low-emission economy.**
 - The five nations called on developed countries to lead by example and support developing countries towards such transitions.
 - BRICS nations opposed trade barriers imposed by certain developed countries under the pretext of tackling climate change.

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 **formalized** 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 hosted the chair for the 2021 BRICS Summit.

➤ **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**, providing mutual support and strengthening the financial stability of the BRICS nations.

○ **Customs Agreements:**

- Customs agreements were signed to **coordinate and ease trade transport** between BRICS countries

○ **Launched of Remote Sensing Satellite:**

- In **August 2021**, the **five space agencies signed an agreement on the Cooperation on BRICS Remote Sensing Satellite Constellation.**
 - The constellation is made up of six existing satellites: Gaofen-6 and Ziyuan III 02, both developed by China, CBERS-4, jointly developed by Brazil and China, Kanopus-V type, developed by Russia, and Resourcesat-2 and 2A, both developed by India.

Note:

Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty

Why in News?

Russia has recently indicated that it is moving towards **revoking its ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT)**.

What is the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT)?

➤ Genesis of the CTBT:

- The CTBT is a multilateral treaty aimed at **banning all nuclear explosions, whether for military or peaceful purposes**.
 - The roots of the CTBT can be traced back to the **Cold War** era when the United States and the **Soviet Union** were engaged in a **nuclear arms race**, conducting numerous nuclear tests.
 - Between **1945 and 1996**, over **2,000 nuclear tests** took place globally, with the **U.S. conducting 1,032 tests** and the **Soviet Union conducting 715 tests**, among others.
 - In response to concerns about the **environmental and health impacts of nuclear tests**, the international community made efforts to limit testing.
 - The **Limited Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (LTBT) of 1963** prohibited nuclear testing in the **atmosphere, outer space, and underwater** but allowed underground tests.
 - The **Threshold Test Ban Treaty (TTBT) of 1974** prohibits **underground nuclear weapons tests** and establishes a **nuclear "threshold,"** yet it falls short of providing a comprehensive ban on all nuclear testing.
- #### ➤ Breakthrough with the CTBT:
- The end of the Cold War and the **dissolution of the Soviet Union**

created a conducive environment for comprehensive arms control measures.

- The CTBT was negotiated at the **Conference on Disarmament in Geneva in 1994**.
- In 1996, the **United Nations** adopted the CTBT, which imposed a complete ban on nuclear weapons testing, closing the gaps left by previous treaties.
- The CTBT became available for signature in September 1996, signifying a major advancement

Treaties Against Nuclear Weapons

Part - I

Nuclear Weapons

- The most dangerous weapons on earth; a **bomb or missile that uses nuclear energy to cause an explosion**.
- Nuclear weapons release energy either by **nuclear fission (atomic bombs) or nuclear fusion (hydrogen bombs)**.
- Even a single weapon is potent of **destroying a whole city**, potentially **killing millions, jeopardising the natural environment** and lives of future generations.
- They were used for the **first and last time in WW-II** by the US in 1945 on **Hiroshima and Nagasaki**.

Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT 1970)



- **Objective:**
 - Prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and its technology
 - Foster peaceful uses of nuclear energy
 - Further the goal of nuclear disarmament
- **Member States:**
 - 191 with **5 nuclear-weapon states (NWS)** (US, Russia, UK, France & China)
- **Nuclear-Weapon States:**
 - Those who **manufactured & exploded** a nuclear weapon or nuclear explosive device **before 1st January 1967**
- **Significance:**
 - **Only binding treaty** to the goal of disarmament by the NWS
- **India and NPT:**
 - India (along with Pakistan, Israel, North Korea, and South Sudan) is **not a member**
 - Opposes it as a **discriminative disarmament policy**
 - India's policy - **No First Use against NWS and no use against non-NWS**
- **NPT Review Conference:**
 - **Undertakes review** of the treaty's implementation **quinquennially**



Note:

in the global endeavour to halt nuclear testing across the world.

- The CTBT will enter into force 180 days after it has been **ratified by all 44 states listed in Annex 2 to the treaty**, which are states that possessed nuclear reactors or research reactors at the time of its adoption.

➤ **Current Position:**

- It has been signed by 187 nations and ratified by 178. However, the treaty cannot formally enter into force until it is **ratified by 44 specific nations**. Eight of these nations have yet to ratify the treaty:

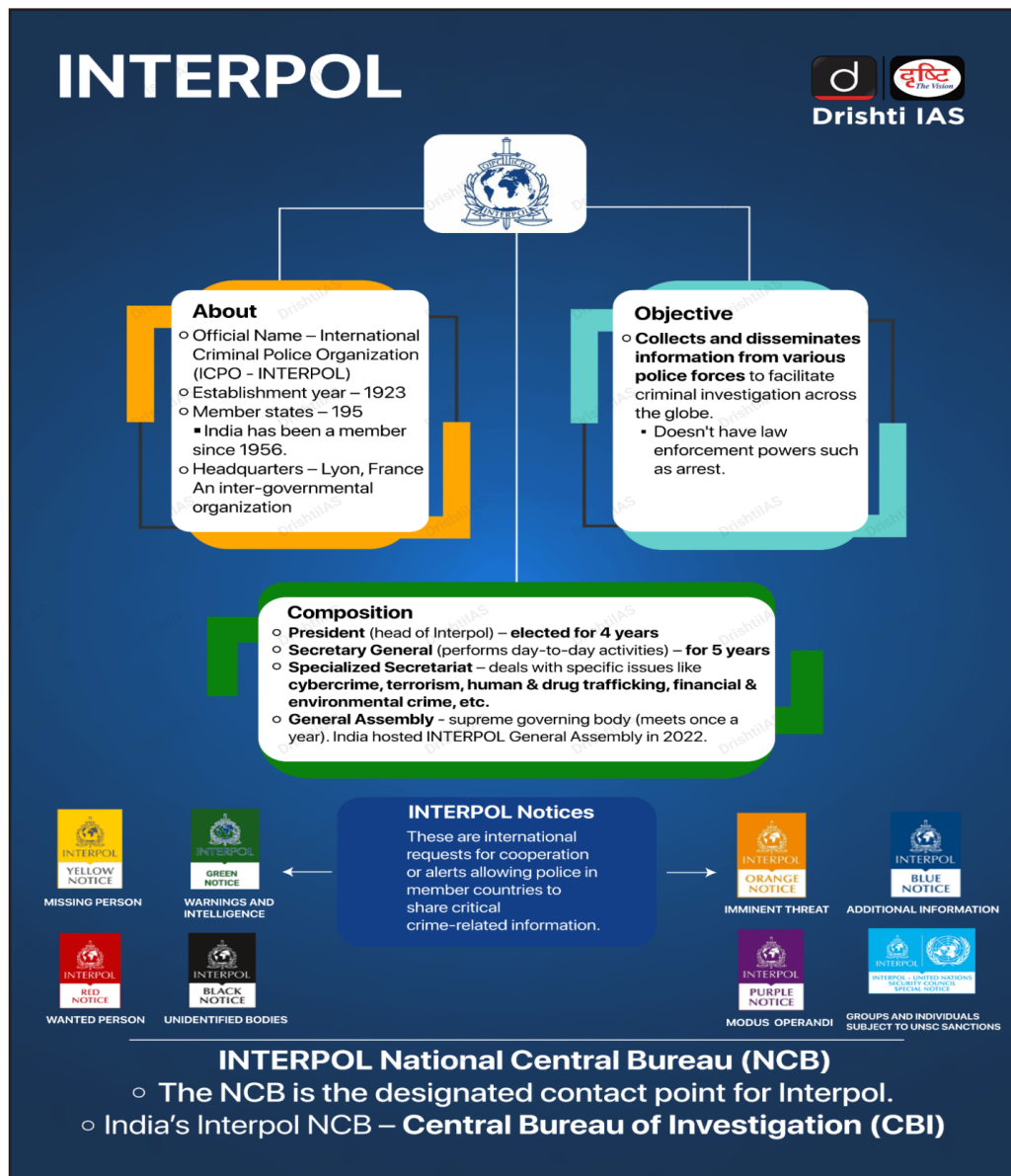
- China, India, Pakistan, North Korea, Israel, Iran, Egypt, United States.

Notices of Interpol

Why in News?

Recently concerns have been raised about the misuse of **Interpol's notice system**, especially the issuance of **blue corner notices**, which are **less scrutinised** than their red corner notices.

- The number of blue notices has **approximately doubled in the last ten years**.
- Critics have argued that **countries often exploit** existing protocols to target political refugees and dissidents.



Note:

What is the Interpol Notice System?

- **About:**
 - **Interpol** serves as a vital information-sharing network for **national police forces** to combat transnational crimes.
 - **Interpol (General Secretariat)** issues notices to member states for missing or wanted persons, which, while **not mandatory** for states to follow, are often treated as warrants for **arrest and extradition**.
- **Requesting Authority:** Notices are issued at the request of:
 - A member country's **Interpol National Central Bureau**
 - At the request of **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.
 - At the request of the **United Nations** concerning the implementation of sanctions imposed by the **Security Council**.
- **Types of Notices:**



Third South Summit

Why in News?

Recently, the **3rd South Summit** was held in Kampala, Uganda, bringing **together the members of the Group of 77 (G77) and China**.

- The Third South Summit brought together the **134 members of the Group of 77 and China** to boost **South-South cooperation** on trade, investment, sustainable development, climate change, poverty eradication, and digital economy, among other areas. The **theme of the summit was "Leaving No One Behind."**

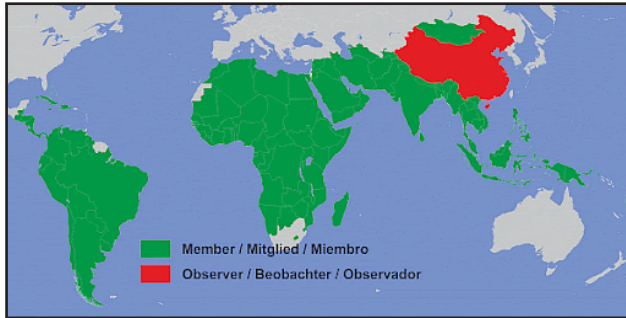
What is Group of 77 (G77)?

- **Establishment:**
 - The **Group of 77 (G-77)** was established on **15th June 1964** by signatories of the "**Joint Declaration of the Seventy-Seven Developing Countries**" issued at the end of the first session of the **United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)** in Geneva.
 - The **G77 group has 134 members excluding China** because the **Chinese government does not consider itself a member, but rather a partner** that provides political and financial support to the group. **Although the group (G 77) mentions China as its member.**
- **Aims:**
 - The Group of 77 is the **largest intergovernmental organization** of developing countries in the United Nations.
 - It provides the means for the countries of the **South to articulate and promote their collective economic interests** and enhance their joint negotiating capacity on all major international economic issues within the United Nations system.
- **Structure:**
 - A Chairman, who acts as its spokesman, coordinates the Group's action in each Chapter.
 - The Chairmanship, which is the highest political body within the organizational structure of the Group of 77, **rotates on a regional basis** (between Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean) and **is held for one year in all the Chapters**.
 - **Chapters** refer to the **regional divisions**, currently, Uganda is the chairman, acts as the spokesperson and coordinates the actions of the G-77 on behalf of the **member countries within the African Chapter**.
 - **Chapters in G77 are the offices of the group in different locations** where they coordinate their activities and represent their interests in various UN agencies and international forums.
 - The chapters of the G77 are in Geneva (UN), Rome (FAO), Vienna (UNIDO), Paris (UNESCO), Nairobi (UNEP) and the Group of 24 in Washington, D.C. (IMF and World Bank).
 - For the year **2024, the Republic of Uganda** holds the Chairmanship of the G-77.

Note:

➤ **South Summit:**

- The South Summit is the **supreme decision-making body of the Group of 77**.
 - The First and the Second South Summits were held in Havana, Cuba, in 2000 and in Doha, Qatar, in 2005, respectively.



What are the Key Highlights of the Third South Summit Outcome Document?

- **Call for Peaceful Solution of Palestinian-Israeli conflict:**
 - Member countries emphasised that **“there can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development”** and called for a **“just and peaceful solution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.”**
- **Universal Implementation of Agendas:**
 - The Outcome Document reaffirmed the commitment to implementing various global agendas, including the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, the **Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA)**, the **Paris Agreement on climate change**, the **New Urban Agenda (NUA)**, and the **Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)**.
- **Poverty Eradication:**
 - Member countries reaffirmed **poverty eradication as the greatest global challenge** and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development.
 - Stressing the importance of adequate means of implementation, leaders called upon developed countries to commit to **a new phase of international cooperation through a strengthened and scaled-up global partnership** for development.
- **Strengthening Multilateral Institutions:**
 - The summit stressed the need to strengthen the role of the **UN General Assembly (UNGA)** and the **Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)** in dealing with the reform of the international financial architecture.

- It was highlighted that the **Global Financial System** failed to provide a global safety net for developing countries. Deep reforms were proposed, including an **SDG Stimulus of USD 500 billion annually**, adequate capitalization of MDBs, and **expansion of contingency financing** for countries in need.
- Called for meaningful contributions to climate finance, including the delivery of **USD 100 billion per year** and the **doubling of adaptation finance by 2025**, encouraging an ambitious new finance goal at the **2024 UN Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC COP 29)**.

➤ **Financing Needs and Debt Solutions:**

- Member countries urged **Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs)** to meet the financing needs of all developing countries, including Low- and Middle-Income Countries, through concessional finance and grants.
- The leaders called for scaling up **debt swaps for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, including swaps for Climate and nature.

➤ **Urgent Reforms for Inclusion and Equity:**

- Leaders at the summit called for **urgent reforms in multilateral organisations** to recognize and leverage the significance of the **Global South**, emphasising the **need for an international financial system** rooted in inclusion and equity.

What is Global South?

➤ **About:**

- The Global South, often **misconceived as a purely geographical concept**, encompasses diverse countries, drawing upon geopolitical, historical, and developmental factors.
 - While it is not solely defined by location, it broadly represents nations facing developmental challenges.
 - Many countries included in the Global South are in the northern hemisphere, such as India, China and all of those in the northern half of Africa.
 - Whereas, Australia and New Zealand, both in the southern hemisphere, are not in the Global South.

➤ **Historical Context:**

- **Brandt Line:** The line was proposed by former German Chancellor Willy Brandt in the 1980s as

Note:

a visual depiction of the north-south divide based upon per-capita GDP.

- This line symbolizes the global economic divide, zigzagging across continents, encompassing parts of **Africa, the Middle East, India, and China, excluding Australia and New Zealand.**



G7's Commitment Towards Carbon-free Electricity Production

Why in News?

The **Group of Seven (G7) countries'** Climate and Energy Ministers and envoys have committed to ensuring **carbon-free electricity production** by 2035 and accelerating the **phase-out of coal**. The agreement was made at **Sapporo, Japan, ahead of the G7 summit** in Hiroshima in May 2023.

- India was also invited in the summit as a 'guest', in the context of its **G20 presidency**.

What are the Major Highlights of the Agreement?

- Recognising the current **global energy crisis** and **economic disruptions**, the agreement calls for accelerating the clean energy transition to **net-zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2050**.
 - The G7 states cited the **urgent need to reduce GHG emissions** by around **43% by 2030** and **60% by 2035**.
- The participants agreed to **accelerate solar and wind energy investments** to produce **1,000 gigawatts of solar power and 150 gigawatts of wind power** from off-shore platforms by 2030 in line with **IPCC's AR6 Report** that repeats the need to ensure that global temperatures do not increase by more than **1.5°C of pre-industrial levels by the end of the century**.

- They reaffirmed that **fossil fuel subsidies** are **inconsistent with the goals of the Paris Agreement** and committed to **eliminating inefficient fossil fuel subsidies by 2025**.
- **Key Issues that Lacked any Concrete Action:**
 - Increasing **efforts to assist other countries** scale up their **energy transition** and energy efficiency.
 - The funding provided by developed countries continues to fall short of the **commitment of USD100 billion per year made in UNFCCC COP27**.
 - UK and Canada's **proposal to phase-out coal by 2030**

What is G7?

- **About:**
 - The **Group of Seven (G7)** is an **intergovernmental organisation** consisting of seven major advanced economies: **Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States**.
 - The **G7, originally G8 (before Russia was uninvited)**, was set up in 1975 as an informal forum of leaders from the world's most advanced economies.
- **Objectives:**
 - The G7's primary objective is to **foster economic growth and stability among its member countries**.
 - It serves as a forum for leaders to discuss issues of mutual concern, including **trade, economic policy, and international security**.
 - The G7 also works to promote **cooperation and coordination on issues such as climate change, poverty reduction, and global health**.
- **Meetings:**
 - The G7 holds an **annual summit** where the leaders of its member countries meet to discuss and address issues of mutual concern.
 - The **summit rotates among member countries**, with each country hosting the event in turn.
- **Significance:**
 - **Economic Powerhouses:** The G7 countries are some of the **world's largest and most powerful economies**, representing 40% of the world's economic activity.
 - They are also among the world's leading trading nations, with significant influence over **global trade policies and regulations**.
 - **Global Governance:** The G7 is an important institution of global governance, with significant

Note:



influence over international institutions such as the **United Nations** and the **World Trade Organization**.

- Its policies and decisions can have significant implications for **global economic and political stability**.

➤ Criticisms:

- **The G7, which consists of some of the world's most developed economies**, is responsible for around a **quarter of global carbon emissions**.
 - It's a staggering figure that **underscores the significant role that these countries play in driving climate change**
- The G7 has faced criticism for being **exclusive and unrepresentative of the world's population**, as it represents only a small fraction of the global population and excludes countries such as **India and China**, which are major economic powers.

- Critics have also argued that the **G7's influence has declined in recent years** as emerging economies have become more important in the global economy.

What are India's Initiatives

Regarding Carbon-Free Electricity?

- **Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana (SAUBHAGYA)**: Empowering rural and urban households through **access to reliable and affordable electricity**
- **Green Energy Corridor (GEC)**: Synchronising **grid-connected renewable energy** with India's national transmission network
- **National Smart Grid Mission (NSGM) and Smart Meter National Programme (SMNP)**: Modernising India's power sector into a secure, adaptive, sustainable, and digitally enabled ecosystem

UN High Seas Treaty

UN HIGH SEAS TREATY

aka BBNJ (Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction) Agreement

For the first time, UN members have agreed on a unified (legally-binding) treaty to protect biodiversity in the high seas

High Seas (HS)	All the saltwater bodies across Earth that aren't part of territorial sea/internal waters of a state	Need to Protect HS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only 1.2% of HSs are currently protected • 10% of global marine species at risk of extinction • High exploitation due to commercial fishing, mining, acidification, pollution
Background of Treaty	Demand for an updated framework to protect marine life in the High Seas, is about 20 years-old		

The last int'l agreement on ocean protection was UNCLOS signed in 1982

This treaty is the 3rd "implementing agreement" under UNCLOS

KEY FEATURES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a new body to manage conservation of ocean life and establish marine protected areas in the high seas • Estd. ground rules for conducting EIAs for commercial activities in oceans
KEY PLAYERS	EU, US, UK and China (in brokering the deal)
SIGNIFICANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieving the 30x30 Target set at UN CBD COP15 • Legal protection of 2/3rd of the ocean (+ livelihoods of coastal communities) • Comprehensive protection of endangered species/habitats on >40% of Earth's surface
ROADBLOCK	How to fairly share marine genetic resources (MGR) & eventual profits among developed/developing nations

Ocean ecosystems produce half the oxygen we breathe, represent 95% of the planet's biosphere and soak up CO₂ (world's largest carbon sink)

Note:

UN Specialised Agencies: FAO, UNIDO and ICAO

UN SPECIALISED AGENCIES

UNSAAs are 15 autonomous international organizations working with the UN

Part I
FAO, UNIDO
and ICAO

FAO

- Estd. - 16th October 1945 (World Food Day)
- Headquarters - Rome, Italy
- Members - 194 countries (incl. India) + EU
- Sister Bodies - World Food Programme (WFP), IFAD
- FAO v/s WFP v/s IFAD:
 - » FAO is a knowledge org.; lead UN agency for technical expertise in food security, agriculture, forestry, fisheries etc.
 - » WFP is a humanitarian org.; provides food aid and logistical operations to save lives in crisis situations
 - » IFAD is a financial institution; funds rural development projects to improve nutritional level
- Flagship Publications:
 - » The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture (SOFIA)
 - » The State of the World's Forests (SOFO)
 - » The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI)
 - » The State of Food and Agriculture (SOFA)
 - » The State of Agricultural Commodity Markets (SOCO)
- FAO's Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS) in India:
 - » Kuttanad Below Sea Level Farming System, Kerala
 - » Koraput Traditional Agriculture, Odisha
 - » Pampore Saffron Heritage, Kashmir

UN Industrial Development Organisation

- Estd. - 1966 (transformed into UNSA in 1985)
- Headquarters - Vienna, Austria
- Member States - 171 (India one of the founders)
- Functions - Tech-cooperation, advisory services and fostering partnerships
- Imp. Declarations - Lima Declaration (2013), Abu Dhabi Declaration (2019)

UNIDO is a custodian agency for 6 industry-related indicators under SDG 9

ICAO

- Estd. - 1944 (by Chicago Convention)
- Function - Set standards/procedures for peaceful global air navigation
- Headquarters - Montreal, Canada
- Members - 193 (incl. India)

ICAO is not an international aviation regulator; it can't arbitrarily close/restrict a country's airspace, shut down routes or condemn airports/airlines



Drishti IAS

Note:

UN Specialised Agencies - UNWTO, IFAD and UPU (Part-2)

UN SPECIALISED AGENCIES

UNSAAs are 15 autonomous international organizations working with the UN

Part II
UNWTO,
IFAD
and UPU

UN World Tourism Organisation

- Estd. - 1975
- Headquarters - Madrid, Spain
- Function -
 - » Promotion of responsible, sustainable & universally accessible tourism
 - » Implementation of the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism
- Member States - 160 (India is a member of UNWTO Executive Council for last 19 years and has chaired it twice)

World Tourism Day is celebrated on 27 September

International Fund for Agricultural Development

- Estd. - 1977 (an outcome of World Food Conference, 1974)
- Headquarters - Rome, Italy
- Function -
 - » Intl. financial institution
 - » Poverty eradication in rural areas of developing countries
- Member States - 177 (incl. India)
- Flagship Publication - Rural Development Report (annual)

Universal Postal Union

- Estd. - 1874 (by Treaty of Bern, 1874)
- Headquarters - Bern, Switzerland
- Function -
 - » Coordinates postal policies among member nations
 - » Sets rules for intl. mail exchanges
 - » Has an advisory/mediating/liaison role
- Member States - 192 (India joined in 1876)

UPU is the 2nd oldest intl. organization worldwide after ITU (estd. 1865)



Note:

BIMSTEC



BIMSTEC

Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation

Members: 7

Significance: Hosts 22% of the world population, accounts for 3.8 trillion of GDP

Formation: 6th June 1997 (Bangkok Declaration)

Secretariat: Dhaka, Bangladesh

BHUTAN

- India is Bhutan's largest trade partner
- Mutually Beneficial Hydropower Cooperation: Mangdechhu, Kholongchhu, Chukha hydropower Projects
- India's grant assistance to Gyalsung Project
- Integration of Bhutan's DrukRen with India's National Knowledge Network

NEPAL

- Shares border with 5 Indian states (Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Sikkim and Bihar)
- Bharat Gaurav Tourist Train connecting India's Ayodhya and Nepal's Janakpur
- Major Issues: Territorial Disputes (Kalapani, Limpiyadhura and Lipulekh)
- Military Exercise: Surya Kiran (Army)

MYANMAR

- Only Southeast Asian country that shares a land border with north-eastern India
- The 2021 coup returned Myanmar to military rule
- India's Development Assistance: India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport (KMMTT), Sittwe port
- Major Issue: Rohingya Crisis

SRI LANKA

- India is Sri Lanka's third largest export destination
- India is the first country to officially back Sri Lanka's debt restructuring programme at IMF
- Major Issue: Fishermen crossing maritime boundary
- Important Exercises: Mitra Shakti (Army), SLINEX (Naval)

BANGLADESH

- Shares the longest border of over 4,096 km with India
- Largest trading partner in South Asia
- Water Sharing Agreements: Kushiyara river (2022), Ganga Water Treaty (1996)
- Major Issues: Teesta River Water Dispute
- Military Exercises: SAMPRITI-X (Military Training), Bongosagar (Naval)

THAILAND

- Thai language is written in script derived from Southern Indian Pallava alphabet
- Hinduism, Buddhism – both religions of Indian origin being popular in Thailand
- Convergence of India's 'Act East' policy with Thailand's 'Act West' policy
- Military Exercises: MAITREE (Army), SIAM BHARAT (Air Force), Indo-Thai CORPAT (Naval)



Note:

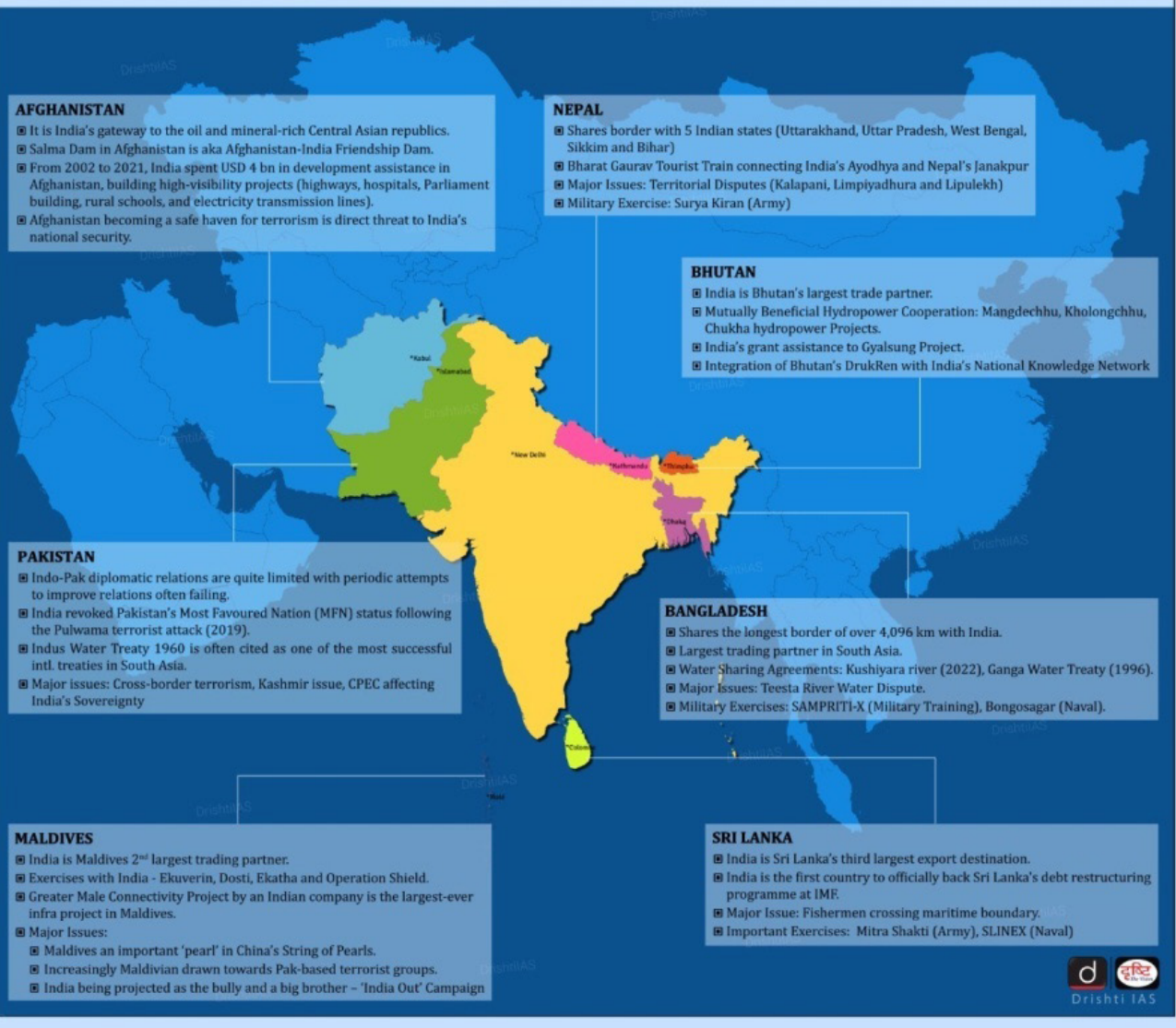
SAARC

SAARC

South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation



- **Members:** 8
- **Etd. by signing SAARC Charter in Dhaka (Dec 1985)**
- **HQ:** Kathmandu, Nepal
- **9 Permanent Observers to SAARC:** Australia, China, EU, Iran, Japan, S. Korea, Mauritius, Myanmar and US
- **Comprises 3% of the world's area, 21% of the world's population and 3.8% of the global economy**
- **Agreements under SAARC:** SAPTA, SAFTA, SATIS, SAARC University



Note:

UN Specialised Agencies: ILO, WHO and ITU

UN SPECIALISED AGENCIES

UNSAAs are 15 autonomous international organizations working with the UN

Part III
ILO, WHO
and ITU

ILO



The only tripartite (govt., trade unions, employers) and the 1st affiliated UNSA

- Estd. - 1919 (Treaty of Versailles)
- Headquarters - Geneva, Switzerland
- Functions -
 - » Set labour standards
 - » Develop policies & programmes for promoting decent work for all
- Member States - 187 (India a founding member + permanent member of ILO Governing Body)
- International Labour Conference -
 - » Meets annually in Geneva
 - » aka International Parliament of Labour
- ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work 1998 (Principles) -
 - » Freedom of Association and The Right to collective bargaining
 - » Elimination of forced or compulsory labour
 - » Abolition of child labour
 - » Elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation



WHO

WHO became functional on April 7, 1948 (now celebrated as World Health Day)

- Estd. - 1948
- Headquarters - Geneva, Switzerland
- Functions -
 - » Provides leadership on global health matters
 - » Shaping health research agenda
 - » Monitoring, assessing health trends
- Member States - 194 (incl. India)
- WHO's regional office for SE Asia is located in New Delhi
- World Health Assembly - WHO's decision-making body, held yearly at Geneva
- Major Initiatives -
 - » UN Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030)
 - » UN Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016-2025)
 - » GLASS Initiative (AMR)
 - » WHO 1+1 Initiative (2019) (TB)

ITU



- Estd. - 1865
- Headquarters - Geneva, Switzerland
- Functions -
 - » Facilitate intl. connectivity in communication networks
 - » Allocate global radio spectrum and satellite orbits
- Member States - 193 (India a regular member since 1952)
- Important Publication -
 - » Global Cybersecurity Index (GCI)



Note:

UN Specialised Agencies: WIPO, WMO and IMO

UN SPECIALISED AGENCIES

UNSA's are 15 autonomous international organizations working with the UN

Part IV
WIPO, WMO
and IMO

WIPO



- Estd. - 1967 (joined UN in 1974)
- Headquarters - Geneva, Switzerland

*World Intellectual
Property Day - 26th April*

- Functions -
 - » Encourage creative activity, promote the protection of intellectual property (IP) throughout the world
 - » Shape balanced intl. IP rules
- Members - 193 (India joined in 1975)

- WIPO Treaties that India has ratified/acceded-
 - » Paris Convention (industrial property)
 - » Berne Convention (for Literary and Artistic Works)
 - » WIPO Performance and Phonograms Treaty
 - » Budapest Treaty
 - » Madrid Protocol for the International Registration of Marks
 - » Marrakesh Treaty (for Published Works by Visually Impaired Persons)
 - » WIPO Copyright Treaty
 - » Washington Treaty (IP for Integrated Circuits)
 - » Nairobi Treaty (for Olympic Symbol)
- Publication - Global Innovation Index



WMO

- Estd. - 1873 (originated from Intl. Meteorological Organization - Vienna International Meteorological Congress)
- » Became a UNSA by WMO Convention 1950

WMO is a UNSA for meteorology, operational hydrology & geophysical sciences

- Headquarters - Geneva, Switzerland

- Functions -
 - » Coordinate activities of National Meteorological/ Hydrological Services in Member States
 - » Predictions concerning locust swarms, transport of pollutants (nuclear, toxic substances, volcanic ash)
- Member States - 193 (incl. India)

World Meteorological Day - 23rd March

IMO



- Estd. - 1948 (Convention on International Maritime Organization held in Geneva)
- Headquarters - London, United Kingdom
- Functions -
 - » Improve safety and security of intl. shipping
 - » Prevent pollution from ships
 - » Also involved in legal matters (liability, compensation issue)

- Member States - 174 (India joined in 1959)
- Important Treaties India has Ratified:
 - » MARPOL (1973) and its Protocols
 - » International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS, 1974)

IMO lists India among the 10 states with the largest interest in intl. seaborne trade



Note:

World Happiness Report 2023

WORLD HAPPINESS REPORT 2023

First published in 2012, WHR is based on people's own assessment of their happiness + certain socioeconomic data

PUBLISHED BY

- UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network

6 KEY FACTORS



HAPPINESS SCORE

- 0-10 (10 being best)
- Based on an avg of **data of a 3-year period**

World Happiness Day - 20th March

GLOBAL PERFORMANCE

- Finland - World's happiest country (6th time in a row)
- Ukraine** - Performance improved despite the War (92nd), Russia ranked 70th
- Top 5 Countries:** Finland > Denmark > Iceland > Israel > Netherlands
- Afghanistan** - Bottom spot since 2020

Dystopia (in contrast to Utopia) - An imaginary country that has the world's least-happy people

INDIA'S RANK

- 126 out of 137** (2022 ranking - 136/146)
- Below **China** (74), **Pakistan** (108), **Sri Lanka** (112), **Myanmar** (117), **Bangladesh** (118) and **Nepal** (119)



Drishti IAS

Note:

Vienna Convention

Why in News?

After pro-Khalistan people took down the Indian flag at the High Commission in London, the Indian government summoned the “senior-most” UK diplomat, Deputy High Commissioner and reminded her of the basic obligations of the UK Government under the Vienna Convention.

What is the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations?

- The Convention was adopted on **14th April 1961 by the United Nations Conference on Diplomatic Intercourse and Immunities** held in Vienna, Austria. India has ratified the convention.
- It entered into **force on April 24, 1964, and is nearly universally ratified**, with Palau and South Sudan being the exceptions.
- It sets out the **special rules – privileges and immunities** – which enable diplomatic missions to act without fear of coercion or harassment through enforcement of local laws and to communicate securely with their sending Governments.
- It makes **provision for withdrawal of a mission** – which may take place on grounds of economic or physical security – and for breach of diplomatic relations which may occur in response to abuse of immunity or severe deterioration in relations between sending and receiving States.
 - A **“receiving State” refers to the host nation where a diplomatic mission is located.**
- In either of these cases – or where permanent missions have not been established – a framework is provided for the interests of each sending State to be protected in the receiving State by a third State.
- It affirms the concept of “inviolability” of a diplomatic mission, which has been one of the **enduring cornerstones of international diplomacy.**
- Basically, the security of any **High Commission or Embassy** is the **responsibility of the host nation.** While diplomatic missions can also employ their own security, ultimately, the host nation is **accountable for security.**
 - The difference between high commission and embassy is basically where they are situated. **Commission applies**

to **Commonwealth member states** whereas Embassy applies to the rest of the world.

India Joins Artemis Accords

Why in News?

Recently, India’s Prime Minister announced **India’s decision to join the Artemis Accords** during the visit to the United States.

- **National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) will collaborate** to send Indian astronauts, trained at the Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas, to the **International Space Station (ISS) in 2024.**

What are Artemis Accords?

- **About:**
 - **Artemis Accords** are established by the **U.S. State Department and NASA with seven other founding members: Australia, Canada, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, the United Arab Emirates, and the United Kingdom** in 2020 for setting common principles to govern civil exploration and use of outer space, the moon, Mars, comets, and asteroids, for peaceful purposes.
 - It builds upon the foundation of the **Outer Space Treaty of 1967.**
 - The Outer Space Treaty, a **multilateral pact under the United Nations**, serves as the foundation for international space law.
 - The treaty emphasizes space as a **shared resource for humanity, prohibits national appropriation, and encourages the peaceful use of space.**
- **Signatory Countries:**



Note:

- India became the **27th** country to sign the nonbinding **Artemis Accords**.
- **Commitments under the Accords:**
 - **Peaceful Purposes:** The signatories will implement memorandum of understanding (MOUs) between governments or agencies to **conduct space activities for peaceful purposes in accordance with international law**.
 - **Common Infrastructure:** Signatories recognize the **importance of common exploration infrastructure** to enhance scientific discovery and commercial utilization.
 - **Registration and Data Sharing:** Relevant space objects are registered, and scientific **data is openly shared in a timely manner**. Private sectors are exempt unless acting on behalf of a signatory.
 - **Preservation of Heritage:** Signatories are **expected to preserve historic landing sites**, artifacts, and evidence of activity on celestial bodies.
 - **Utilization of Space Resources:** Utilization of space resources should **support safe and sustainable activities and not interfere with other signatories' activities**. Information on location and nature must be shared to prevent interference.
 - **Mitigation of Debris:** Signatories plan for the **safe disposal of spacecraft** and limit the generation of harmful debris.

What are the Main Missions under the Artemis Program?

- **Artemis-I: Unmanned Mission to the Moon**
 - The Artemis program began with the launch of the **spacecraft named "Orion"** on the **Space Launch System (SLS)** from NASA's Kennedy Space Center on **November 16, 2022**.
 - The **SLS, a super heavy-lift launch vehicle**, carried Orion on a single mission directly to the moon.
- **Artemis-II: Crewed Lunar Flyby Mission:**
 - Scheduled for 2024, **Artemis-II will mark the first crewed mission under the Artemis program**.
 - **Four astronauts will be aboard the SLS** as it performs multiple maneuvers on an expanding orbit around Earth.
 - The mission will also **involve a lunar flyby and return to Earth**.

- **Artemis-III: Human Return to the Moon:**
 - Set for 2025, **Artemis-III will mark a significant milestone in human space exploration** as astronauts return to the moon.
 - This mission will go beyond the lunar flyby of Artemis-II, allowing astronauts to **land on the lunar surface and study the moon more extensively**.
 - Also, the **establishment of a Lunar Gateway station is planned for 2029**. This station will serve as a docking point for astronauts and facilitate scientific research and experiments.

India, US, UAE and Saudi Arabia Discuss Infrastructure Initiatives

Why in News?

Recently, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia hosted a special meeting of the **National Security Advisers (NSAs)** of **India, the US, and the UAE**.

What are the Key Highlights of the Meeting?

- The discussions **aimed to strengthen relations and ties between the countries** in a way that **enhances growth and stability in the region**.
- The meeting **focused on regional initiatives on infrastructure**.
- The meeting sought to advance their shared vision of a more secure and prosperous **Middle East region interconnected with India and the world**.
- Among the projects discussed, a plan to **connect Gulf countries via a railway network and connect to India via shipping lanes from "two ports" in the region** is highlighted.
 - This is meant to provide a **counter to China's Belt and Road initiative** and other inroads in the region.
- The idea for the initiative came up during talks held over the past 18 months by the I2U2.
 - The **I2U2 Quad**, works on connecting **"South Asia to the Middle East to the United States in ways that advance economic technology and diplomacy"**.

What is the I2U2 Quad?

- **About:**
 - I2U2 is a new grouping formed by **India, Israel, the UAE, and the US**.
 - It is also referred to as the **West Asian Quad**.

Note:



➤ Objectives:

- It is focused on **expanding economic and political cooperation in the Middle East and Asia**.
- The framework aims to **foster support and cooperation in infrastructure, technology and maritime security**.

➤ Formation of I2U2:

- I2U2 was initially formed in **October 2021** following the **Abraham Accords**.
 - The Abraham Accords normalized relations between **Israel and a number of Arab Gulf countries**.

➤ First Summit of I2U2:

- The first virtual summit of I2U2 took place on July 14, 2022.
- The summit focused heavily on the **global food and energy crisis resulting from the conflict in Ukraine**.

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**.

Arab League

Why in News?

Recently, the Arab League has re-admitted **Syria into the organization**, after a suspension over a decade.

Why has Syria Re-admitted to the Arab League?

➤ Suspension:

- Syria was **suspended from the Arab League in 2011** after it violently cracked down on anti-government protests.
- The Arab League accused Syria of not **complying with a peace plan that called for a withdrawal of military forces**, the release of political prisoners, and the start of a dialogue with opposition groups.

- Despite attempts at peace negotiations and ceasefire agreements, the violence continued, leading to Syria's suspension.
- This had economic and diplomatic consequences for Syria.

➤ Readmission:

- The move signifies softness in relations between Syria and other Arab governments and is seen as the **start of a gradual process to resolve the crisis in Syria**.
 - The **Crisis in Syria** has resulted in the **displacement of roughly half of the pre-war population of 21 million** and the deaths of over 300,000 civilians.
- A committee involving Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq will be established to help **Syria achieve these goals**.
 - But the decision does not mean a resumption of relationships between Arab states and Syria as it is up to each country to decide this individually.
- It calls for a resolution of the crisis **resulting from Syria's civil war**, including the flight of refugees to neighboring countries and drug smuggling across the region.

What is the Arab League?

➤ About:

- Arab League, also called **League of Arab States (LAS)**, is an intergovernmental pan-Arab organisation of all Arab states in the **Middle East** and North Africa.
- It was formed in Cairo, Egypt on 22nd March 1945, following the adoption of the **Alexandria Protocol in 1944**.

➤ Members:

- **Currently, there are 22 Arab countries:** Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

➤ Objective:

- It aims to strengthen and coordinate the **political, cultural, economic, and social programs of its members** and to **mediate disputes** among them or between them and third parties.

Note:



- The signing on 13th April 1950, of an agreement on joint defense and economic cooperation also **committed the signatories to coordination of military defense measures.**

➤ Concerns:

- The Arab League has been criticized for its **inability to effectively address the issues it was created to handle.** Many question the relevance of the institution, with its slogan of **“one Arab nation with an eternal mission”** being seen as outdated.
 - This has led to instances where important events, like the annual leaders’ summit, have been postponed or canceled.
- The League has also been criticized for its **lack of effectiveness in enforcing decisions and resolving conflicts among** its members. It has been accused of disunity, poor governance, and being more **representative of autocratic regimes than of the Arab people.**

What is the Significance of the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) for India?

➤ Middle East:

- 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.**
- Two additional reasons are the **huge number of Indians who work in the Gulf countries,** and the **Remittance** they send back home.

➤ North Africa:

- North African nations like **Morocco and Algeria are important** as they serve as gateways to other parts of Africa, which is relevant for India, given its desire to **penetrate Francophone Africa (French Speaking African Nations).**
- North Africa is significant for India because of its potential as a source of clean energy. The region has **abundant solar and wind resources,** which can be harnessed to generate electricity.

- India has set ambitious renewable energy targets, and **North Africa could provide an opportunity for India to meet its renewable energy goals.**
- North Africa is also **strategically located, making it an important region for trade and commerce.**
- The **Suez Canal** puts North Africa at the crossroads of global trade. With more than 22000 ship transits in 2022, the canal is one of the world’s most important maritime routes.

International Religious Freedom Report 2023

Why in News?

The government of India **rejected the recommendations of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom’s (USCIRF) 2023 report,** calling it biased and motivated.

What is USCIRF?

USCIRF is an **independent, bipartisan US federal government commission,** dedicated to defending the universal right to freedom of religion or belief abroad.

- It is an **advisory body to the US Congress.**
- It is **Headquartered in Washington DC.**
- **Established by the US government after the inaction of the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA), 1998** the recommendations of USCIRF are non-binding on the state department. IRFA provides that US policy includes condemning violations of religious freedom and assisting other governments in the promotion of this right.
 - Traditionally, **India does not recognize the view of USCIRF.**

What are the Concerns Raised About India?

- **Concerns About Certain Laws and Policies:** The report highlights concern regarding certain laws and policies in the country that have been **criticized for their potential to discriminate on the basis of religion.**
 - These include laws related to conversion, interfaith relationships, hijab, and **cow slaughter,** as well as the **Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019** and the **National Register of Citizens (NRC)** All of

Note:



these, it alleges, have **not impacted minorities in a favorable way.**

- **Measures Affecting Freedom of Expression:** It raises concerns about **alleged measures that may have impacted critical voices**, particularly those belonging to **religious minorities**.
 - These include surveillance, harassment, property demolition, and detention under the **Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), 1967**. Some **Non-Governmental organizations (NGOs)** have also been subject to scrutiny under the **Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), 2010**.
- **India as a CPC:** It has **criticized the US State Department for not having designated India as a Countries of Particular Concern (CPC)** and has called for sanctions on Indian government agencies and officials.
 - USCIRF has been **recommending India's designation as a country of particular concern since 2020** but it hasn't been accepted by the US government so far.

What are the Recommendations of the Report?

- For 2023, based on religious freedom conditions in 2022, **USCIRF recommends that the State Department:**
- **Redesignate as CPCs:** Burma, China, Cuba, Eritrea, Iran, Nicaragua, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan;
 - **Designate as Additional CPCs:** Afghanistan, India, Nigeria, Syria, and Vietnam;
- **Maintain on the Special Watch List (SWL):** Algeria and the Central African Republic (CAR);
 - **Include on the SWL:** Azerbaijan, Egypt, Indonesia, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Turkey, and Uzbekistan;
- **Redesignate as Entities of Particular Concern (EPCs):** Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the Houthis, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP also referred to as ISIS-West Africa), and Jamaat Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM).

Criteria for Designation of Countries in Different Categories

- **CPCs:** When the government of the countries engage in or tolerate "systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations" of the right to freedom of religion or belief under IRFA 1998.

- **SWL:** It is based on the governments' perpetration or toleration of severe religious freedom violations.
- **EPCs:** For systematic, ongoing, and egregious religious freedom violations.

What is the State of Freedom of Religion in India?

- Freedom of religion in India is a **fundamental right guaranteed by Article 25-28 of the Constitution of India**.
 - **Article 25** (Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion).
 - **Article 26** (Freedom to manage religious affairs).
 - **Article 27** (Freedom as to payment of taxes for promotion of any religion).
 - **Article 28** (Freedom as to attendance at religious instruction or religious worship in certain educational institutions).
- Further, **Article 29 and 30 of the Constitution** deal with the protection of interests of minorities.

WTO Needs to Relook at Farm Subsidies

Why in News?

The finance minister of India has urged the **World Trade Organisation (WTO)** to look at the **issue of farm subsidies** with an open mind as it impacts the food security needs of emerging economies in the backdrop of COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war.

- The FM said this while Speaking at the **Asian Development Bank (ADB)** Governor's seminar on 'Policies to support Asia's rebound.

Note:

- The Asian Development Bank (ADB) Governor's Seminar is an **annual event that brings together the Governors of ADB's member countries**, leading policy makers, development experts, etc. to discuss developmental issues in the Asia-Pacific region.
 - **Headquartered in Manila (Philippines)**, the ADB is a regional development bank established in 1966 to promote economic and social development in Asia and the Pacific.
- **The Board of Governors** is ADB's highest policy-making body; comprised of one representative from each member nation.

Note:

What are the Subsidies under WTO?

➤ **Amber Box:**

- Amber box subsidies are those **that can distort international trade by making a country's products cheaper** in comparison to those of other countries.
 - **Examples:** Subsidies for inputs such as **fertilisers, seeds, electricity, irrigation, and Minimum Support Price (MSP).**
- According to the WTO, agriculture's **amber box is used for all domestic support measures** that are deemed to distort production and trade.
 - As a result, the **trade agreement requires signatories to commit to reducing trade-distorting domestic supports** that fall into the amber box.
- Members who do not make these commitments must keep their amber box support within 5-10% of their value of production. (***Di Minimus Clause***)
 - **10% for developing countries**
 - **5% for developed countries**

➤ **Blue box:**

- It is the **"amber box with conditions"** — conditions, designed to reduce distortion.
- Any support that would normally be in the amber box is placed in the blue box if **it requires farmers to limit production.**
 - These subsidies aim to limit production by imposing production quotas or requiring farmers to set aside part of their land.
- At present there are **no limits on spending on blue box subsidies.**

➤ **Green Box:**

- Green Box is domestic support **measures that don't cause trade distortion or at most cause minimal distortion.**
- The Green box subsidies are **government funded without any price support to crops.**
 - They also include environmental protection and regional development programmes.
- "Green box" subsidies are therefore **allowed without limits** (except in certain circumstances).

Why is there a Need to Relook into Subsidy Norms?

➤ **Unequal Opportunities to Global South:**

- Ever since the establishment of WTO, there has been a **complaint regarding the export of agricultural goods**, and in general, the viewpoints of the **Global South and emerging markets have not been given equal weight** as those of the developed nations in trade discussions.
- The 'Global South' largely refers to countries in Asia, Africa and South America.

➤ **Issues with Food Subsidy Limit:** There is an **issue with the reference price adopted under global trade norms** - a WTO member country's **food subsidy bill should not breach the limit of 10%** of the value of production based on the reference price of 1986-88.

- Subsidies for agriculture and poor farmers in developing countries were not counted at all and were frozen by the WTO.
- **Food security is comparatively stronger in developed nations** than in developing countries because of the **unbalanced nature of trade agreements.**

➤ **Rising Food Insecurity:** The challenges on food security posed by the **Covid-19** pandemic and **Russia-Ukraine conflict** have once again emphasized to relook the subsidy norms as food and fertilizer security have become more important now.

➤ **India's Demand:** As part of permanent solution, **India has asked for measures like amendments in the formula** to calculate the food subsidy cap and **inclusion of programmes implemented after 2013** under the ambit of '**Peace Clause**'.

What is the WTO's Peace Clause?

- As an interim measure, the WTO members agreed on a mechanism called the '**Peace Clause**' in December 2013 and **pledged to negotiate a permanent solution.**
- Under the Peace Clause, WTO members **agreed to refrain from challenging any breach in prescribed ceiling** by a developing nation at the dispute settlement forum of the WTO.
- This clause will stay till a permanent solution is found to the food stockpiling issue.

Note:



India's Commitment to UN Peacekeeping

Why in News?

Recently, the **Indian Army** commemorated the **75th International Day of United Nations (UN) Peacekeepers** on 29th May (which was designated by the UN General Assembly) at the **National War Memorial** in New Delhi.

- **Theme 2023: 'Peace begins with me'.**
- This day holds significance as it marks the anniversary of the first **UN peacekeeping (UNPK) mission** in 1948.
- Additionally, India unveiled plans to conduct two initiatives later in 2023, specifically designed to train **women personnel from South East Asia, as part of their collaboration with ASEAN** in the defence sector.

What is India-ASEAN Initiative for Women in UNPK operations?

The 'India-ASEAN Initiative for women in UNPK operations' refers to a collaborative effort between **India and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)** to promote the **participation of women in UNPK operations**.

- This initiative focuses on **providing training and support to women personnel** from ASEAN member-states who are interested in serving as peacekeepers.
 - Under this initiative, India has announced two specific initiatives:
 - **Specialized courses at the Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping (CUNPK)** in New Delhi. These courses will offer targeted training in peacekeeping operations to women peacekeepers from ASEAN countries.
 - The aim is to **equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge** to effectively contribute to UNPK missions.
 - **Table Top Exercise for women officers from ASEAN.** This exercise will **simulate various scenarios and challenges faced by UN peacekeepers**, allowing participants to enhance their understanding and preparedness for UNPK operations.

What is UN Peacekeeping?

- **About:**
 - UN Peacekeeping is a vital tool employed by the **United Nations** to help **countries navigate the path from conflict to peace**.
 - It involves the **deployment of military, police, and civilian personnel** to regions affected by conflicts or political instability.
 - The primary objective of UN Peacekeeping is to **facilitate peace and security, protect civilians, and support the restoration of stable governance structures**.
 - It brings together **the UN General Assembly, the UN Security Council, the Secretariat, troop and police contributors** and the host governments in a combined effort to maintain international peace and security.
- **First Mission:**
 - The first UN peacekeeping mission was established in May 1948, when the **UN Security Council** authorized the deployment of **UN military observers to the Middle East** to form the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) to monitor the **Armistice Agreement between Israel and its Arab neighbours**.
- **Mandates:**
 - The mandates **vary from operation to operation**, but they generally include some or all of the following elements:
 - Monitoring ceasefires, peace agreements, and security arrangements.
 - Protecting civilians, especially those at risk of physical harm.
 - Facilitating political dialogue, reconciliation, and supporting elections.
 - Building rule of law, security institutions, and promoting human rights.
 - Delivering humanitarian aid, supporting refugee reintegration, and promoting environmental sustainability.
- **Principles:**
 - **Consent of the Parties:**
 - Peacekeeping operations require the **consent of the main parties involved in the conflict**.

Note:

- Without consent, a peacekeeping operation risks becoming a **party to the conflict** and deviating from its peacekeeping role.
- **Impartiality:**
 - Peacekeepers should maintain **impartiality in their dealings** with the parties to the conflict.
 - **Impartiality does not mean neutrality**; peacekeepers should **actively execute their mandate** and **uphold international norms**.
- **Non-use of Force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate:**
 - Peacekeeping operations should refrain from using force, except when necessary for **self-defence** and **protection of their mandate**.
 - “Robust” peacekeeping allows the use of force with Security Council authorization and consent from the host nation and parties involved.
- **Achievements:**
 - Since its inception in 1948, UN Peacekeeping has played a crucial role in ending conflicts and promoting reconciliation in numerous countries.
 - Successful peacekeeping missions have been carried out in places like **Cambodia, El Salvador, Mozambique, and Namibia**.
 - These operations have **made a positive impact on restoring stability**, enabling the **transition to democratic governance**, and fostering economic development.

What are India's Contributions in UN Peacekeeping?

- **Troop Contribution:**
 - India has a rich legacy of contributing to UN Peacekeeping operations. It is one of the **largest troop-contributing countries**, with a history of deploying soldiers, medical personnel, and engineers to various peacekeeping missions worldwide.
 - India has contributed approximately 2,75,000 troops to peacekeeping missions so far.
- **Casualties:**
 - Indian Army soldiers have made significant sacrifices while serving in UN Peacekeeping Missions, with 179 soldiers losing their lives in the line of duty.
- **Training and infrastructure:**
 - The Indian Army has established the **Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping (CUNPK)** in New Delhi.

- This center provides specialized training for more than 12,000 troops every year in peacekeeping operations, hosting national and international courses for potential peacekeepers and trainers.
- CUNPK plays a crucial role in sharing best practices and enhancing the capacity of peacekeepers.

➤ Women in Peacekeeping:

- India has taken proactive measures to promote gender equality in peacekeeping operations.
 - India has deployed **Female Engagement Teams** in **United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission** in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo** and **United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei**, which is the **second largest women contingent after Liberia**.
 - India has also deployed **Women Military Police** in **United Nations Disengagement Observer Force** and women staff officers and military observers in various missions.

UN Concerns Over Eritrean Deportations from Israel

Why in News?

The **United Nations** has expressed its concern over the **possible mass deportations of Eritrean asylum seekers from Israel**, following violent clashes between rival factions of the Eritrean community in Tel Aviv.

- The UN refugee agency said that such an act of refoulement would **violate international law**.

What Prompted the UN's Concern?

- The **United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR)** said it was “deeply concerned” about clashes that occurred when a **demonstration against an Eritrean government event turned violent**.
 - The **UNHCR** called for calm and urged all parties involved to avoid actions that could escalate the situation further.

UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR):

- The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was **created in 1950**, during the aftermath of the Second World War, to **help millions of Europeans who had fled or lost their homes**.

Note:

- In 1954, UNHCR won the **Nobel Peace Prize** for its groundbreaking work in Europe. But it was not long before we faced our next major emergency.
- In 1981, it received a second **Nobel Peace Prize** for what had become worldwide assistance to refugees.

What is International Law and Policy on Asylum and Deportation?

➤ Eritrean Deportations and Breach of International Law:

- Principle of non-refoulement:
 - The **principle of non-refoulement (1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol)** is a well-established concept in international law, and in particular in the context of refugee law.
 - Under **international human rights law**, the principle of non-refoulement guarantees that **no one should be returned to a country where they would face torture, cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, and other irreparable harm.**
 - **Israel is a party to these treaties** and has an obligation to respect, protect, and fulfill the rights of refugees and asylum seekers within its territory or effective control.
 - By expelling Eritreans, Israel would violate the principle of non-refoulement, as **Eritrea is considered one of the world's most authoritarian states, where human rights violations are widespread and severe.**
 - Eritreans who are returned to their country of origin could face torture, ill-treatment, indefinite military service, political repression, or even death.
- **Right to asylum:**
 - The right to asylum is a fundamental human right that is recognized by the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights.**
 - The right to asylum implies that **every person has the right to seek and enjoy protection from persecution in other countries.**
 - By expelling Eritreans en masse, Israel would violate the right to asylum, as it would deny them the opportunity to seek and enjoy protection from persecution in Israel or in other safe countries.

Note:

- India is **not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol**, the key legal documents pertaining to refugee protection under International Law.
 - Further, Article 21 of the Constitution encompasses the right of non-refoulement.
- India does not have national asylum legislation.
 - However, **The Refugee and Asylum Bill, 2019**, was introduced in Rajya Sabha but has yet to be passed by the Parliament.

International Law:

- **About:**
 - Coined by **Jeremy Bentham in 1780.**
 - Governs relations between countries (states).
 - Aims to **benefit citizens and promote friendly relations.**
 - Resolves international problems through cooperation and peaceful means.
- **Aims:**
 - Protect **fundamental humanitarian rights.**
 - Aims to **benefit citizens and promote friendly relations.**
 - Resolves international problems through cooperation and peaceful means
- **Subjects of International Law:**
 - **Individuals:** Common people of any state.
 - **International Organizations:** e.g. **United Nations.**
 - **Multinational Companies:** Operate in multiple countries.

Key Facts About Eritrea:

- Eritrea is a country in the **Horn of Africa**, located on the **Red Sea Coast.**
- Capital: **Asmara.**
- It shares borders with **Ethiopia, Sudan, and Djibouti.**
- The country also shares **maritime borders with Saudi Arabia and Yemen.**
- It is a former Italian colony that became part of a federation with Ethiopia in 1947, In 1952 Eritrea was annexed by Ethiopia. The country became independent in 1993.

Note:



India's Interest Arctic Region and the Northern Sea Route

Why in News?

Murmansk, popularly called the capital of the **Arctic Region** and the beginning point of the **Northern Sea Route (NSR)**, is witnessing the rising trend of **Indian involvement in Cargo traffic**.

- In the first seven months of 2023, India got a share of **35%** of eight million tonnes of cargo handled by the Murmansk port, which is about **2,000 km northwest of Moscow, Russia**.

What is the Significance of the Arctic for India?

- **Untapped Hydrocarbon Reserves:**
 - The region constitutes the **largest unexplored prospective area** for hydrocarbons remaining on the earth. It is estimated that the region may hold over 40% of the current global reserves of oil and gas.
 - The region has rich deposits of coal, gypsum and diamonds and also substantial reserves of zinc, lead, placer gold and quartz.
 - The Arctic can therefore **potentially address India's energy security** needs and deficiency of strategic and rare earth minerals.
 - However, the government's Arctic Policy of 2022 mentions that the country's approach to economic development of the region is guided by **UN Sustainable Development Goals**.

- **India's Historical Engagement:**
 - India's engagement with the Arctic dates back to the signing of the **Svalbard Treaty in 1920**.
 - India has conducted various scientific studies and research in the region, focusing on **atmospheric, biological, marine, hydrological, and glaciological** studies.
 - Initiatives like the Himadri research station, multi-sensor moored observatory, and northernmost atmospheric laboratory showcase India's commitment to Arctic research.
 - Becoming an observer-state of the Arctic Council in 2013 strengthened **India's Arctic presence**.
- **Geographical Significance:**
 - The Arctic helps circulate the world's **ocean currents**, moving cold and warm water around the globe.
 - Also, Arctic sea ice acts as a huge white reflector at the top of the planet, bouncing some of the sun's rays back into space, helping keep the Earth at an even temperature.
- **Environmental Significance:**
 - The Arctic and the **Himalayas**, though geographically distant, are interconnected and share similar concerns.
 - The Arctic meltdown is helping the **scientific community to better understand the glacial melt in the Himalayas**, which has often been referred to as the 'third pole' and has the largest freshwater reserves after the North and South poles.
 - Therefore, the study of the Arctic is critical to Indian scientists. In line, India launched its first scientific expedition to the Arctic Ocean in 2007 and opened the **Himadri research base** in the Svalbard archipelago (Norway) and has been actively engaging in research there ever since.

What is the North Sea Route (NSR)?

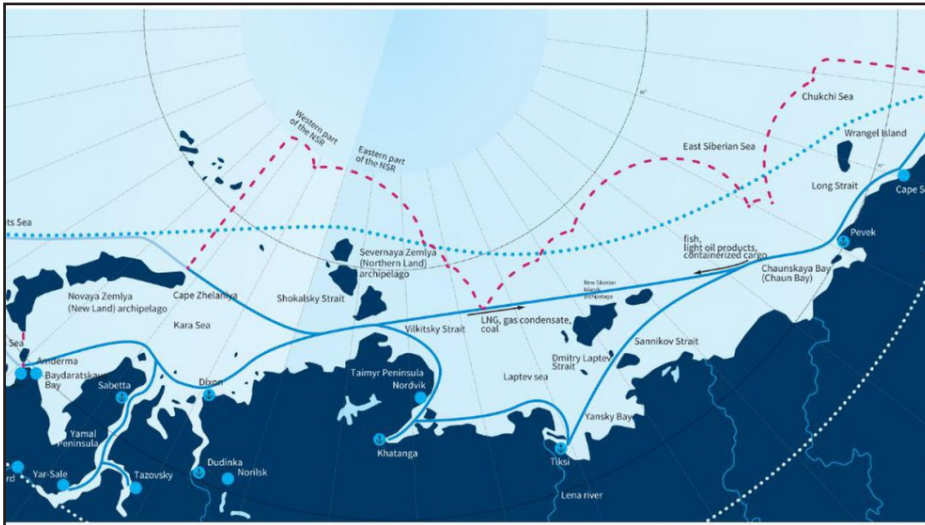
- **About:**
 - The NSR, the **shortest shipping route for freight transportation between Europe and countries of the Asia-Pacific** region, straddles the **Four Seas (Barents, Kara, Laptev and East Siberian Sea)** of the **Arctic Ocean**.

Note:

- Running to 5,600 km, the Route begins at the boundary between the Barents and the **Kara seas (Kara Strait)** and ends in the **Bering Strait (Provideniya Bay)**.
- It offers potential distance **savings of up to 50% compared to traditional routes through the Suez or Panama Canals**.
 - The **2021 Suez Canal Blockage** heightened interest in the **NSR as an alternative trade route**.

➤ Future Developments and Collaborations:

- Russia's NSR development plan aims for significant cargo traffic growth by 2035. The CVMC project, designed to link India and Russia via the NSR, holds promise for reducing transport times and enhancing trade efficiency.
- A forthcoming workshop between the two countries is expected to provide a platform for advancing the CVMC project.



Artificial Intelligence Safety Summit 2023

Why in News?

The **Artificial Intelligence (AI) Safety Summit 2023** held at **Bletchley Park, England** has marked a significant turning point in the global approach to tackling the **challenges posed by frontier AI technologies**.

➤ To tackle these challenges, 28 major countries, including the United States, China, India, and the **European Union**, signed the **Bletchley Park Declaration** at this

first-ever AI Safety Summit.

- This landmark declaration seeks to create a collective understanding and coordinated approach to address the potential risks and benefits of **advanced AI systems, known as frontier AI**.

Note:

- Frontier AI is defined as **highly capable foundation generative AI models** that can produce realistic and convincing outputs, such as text, images, audio, or video, on demand.

What are the Key Highlights of Artificial Intelligence Safety Summit 2023?

➤ Bletchley Park Declaration:

- The Bletchley Park Declaration is the first global pact on tackling frontier AI risks, and it reflects a high-level political consensus and **commitment among the major AI players in the world**.
- It acknowledges the **potential of AI to enhance human well-being** but also recognizes the **risks**

➤ Russia's Role in NSR Development:

- The Arctic's icebound nature necessitates icebreaking assistance for safe navigation along the NSR. **Russia boasts the world's only nuclear-powered icebreaker fleet, ensuring year-round operation**. **Rosatom**, the NSR infrastructure operator, oversees this fleet.
- With Russia's ambitious plans to enhance the NSR's cargo traffic, its **nuclear icebreaker fleet remains central to the project**.

➤ Driving Factors for India's NSR Engagement:

- The increasing cargo traffic along the NSR, with a growth rate of **approximately 73% during 2018-2022**, aligns with India's expanding imports of **Russian Crude Oil** and coal.
- The NSR's potential as a transit route also suits **India's trade-heavy economy**.
- The **Chennai-Vladivostok Maritime Corridor (CVMC)** project offers a **shorter and efficient trade route**, further boosting India's interest in the NSR.
- Additionally, India seeks to balance **China and Russia's potential collective influence** over the NSR.

Note:

posed by AI, especially frontier AI, which may cause serious harm, either deliberate or unintentional, particularly in domains like cybersecurity, biotechnology, and disinformation.

- It emphasizes the need for **international cooperation to address AI-related risks**, as they are inherently global, and calls for collaboration among all actors, including companies, civil society, and academia.
- The declaration also announces the establishment of a regular AI Safety Summit, which will provide a platform for **dialogue and collaboration on frontier AI safety**.
 - The **next summit will be hosted by France** within a year, and South Korea will co-host a mini virtual AI summit in the next six months.
- **India's Stance at the Summit:**
 - India has shifted from a stance of not considering AI regulation to actively **formulating regulations based on a risk-based, user-harm approach**.
 - India called for a global framework for the expansion of **"ethical" AI tools**, signaling a commitment to responsible AI usage.
 - India has shown interest in **establishing regulatory bodies at both domestic and international levels** to ensure the responsible use of AI.
 - **Digital India Act, 2023** which is yet to implement, is expected to introduce issue-specific regulations for online intermediaries, including **AI-based platforms**.

Key Facts About Bletchley Park

- Bletchley Park is located approximately 80 km north of London in Buckinghamshire, England.
 - During **World War II**, it served as the main site for the **British Government Code and Cypher School (GC&CS)**.
 - Bletchley Park during the war, worked on deciphering enemy messages.
 - The **Turing Bombe**, developed at Bletchley Park, is renowned for its pivotal role in breaking the **supposedly unbreakable German Enigma code**.
 - This electro-mechanical device significantly accelerated the code breaking process, contributing to the **Allies'** success during World War II.

- Bletchley Park also developed the **Colossus machine**, often regarded as the world's first programmable electronic digital computer.
- The principles and innovations developed at Bletchley Park continue to influence **modern computing and artificial intelligence**.
- Bletchley Park is now a museum and a historic site, attracting visitors interested in its wartime history and contributions.

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.

- 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**.

Note:



- 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.

What is India's Position on Bilateral Negotiation with Sri Lanka?

- India launched its own **bilateral negotiations with Sri Lanka** in January 2023.
 - The **Indian External Affairs Minister** announced that India had written to the **IMF** providing the necessary financial assurances, adding that it hoped others would follow suit.
- 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.

6. India Europe Relations

India- EU Trade and Technology Council

Why in News?

Recently, the 1st Ministerial meeting of the **India-European Union Trade and Technology Council (TTC)** took place, in Brussels, Belgium.

- The EU-India Trade and Technology Council is the **second bilateral forum for the EU and the first one established** with any partner for India. The EU and the US launched a TTC in June 2021.

What are the Key Highlights of the Meeting?

- The Meeting involved **discussions on roadmaps for future cooperation** under the three working groups:
 - Strategic Technologies, **Digital Governance**, and Digital Connectivity

- **Green and Clean Energy** Technologies
- Trade, Investment, and Resilient Value Chains
- The meeting aimed to **provide direction and lay the roadmap for cooperation between the two sides regarding:**
 - Addressing mutual market access
 - **WTO (World Trade Organization)** reforms
 - The ongoing negotiations for a **Free Trade Agreement (FTA)**
 - Cooperation in various areas of mutual interest
- India and the EU were also working to resolve a **looming issue in their trade relationship** — the **E.U.'s Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)**.
 - The E.U. describes the CBAM as a "landmark tool" which places a "fair price" on carbon emitted during the production of goods that are entering the EU and a mechanism to "encourage cleaner industrial "production outside the EU.

What is India - EU Trade and Technology Council (TTC)?

- **About:**
 - The formation of the TTC was announced by the Indian Prime Minister and **President of the European Commission** in 2022 with the objective of creating a High-level coordination platform to tackle strategic challenges at the nexus of trade, trusted technology and security.
- **Meetings:**
 - **Ministerial meetings of the TTC will be held annually**, ensuring regular high-level engagement between India and the EU.
 - These meetings will alternate in terms of **location, taking place in either India or the EU, to foster balanced participation** and strengthen bilateral cooperation.
- **Working Groups:** The TTC consists of three Working Groups (WGs) that report on roadmaps for future cooperation:
 - **WG on Strategic Technologies, Digital Governance, and Digital Connectivity:**
 - It will **work jointly on areas of mutual interest** such as digital connectivity, **Artificial Intelligence, 5G/6G**, high performance and **Quantum Computing, Semiconductors**, cloud systems, **Cybersecurity**, digital skills and digital platforms.

Note:

- **WG on Green and Clean Energy Technologies:**
 - It will focus on **green technologies, including investment and standards**, with emphasis on research and innovation.
 - Areas to be explored could be clean energy, **Circular Economy**, waste management, plastic and **litter in the ocean**, waste to hydrogen and recycling of batteries for e-vehicles.
 - It will also foster cooperation between EU and Indian incubators, SMEs and **start-ups**.
- **WG on Trade, Investment, and Resilient Value Chains:**
 - It will work on the resilience of **supply chains and access to critical components, energy, and raw materials**.
 - It will also work to resolve **identified trade barriers and global trade challenges** by promoting cooperation in multilateral fora. It will work towards promotion of international standards and cooperation on addressing global geopolitical challenges.

India and EFTA

Why in News?

In a recent meeting held in New Delhi, **India and the four European countries that form the European Free Trade Association (EFTA)** have expressed their willingness to resume their negotiations for a **Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA)** that has been stalled since 2018.

- The TEPA aims to boost bilateral trade and economic cooperation between the two regions by reducing tariffs and non-tariff barriers, enhancing market access, and promoting investment flows.

What is EFTA?

- EFTA is an intergovernmental organization that was established in 1960 as an alternative trade bloc for those **European states that were unable or unwilling to join the European Union (EU)**.
 - EFTA comprises **Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland**, which are not part of the EU but have access to its single market through various agreements.
- **EFTA is India's 9th largest trading partner**, accounting for about 2.5% of India's total merchandise trade in 2020-21.

- The main items of India's exports to EFTA are **textiles, chemicals, gems, and jewelry, machinery, and pharmaceuticals**.
- The main items of India's imports from EFTA are **machinery, chemicals, precious metals, and medical instruments**.



What is TEPA?

- **Objective:**
 - The TEPA aims to **create opportunities for trade and investment between India and EFTA by eliminating/reducing tariffs and non-tariff barriers** on a wide range of products.
 - It aims to ensure **fair and transparent market access conditions for service providers and investors** and will **enhance cooperation on intellectual property rights protection and enforcement**.
 - TEPA aims to facilitate **trade procedures and customs cooperation** along with effective mechanisms for **dispute resolution**.
- **Coverage:**
 - The TEPA is a comprehensive agreement that covers **trade in goods, trade in services, investment, intellectual property rights, competition, government procurement, trade facilitation, trade remedies, dispute settlement, and other areas of mutual interest**.
- **Recent Highlights:**
 - Participants acknowledged challenges posed by **global economic and trade environment**.

Note:

- Participants agreed to address **bilateral trade and economic partnership issues in a constructive and pragmatic manner.**
- India proposed to **include talks on gender equality and women empowerment in TEPA negotiations.**
- India committed to **promote social development along with economic growth.**

How are India's Relations with EFTA Countries?

➤ India and Switzerland Relations:

- An **inter-governmental framework agreement on technical and scientific cooperation** was signed, leading to the launch of the **Indo-Swiss Joint Research Programme**
- **Skill training collaboration** between both countries is facilitated through institutes such as the Bharatiya Skill Development Campus and University, Indo-Swiss Centre of Excellence in Pune, and the Vocational Training Center in Andhra Pradesh.
- Switzerland is the **12th largest investor in India**, accounting for 1.07% of total FDI in India from **April 2000 to September 2019.**

➤ India and Norway Relations:

- The India-Norway Task Force on **Blue Economy for Sustainable Development** was inaugurated in 2020.
- More than 100 Norwegian companies have established themselves in India.
- The **Norwegian Pension Fund Global** is one of India's largest single foreign investors.
- **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.**

➤ India and Iceland Relations:

- India and Iceland established diplomatic relations in 1972 and have strengthened their ties since 2005 with **high-level visits and exchanges.**
- India and Iceland share common values of **democracy, rule of law, and multilateralism.**
- Iceland supports **India's candidature for a permanent seat** at the **UN Security Council.**
- India and Iceland cooperate in **trade, renewable energy, science and technology, education, culture, and development.**

- Several agreements have been signed between the two countries to facilitate economic cooperation, such as a **Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement.**

➤ India and Liechtenstein Relations:

- The two countries have friendly relations based on mutual respect and cooperation.
- The bilateral trade between the two countries is modest, amounting to US\$ 1.59 million in 2016-17.
- The two countries have exchanged **high-level visits to strengthen their ties.**
- The two countries have signed agreements to facilitate economic cooperation, such as a Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement.
- **Liechtenstein supports India's candidature for a permanent seat at the UNSC.**

India-France Relations

Why in News?

Recently, the President of France visited India on the Occasion of **Republic Day (26th January)**, where India and France discussed Bilateral cooperation, expressing satisfaction with the increasing "complexity and interoperability" of India-France joint defence exercises.

What are the Key Highlights of the India-France Bilateral Meeting?

➤ Intensification of Cooperation in Southwest Indian Ocean:

- Both countries agreed to **intensify cooperation in the Southwest Indian Ocean**, building on joint surveillance missions carried out **from the French island territory of La Reunion** in 2020 and 2022.
- This cooperation contributes **positively to the securitisation of strategic sea lanes of communication.**

➤ Indo-Pacific Partnership:

- Both sides emphasized the **significance of the Indo-Pacific Region** for their sovereign and strategic interests.
- They committed to **deepening the long-standing partnership** in the Indo-Pacific, based on their common vision, and expressed satisfaction with the expanding **nature of their engagement in the region.**

Note:

➤ **Defence and Security Partnership:**

- The defence and security partnership between India and France in the Indo-Pacific region was highlighted as a cornerstone of their collaboration.
- This partnership includes a comprehensive range of bilateral, multinational, regional, and institutional initiatives, especially in the **Indian Ocean Region**.
- The leaders **discussed joint tri-services exercises** and increasing capacities, particularly in the **maritime domain**.

➤ **Trilateral Cooperation:**

- Both countries committed to **revitalising trilateral cooperation with Australia**, deepening cooperation with the **United Arab Emirates (UAE)**, and exploring new trilateral **partnerships in the region**.
 - In June 2023, the first edition of **India, France and UAE Maritime Partnership Exercise** commenced in the Gulf of Oman.

➤ **Economic Development and Connectivity:**

- Both countries acknowledged the importance of joint and multilateral initiatives for supporting sustainable economic development, human welfare, environmental sustainability, resilient infrastructure, innovation, and connectivity in the region.
- They called for the early launching of the **Indo-Pacific Triangular Development Cooperation Fund** to facilitate the scaling up of green technologies.

➤ **India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEC):**

- The leaders recalled the launch of the **India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEC)**, considering it of great strategic importance for enhancing the potential and resilience of commerce and energy flow between India, the **Middle East**, and Europe.

➤ **Multilateralism and UN Reform:**

- Both countries called for **reformed and effective multilateralism**, stressing the urgent need for the reform of the **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)**.
 - France reiterated its support for India's permanent membership in the UNSC.
- Both Sides highlighted the need for the reform of **Multilateral Development Banks** and welcomed the report submitted by the Independent Expert Group for providing concrete suggestions in this regard.

- They acknowledged enhanced cooperation between the **Paris Club and India** in official debt restructuring cases.

➤ **Defence Industrial Cooperation:**

- Both sides reiterated their commitment to **deepening integration between the two countries' defense industrial sectors**. They discussed co-design, co-development, and co-production opportunities for defence supplies, not only for India but also for other friendly countries.

● **Tata Group and Airbus Agreement:**

- **Tata Group and Airbus** signed an agreement for the development and manufacturing of **civilian helicopters**.
 - ◆ Tata and Airbus are already cooperating to make the **C-295 Transport Aircraft** in Gujarat.
- The industrial partnership aims to produce **H125 helicopters with a significant indigenous and localization component**.

● **Shakti Jet Engine Deal:**

- Ongoing discussions between India and **Safran regarding the Shakti jet engine deal** were highlighted. The focus of these discussions is on achieving specifications aligned with India's future fighter jet requirements, involving aspects beyond just the transfer of manufacturing technology.

● **CFM International and Akasa Air:**

- French jet engine maker CFM International also announced an agreement with India's Akasa Air to buy **more than 300 of its LEAP-1B engines** to power 150 Boeing open new tab 737 MAX aircraft.

➤ **Space Cooperation:**

- The countries launched the **Strategic Space Dialogue**, signed a Letter of Intent on Defence Space Cooperation, and an MoU between **ISRO's New Space India Limited (NSIL)** and **Arianespace of France** for satellite launch missions.
- The leaders expressed dedication to expanding space cooperation, including co-development, manufacture, and launch of satellites.

Note:





with the law of the sea, in particular the provisions of the [United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea \(UNCLOS\)](#) and with full respect for the **sovereignty, territorial integrity, and freedom of navigation to the benefit of international peace, stability and security.**

➤ **Culture and Tourism:**

- Both leaders **welcomed efforts to promote exchanges in all forms of art.**
- They also agreed to encourage joint efforts in preserving and protecting ancient sites and **strengthen cooperation**

within the [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization \(UNESCO\).](#)

➤ **Trade and investment:**

- The two countries also aimed to **double bilateral trade by 2030.** They agreed to explore new opportunities in sectors such as renewable energy, infrastructure, pharmaceuticals, agriculture, and innovation.

➤ **Mobility and Migration Partnership Agreement (MMPA):**

- Both leaders agreed that an early finalization of an MMPA would be mutually beneficial, facilitating in particular the **free movement of the workforce between the two countries.**

➤ **Broad Spectrum of Collaboration:**

- Discussions span various domains, including digital **payments, shipping, pharmaceuticals, and education.**

What is the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier?

- The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier is a **war memorial located in Syntagma Square in Athens, Greece.**
- It is dedicated to **Greek soldiers who lost their lives in various wars.**
- The tomb serves as a symbol of remembrance and honour for the sacrifices made by anonymous soldiers.
- It was sculpted between **1930 and 1932** by sculptor **Fokion Rok.**

India and Greece Relations

Why in News?

Recently, India and Greece have taken a significant step by upgrading their relationship to a strategic partnership. The partnership aims to **double trade, enhance defence and security collaboration, and address shared challenges.**

- On this occasion, the Greek President Katerina Sakellaropoulou conferred the Prime Minister (PM) of India with “**The Grand Cross of the Order of Honour**”.
- The Indian PM paid tribute at the “**Tomb of Unknown Soldier**” in Athens.

What are the Main Areas of Cooperation Under the Strategic Partnership?

➤ **Defence and Security:**

- India and Greece agreed to **intensify their defence and security cooperation**, especially in maritime security, **counter-terrorism, cyber security, and the defence industry.**
- Decided that there should also be an **India-Greece dialogue framework at the level of [National Security Advisors \(NSAs\).](#)**

➤ **Maritime Security and Adherence to International Law:**

- As leaders of two **ancient sea-faring nations with a long-standing maritime outlook**, they shared their vision of a **free, open and rules-based Mediterranean Sea and Indo-Pacific**, in accordance

Note:



What is the Grand Cross of the Order of Honour?

- The Grand Cross of the Order of Honour is the **second-highest civilian honour in Greece, after the Grand Cross of the Order of the Redeemer.**
- The award was established in 1975 and features the **head of goddess Athena on its front side, along with the inscription "ONLY THE RIGHTEOUS SHOULD BE HONORED".**
- The award is given to individuals who have distinguished themselves in the fields of politics, diplomacy, culture, science, or social service, and who have promoted the interests and values of Greece.

Key Facts about Greece:

- Greece is a country in southern Europe with a long coastline on the **Mediterranean Sea**. It is bordered by **Albania, North Macedonia, Bulgaria, and Turkey.**
- Greece is one of the **oldest civilizations in the world and is considered the cradle of Western civilization**. It is the birthplace of **democracy, philosophy, theater, and the Olympic Games.**



- **Government:** Parliamentary Republic.
- **Capital:** Athens, **National**
- **Language:** Greek
- **Currency:** Euro
- **Major Mountains Ranges:** Pindus and the Taurus mountains.
- The longest river in **Greece is the river Haliacmon.**
- Greece's highest mountain is Mount Olympus.

Note:

Schengen Zone

Why in News?

Recently, **Kosovo** achieved a significant milestone after facing delays in **Schengen approval**. It has secured visa-free access to the **Schengen zone**, the world's largest area of free movement.

- Kosovo becomes the last non-**European Union (EU)** country in the Western Balkans to enjoy this privilege.

What is the Schengen Zone?

➤ About:

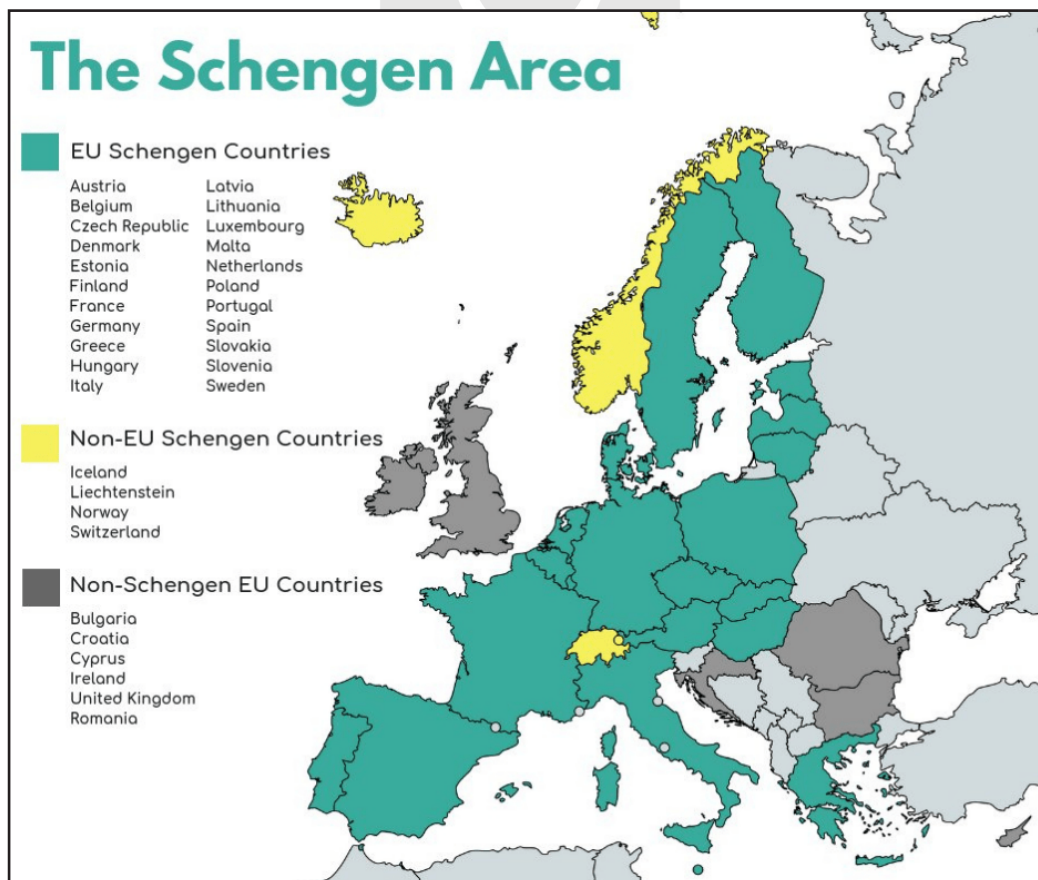
- The **Schengen Agreement** is a treaty signed in **1985** by five member states (Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands) of the European Economic Community.
 - The agreement aims to **create a border-free area in Europe** that allows the free movement of people, goods, services, and capital called the Schengen Area, where internal border checks are largely abolished.
- All EU member states without opt-outs must join Schengen upon meeting technical requirements.

- **Non-EU countries** like Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Iceland are part of Schengen through **special association agreements**.

- Over time, the Schengen area has grown to **encompass 27 countries**, spanning over **4 million square kilometres** and hosting nearly 420 million inhabitants.

➤ Benefits of Schengen:

- Schengen enables seamless travel for **over 400 million individuals across member states without border checks**.
- Facilitates approximately 1.25 billion journeys annually, fostering tourism, cultural exchange, and economic prosperity.
- Schengen promotes cooperation among police, customs, and border control authorities to **combat terrorism and organized crime**.
- For nationals of Schengen countries, visa-free travel and the absence of internal border checks enhance convenience and facilitate economic integration.
- Schengen's border-free regime symbolises European values of unity and solidarity.



Note:

Key Facts About Kosovo

- Kosovo, which has a majority Albanian population and a minority of Serbs, is a landlocked region bordered by Albania, Macedonia, Serbia, and Montenegro.
- Its capital and largest city is **Pristina**.
- According to the **World Bank**, Kosovo is a parliamentary republic and upper-middle-income country. It declared **independence from Serbia on 17th February 2008** and is recognised as an independent country by more than **100 United Nations members**.
 - India, Brazil, China, Russia, and Mexico have not recognised Kosovo as an independent country.
 - However, **Serbia does not recognize Kosovo as an independent state** and continues to claim it as the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija.



Note:



Northern Ireland Conflict

Why in News?

Recently, a pro-Irish unity politician made history by becoming the first Nationalist First Minister of Northern Ireland amid political deadlock reflecting the region's complex divisions.

- Rooted in its troubled past, the move signals a potential shift towards reconciliation and inclusive governance.



Note:



drishti

What are the Key Facts About Northern Ireland?

- **Location and Geography:** Northern Ireland is situated in the northeastern quadrant of the island of Ireland. It shares borders with the Republic of Ireland to the south and west, while the Irish Sea separates it from England and Wales to the east and southeast, and the North Channel separates it from Scotland to the northeast.
- **Political Status:** Northern Ireland is a constituent country of the United Kingdom, alongside England, Scotland, and Wales. It is **not a sovereign state** but has its own devolved government within the framework of the United Kingdom.
- **Capital and Major Cities:** The capital city of Northern Ireland is Belfast, a modern city with a rich industrial history, including shipbuilding. Other major cities include Londonderry (also known as Derry) and Armagh.
- **Cultural Contributions:** Northern Ireland has made significant contributions to world culture, particularly in literature, music, and the arts. Notable figures include poet Seamus Heaney and musician Van Morrison.
- **Economy:** Historically reliant on industries such as shipbuilding and textiles, Northern Ireland's economy has diversified in recent decades, with a focus on technology, tourism, and services.
- **Demographics:** The population of Northern Ireland is **diverse, with a mix of ethnicities, religions,** and cultural backgrounds. The region's population is predominantly Christian, with significant Protestant and Catholic communities.

What is the Good Friday Agreement?

- The Good Friday Agreement, also known as the **Belfast Agreement**, is a historic peace treaty signed on 10th April, 1998, in Northern Ireland.
- It aimed to bring an end to the violence and conflict that had plagued the region for decades, particularly during the period known as "The Troubles."

India-Italy Migration and Mobility Agreement

Why in News?

Recently, the **Union Cabinet** granted **ex-post facto approval** to the **Migration and Mobility Agreement between India and Italy**.

What is Migration and Mobility Agreement between India and Italy?

- **About:**
 - The agreement is set to strengthen cooperation on issues related to **irregular migration** while bolstering people-to-people ties between India and Italy.
 - It facilitates mobility for various segments, including **students, skilled workers, businesspersons, and young professionals**, fostering exchange and collaboration.
- **Key Provisions:**
 - **Temporary Residence for Indian Students:** Graduates seeking professional exposure in Italy post-academic or vocational training can secure temporary residency for **up to 12 months**.
 - **Reserved Quotas for Workers:** The agreement outlines **quotas for non-seasonal and seasonal Indian workers**, with a reserved quota range over the years **2023-2025** under the existing Flows Decree.
 - The Italian government's annual "**Flow Decree**" (**Decreto Flussi**) sets the maximum number of non-EU citizens who can enter Italy for work and self-employment
- **Implementation:**
 - The agreement will remain in force for **5 years**, with automatic renewal unless terminated.
 - A **Joint Working Group (JWG)** will oversee its implementation, convening periodically to evaluate progress and propose supportive measures for effective execution.

Note:



Key Facts About Italy

- **About:**
 - Italy is a boot-shaped peninsula that juts out of southern Europe into the **Adriatic Sea, Tyrrhenian Sea, Mediterranean Sea**, and other waters.
- **Bordering Countries:**
 - Italy has international borders with **Austria, France, the Holy See (Vatican City), San Marino, Slovenia, and Switzerland**.
 - Italy also shares maritime borders with **Albania, Algeria, Croatia, Greece, Libya, Malta, Montenegro, Spain, and Tunisia**.
- **Form of Government:** Republic
- **Capital:** Rome
- **Money:** Euro
- **Major Mountains:** Alps, Apennines
- **Major Rivers:** Po, Adige, Arno, Tiber



Italy Withdraws from China's BRI

Why in News?

Italy has withdrawn from **China's Belt and Road Initiative**, more than four years after becoming the **only G7 nation to sign up**.

- Italy's potential withdrawal from China's BRI stems from a combination of **economic, geopolitical, and strategic factors** that have led the country to reassess its participation.



What are the Reasons for Italy's Withdrawal From BRI?

- **Economic Imbalance:**
 - Italy had joined the BRI in 2019 at a time it was desperate for investment and infrastructure building, having survived **three recessions in 10 years**.
 - However, the anticipated economic benefits haven't materialized as in these four years later, the agreement hasn't done much for Italy.
 - According to figures from the Council on Foreign Relations, Chinese **FDI (Foreign Direct Investment)** in Italy dropped from USD 650 million in 2019 to just USD 33 million in 2021.
 - In terms of trade, since joining BRI, Italy's exports to China increased from 14.5 billion euros to a mere 18.5 billion euros, while Chinese exports to Italy expanded from 33.5 billion euros to 50.9 billion euros.
- **Geopolitical Realignment:**
 - Italy's reconsideration is part of a broader trend **among European nations to reassess their relationships with China**.
 - Concerns over China's increasing influence, geopolitical alignments, and strategic implications, particularly amid **global events like the Russia-Ukraine conflict**, have prompted Italy to reevaluate its stance toward the BRI.
 - In April, the **EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI)** collapsed. Last year, **Estonia and Latvia quit the 17+1**, China's diplomatic push in Central and Eastern European countries. **Lithuania had walked out in 2021**.

Note:

- **Alignment with Western Allies:**
 - Italy's inclination to align itself more closely with its Western allies, especially in the G7, might influence its decision regarding the BRI.
 - With the G7 presidency upcoming, **Italy might see leaving the BRI as a gesture of solidarity with Western allies.**
- **Negative Press and Debt Concerns:**
 - The BRI has faced criticism globally for **potential debt traps and lack of transparency in financial dealings.**
 - Reports of other countries facing substantial debt burdens due to their participation in the **BRI might be contributing to Italy's Withdrawal.**

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 5G.**
- This Cooperation aims at benefiting humanity and is firmly guided by their shared **democratic values and respect for universal human rights.**
 - **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.

What are the Key Facts About Germany?

- **Bordering Countries:** Germany shares borders with nine countries, **France, Luxembourg, Denmark, Belgium, Switzerland, Austria, Czech Republic, the Netherlands and Poland.**
- **Location:** It is located in Central Europe, bordering the **Baltic Sea** and the North Sea.
- **Rivers:** Danube, Rhine, Ems, Weser, Elbe and Oder

Note:

- **Forest:** The Black Forest is Germany's **largest and most famous wooded area located in the southwest near the Swiss border**. It is the source of the Danube, one of Europe's longest rivers.
- **Form of Government:** Germany is a **federal parliamentary republic with a President as the head of state** and a Chancellor as the head of government.
- **Main Industrial Regions:** Ruhr, Hanover, Munich, Frankfurt am Main, and Stuttgart.

Kosovo-Serbia Conflict

Why in News?

Serbian protesters and **NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization)** peacekeepers recently clashed in Kosovo, leading to more than 60 injuries. It is the most serious violence seen in the region in over a decade.

What is the Cause for Current Tension?

- Northern Kosovo experiences frequent tensions stemming from the larger ethnic and political divide between **ethnic Serbs and Albanians**.
- Ethnic Serbs, who form a majority in northern Kosovo, attempted to block **Albanian mayors from taking charge in local councils**.
- Serbs boycotted local elections in April 2023, resulting in a low voter turnout of less than 3.5%. The election results were **rejected by Serbs as illegitimate**.

What is the Kosovo-Serbia Conflict About?

- **Geography:**
 - **Serbia:** Serbia is a landlocked country in **eastern Europe that shares borders** with Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria.
 - **Kosovo:** Kosovo is a small landlocked region that **lies to Serbia's southwest**, sharing borders with North Macedonia, Albania, and Montenegro. Many Serbs consider **Kosovo the birthplace of their nation**.
 - Kosovo declared **independence from Serbia in 2008**, but Serbia does not recognize Kosovo's statehood.
- **Ethnic Background:**
 - Kosovo is a region where Serbs and Albanians, representing different ethnicities and religious backgrounds, have been living for centuries.

- 1.8 million people living in **Kosovo, 92% are Albanian and only 6% Serbian**. The rest are Bosniaks, Gorans, Turks and Roma.
- Serbs are primarily **Eastern Orthodox Christians**, while Albanians in Kosovo are predominantly Muslim. Other minority groups **include Bosnians and Turks**. Serbs form the majority in Serbia, while Albanians are the majority in Kosovo.
- **Battle Of Kososvo:**
 - Serbian nationalists view the 1389 Battle of Kosovo **between the Serbian prince Lazar Hrebeljanovic and the Ottoman Sultan Murad Hudavendigar** as a defining moment in their national struggle.
 - On the other hand, Kosovo's majority ethnic Albanians view Kosovo as belonging to them and accuse Serbia of occupation and repression.
- **Disintegration of Yugoslavia:**
 - From 1945 after the end of **World War II** to 1992, the area in the Balkans comprising present-day **Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia, was one country, officially known as the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY)** with Belgrade as its capital.
 - Serbia included autonomous provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina. Following the collapse of the **Soviet Union, Yugoslavia disintegrated**, with each republic becoming an independent country.
 - Slovenia was the first to **secede in 1991**.
 - The late 1980s and early 1990s saw the weakening of the central government in Yugoslavia, **accompanied by resurgent nationalism**.
 - Political leaders exploited nationalist rhetoric, eroding the common Yugoslav identity and fueling fear and mistrust among ethnic groups.
 - In 1998, ethnic Albanian rebels formed the **Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA)** to challenge Serbian rule.
- **Intervention of NATO:**
 - NATO intervened in 1999 after **Serbia's brutal response**, leading to a 78-day air campaign against Kosovo and Serbia.
 - Serbia agreed to withdraw its forces from Kosovo, **resulting in the return of Albanian refugees** and the displacement of many Serbs who feared reprisals.
 - In June 1999, Kosovo came under international administration, with its final status **remaining**

Note:

unresolved. Several Serbian leaders, including President Milošević, were indicted for war crimes by the UN's tribunal.

What is the Current Status of Kosovo?

- While Kosovo declared independence in 2008, Serbia still considers it to be an integral part of Serbian territory.
- Countries such as **India, China, and Russia** do not recognise Kosovo as a separate country, while the **US, the majority of EU countries**, Japan and Australia do so.
- A total of 99 out of 193 **United Nations (UN)** countries now recognize Kosovo's independence.

What was India's Stand on the Status of Kosovo?

- India claims that **Kosovo does not fulfill the three principles required for recognition**: a defined territory, a duly constituted government accepted by the people, and effective control over an area of governance.
- India has **opposed Kosovo's membership in international bodies such as UNESCO, Apostille Convention**, Convention for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes, and Egmont Group of Financial Intelligence Units.
- India's non-recognition of Kosovo is **based on its support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Serbia**, with whom it has a long-standing relationship.

India Denmark Cooperation

Why in News?

Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change expressed that India and Denmark can jointly demonstrate the feasibility of achieving ambitious climate and sustainable energy goals during the 'India-Denmark: Partners for Green and Sustainable Progress Conference' in New Delhi.

- Since the launch of the **Green Strategic Partnership** in 2020, the bilateral cooperation is focused on promoting green and sustainable development.

What is Green Strategy 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**.

- Danish companies with niche technologies and expertise have offered to help India in meeting its **air pollution** control targets, including in the key area of tackling the problem of **burning crop stubble**.
- Other key points under the partnership include dealing with the **Covid-19** pandemic and **cooperation in water efficiency and water loss**.
- The creation of **India-Denmark energy parks** in areas with large numbers of Danish firms and an **India-Denmark skill institute** to train Indian manpower has been proposed.
- The Green Strategic Partnership will build on an existing **Joint Commission for Cooperation** and existing **joint working groups**.

What is the State of India Denmark Cooperation?

➤ 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.

➤ 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.
- 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

Note:



hoisting ceremony and vibrant **Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav celebrations, attended by a large number of the diaspora.**

- 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.

➤ **Intellectual Property Cooperation:**

- The MoU signed in 2020 aims at increasing IP co-operation between the two countries by way of, exchange of information and best practices on processes for disposal of applications for patents, trademarks, industrial designs, and **Geographical Indications**, and cooperation in the field of protection of Traditional Knowledge.

- It will be a landmark step forward in India's journey towards becoming a major player in global innovation and further the objectives of the **National Intellectual Property Rights Policy, 2016.**

2nd CII India Nordic-Baltic Business Conclave 2023

Why in News?

Recently, the 2nd **CII (Confederation of Indian Industries)** India Nordic-Baltic Business Conclave 2023 was held in New Delhi, aiming to foster collaboration between **India and the Nordic Baltic Eight (NB8) countries**, known for their prowess in innovation and technology.

What is Nordic Baltic (NB) 8?

- The NB8 is a **regional cooperation format** that brings together the Nordic countries and the Baltic states.
 - It comprises **five Nordic countries**: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, along with **three Baltic states**: Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.
- The group shares **historical, cultural, and geographical ties**, fostering collaboration and cooperation in various fields, including politics, economics, trade, security, and culture.
- While the Nordic countries are **located in Northern Europe** and share similarities in governance, social systems, and values, the **Baltic states are situated in Northeastern Europe** and have their unique historical backgrounds and geopolitical positioning.



Note:



drishti

What are the Key Highlights of the Conclave?

- **Food Processing and Sustainability:**
 - Discussions focused on **transforming food systems towards sustainability** by sharing experiences, innovations, and best practices between India and the Nordic-Baltic nations.
 - Collaboration aimed to address global challenges with a holistic approach encompassing economic, social, and environmental dimensions.
- **Blue Economy and Maritime Cooperation:**
 - Emphasis was placed on **efficient management of the Blue Economy** to enhance **Global Supply Chain Resilience**, promote sustainable marine practices, encourage innovation, and foster greater maritime cooperation between India and the Nordic-Baltic countries.
- **Renewable Energy Integration:**
 - Deliberations **centered around India's push for Renewable Energy integration**, identifying resources, policy support, energy storage, and advanced technology initiatives.
 - The aim was to seek **support from innovative Nordic-Baltic economies** in identifying and implementing clean energy-related technologies.
- **Transition to Industry 5.0:**
 - Collaboration discussions **focused on leveraging advanced technologies like AI (Artificial Intelligence), IoT, and smart manufacturing** to enhance productivity and efficiency in the manufacturing sector.
 - The aim was to **explore how cooperation between India and Nordic-Baltic nations** could contribute to India's goal of becoming a developed nation by 2047.
- **Green Financing for Climate Action:**
 - The conclave highlighted the significance of **climate finance** in achieving green and sustainable transitions. Discussions aimed at exploring strategies and solutions to drive funding and investments, fostering greater collaboration between India and the Nordic-Baltic countries in advancing climate action.
- **Information Technology and AI Collaboration:**
 - Emphasis was placed on exploring potential areas of cooperation between India and the Nordic-Baltic countries in leveraging IT and AI to address

complex societal challenges. Skill development initiatives were also discussed to enable inclusive AI and IT growth.

- **Resilient Supply Chain and Logistics:**
 - Discussions revolved around the need to build efficient and resilient supply chains, aligning with India's Logistics Policy. The conclave aimed to explore how India and the Nordic-Baltic countries could collaborate to strengthen global value chains using technological advancements.

Global DPI Summit

Why in News?

The third meeting of the **G20 Digital Economy Working Group (DEWG)** commenced in Pune, Maharashtra with the inauguration of the **Global DPI (Digital Public Infrastructure) Summit** and Exhibition.

- The session explored **common principles and design aspects of DPI**, including open standards, partnerships, interoperability, and affordability.
- India has also introduced the idea to form an alliance of countries, called **One Future Alliance**, which would allow like-minded nations to **use technology to improve people's lives**.

NOTE: The DEWG, originally called DETF, was formed in 2017 as part of the German G20 presidency with the aim of promoting the implementation of a **secure, interconnected, and inclusive digital economy**.

- With the global digital economy estimated to be worth USD 11 trillion and expected to reach USD 23 trillion by 2025, **the DEWG plays a critical role in shaping global policy** discourse in the digital space.

What are the Highlights of the Summit?

- **Setting the Stage for DPI Advancements:**
 - India's role as a test case for successful DPI implementation and digital transformation was underscored.
 - India **signed MoUs with Armenia, Sierra Leone, and Suriname** to share its successful digital solutions implemented at scale through the **India Stack**.
- **Digital Identities for Empowering People:**
 - The session focused **on the role of digital identity** as the foundation for national priorities and social cohesion.

Note:



- Different models of implementation, such as centralized, federated, and **decentralized, were discussed.**
- India's Aadhaar and the Philippine's PhilSys were highlighted as notable examples.
- **Digital Payments and Financial Inclusion:**
 - The session explored the **role of DPI in facilitating fast and inclusive digital payments.**
 - Discussions included **settlement types, risk management, user onboarding costs,** and bridging the financial divide through DPI.
- **DPI for Judicial Systems and Regulations:**
 - The session discussed the implementation of **DPI in judicial systems.**
 - Topics covered included **e-court systems, e-filing, paperless courts,** live streaming, and the need for appropriate institutions and regulations to instill trust in DPI-powered judiciary systems.
- **Draft PKI Mutual Recognition Framework:**
 - Draft **Public Key Infrastructure (PKI) Mutual Recognition Framework** has been released by Ministry of Electronics & IT, Government of India with an **aim to take the lead on the subject of implementation** and adoption of India's DPI beyond the country's borders.

What is One Future Alliance?

- It is an alliance of countries to be formed to leverage technology for the **betterment of people's lives.** It aims to enable **like-minded nations to collaborate and use technology** to drive **Social, Economic, and Sustainable Development.**
- The alliance seeks to build upon the **open-source customizable stacks** that are already available and encourage countries to innovate and customize these solutions for their specific needs.
- The alliance acknowledges the evolving nature of technology, including the power of artificial intelligence and multilingual capabilities, and aims to implement and advance **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)** while fostering cooperation in areas such as cybersecurity and digital skilling.

What is Digital Public Infrastructure?

- DPI refers to **blocks or platforms such as digital identification,** payment infrastructure and data exchange solutions that help countries deliver essential services to their people, empowering citizens and improving lives by enabling digital inclusion.
- DPIs mediate the **flow of people, money and information.** First, the flow of people through a **digital ID System.** Second, the flow of money through a **real-time fast payment system.** And third, the flow of personal information through a **consent-based data sharing system** to actualize the benefits of DPIs and to empower the citizen with a real ability to control data.
 - These three sets become the foundation for developing an effective DPI ecosystem.
- Each DPI layer fills a clear need and generates considerable value across sectors.
- India, through India Stack, became the first country to develop all three foundational DPIs, **Digital identity (Aadhar), Real-time fast payment (UPI) and Account Aggregator built on the Data Empowerment Protection Architecture (DEPA).**
 - DEPA creates a digital framework that allows users to share their data on their own terms through a third-party entity, who are known as Consent Mangers.

Call for a New Treaty for Outer Space

Why in News?

- The **United Nations (UN)** has recently released a policy brief titled **"For All Humanity — The Future of Outer Space Governance,"** recommending the development of a new treaty to ensure **peace, security, and the prevention of an arms race** in outer space.
- The recommendations come ahead of the upcoming **UN Summit of the Future, scheduled for September 2024, in New York.** The summit aims to facilitate multilateral solutions and strengthen global governance to address future challenges.

What are the Key Highlights?

- **Increasing Satellite Launches:**
 - There has been an exponential increase in **satellite launches over the past decade,** driven by both government and private sector participation.

Note:

- In 2013, there were **210 new launches, which increased to 600 in 2019 and 1,200 in 2020 and 2,470 in 2022.**
- Countries like the United States, China, India, and Japan are **leading the way in space activities**, including manned missions, lunar exploration, and resource exploitation.
- **National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)**, through its **Artemis** mission, **plans to land the first woman and the next man on the Moon.**
- Minerals on the Moon (has rich deposits of helium 3, which is rare on Earth), asteroids (abundant deposits of valuable metals, including platinum, nickel and cobalt) and planets can be attractive for countries.
- **Lack of International Framework:**
 - There is an absence of an agreed international framework on space resource exploration, exploitation, and utilization.
 - The brief underscores the importance of establishing mechanisms **to support the implementation of space resource activities** while addressing issues of jurisdiction, control, liability, and responsibility for environmental pollution.
- **Coordination and Space Traffic Management:**
 - The current coordination of space traffic is fragmented, with different national and regional entities **employing varying standards and practices.**
 - The lack of coordination poses **challenges for countries with limited space capacity.**
- **Space Debris and Environmental Concerns:**
 - The proliferation of space debris is identified as a significant issue, with thousands of **objects posing threats to operational spacecraft.**
 - The UN calls for **legal considerations related to jurisdiction**, control, liability, and responsibility for environmental pollution caused by space debris. Technology to remove space junk is being developed, but the legal aspects require attention.

What are the Recommendations?

- **New Treaty for Peace and Security:**
 - The UN recommends the **negotiation and development of a new treaty** to ensure peace, security, and the prevention of an arms race in outer space.

- This treaty would **establish international norms, rules, and principles to address emerging threats and promote responsible space activities.**
- **Coordinated Space Situational Awareness:**
 - Member states are **urged to establish an effective framework for coordinating space situational awareness**, space object maneuvers, and space events. This coordination will enhance the safety and security of space operations.
- **Space Debris Removal Framework:**
 - The UN calls for the **development of norms and principles for Space Debris removal, considering both legal and scientific aspects.**
 - An effective framework for sustainable exploration, exploitation, and utilization of space resources, particularly on the Moon and other celestial bodies, is recommended.

What is Outer Space?

- **About:**
 - Outer space, also known as space or celestial space, refers to the **vast expanse beyond Earth's atmosphere** and between celestial bodies. It is a vacuum that exists beyond the Earth's atmosphere and **extends indefinitely throughout the universe.** Outer space is characterized by extremely low density and pressure, as well as the absence of air and other atmospheric elements.
- **UN Treaties:**
 - The treaties commonly referred to as the **"five United Nations treaties on outer space"** are:
 - **The Outer Space Treaty 1967:** Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies.
 - **Rescue Agreement 1968:** Agreement on the Rescue of Astronauts, the Return of Astronauts and the Return of Objects Launched into Outer Space.
 - **Liability Convention 1972:** Convention on International Liability for Damage Caused by Space Objects.
 - **The Registration Convention 1976:** Convention on Registration of Objects Launched into Outer Space.

Note:



- **The Moon Agreement 1979:** Agreement Governing the Activities of States on the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies.

- India is a signatory to **all five of these treaties but has ratified only four. India did not ratify the Moon agreement.**

India-Romania Defense Agreement

Why in News?

Recently, India and Romania have signed the **Defense Cooperation Agreement**, aiming to set up and expand Military Cooperation between both countries.

What is the Agreement About?

- The agreement will provide the **legal framework for future cooperation in the field of defense** through the exchange of expertise and knowledge on subjects of mutual interest including **co-development and co-production of military hardware**.
- The agreement will promote cooperation in the field of defense between both countries and open up enormous opportunities in sectors like **defense medicine, scientific research, cyber defense, technology** and research and development.

What is the Significance of the Agreement?

- The **EU (European Union) Strategy** for cooperation in the **Indo-Pacific** is an opportunity to strengthen EU-India cooperation in the region. Romania is committed to active involvement in the Indo-Pacific within the framework of this strategy.
- The EU-India Strategic Partnership roadmap and commitments from the EU-India Leaders' Meeting in May 2021 provide a good basis to enhance cooperation and promote **regional security in the Indo-Pacific**.
- Strengthening relations with Indo-Pacific partners is crucial for addressing global challenges and **upholding the rule-based international order** at both bilateral and multilateral levels.

NET Zero Innovation Virtual Centre

Why in News?

In the recent **India-UK Science & Innovation Council meeting**, **India and the United Kingdom** announced the

establishment of a '**NET Zero**' Innovation Virtual Centre aimed at addressing **climate change and environmental targets**.

What is the NET Zero Innovation Virtual Centre?

- It is a joint initiative of **India and the UK** to enhance their cooperation on science and technology, especially on **climate change and environmental issues**.
- It will provide a platform to bring stakeholders from both countries together to work on some of the focus areas such as the **decarbonization of manufacturing process and transport systems, and green hydrogen as a renewable source**.
- It will support the goal of achieving **net zero emissions balancing the amount of greenhouse gases emitted and removed from the atmosphere**.
- It will also facilitate knowledge **exchange, innovation, research and development, capacity building, and policy dialogue** between the two countries.

What are the Key Highlights from the Meeting?

- **India-UK Science and Technology Cooperation:**
 - The UK has emerged as **India's 2nd largest international research and innovation partner**.
 - The joint research program between India and the UK has **grown from almost zero to close to £300-400 million**.
- **India's Economic and Technological Capabilities:**
 - India is fast moving to become an **economic powerhouse** driven by its extraordinary **technological and innovative capabilities**, especially after the **Covid vaccine success story**.
 - Energy efficiency and renewable energy are central pillars where India has already taken the lead through various initiatives like the **India Solar Alliance and Clean Energy Mission**.
 - India is committed to achieving ambitious **net-zero targets through consistent efforts** towards developing mitigation and monitoring solutions for **environmental pollution and techno-based pathways for reducing carbon emissions**.
- **Industry-Academia Collaboration:**
 - The cooperation will provide an opportunity for Indian and UK academia and industry to **develop newer products/processes together for the economic growth of both nations**.

Note:

Third Employment Working Group Meet

Why in News?

The **Indian G20 Presidency** is organising the **third Employment Working Group (EWG)** meeting at the **International Labour Organization (ILO)** headquarters in **Geneva, Switzerland**.

- This meeting, which aligns with the ILO's annual **International Labour Conference**, brings together delegates from **G20 member countries**, guest countries, and international organizations including **International Labour Organization (ILO)**, **Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)**, **International Social Security Association (ISSA)**, **World Bank (WB)**.

What are the Major Highlights of the Meet?

- **Priority Areas:**
 - The Indian Presidency has identified three priority areas for the EWG in 2023:
 - **Addressing Global Skill Gaps:** This area focuses on developing strategies to bridge the **skill gaps prevalent in the global workforce** and enhance employability.
 - **Gig and Platform Economy and Social Protection:** Discussions centre around ensuring **social protection for workers in the gig** and platform economy, considering the evolving nature of work.
 - The **gig and platform economy** refers to a **modern work arrangement** where individuals perform **short-term, freelance, or on-demand tasks or services through digital platforms or apps**.
 - It is characterised by the **temporary and flexible nature of work, facilitated by online platforms that connect service providers (often referred to as gig workers) with customers or clients**.
 - **Sustainable Financing of Social Protection:** This area emphasises the importance of **sustainable financing models to support social protection initiatives** and provide safety nets for workers.

➤ Phases of the Meet:

- The EWG meeting is organised in four different phases in different cities in India.
 - The first phase was held in **Jodhpur, Rajasthan, in February 2023**.
 - The second phase was held in **Guwahati, Assam, in April 2023**.
 - The third phase is being held in **Geneva from 31st May to 2nd June 2023**.
 - The fourth and final phase will be held in **Indore, Madhya Pradesh in July 2023**.

What is an Employment Working Group?

➤ About:

- The **Employment Working Group (EWG)** is a **forum established within the G20 framework** to address issues related to **employment, labour markets, and social policies**.
- It serves as a platform for G20 member countries and relevant international organisations to engage in discussions, share experiences, and develop policy recommendations on employment-related matters.

➤ Purpose:

- The main purpose of the EWG is to **promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth by fostering job creation, improving labour market outcomes, and ensuring social protection for workers**.

What is the International Labour Organization?

➤ About:

- The **ILO** is **one of the international knowledge partners of the Ministry of Labour and Employment** that provides technical expertise to the EWG.
- The ILO is a **United Nations** agency whose mandate is to **advance social and economic justice by setting international labour standards**.
- Founded in **October 1919 (Treaty of Versailles)** under the League of Nations, it is the **first and oldest specialised agency of the UN**.

Note:



- **Members:**
 - The ILO has a **tripartite structure** that brings together representatives of governments, employers and workers from its **187 member states**.
 - India is a **founder member of the International Labour Organization**.
- **International Labour Conference:**
 - The ILO also hosts an annual **International Labour Conference in Geneva** that sets the International labour standards and the broad policies of the ILO.
 - It is often referred to as an **International Parliament of Labour**.
- **Means of Action:**
 - The principal means of action in the ILO is the setting up of the **International Labour Standards in the form of Conventions and Recommendations**.
 - Conventions are international treaties and are instruments, **which create legally binding obligations** on the countries that ratify them.
 - Recommendations are **non-binding and set out guidelines orienting national policies and actions**.
- **Achievements:**
 - Received the **Nobel Peace Prize in 1969**.
 - For improving peace among classes
 - Pursuing decent work and justice for workers
 - Providing technical assistance to other developing nation
- **Major Reports Released by ILO:**
 - [World Employment and Social Outlook](#)
 - [World Social Protection Report](#)
 - [Global Wage Report](#)

Atlantic Declaration

Why in News?

The **United States and the United Kingdom** have announced the **Atlantic Declaration** for a **Twenty-First Century U.S.-UK Economic Partnership**.

- This declaration aims to **adapt, reinforce, and reimagine the longstanding alliance between the two nations** to effectively address the challenges of the current era.
- With this new declaration, both nations seek to strengthen their collaboration in **defence, security, science, technology, and economic domains**.

What are the Major Highlights of the Atlantic Declaration?

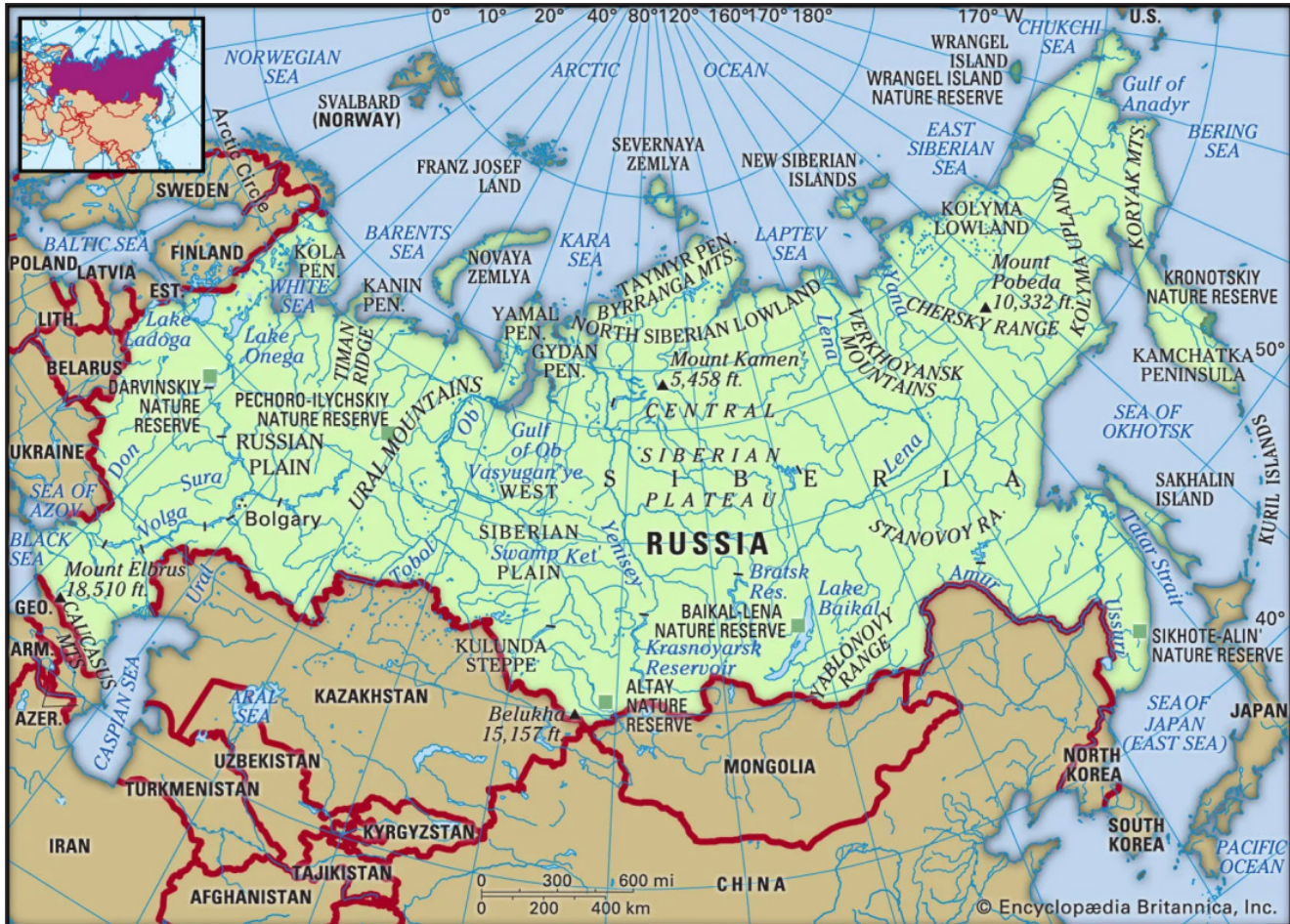
- **About:**
 - The Atlantic Declaration is focused on **building a resilient, diversified, and secure [supply chain](#)**, reducing strategic dependencies.
 - The partnership aims to leverage the energy transition and technological breakthroughs to drive shared growth, create employment opportunities, and uplift communities.
- **Atlantic Declaration Action Plan (ADAPT):**
 - The ADAPT sets forth a comprehensive strategy to enhance **economic growth, competitiveness, and resilience while prioritising workers, businesses, climate, and [national security](#)**.
 - The plan encompasses five key pillars and involves regular high-level meetings to drive progress and increase ambition over time.
- **Five Pillars:**
 - **Leadership in Critical and Emerging Technologies:** Sharing best practices in areas such as **[artificial intelligence, quantum computing, biotechnology, and advanced manufacturing](#)**.
 - **Cooperation on Economic Security and Technology Protection:** This will include sharing information and best practices on **[cybersecurity](#)**, supply chain resilience, and technology governance.
 - **Partnering on an Inclusive and Responsible Digital Transformation:** Collaborating on digital skills training and workforce development to ensure the readiness of individuals for the digital economy.
 - **Building the [Clean Energy](#) Economy of the Future.**
 - **Strengthening Alliance across Defense, Health Security, and Space.**

India-Russia Bilateral Meeting

Why in News?

Recently, the External Affairs minister of India has visited Russia for a Bilateral Meeting where both the countries signed agreements on **[Nuclear Power](#)** and in areas of medicines, pharmaceutical substances and medical devices.

Note:



What are the Key Highlights of the India-Russia Bilateral Meeting?

➤ Economic Collaboration:

- Emphasis on strategic collaboration in **defense, space exploration, nuclear energy**, and technology sharing, reflecting the robustness of the longstanding partnership and **exploring avenues for deeper cooperation**.
- Both Countries **agreed on the expansion of the exports of Russian hydrocarbons** to the Indian market as well as the cooperation in the peaceful use of nuclear energy.
- The two sides **finalised the programme of cooperation in the Far East** and it was decided to hold an early meeting of EaEU-India FTA negotiations.

➤ Agreement on Nuclear Power Plants:

- India and Russia signed **agreements to move forward with future units of the Kudankulam nuclear power project** in Tamil Nadu.

- India is already operating two **Russian-built nuclear plants** while another four are under **construction in Kudankulam, Tamil Nadu**.

- The Kudankulam nuclear power plant, **India's largest, is being built in Tamil Nadu** with the technical assistance of Russia. The construction began in March 2002. Since February 2016, the first power unit of the Kudankulam NPP has been steadily operating at its design capacity of 1,000 MW.
- The plant is expected to start operating at full capacity in 2027, according to Russian state media.

➤ Diplomatic Initiatives:

- Discussion on multilateral forums and international organizations where India and Russia collaborate or hold common interests, including forums like **BRICS, SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization), and UN affairs**.

Note:

Wagner Mutiny in Russia

Why in News?

Recently, the chief of Russia's Wagner Private Military Company staged a short-lived Mutiny against the country's defense establishment, pushing Russia into an unprecedented internal security crisis.

What is the Background?

- **Accusations on MoD:**
 - The chief of the Wagner Group (Prigozhin) leveled serious accusations against the leadership of Russia's Ministry of Defense (MoD), claiming corruption and incompetence.
 - Wagner Group also released a video accusing the defense leadership of ordering airstrikes on Wagner and taking control of the Southern Military District headquarters in Rostov-on-Don.
 - In an attempt to address their grievances, Wagner forces embarked on a "march of justice" towards Moscow, resulting in clashes and significant damage.
- **Labeled Treason:**
 - The Russian President condemned the mutiny, labeling it a "Treason".
 - He ordered the security services to suppress the rebellion. However, he faced a dilemma due to Wagner's past alliance and its effectiveness.
- **Negotiation:**
 - Russian President with the help of President of Belarus negotiated with Prigozhin. As per negotiation Prigozhin agreeing to retreat and relocate to Belarus.

What is the Wagner Group?

- The Wagner Group also known as PMC Wagner is a Russian paramilitary organization, founded in 2014.
- Wagner at its peak had about 50,000 mercenary recruits - many of them ex-prisoners - fighting in Ukraine.
- The group has operated for years on battlefields in the Middle East, Africa and Latin America.

Russia-India Bilateral Trade

Why in News?

Recently, Russia's Deputy Prime Minister has attended the 24th Russia-India Inter-Governmental Commission (IGC) meeting in India.

- Russia has expressed its interest in importing manufacturing equipment, including machinery, from India to replace those of Western origin.

What are the Key Highlights of the Meeting?

- Both countries reviewed the defense cooperation between India and Russia, which has been facing challenges related to deliveries and payments due to the ongoing war in Ukraine.
- The two countries discussed the plans that India has for Russia's far eastern region, which is an essential part of Russia's strategy in the Indo-Pacific region.
- They held discussions on bilateral trade efforts and the identification of new industrial points that would provide additional impetus for trade between the two countries.
 - Balance of trade currently tilts in favor of Russia, and hence, the two sides discussed ways to bring more balance in trade relations.
- Both sides also discussed a wide range of issues related to bilateral trade, economic, and humanitarian cooperation.
 - These discussions covered many areas of mutual interest, including those related to technology, energy, healthcare, and education.

What is the Status of India-Russia Trade Ties?

- India's total bilateral trade with Russia stood at ~USD 13 Billion in 2021-22 and USD 8.14 Billion in 2020-21.
- Russia is India's seventh biggest trading partner, up from 25th position in 2021.
 - The US, China, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Indonesia were the six countries that recorded higher volumes of trade with India during the first five months of 2022-23.

Challenges in Major Defence Deals with Russia

Why in News?

Major defence deals between India and Russia, particularly the S-400 Deal, are facing uncertainties due to various factors including the ongoing War in Ukraine and payment challenges.

- The S-400 deal involves the procurement of advanced air defense systems from Russia. Three out of the contracted five S-400 regiments have been delivered as part of a deal signed in 2018.

Note:



What are the Challenges Faced by the Defense Deals?:

➤ S-400 Deal Complexities:

- The S-400 deal has faced complications, including concerns about U.S. sanctions [Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act \(CAATSA\)](#) and delays in milestone payments.
 - The war in Ukraine has compounded challenges in executing the deal.

➤ Payment Crisis:

- An estimated USD 3 billion payments are **currently held up due to payment challenges**. Efforts to resolve this crisis through a [Rupee-Rouble Arrangement](#) have not been successful due to trade imbalances and accumulating Rupees on the Russian side.
 - Due to [Russia's Exclusion](#) from the [Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication \(SWIFT\)](#) system, India and Russia had adopted a Rupee-Rouble payment mechanism to settle payments for defence deals.
- While small payments have resumed, larger payments remain stuck, creating challenges in **completing ongoing and future deals**.

➤ Delays in S-400 Deliveries and Frigates:

- While three regiments have been delivered, the delivery of the **remaining two regiments is delayed**. The revised schedule remains **uncertain until payment issues are resolved**.
 - Delivery of two [Krivak-Class Stealth Frigates](#) under construction in Russia for the [Indian Navy](#) is further delayed.

How is the Defence Trade Dynamics Between India and Russia?

➤ Buyer-Seller Framework to Joint Research:

- India-Russia military-technical cooperation has **evolved from a buyer-seller framework to one involving joint research**, development and production of advanced defence technologies and systems.

➤ Joint Military Programmes:

- [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

Note:



- **Military Hardware:**
 - The military hardware purchased/leased by India from Russia includes:
 - [S-400 Triumf](#)
 - [Kamov Ka-226](#) 200 to be made in India under the [Make in India initiative](#)
 - [T-90S Bhisma](#)
 - [INS Vikramaditya aircraft carrier programme](#)
- **Submarine Programmes:**
 - Russia also plays a very important role in **assisting the Indian Navy** with its submarine programmes:
 - Indian Navy's first submarine, '[Foxtrot Class](#)' came from Russia
 - [INS Vikramaditya](#), the sole aircraft carrier operated by India, is of Russian origin.
 - India operates nine of the fourteen conventional submarines sourced from Russia.
- **Recent Development:**
 - Between 2018 and 2021, defence trade between India and **Russia amounted to approximately USD 15 billion**, encompassing significant deals including **S-400, frigates, AK-203 assault rifles**, and emergency procurements.
 - The defence trade relationship has been influenced by geopolitical dynamics, including the Balakot

air strike in 2019 and the standoff with **China in Eastern Ladakh in 2020**.

What is Russia's S-400 Deal?

- **About:**
 - Russia's S-400 deal refers to the procurement of the **S-400 Triumf, a highly advanced mobile Surface-to-Air Missile (SAM) system**.
 - In October 2018, India signed a **5.43 billion USD deal with Russia for the S-400 Triumf missile system** despite objections from the US and the threat of sanctions under [Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act \(CAATSA\)](#).
- **Features:**
 - The system can engage all types of aerial targets including aircraft, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) and ballistic and cruise missiles within the range of 400km, at an altitude of up to 30 km.
 - The system can track 100 airborne targets and engage six of them simultaneously.

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.



Note:

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**.

Negotiations to Revive Black Sea Grain Deal

Why in News?

Recently, the Turkish President has met with the Russian President in order to revive the **Black Sea Grain Deal**, which Russia had withdrawn from in July 2023.



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.

- The Initiative specifically allows for commercial food and fertilizer (including ammonia) exports from three key Ukrainian ports in the Black Sea – **Odesa, Chornomorsk, Yuzhny/Pivdennyi**.

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).

Note:



- 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 JCC was established to **monitor the implementation of the Black Sea Grain Initiative**.
 - The JCC is hosted in **Istanbul and includes representatives from Russia, Türkiye, Ukraine and the UN**. The UN acts also as the Secretariat for the Centre.
 - 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 **unauthorised cargo or personnel onboard**.
 - Following this, they are allowed to **sail onwards to Ukrainian ports** for loading through the designated corridor.

- **year 2022-23**, signifying a steady rise in economic collaboration between the two nations.
- **Collaboration on Port Infrastructure and Klaipeda Port's Advantages:** Discussions centered on exploring collaboration opportunities, **leveraging India's expertise in port infrastructure development**.
 - This collaboration is aimed at **capitalizing on Lithuania's strategic location** as a gateway to vital industrial areas in Eastern Europe.
 - The spotlight was on the **unique advantages of Klaipeda port**, notably its **year-round ice-free status**.
 - As the **leading Baltic port for container transshipment**, it holds a pivotal position in facilitating trade, boasting advantageous land connections to **key industrial zones in Eastern Europe**.
- **Diverse Investment Opportunities:** India presented a spectrum of investment avenues to Lithuania across various sectors, including **Port Modernization (PPP), Port Connectivity, Coastal Shipping, Maritime Technology, Sagarmala Project, and Decarbonization initiatives**, aiming to foster comprehensive economic partnerships and sustainable growth.

India-Lithuania Relations

Why in News?

Recently, Indian Minister of State for **Ports, Shipping, and Waterways** and Vice Minister in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of **Lithuania**, convened in New Delhi to bolster the **maritime bilateral relations between India and Lithuania**.

What are the Major

Highlights of the Meeting?

- **Resident Mission Inauguration in Vilnius:** The inauguration of **India's Resident Mission in Vilnius was commended**, highlighting it as a significant step affirming India's commitment to strengthening bilateral relations with Lithuania.
- **Bilateral Trade Growth:** India emphasized the **positive trajectory of bilateral trade**, citing a consistent increase to **USD 472 million by the fiscal**



Note:

7. India Australia Relations

India-Australia 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue

Why in News?

Recently, the 2nd India-Australia **2+2 Ministerial Dialogue** was held in New Delhi, India, where foreign Affairs Ministers and Defense Ministers of both countries attended the Meeting.



What are the Key Highlights of the India-Australia 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue?

- **Enhanced Cooperation:**
 - Both nations emphasized further cooperation in information exchange and Indo-Pacific **Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)**, underlining the importance of these aspects in strengthening their strategic ties.
 - The Quad's Indo-Pacific MDA is in the implementation phase, slated to be a prominent agenda item at the upcoming Quad summit hosted by India.
- **Implementing Arrangements:**
 - Both sides discussed the implementing arrangements on **hydrography cooperation** and cooperation for **air-to-air refueling**, signaling a step toward concrete collaboration in defense areas.
- **Niche Training Areas:**
 - There's a **shared vision to collaborate in specialized training areas** such as **Artificial Intelligence (AI)**, **Anti-Submarine Warfare**, anti-drone warfare, and the cyber domain, highlighting a commitment to developing advanced defense capabilities.

- **Defense Industry Collaboration:**
 - Both countries recognized **the potential of deepening cooperation in defense** industry and research as a means to enhance their already strong relationship.
 - They Identified potential areas of collaboration including shipbuilding, ship repair and maintenance, as well as **aircraft maintenance, repair, and overhaul**.
- **Research in Underwater Technologies:**
 - Discussion on joint research in underwater technologies and collaboration between defense start-ups **signifies a push for innovation and technological advancement** in defense strategies.
- **Reaffirmed Bilateral Defense Relations:**
 - Both countries reaffirmed **commitment to strengthen bilateral defense relations** and expressed satisfaction over increasing military-to-military cooperation, joint exercises, exchanges, and institutional dialogues.

How have been the India-Australia Relations so far?

- **Historical Perspective:**
 - Australia and India for the first time established diplomatic relations in the **pre-Independence period**, when the Consulate General of India was first opened as a **Trade Office in Sydney in 1941**.
 - India-Australia relations touched a historic low when the **Australian Government condemned India's 1998 nuclear tests**.
 - In 2014, Australia signed a Uranium supply deal with India, the first of its kind with a country that is a non-signatory to the **Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty**, in recognition of India's "impeccable" non-proliferation record.
- **Strategic Ties:**
 - In 2020, Prime ministers of both the countries elevated bilateral relationship from Strategic Partnership to **Comprehensive strategic Partnership during India-Australia Leaders' Virtual Summit**.
 - In 2021, the prime ministers of both the countries met during **COP26** at Glasgow.
 - In 2022, there has been a series of high-level engagements and exchange of ministerial visits in 2022 and in 2023 including India-Australia virtual

Note:



summit and Foreign Ministers meet. Several key announcements were made during 2nd India-Australia Virtual Summit including:

- A Letter of Intent on Migration and Mobility Partnership Arrangement to foster the exchange of skills.

➤ Defence Cooperation:

- The **2+2 Ministerial Dialogue** took place in September 2021, and the Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister of Australia visited India in June 2022.
- The **Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA)** was signed during the Virtual Summit in June 2020 to enhance defence cooperation.
- **Joint military exercises:**
 - Australia will host the **"Malabar" exercises** in August 2023, with participation from India, Japan, and the US.
 - India has been invited to join the Talisman Sabre exercises in 2023.

➤ China Factor:

- Australia-China ties became strained due to several reasons including Australia banning Huawei from the 5G network, call for enquiry into the origins of Covid-19 and Slamming **china's human rights violations in Xinjiang** and Hongkong.
 - China responded by imposing trade barriers on Australian exports, and by cutting off all ministerial contact.
- India is facing Chinese aggression along the border which has been highlighted by incidents such as **Galwan valley clash**.
- Both Australia and India support a rules-based international order and they are seeking to forge regional institutions in the Indo-Pacific which are inclusive, promote further economic integration.
 - The countries' participation in **Quad** (India, Australia, US, Japan) is an example of their convergence of interests, based on shared concerns.

➤ Multilateral Cooperation:

- Both are members of the **Quad, Commonwealth, Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), ASEAN Regional Forum**, Asia Pacific Partnership on Climate and Clean Development, and have participated in the **East Asia Summits**.

- Both countries have also been cooperating as members of the Five Interested Parties (FIP) in the **World Trade Organization** context.
- **Australia is an important player in Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)** and supports India's membership of the organisation.

➤ Economic Cooperation:

- **Economic Cooperation Trade Agreement (ECTA):**
 - It is the first free trade agreement signed by India with a developed country in a decade which entered into force in December 2022.
 - It has resulted in an immediate reduction of duty to zero on 96% of Indian exports to Australia in value (that is 98% of the tariff lines) and zero duty on 85% of Australia's exports (in value) to India.
- **Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI):**
 - India and Australia are partners in the trilateral arrangement along with Japan which seeks to enhance the resilience of supply chains in the **Indo-Pacific Region**.
- **Bilateral Trade:**
 - Australia is the 17th largest trading partner of India and India is Australia's 9th largest trading partner.
 - Bilateral trade between India and Australia was US\$ 27.5 billion in 2021, there is potential for it to reach around US\$ 50 billion in five years.

➤ Cooperation on Clean Energy:

- In February 2022, countries signed a Letter of Intent on New and Renewable Energy for cooperation to reduce the cost of renewable energy technologies, including ultra low-cost solar and clean hydrogen.
- India announced Australian Dollars (AUD) 10 million for Pacific Island Countries under the **International Solar Alliance (ISA)**.
- Both the countries committed USD 5.8 million to the three-year **India-Australia Critical Minerals Investment Partnership**.

Aviation Cooperation Between India and New Zealand

Why in News?

Recently, India and New Zealand signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to boost cooperation in **civil aviation**.

Note:



- Furthermore, a meeting took place between the **Agriculture Ministers of both countries**, where they not only reaffirmed their commitment to **boost agricultural collaboration** and invited India to join the **Global Research Alliance(GRA)**.

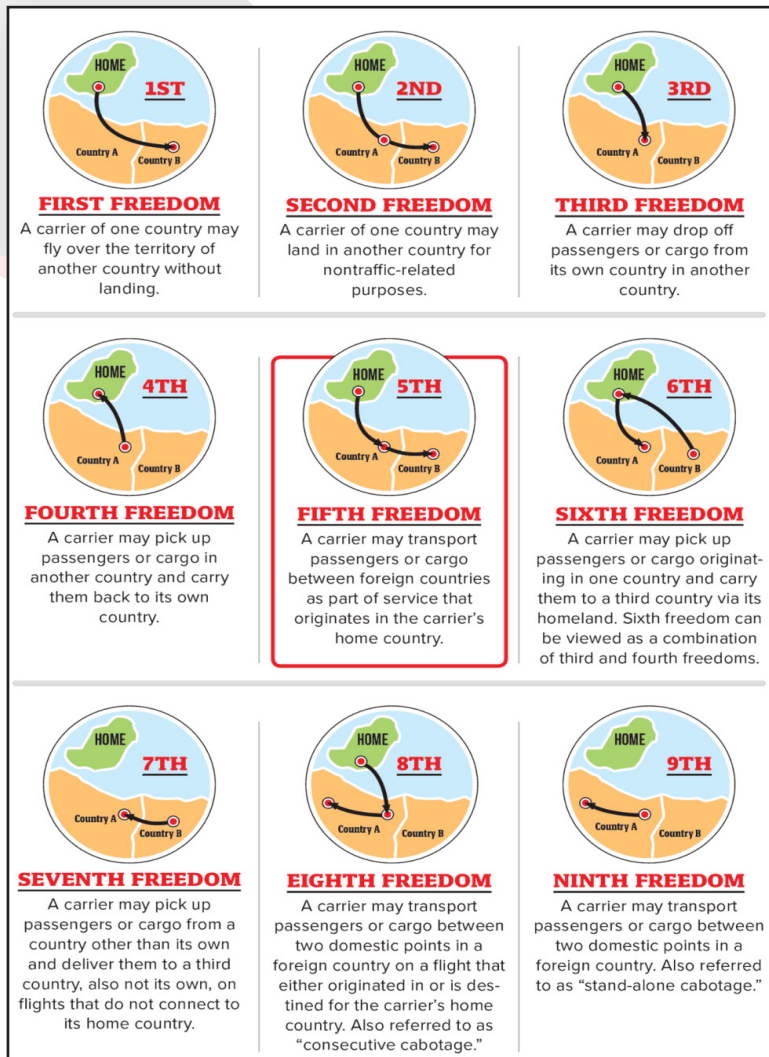


Freedom Traffic Rights in Aviation

- Freedom traffic rights refer to the **rights granted to airlines by international agreements or treaties to operate air services between countries**.
- These rights outline the extent to which airlines can fly into and out of a country, including the number of flights, routes, and destinations they can serve.
- There are different levels or “freedoms” of traffic rights, **ranging from the first freedom (the right to overfly a country without landing) to the ninth freedom (cabotage, which allows foreign airlines to operate domestic flights within another country)**.
- These rights are negotiated and agreed upon in bilateral or multilateral air service agreements between nations.

What are the Key Highlights of MoU on Civil Aviation?

- Building upon an **Air Services Agreement, 2016**, the MoU aims to **further strengthen the aviation partnership between India and New Zealand**.
- The cooperation in civil aviation includes **scheduling new routes, codeshare services, traffic rights, and capacity entitlement**.
- Both **India and New Zealand enjoy the privilege of exercising third and fourth freedom traffic rights**, enabling them to conduct unlimited services using any type of aircraft.
 - New Zealand’s airlines **can operate to/ from six destinations in India**, while Indian airlines can serve Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, and three additional points in New Zealand, as determined by the Government of the Republic of India.
- Airlines from both countries **can freely operate unlimited cargo services using any type of aircraft**, with the right to stop at **intermediate points and extend their services to destinations beyond**, without being restricted by specified route points.



Note:

Global Research Alliance

- The GRA is an **international organization** that brings countries together to find ways to grow **more food without growing greenhouse gas emissions**.
- The **GRA was launched in 2009 by New Zealand** and has since grown to include 67 member countries (**India is not a member**).
- The GRA goal is to reduce the **emissions intensity of agricultural production systems** and increase their potential for **soil carbon sequestration**.
- The GRA focuses on three main agricultural sub-sectors: **paddy rice, croplands, and livestock**.
 - It also coordinates **cross-cutting activities such as inventories and nationally determined contributions (NDCs), soil carbon and nitrogen cycling, and integrative research**.

India New Zealand Round Table Meeting

Why in News?

Recently, the **first Round Table Joint Meeting** between India and New Zealand with the industry and industry associations of both the countries took place in New Delhi.

- The meeting was co-chaired by the **Additional Secretary, Department of Commerce** and **High Commissioner of New Zealand**.

What are the Key Highlights of the Meeting?

- Both the countries acknowledged the **huge potential in India and New Zealand partnership** and the need for **bringing in synergy for enhanced economic relations** in areas of mutual interest.
- There was an acknowledged need to work beyond any free trade agreement and explore other areas where both can complement each other.
- The discussions focused on taking forward the objectives of the **Joint Trade Committee (JTC)**, formed under the **Bilateral Trade Agreement of 1986**.
- New Zealand emphasised on facilitating trade and association with private sectors with some of the key areas being the **promotion of Unified Payment Interface (UPI) system, carbon credit co-operation** and working on issues like the requests on **non-tariff measures for bilateral gains** to the businesses of both the sides.

- The need for **increasing the air connectivity links** between the two countries was also emphasised.

What are the Key Points about New Zealand?

- **Official Name:** New Zealand/Aotearoa (Maori)
- **Form of Government:** Parliamentary democracy
- **Capital:** Wellington
- **Official Languages:** English, Maori
- **Currency:** New Zealand dollar
- **Major Mountain Ranges:** Southern Alps, Kaikoura Ranges
- **Highest Mountain Peak:** Mount Cook (3,754 meters) - called "**Cloud Piercer**" by Maori people
- **Major Rivers:** Waikato, Clurtha, Rangitaiki, Wanganui, Manawatu, Buller, Rakaia, Waitaki and Waiau
- **2 Main Islands:** North and South Islands - separated by the **Cook Strait**

8. Foreign Policy of India

Gujral Doctrine of Foreign Policy

Why in the News?

Recently, the **11th death anniversary** of the precursor of **Gujral doctrine**, IK Gujral, the **12th Prime Minister of India** has been marked on November 30.

- He is the only Prime Minister with a foreign policy approach identified with his name the **Gujral Doctrine**.

Who is Inder Kumar Gujral?

- Inder Kumar Gujral was sworn in as the **12th Prime Minister of India** from **April 1997 to May 1998**.
- IK Gujral can be remembered for two significant contributions to **Indian foreign policy**:
 - He propounded the '**Gujral doctrine**' when he was the **Union minister of External Affairs** from **1996 to 1997**.
 - Despite international pressure, Gujral firmly refused to sign the **Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT)** in **October 1996**.

What is the Gujral Doctrine?

- The **Gujral doctrine** delineated its approach towards India's neighbors, which later came to be known as the **Gujral Doctrine**. This consisted of **five basic principles**. It was outlined at a speech in **Chatham House** in **London** in **September 1996**.

Note:

- The five basic principles of **Gujral Doctrine**:
 - India, surrounded by neighbors such as **Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, and Sri Lanka**, doesn't seek reciprocity but instead offers assistance wholeheartedly, guided by **goodwill and trust**.
 - **South Asian** nations won't tolerate the use of their territory to harm the interests of another country in the region.
 - None will interfere in the **internal affairs** of another.
 - All **South Asian Countries** must respect each other's **territorial integrity and sovereignty**.
 - Nations will settle all their disputes through **peaceful bilateral negotiations**."
- The **Gujral Doctrine** believed that **India's significant size and population naturally** positioned it as a key player in **South East Asia**.
- To enhance its standing and reputation, the doctrine advocated adopting a non-dominant approach towards smaller neighboring countries. It, thus, recognises the supreme importance of friendly, cordial relations with neighbors.
- It also stressed the significance of maintaining ongoing dialogue and refraining from unnecessary provocations, such as commenting on the internal affairs of other nations.

India's Act East Policy

Why in News?

Recently, the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways has flagged off the first batch of **trial Cargo**

Vessels from Maia Inland Custom Port in West Bengal to Sultanganj Port in Bangladesh, marking a significant step under **India's Act East Policy**, with a focus on enhancing **Inland Water Transport**.

- It has been organised by the **Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI)**, marking a new beginning for improved connectivity and cooperation between India and Bangladesh.

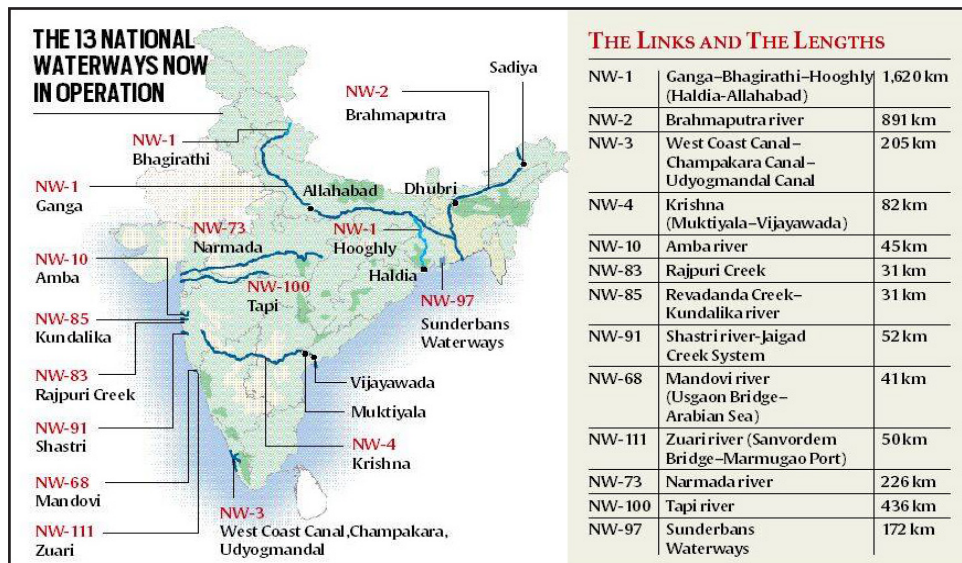
What is Inland Water Transport (IWT)?

About:

- IWT refers to the transportation of goods and passengers via navigable rivers, canals, lakes, and other inland waterways.
- This mode of transport utilises watercraft such as boats, barges, and ships to move cargo and people within a country's interior regions, connecting various ports and terminals along the water routes.

Significance:

- IWT is a **highly cost-effective mode of transportation**, particularly for bulk cargo like coal, iron ore, cement, food grains, and fertiliser.
- Despite its advantages, its current share in **India's modal mix is only 2%**. The government aims to increase this **share to 5% by 2030** under the **Maritime India Vision (MIV)-2030**.
 - To achieve this goal, the IWAI has identified 25 new National Waterways (NWs) through feasibility studies to make them navigable for transportation.



Note:

What is Act East Policy?

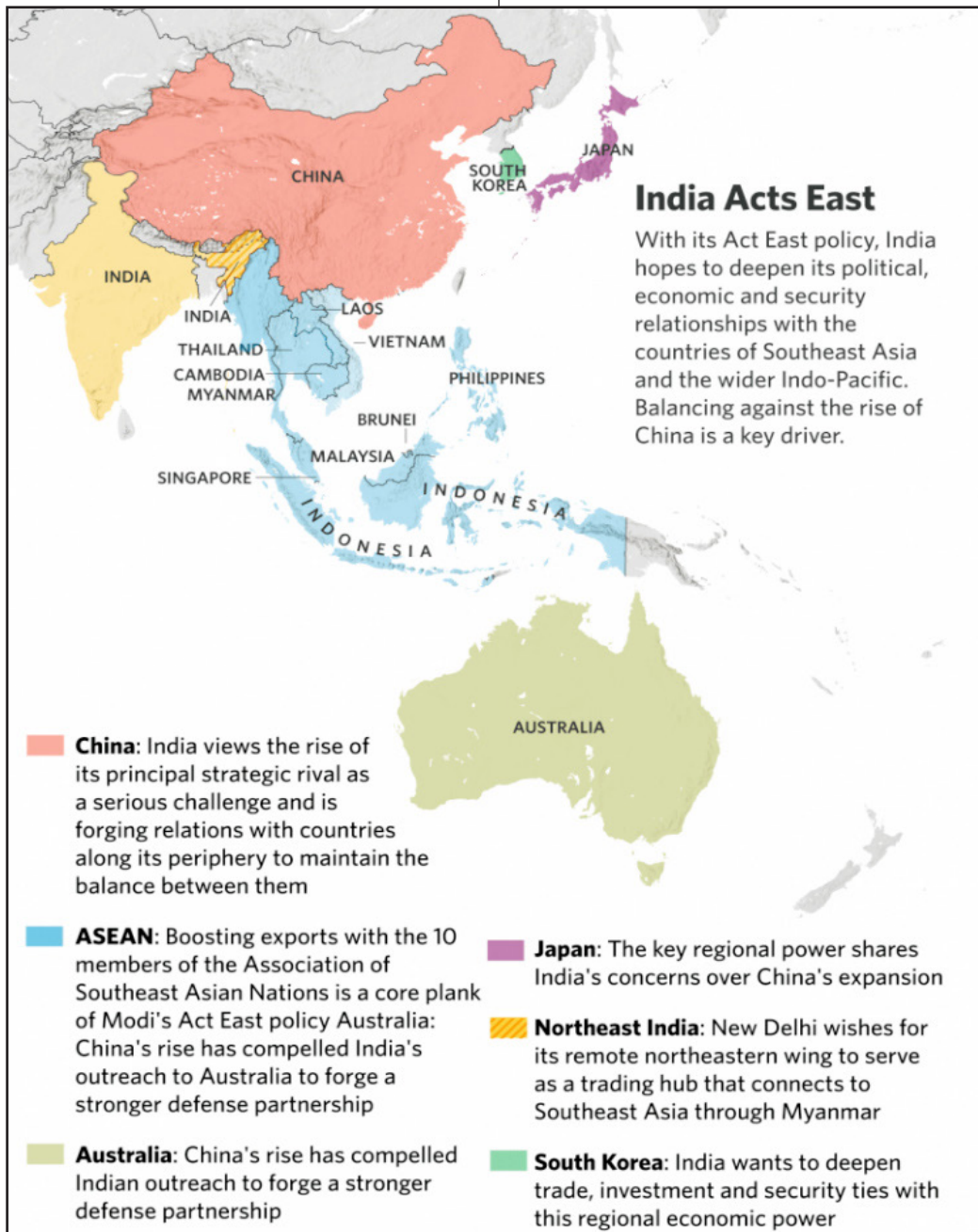
➤ About:

- The '**Act East Policy**' announced in November, 2014 is the upgrade of the "**Look East Policy**".
- It is a diplomatic initiative to promote economic, strategic and cultural relations with the vast Asia-Pacific region at different levels.
- It involves **intensive and continuous engagement with Southeast Asian countries** in the field of connectivity, trade, culture, defence and people-

to-people-contact at bilateral, regional and multilateral levels.

➤ Aim:

- To promote **economic cooperation, cultural ties and developing a strategic relationship** with countries in **Indo-pacific region** with a proactive and pragmatic approach and thereby improving the economic development of the **North Eastern Region (NER)** which is a gateway to the South East Asia Region.



Note:



What is the Look East Policy?

- In order to recover from the loss of the strategic partner -USSR (end of the **Cold war** 1991), India sought to build up a relationship with the USA and allies of the USA in Southeast Asia.
- In this pursuit, former Prime minister of India **P V Narasimha Rao launched Look East policy in 1992**, to give a strategic push to India's engagement with the South-East Asia region, to bolster its standing as a regional power and a counterweight to the strategic influence of the People's Republic of China.

What are the Initiatives to Enhance Connectivity under Act East Policy?

- **Agartala-Akhaura Rail Link** between India and Bangladesh.
- Intermodal transport linkages and **inland waterways through Bangladesh.**
- **Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project** and the **Trilateral Highway Project** connecting the **North East with Myanmar and Thailand.**
- Under **India-Japan Act East Forum**, projects such as Road and Bridges and modernization of Hydro-electric power projects have been undertaken.
 - India-Japan Act East Forum was established in 2017 which aims to provide a platform for India-Japan collaboration under the rubric of India's "Act East Policy" and **Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy"**.
 - The Forum will identify specific projects for economic modernization of India's North-East region including those pertaining to connectivity, developmental infrastructure, industrial linkages as well as people-to-people contacts through tourism, culture and sports-related activities.

Raisina Dialogue 2024

Why in News

Recently, the 9th edition of the Raisina Dialogue took place in New Delhi, with over 2,500 participants from approximately 115 countries attending the conference in person.

- **Greece's Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis** joined the inauguration session as the chief guest.

What is Raisina Dialogue?

➤ About:

- The Raisina Dialogue is an **annual conference on geopolitics and geoeconomics**, which aims to address the most challenging issues faced by the world. It was structured along the lines of the **Shangri-La Dialogue.**
 - It is a **component of India's "intelligence diplomacy,"** which, though not prominently featured in the public eye, **plays a crucial role in the national security framework**, alongside the diplomatic corps and the armed forces.
- The conference takes place in New Delhi and is attended by **people from political, business, media, and civil society** backgrounds.
- The Dialogue is structured as a multi-stakeholder, cross-sectoral discussion, involving heads of state, cabinet ministers and local government officials, who are joined by thought leaders from the private sector, media and academia.
- Delhi-based think tank **Observer Research Foundation (ORF)**, in partnership with the **Ministry of External Affairs**, hosts the conference.

➤ 2024 Theme and Thematic Pillars:

- **Chaturanga:** Conflict, Contest, Cooperate, Create.
- The participants engaged with each other over **six "thematic pillars"**. These include:
 - **Tech Frontiers:** Regulations & Realities
 - **Peace with the Planet:** Invest & Innovate
 - **War & Peace:** Armouries & Asymmetries
 - **Decolonising Multilateralism:** Institutions & Inclusion
 - **The Post 2030 Agenda:** People & Progress
 - **Defending Democracy:** Society & **Sovereignty.**

➤ Similar Dialogues around the World:

- **Munich Security Conference (MSC):** Held annually in Munich, Germany, the MSC is one of the most prominent **forums for discussing international security policy.**
- **Shangri-La Dialogue:** Organized by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) and held **annually in Singapore**, the Shangri-La Dialogue **focuses on security issues in the Asia-Pacific region.**
- **Oslo Freedom Forum:** It is an **annual conference focused on human rights, democracy, and**

Note:



freedom. It brings together activists, journalists, and policymakers to share ideas and strategies for advancing human rights globally.

Observer Research Foundation

- It is an **independent think tank based in New Delhi** with three centres in Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata.
- It seeks to **lead and aid policy thinking** towards building a strong and prosperous India in a fair and equitable world and helps discover and inform India's choices. It carries **Indian voices and ideas to forums shaping global debates**.
- It provides non-partisan, independent, well-researched analyses and inputs to diverse decision-makers in governments, business communities, academia and civil society worldwide.

Goa Maritime Conclave 2023

Why in News?

Recently, the 4th edition of **Goa Maritime Conclave (GMC) - 2023** has been held by the Indian Navy under the aegis of **Naval War College, Goa**.

- The conclave was attended by delegates from twelve **Indian Ocean nations**, including Comoros, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Myanmar, Seychelles, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and Thailand.
- **Theme 2023:** "Maritime Security in the Indian Ocean Region: Converting Common Maritime Priorities into Collaborative Mitigating Frameworks".

What are the Key Highlights of Goa Maritime Conclave?

- **About:**
 - The GMC is a high-level gathering of naval and defense officials from various **Indian Ocean Region (IOR)** nations to discuss common maritime challenges and enhance regional cooperation.
 - It is the Indian Navy's outreach Initiative providing a multinational platform to harness the collective wisdom of practitioners of maritime security and the academia **towards garnering outcome oriented maritime thought**.
 - It provides a forum for exchange of views by the Chiefs of Navy/ Heads of Maritime Agencies on dealing with **contemporary and future maritime challenges**, as well as presenting cooperative

strategies for enhancing interoperability amongst partner maritime agencies.

➤ Defense Minister's Address:

- During the Conclave Defence Minister of India referred to the concept of "**Prisoner's Dilemma**" to underscore the need for countries to collaborate with each other instead of working **at cross purposes**.
 - The concept of the Prisoner's Dilemma, when applied in the domain of international relations, can explain and analyze various situations where countries face strategic decision-making challenges.
 - For example, when two or more countries engage in an arms race, they often do so out of mutual fear and mistrust.
- The Indian Defense Minister stressed the need for **multinational collaborative mitigation frameworks in the IOR** to address common maritime challenges.
 - He emphasized the importance of self-reliance in the defense sector to enhance regional security and prosperity.
 - Also emphasized that a **free, open and rule-based maritime order is a priority for all of us.** 'Might is right' has no place in such a maritime order. Adherence to international maritime laws, as **enunciated in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) 1982**, must be our lodestar.

What is Prisoner's Dilemma?

- **About:**
 - The Prisoner's Dilemma is a **fundamental concept in game theory**, a branch of mathematics and social science that analyzes **strategic decision-making in situations** where the outcome depends on the **choices of multiple participants**.
- **Prisoner's Dilemma Scenario:**
 - The Prisoner's Dilemma is often illustrated using a scenario where two individuals, let's call them A and B, are arrested for a crime, and they are placed in separate interrogation rooms.
 - The police lack concrete evidence, **but they offer each prisoner a choice:**
 - If both prisoners remain silent (cooperate), they both serve a relatively short sentence, If both prisoners confess, they both receive a moderately long sentence.

Note:

- The dilemma arises from the fact that each prisoner must decide without knowing the other's choice. The logical decision for each individual, considering their self-interest, is to confess because it ensures **the least severe outcome regardless of the other's choice.**

Role of UPI in Shaping Foreign Policy

Why in News?

India's digital strength has reached new heights with the **United Payments Interface (UPI)** surpassing **10 billion transactions**, signifying not only domestic success but also its vital role in foreign policy.

- Transactions on UPI have grown by over 50% year-on-year. **UPI crossed 1 billion monthly transactions for the first time in October 2019.**

How does UPI Contribute to India's Foreign Policy?

- **Digital Diplomacy:**
 - India aims to assume a leadership role in the **Global South** by pioneering **digital governance**.
 - India's **digital public infrastructure (DPI)** push is a differentiator from China's focus on physical infrastructure development in developing countries.
 - **International Expansion:**
 - Since June 2023, India has signed agreements with countries like **Armenia, Sierra Leone, Suriname, Antigua & Barbuda and Papua New Guinea** to share **India Stack**.
 - Similarly, UPI has also been taken to international markets such as France, UAE, Singapore and Sri Lanka, with countries like Japan, Mauritius, and Saudi Arabia having shown an interest in adopting the payment system.
- **Global Digital Public Infrastructure Repository (GDPIR):**
 - India plans to establish the **GDPIR to share DPI practices globally**.
 - The GDPIR aims to **facilitate the exchange of tools and resources related to DPI among G20 members and beyond**.
- **Economic Diplomacy:**
 - UPI's success attracts **foreign investments and partnerships**, contributing to **India's economic diplomacy efforts and strengthening bilateral relations**.

What is India Stack?

- India Stack is a **set of APIs (Application programming interfaces)** that allows governments, businesses, startups, and developers to utilize a unique digital infrastructure to solve India's hard problems towards **presence-less, paperless, and cashless service delivery**.
- India Stack is a **government-led initiative that focuses on building a robust digital infrastructure** to enable various digital services across different sectors.
 - The components of this collection are **owned and maintained by different agencies**.
- INDIA STACK aims to streamline and enhance **identity verification, data exchange, and digital payment processes to make them more accessible and efficient for citizens**.
- It includes digital public goods, which are digital resources and tools made available to the public to support various digital services and initiatives.
- The India Stack comprises three key layers: **identity, payments, and data management**.
 - **Identity Layer (Aadhaar):**
 - **Aadhaar** serves as the cornerstone of India Stack, offering digital identity products.
 - It is issued by the **Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI)** under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.
 - Aadhaar is considered a **proof of residence and not a proof of citizenship, and it does not grant any rights to domicile in India**.
 - **Payments Layer (UPI):**
 - UPI forms the second layer, ensuring **interoperability among money custodians, payment rails, and front-end payment applications**.
 - Managed by the **National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI)**, UPI is licensed to **third-party private entities like PhonePe, Google Pay, and Paytm**.
 - **Data Governance Layer:**
 - Digital Locker is built on **Data Empowerment and Protection Architecture (DEPA)**; it incorporates a consent management system, enabling the secure sharing of information for better financial, health, and telecom-related products and services.

Note:



- It consists of a set of **digital identity products centered around Aadhaar**. It can be used to **remotely authenticate via two-factor or biometric authentication**, receive digitally signed records such as driver's licenses, educational diplomas, and insurance policies, and sign documents or messages using a government-backed digital signature service.
- Aside from UPI, a number of digital solutions that the Indian government has rolled out in the last few years, including **CoWin, DigiLocker, Aarogya Setu, and Government e-Marketplace (GeM)**, all utilize the three fundamental layers of the Indian Stack.
- The **vision of India Stack is not limited to one country (India); it can be applied to any nation**, be it a developed one or an emerging one.

9. 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.**
- **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.

➤ Geographical Spread:

- 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.**

Note:



COUNTRIES WITH OVER 1 MILLION OVERSEAS INDIANS



Source: MEA, as on Dec 25, 2021

TOP DESTINATIONS FOR INDIANS

- United Arab Emirates
- United States
- Saudi Arabia

Source: World Migration Report, top 20 international migration country-to-country corridors

REMITTANCES (IN 2020)

India	\$83.15 bn
China	\$59.51 bn
Mexico	\$42.88 bn
Philippines	\$34.91 bn
Egypt	\$29.60 bn

Source: World Migration Report

What is the Significance of the Indian Diaspora?

- **Enhancing India's Soft Power:** Indian diaspora is one of the richest minorities in many developed countries. Their advantage is evident in "diaspora diplomacy", whereby they act as "bridge-builders" between their home and adopted countries.
 - The Indian diaspora is not just a part of India's soft power, but a fully transferable political vote bank as well.
- Also, many people of Indian origin hold **top political positions in many countries**, which enhances India's political clout at multilateral institutions like the United Nations.
- **Economic Contribution:** Remittances sent by the Indian diaspora have positive systemic effects on the **Balance of Payments (BOP)**, which help to bridge a wider trade deficit.
 - The migration of less-skilled labor (especially to West Asia) has helped in bringing down **disguised unemployment** in India.

Note:



- Further, the **migrant workers facilitated the flow of tacit information**, commercial and business ideas, and technologies into India.

10. News in Short

Order of the Druk Gyalpo

Why in News?

Recently, the Prime Minister of India received Bhutan's highest civilian award, the 'Order of the Druk Gyalpo', during his two-day State visit to Bhutan.

- He is the **first foreign Head** of the Government to receive the honour.



What is the 'Order of the Druk Gyalpo' Award?

- **About:**
 - The Order of the Druk Gyalpo stands as **Bhutan's most esteemed civilian accolade**, reserved for individuals who have **demonstrated exceptional contributions** to society, embodying values of service, integrity, and leadership.
- **Accolade on Indian PM:**
 - Indian PM's selection as the **first foreign Head of Government to receive this honour** underlined the **strong bilateral ties between the two countries**.

- The award underscores his leadership, characterised by an unwavering commitment to progress, which aligns **closely with Bhutan's national vision of achieving Self-Reliance**.
- Indian PM has emerged as a figure of destiny, transforming the ancient civilisation of India into a **dynamic centre of technology** and innovation.
 - His commitment to safeguarding the environment and investing in **renewable energy** makes India's progress truly well-rounded.



Top honours for PM Modi

Acknowledging the Global Statesman

Saudi Arabia 🇸🇦
Order of Abdulaziz Al Saud
 Highest civilian honour named after the founder of the modern Saudi state (2016)

UAE 🇦🇪
Order of Zayed Award
 Highest decoration of the UAE awarded to kings, presidents and heads of states (2019)

Bhutan 🇧🇹
Order of The Druk Gyalpo
 PM Modi is the first foreigner to receive it (2021)

Palestine 🇵🇸
Grand Collar of the State of Palestine Award
 Highest award for foreign dignitaries (2018)

Russia 🇷🇺
Order of St. Andrew Award
 Highest civilian honour of the country (2019)

Afghanistan 🇦🇫
State Order of Ghazi Amir Amanullah Khan
 Highest civilian honour (2016)

Maldives 🇲🇻
Order of the Distinguished Rule of Nishan Izzuddin
 The highest honour awarded to foreign dignitaries (2019)

South Korea 🇰🇷
Seoul Peace Prize
 Awarded for contributions to the harmony of mankind, it honored the PM for 'Modinomics' which reduced social and economic disparity. (2018)

USA 🇺🇸
Legion of Merit
 Awarded to Heads of Government. Given in recognition of the PM's steadfast leadership and vision for India's emergence as a global power (2020)

What are the Key Pacts Signed by India and Bhutan?

- **Establishment of Rail Links:**
 - An MoU was finalised on the establishment of rail links between India and Bhutan, including the **Kokrajhar-Gelephu rail link** and **Banarhat-Samtse rail link**.
- **Petroleum, Oil, Lubricants (POL):**
 - An agreement was made for the general supply of POL and related products **from India to Bhutan**, facilitating supply through **agreed entry/exit points**.

Note:

- **Recognition of Bhutan Food And Drug Authority (BFDA):**
 - An agreement was reached for the recognition of official control exercised by BFDA by the **Food Safety and Standards Authority Of India (FSSAI)**, promoting ease of doing business and reducing compliance costs.
- **Cooperation in Energy Efficiency and Energy Conservation:**
 - An MoU aimed to assist Bhutan in enhancing energy efficiency in the household sector through various measures such as promoting a **star labelling program** and **institutionalising training of energy auditors**.
- **Pharmacopoeia, Vigilance, and Testing of Medicinal Products:**
 - This MoU aimed to enhance cooperation and exchange information in the regulation of medicines, allowing for the acceptance of Indian Pharmacopoeia by Bhutan and the **supply of generic medicines at affordable prices**.
- **Joint Plan of Action (JPOA) on Space Cooperation:**
 - A concrete roadmap was established for further developing space cooperation through exchange programs and training.
- **Digital Connectivity:**
 - Both countries signed for renewal of the MoU on **Peering Arrangement between the National Knowledge Network of India (NKN) and the Druk Research And Education Network of Bhutan**.
 - This MoU aims to enhance **digital connectivity between India and Bhutan** and will benefit the scholars and research institutions of Bhutan.

India's Push for Security Council Reform: The G4 Model

Why in News?

Participating in the **Intergovernmental Negotiations on Security Council Reform**, India has presented a detailed model on behalf of the **G4 nations** for **United Nations Security Council Reform**.

- The model includes new permanent members elected democratically by the **UN General Assembly** and shows flexibility on the veto issue.
- The G4 (Brazil, Germany, India and Japan) was created in 2004 and has been promoting Security Council reform.

What are the Key Features of the G4 Proposed Model?

- **Addressing Under-representation:** The model highlights the “**glaring under-representation and un-representation**” of key regions in the Council’s current composition, which hampers its legitimacy and effectiveness.
- **Membership Expansion:** The G4 model advocates for increasing the Security Council’s membership from the **current 15 to 25-26 members**.
 - This expansion includes **adding 6 permanent and 4 or 5 non-permanent** members.
 - Two new permanent members each are proposed from **African states and Asia Pacific states, one from Latin American and Caribbean states**, and one from Western European and Other states.
- **Flexibility on Veto:** In a departure from the existing framework where only the five permanent members hold veto powers, the G4 model offers flexibility on the **veto issue**.
 - New permanent members would refrain from exercising the veto until a decision on the matter is taken during a review process, demonstrating a willingness to engage in constructive negotiations.
- **Democratic and Inclusive Election:** The proposal emphasizes that the decision on which member states will occupy the new permanent seats will be made through a **democratic and inclusive election by the UN General Assembly**.

Note:



What is the United Nations Security Council?

UN Security Council (UNSC)

The UN Charter vests the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security to the UNSC

About

One of the 6 principal organs of UN; established in 1945 by UN Charter

Headquarters

New York City

First Session

17 January 1946 at Church House, Westminster, London

Membership

- 15 members - 5 Permanent Members (P5), 10 Non-Permanent Members elected for two-year terms (5 elected each year)
- P5 - the US, the UK, Russia, France and China

Presidency

- Rotates every month among the 15 members
- India's Presidency for year 2022 - December

Voting Powers

- 1 member = 1 vote
- P5 have veto power
- Members of UN sans membership of UNSC participate without vote

UNSC Committees/Resolutions

Terrorism

- Resolution 1373 (Counter Terrorism Committee)
- Resolution 1267 (Da'esh and Al Qaeda Committee)

Non-Proliferation Committee

- Resolution 1540 (against nuclear, chemical and biological weapons)

India and UNSC

- Served 7 times as non-permanent member; elected for the 8th time for 2021-22; advocates for a permanent seat
- Arguments for a permanent seat:
 - 43 peacekeeping missions
 - Active participation in formulating Human Rights Declaration (UDHR)
 - India's population, territorial size, GDP, economic potential, cultural diversity, political system etc.



G4

Group of 4 countries (Brazil, Germany, India and Japan) which advocate each other's bids for permanent seats in the UNSC

Uniting for Consensus (UfC) Movement

- Informally known as the **Coffee Club**
- Countries oppose the expansion Permanent Seats of UNSC
- Prime movers of the club - Italy, Spain, Australia, Canada, South Korea, Argentina and Pakistan
- Italy and Spain are opposed to Germany's bid; Pakistan - India's bid; Argentina - Brazil's bid and Australia - Japan's bid

Major Challenges in UNSC

- Usual UN rules don't apply to UNSC deliberations; no records of meetings kept
- Powerplay in UNSC; anachronistic veto powers of P5
- Deep polarisation among P5; frequent divisions end up blocking key decisions
- Inadequate representation of many regions among of the world



What is the Procedure of UN Security Council Reforms?

UN Security Council reform requires an amendment to the Charter of the United Nations. The relevant procedure as set out in **Article 108** involves a two-stage process:

- **First Stage:** The General Assembly, where each of the 193 member states holds one vote, must endorse the reform with a two-thirds majority, equivalent to at least 128 states.
 - This stage **does not grant the right of veto**, as per Article 27 of the Charter.

- **Second Stage:** Upon approval in the first stage, the United Nations Charter, considered an international treaty, undergoes amendment.
 - This amended Charter requires ratification by at least two-thirds of the member states, including all five permanent Security Council members, adhering to their respective national procedures.
 - In this stage, the ratification process can be influenced by the parliaments of the permanent members, potentially affecting the entry into force of the amended Charter.

Note:

Note: A negative vote from permanent members in the General Assembly does not prevent them from later ratifying the amended Charter.

- For instance, during the 1963 vote to enlarge the Security Council, **only one permanent member voted in favour.**
- However, within 18 months by 1965, all five permanent members had ratified the amended Charter.

France Considers Legalising Assisted Dying

Why in News?

France, after recently adding **abortion** as a **constitutional right**, is now considering legalising a form of assisted dying called “**aid in dying**”.

- The proposed bill will have strict conditions, allowing assisted dying for individuals with incurable illnesses expected to cause death in the short- or middle-term.
- The country already allows **passive euthanasia**.

What is Assisted Dying and Passive Euthanasia?

- **Assisted Dying:** Assisted dying involves individuals who are terminally ill seeking medical assistance to obtain lethal drugs, which they then **administer themselves to end their own lives**.
 - It typically occurs **when patients are facing unbearable suffering** due to a terminal illness and wish to have control over the timing and manner of their death.
 - The primary distinction of assisted dying is that **individuals actively participate in the process of ending their lives** with the aid of medical professionals.
- **Passive Euthanasia:** Passive euthanasia occurs when **life-sustaining treatments are withheld or withdrawn**, allowing the patient to die naturally.
 - This may involve decisions to **stop medical interventions** such as ventilators, feeding tubes, or medications that sustain life.
 - Passive euthanasia is often considered distinct from active euthanasia because it does not involve directly causing the patient’s death but rather allows death to occur by natural means.

- **Active euthanasia involves deliberately using lethal substances** or actions to end a person’s life.

➤ Countries with Legalised Assisted Dying or/and Euthanasia:

- **Netherland, Luxembourg, Belgium, Spain** allows both euthanasia and assisted suicide for anyone who faces “**unbearable suffering**” that has no chance of improvement.
- **Switzerland bans euthanasia** but allows assisted dying in the presence of a doctor or physician.
- The United States has different laws in different states. **Euthanasia is allowed in** some states like **Washington, Oregon, and Montana**.

○ **India allows for passive Euthanasia.**

- In ***Aruna Ramachandra Shanbaug v. Union of India Case, 2011***, Supreme Court **recognised passive euthanasia in this case** (for Aruna Shanbaug, who was in vegetative state) by which it had permitted **withdrawal of life-sustaining treatment from patients** not in a position to make an informed decision.

- The Supreme Court of India **legalised passive euthanasia**, In ***Common Cause V/s Union of India Case, 2018***, citing the importance of a ‘**living will**.’

- The ruling allows mentally competent adults to refuse medical treatment or opt not to receive it, thus embracing a natural death, under specific circumstances.

- The court emphasised that **dignity in the dying process is integral to the right to life** guaranteed by **Article 21 of the Constitution**.

- In 2023, the Supreme Court revised rules for passive euthanasia to simplify and expedite the process.

- SC eliminated the requirement for a judicial magistrate to validate a living will, stating that attestation by a notary or a gazetted officer is adequate.

Belgium Recognises Ecocide as a Crime

Why in News?

The Federal Parliament of **Belgium** has made history by becoming the **first country in the European Continent** to recognise ‘**ecocide**’ as a **national as well as an international crime**.

Note:



- The law targets individuals in positions of decision-making power and corporations, aiming to prevent and punish severe environmental degradation such as extensive oil spills.

Note:

- **Belgium is a federal and constitutional monarchy** divided into two main linguistic and cultural regions: **Flemish (Dutch)-speaking** Flanders and **French-speaking** Wallonia.
- Belgium is called the **'Cockpit of Europe'** because it is where the largest number of European battles have taken place in history.
- Its capital, Brussels, is also the seat of the European Union (EU).



What is Ecocide?

- Ecocide is defined as **“unlawful or wanton acts committed with knowledge** that there is a substantial likelihood of severe and either widespread or long-term damage to the environment being caused by those acts.”
 - The definition was provided by the **Independent Expert Panel for the Legal Definition of Ecocide**, formed by the Stop Ecocide Foundation.
- Ecocide is considered a form of **environmental crime** and is often associated with significant **negative impacts on biodiversity, ecosystems, and human well-being.**

- Recognizing ecocide as a crime aims to hold individuals and corporations accountable for their actions and to prevent further environmental degradation.
- Ecocide is a crime in 12 countries, with nations mulling laws around criminalising environmental damage that is wilfully caused and harms humans, animals and plant species.

UN General Assembly Adopts Landmark AI Resolution

The **UN General Assembly** has taken a historic step by adopting a landmark resolution focused on promoting the **safe, secure, and trustworthy use of artificial intelligence (AI) systems**, aligning with the goals of sustainable development.

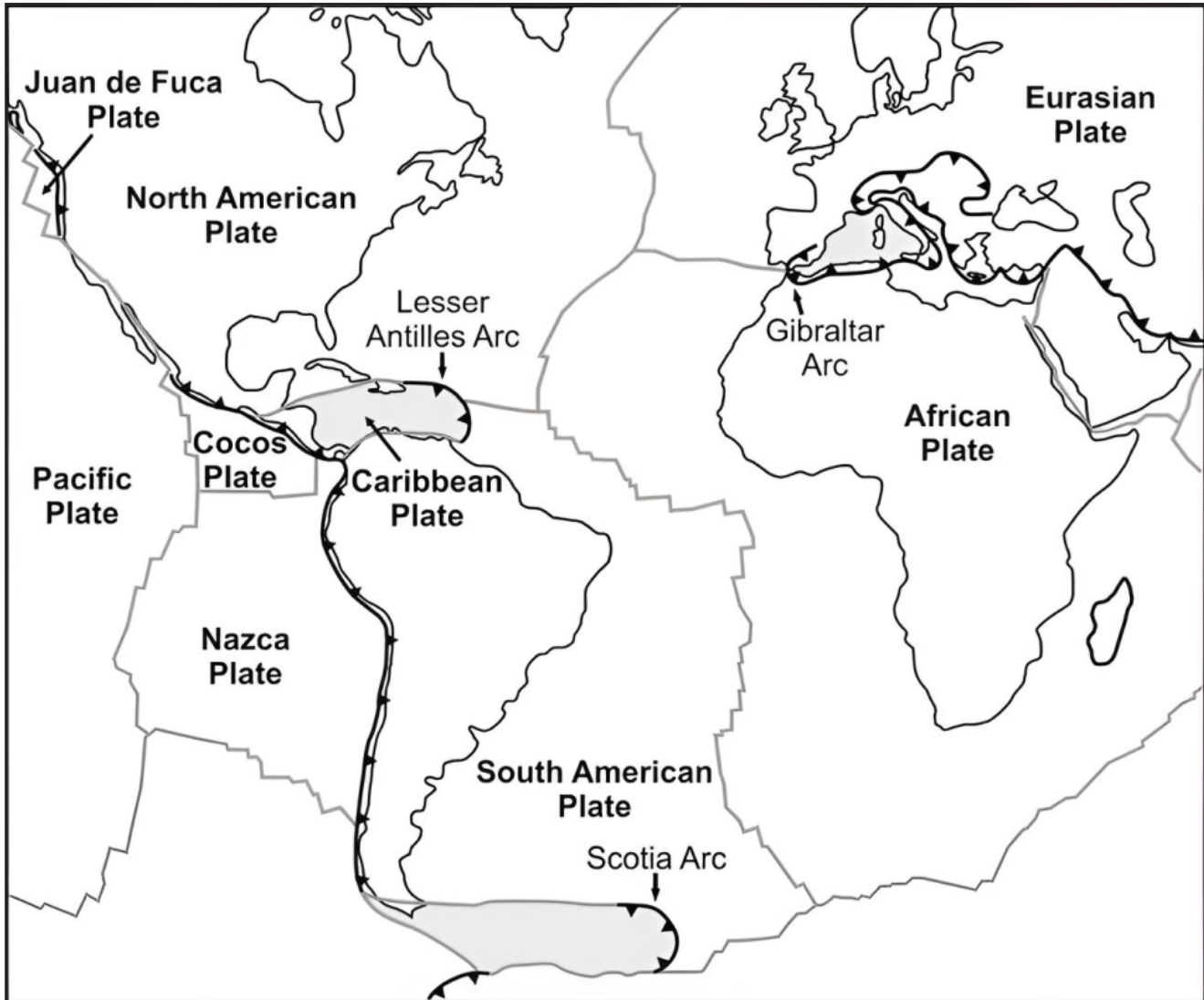
- This adoption marks the first time the Assembly has addressed regulation in the rapidly evolving field of AI, signalling a significant milestone in global governance.
- The resolution recognises AI's potential to accelerate progress towards the **17 Sustainable Development Goals** and calls for cooperation among states, private sectors, civil society, and other stakeholders to develop regulatory frameworks and governance approaches for safe AI usage.
- Additionally, the Assembly stresses the importance of **bridging the digital divide by supporting developing countries** in gaining inclusive access to AI technologies and enhancing digital literacy, ensuring that technological advancement benefits everyone equally.
 - While **General Assembly resolutions are not legally binding**, they serve as a crucial indicator of global opinion.

Concern Over Gibraltar Strait Subduction Zone

Recently, Scientists raised concerns about the future of the **Atlantic Ocean**. They have identified a **subduction zone** beneath the **Gibraltar Strait**, situated between **Spain and Morocco**.

- It is a narrow gap separating **Europe** and **Africa**. It marks the meeting point of the **Eurasian Plate** and the **African Plate**.
- **The Ring of Fire:** Similar to the **Pacific Ocean's Ring of Fire**, where subduction zones encircle the **Pacific Ocean**, the **Atlantic Ocean** may witness the formation of a new subduction system.

Note:



- **Subduction Process:** Subduction zones occur where tectonic plates interact, with one plate diving below another. In this case, the **African Plate** is subducting beneath the **Eurasian Plate**, leading to seismic activity and earthquake risks.
 - Scientists predict that this subduction zone will expand westwards over the next 20 million years.
- **Ocean Basin Shrinking:** The subduction process could lead to the **shrinking of the ocean basin**, ultimately closing off the **Atlantic Ocean**.
- **Subduction Invasion:** Despite its current relatively small size (about 125 miles in length), projections suggest that the **subduction zone could expand to approximately 500 miles** within the next two decades.
 - This phenomenon is known as “**subduction invasion**.”

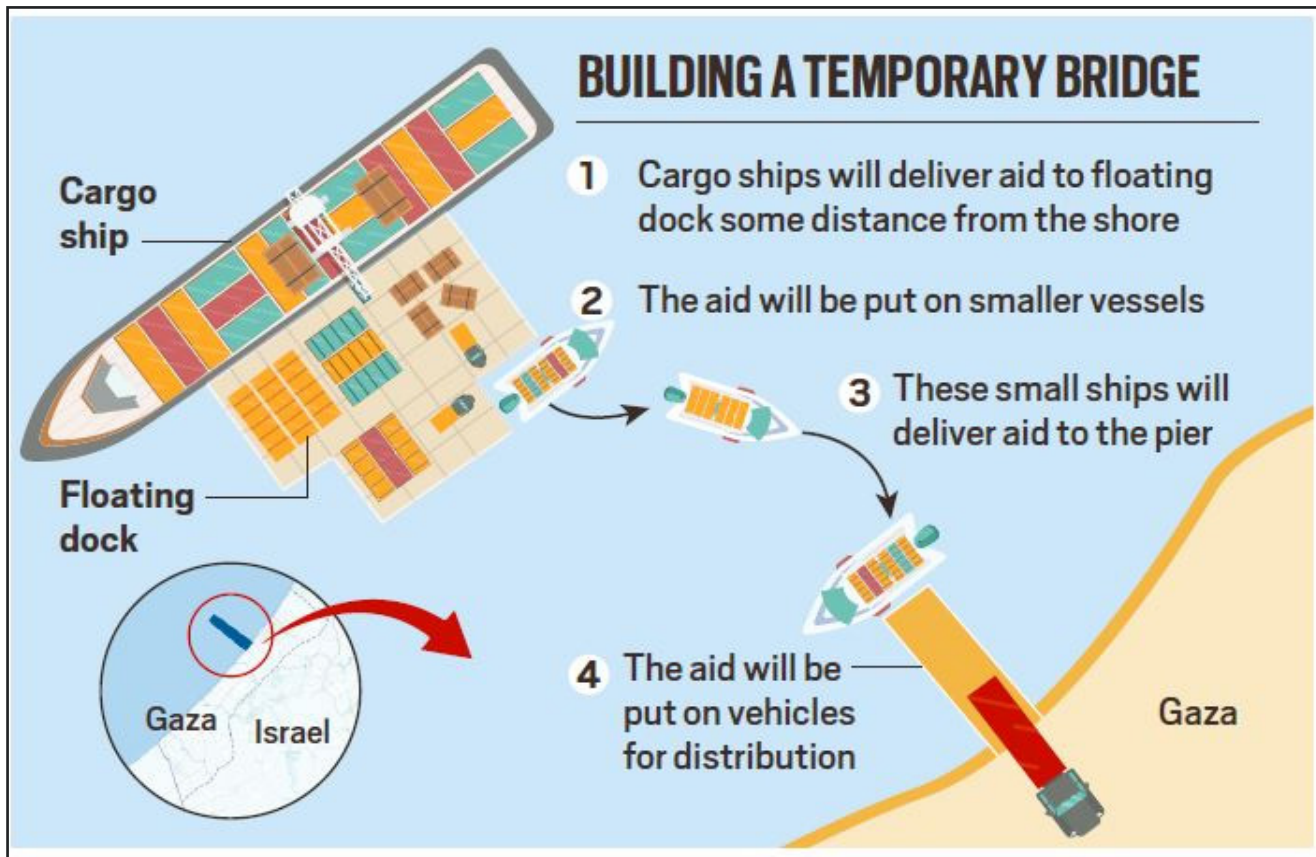
JLOTS Project

The US plans to deliver aid to Gaza from a floating dock at sea through the **Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore Project (JLOTS)**. The goal is to deliver aid equivalent to **two million meals a day** to Gaza.

- JLOTS capabilities are **used to transport cargo by sea when one or more ports cannot be operated** or are not available for loading or unloading.
 - Overall, JLOTS integrates infrastructure, logistics, security, and environmental considerations **to facilitate effective disaster response and humanitarian aid delivery**.
- The project will consist of **two main components, a floating dock and a long pier with a causeway**.

Note:





- The **floating dock** will be constructed using steel components delivered to the site by a roll-on, roll-off ship, a type of cargo vessel equipped with a platform for loading and unloading heavy cargo.
- The **pier will connect to the shore**, while the dock could be placed up to a kilometre away. This **setup ensures that aid-carrying ships avoid the risk of getting stuck in shallow waters** near the shore.

Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

Recent clashes in the eastern **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)** have sparked international concern and worsened the already severe **humanitarian situation** in the area.

- Many fatalities and thousands displaced due to clashes between the **Congolese army** and the **Rwandan-supported M23 group** near **Goma** in **North Kivu province**.
- **About:**
 - The DRC is **2nd largest country in Africa** and the **11th largest** in the world.



- It has a small coastline with the Atlantic Ocean. DRC is bounded to the **north by the Central African Republic and South Sudan**; to the **east by Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and Tanzania**; to the **southeast by Zambia**; and to the **southwest by Angola**.
 - **Kinshasa**, the capital of the DRC, is located on the **Congo River**, the only river to **cross the equator twice** in Africa.
- The official language is **French**, but other languages include **Kituba, Lingala, Swahili, and Tshiluba**.

Note:

- **Katanga Plateau** is considered to be a rich mining region, which supplies cobalt, copper, tin, radium, uranium, and diamonds.

India and Dominican Republic to Strengthen Economic Ties with JETCO Protocol

The protocol for the establishment of the **Joint Economic and Trade Committee (JETCO)** between India and the **Dominican Republic** was signed at **Santo Domingo (Capital of the Dominican Republic)**.

- The protocol envisages strengthening and develop cooperation on trade, services, industrial technologies and various other sectors by means of technical assistance, training programmes and capacity building.
- Diplomatic relations between **India and Dominican Republic** were established in May 1999. However, at present, **there is no bilateral institutional mechanism**

between India and the Dominican Republic on trade and commerce.

- **India primarily imports gold from the Dominican Republic** and exports pharmaceuticals, marine products, motor vehicles, two and three-wheelers etc.



Haiti

Source: TH

Recently, **Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry** announced his intention to resign, once a **transitional presidential council** is created.



Note:

➤ About:

- It is located between the **Caribbean Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean**.
- It occupies the **western one-third of the island of Hispaniola**, sharing a border with the **Dominican Republic on the eastern side**.
 - Haiti is also neighbored by **Jamaica to the west and Cuba to the northwest**.
- **Official Languages:** French, Haitian Creole.
- **Major Mountain Ranges:** Massif de la Selle, Massif du Nord.
- It is the **world's first independent Black-led republic**.
 - The nation underwent about two centuries of **Spanish colonial rule** and more than a century of French rule.

Italian Court Ruling Against Returning Sea Migrants

Source: TH

Italy's highest court, the Court of Cassation, ruled that it is **illegal to return rescued sea migrants to Libya**.

- The court's ruling is based on the **principle of non-refoulement** that forbids the forced return of people to countries where their lives or rights are at risk.
 - The court's ruling affirms Libya as unsafe for migrants, highlighting the risk of "inhuman and degrading treatment" in detention centres under coastguards and militias if returned.
- Italy's top court ruling that it is illegal to return sea migrants to Libya aligns with **Article 98 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)**.
 - This article obligates **states to help anyone found at sea** in danger of being lost and to rescue those in distress if they can do so without serious danger to their own ship or people.



Note:

Yaounde Declaration

Source: DTE

Recently, the **Yaoundé Declaration** marked a significant milestone in the fight against malaria, as health ministers from 11 African countries pledged to **end malaria deaths**.

- The **total number of malaria cases globally increased from 233 million in 2019 to 249 million in 2022**.
- Africa witnessed a significant rise in malaria cases during this period, reaching 233 million cases. **Africa accounts for 94% of global malaria cases and 95% of malaria-related deaths**.
- While progress against malaria has stagnated in the **WHO Africa region**, the 11 African countries involved in the Yaounde conference account for **over 70% of the global malaria burden**.
 - The declaration aims to strengthen health infrastructure, expand personnel capacity, and enhance program implementation. They also seek to foster partnerships for funding, research, and innovation.
- Despite the declaration, **experts highlight the need for concrete action** on the ground. The **African Union's goal to control and eliminate malaria by 2030** faces significant financial gaps, with USD 1.5 billion needed to sustain basic malaria services and additional funds required for climate adaptation in the health sector.

Argentina Withdraws from BRICS Plan

Source: BBC

Recently, Argentina, under the leadership of **President Javier Milei**, has decided not to join the **BRICS bloc** of developing economies, despite being scheduled to join.

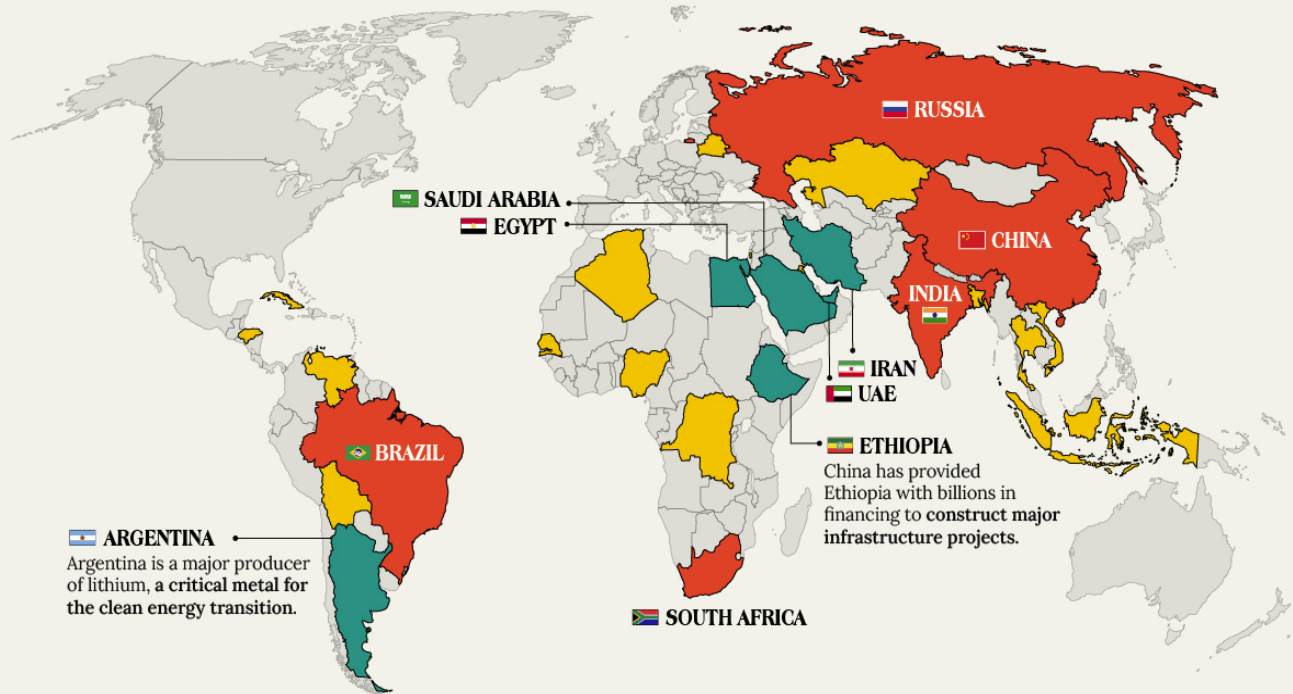
- **Argentina** was among six countries **invited in August to join the BRICS bloc**, which currently consists of **Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa**.
 - Argentina was set to join on **1st January 2024**.
 - These points highlight Argentina's decision under Milei's leadership to distance itself from the **BRICS** and align more closely with the **United States and Israel**, reflecting a shift towards **right-wing populism** in its foreign policy.
- The initial stage of enlargement involves extending invitations to countries such as **Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE** to join BRICS.
 - More than **40 nations** have shown keen interest in becoming members of BRICS.



VISUALIZING THE 2023 BRICS EXPANSION

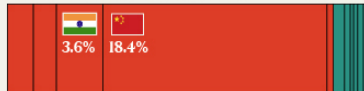
BRICS, a bloc of developing countries formed in 2010, is set to welcome six new members at the beginning of 2024.

▲ Members ▲ New Members ▲ Applied for membership



SHARE OF GLOBAL

GDP 2023 EoY PROJECTION



BRICS total with new members

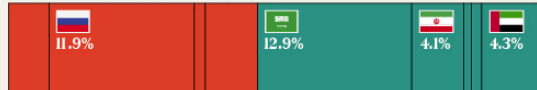
29% Saudi Arabia is the only trillion-dollar economy being added to BRICS.

POPULATION 2023



46% Adding high-population-growth countries like Ethiopia means BRICS could soon represent over half the world's population.

OIL PRODUCTION 2022



43% The addition of Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the UAE will more than double BRICS' share of global oil production.

EXPORTS OF GOODS* 2022



25% BRICS' share of global exports will increase slightly, continuing to be led by China.

*Merchandise trade only.

Sources: IMF, World Population Review, EI Statistical Review of World Energy, World Trade Organization

visualcapitalist.com

Note:

EU Fines Apple for Antitrust Violations in App Store

Source: TH

The **European Union's** recent 1.8 billion euro fine against **Apple** sheds light on the tech giant's alleged **antitrust violations**, specifically regarding its treatment of competitors and the imposition of fees within its App Store ecosystem.

- Apple was accused of **unfairly favouring its own music streaming service, "Apple Music"**, over competitors like **Spotify** by restricting their ability to inform users about alternative subscription options and by imposing significant fees for in-app purchases.
- The European Commission found that Apple's actions violated European Union antitrust laws, particularly regarding the **abuse of its dominant market position** and anti-steering provisions that hindered competition.
- The fine underscores the EU's stance against anti-competitive practices and sets a precedent for future tech antitrust cases.

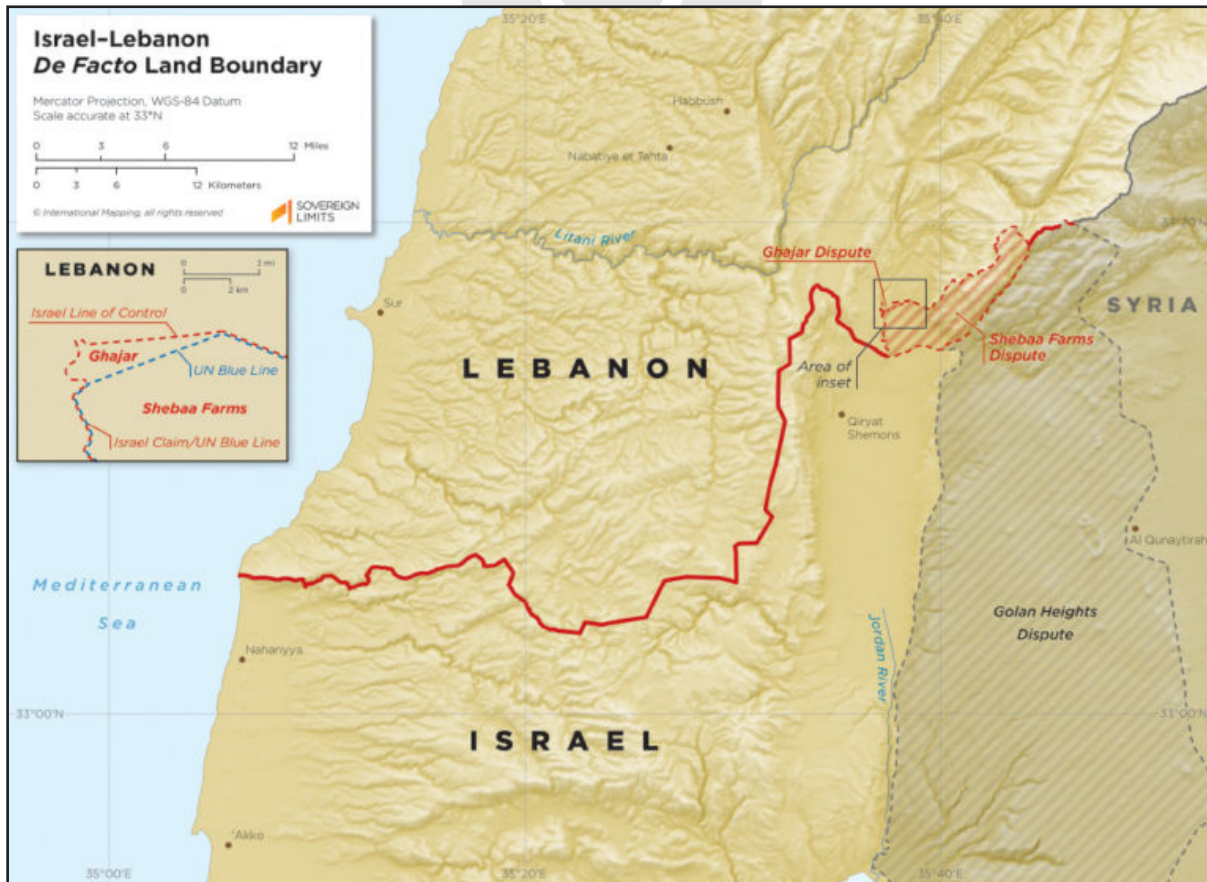
- Apple denies antitrust allegations, stating no evidence of anti-competitive behaviour, and plans to appeal the EU decision.

Blue Line

Source: FT

Recently, the borders between **Israel** and **Lebanon** have been under intensified attack by **Hezbollah**.

- The border between **Israel** and **Lebanon**, known as the **"Blue Line,"** was set by the **United Nations** in **2000** after Israel withdrew its military from **southern Lebanon**.
 - It's not an **official international border** but a **demarcation line**.
- Originally, it was the boundary established by **Britain** and **France** in the **1920s**, between **Lebanon**, **Syria** and **Palestine**.
- **Hezbollah** is a **Shia Islamist political party** and **militant group** based in **Lebanon**. It emerged in the **1980s** as a response to the **Israeli occupation** of **southern Lebanon**. It is also designated as a terrorist organisation by several countries, including the **United States** and **Israel**.



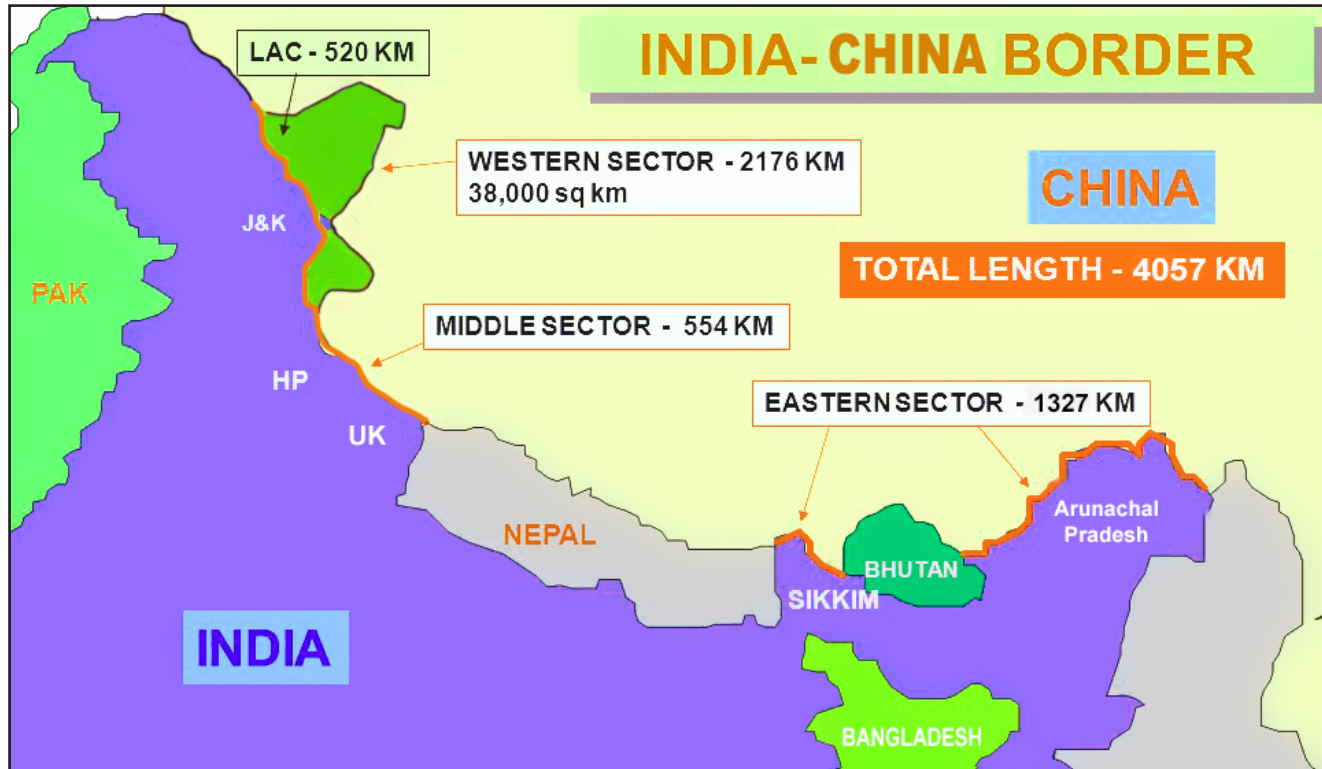
Note:

India-China Border Affairs

Recently, Indian and Chinese diplomats convened for the 29th meeting of the **Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC) on India-China Border Affairs** in Beijing, marking a significant development amid the **ongoing tensions along the Line of Actual Control**.

➤ Both sides agreed to maintain regular contact through diplomatic and military channels.

- They also agreed to promote the **transition of the border situation into a normalised phase of control and management**.
- The India-China Border is not fully demarcated, this has led to tensions between the countries.
- **The Line of Actual Control (LAC)** serves as the boundary separating Indian-controlled territory from Chinese-controlled territory.



Alliance for Global Good – Gender Equity and Equality

Source: PIB

Recently, the Ministry of Women & Child Development, Government of India launched the logo and the website for the **Alliance for Global Good – Gender Equity and Equality**.

➤ It marks a significant milestone in the global pursuit of gender equality. Launched in **Davos 2024 (54th annual World Economic Forum)**, it is a testament

to India's unwavering commitment to the **cause of women-led development**.

- The alliance aims to consolidate global best practices, foster knowledge exchange, and attract investments in women's health, education, and entrepreneurship, in line with various **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**.
- It is being supported by influential partners like the **Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation** and anchored by institutions such as the **CII Centre for Women Leadership**

Note:

