

To the Point

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Current Affairs Yearly Complitation

For Prelims 2023

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JAN. 2022 - JAN. 2023

An initiative By Pradeep Kumar (SOCIOLOGY EXPERT)

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We take all reasonable steps to keep this information current and accurate, but errors can occur.

We express our gratitude to all our team members and thankful to all the advisors for making first step in publishing a small magazine.

Our Methodology for this Magazine

We have used authentic sources such as The Hindu, Indian express, PIB, Live Mint etc to collect articles which are important for Exam

The topics has been categorised subject wise so that is is easy for aspirants to read in flow and relate the topics

Background information has been provided so static related to current can be covered

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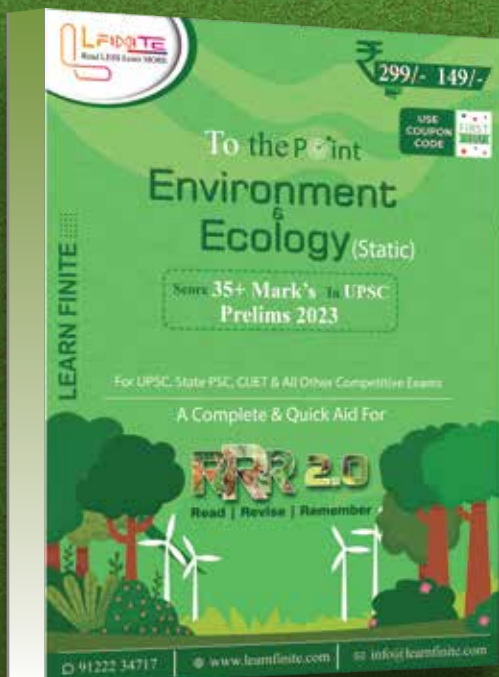
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The Indo US Trade and Commerce

In News

The Department of Agriculture and farmer welfare (DAC&FW) and the US Department of Agriculture signed an agreement for implementing the “2 Vs 2” Agri market access issues.

About the framework agreement:

- The framework agreement on 2 Vs 2 Agri market access would emphasize issues related to inspection and transfer for Indian mangoes along with the market access for pomegranate arils from India and market access for US cherries and alfalfa hay.
- This will promote the export of Indian agri-products easing access to the US market.
- It has been notified by the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying that it is ready to open up the market for US pork.
- This framework agreement will offer a possibility to restore India’s trade benefits under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) of the US. The same issue was raised in the US- India Trade Policy Forum.

Joint Development Agreement between India and Africa

In News

A joint development agreement was signed between Power Grid Corporation of India Limited and Africa50, the pan-African infrastructure investment platform to continue to develop the Kenya Transmission Project through Public Private Partnership.

About the Project:

- The project involves the development, financing, construction and operation of transmission lines.
- Followed by its completion, the project will be Kenya’s first Independent Power Transmission and will set a reference point in Africa as the first financing of transmission lines on a PPP basis.
- The technical operational support would be provided by POWERGRID which is one of the world’s leading electric transmission utility companies.
- **Africa50** will assist the project by bringing its expertise on development and finance bridging the gap between the Kenyan government and private investors.

About Africa50

It is an infrastructure investment platform that contributes to Africa’s economic growth by developing and investing in bankable infrastructure projects, catalysing public sector capital and mobilising private sector funding.

India and Sri Lanka

In News

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar’s virtual meeting with Sri Lanka’s Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa, with an assurance that India will support Sri Lanka “in all possible ways for overcoming the economic and other challenges posed by COVID-19 pandemic”, was significant and timely.

Crisis faced by Sri Lanka

- A crucial week lies ahead for the Sri Lankan economy, when President Gotabaya Rajapaksa must make a decision on whether to service debts to bonds with an instalment of \$500 million due on January 18, or to default for the first time ever, given the island’s precarious finances.
- A slump in GDP spurred by COVID-19 losses to tourism, exports and remittances,

- Foreign reserves that dwindled from \$7.5 bn in 2019 to \$1.6 bn in November 2021, and
- Pending debt repayments of more than \$7 bn expected in 2022.

Help from India and China:

- In the preceding weeks, the Rajapaksa government reached out to India and China, which are most likely to help given their respective interests in the island.
- Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, visited recently, who discussed:
 - A full debt restructure of Sri Lankan borrowings.
 - Beijing has also extended a currency swap arrangement of \$1.5 billion.
- India decided on a “four-pronged” initiative:
 - Lines of Credit (LoC) towards the import of fuel, food and medicines - the \$1.5 bn LoC for essential imports is reportedly under way.
 - Currency swap - India has extended \$400 million under the “SAARC currency swap” arrangement.
 - A partial deferral of a \$500 million settlement from Sri Lanka by two months;

Way forward

It is important to note that in times of peril, New Delhi and Colombo have established a robust channel of communication and demonstrated an ability to act on promises quickly, proving that adage about friends (and neighbours) in need.

I4F Programme

In News

The 8th Governing body meeting was held virtually and involved the experts from India and Israel to widen the scope of the India-Israel Industrial R&D & Technological Innovation Fund (I4F).

About I4F programme

- The India- Israel collaborative ecosystem has been broadened with the approval of 3 joint R&D giving new directions to boost research and innovation.
- The projects include centrally monitored IoT nanosensors for molecular diagnostics in healthcare and screening applications, mosquito control biological solutions and IoT enabled satellite communication for real-time collection of agriculture and environment data across the country.
- The experts recommended focusing on Partnership Development Activities that result in the increase of more business activities between Indian and Israeli companies and startups through online events.
- The I4F fund is a cooperation between the Department of Science and Technology, the Government of India and the Israel Innovation Authority, Government of Israel.
- **The Global Innovation & Technology Alliance (GITA)** has been appointed to implement the I4F programme in India whereas Israel Innovation Authority is the implementing agency in Israel.

BRICS STI Steering Committee

In News

The 15th meeting of the BRICS Science Technology Innovation Steering Committee was organized and attended by representatives from BRICS scientific ministries.

About the Committee

- India will host a series of five events in 2022 namely:
 - BRICS startups forum meeting

- Working groups meeting on Energy, Biotechnology and Biomedicine
- ICT and High-Performance Computing
- Science, Technology, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship Partnership (STIEP) Working Group Meeting
- Launch of BRICS innovation launchpad as a microsite (Knowledge hub)
- A number of sectoral events and meetings have been planned along with Ministerial Summits.

India-Mauritius Developmental Projects

In News

The Governments of India and Mauritius jointly inaugurated the social housing units project taking the developmental partnership to the next level.

About the project

- A state of the art Civil Service College along with a 8 MW(megawatt) solar photovoltaic farm , both supported by India, have been established as a part of the developmental partnership.
- The need to expand the learnings of Mission Karmayogi has been emphasized in order to revamp civil services that aim to meet the demands of changing needs of the nation.
- The establishment of the solar farm reflects India's commitment towards adopting renewable energy with its landmark vision of ISA.
- Other developmental projects that were facilitated by India include the Metro Express Project, Supreme Court building, ENT hospital and supply of digital tablets to primary school children.

India and France S&T Cooperation

In News

India and France signed an MoU to expand their science and technology cooperation with the major objective of advancement in human health.

Highlights of the MoU

- The MoU on science and technology cooperation has been signed between CSIR and Institut Pasteur. Institut Pasteur is a french non-profit private foundation that deals with the study of biology, micro-organisms, diseases and vaccines.
- The agreement aims to enhance collaboration between India and France in the area of health research and in the study of infectious diseases.
- Both the countries will jointly work for providing effective and affordable healthcare solutions not only for the people of India and France but also for the global good.
- This MoU includes provisions that are intended to develop potential scientific and technological cooperation and networking between scientists from CSIR and Institute Pasteur.

India-Central Asia Virtual Summit

In News

The first India-Central Asia summit was hosted by the Prime Minister of India in virtual format.

About the Summit

- The Summit was attended by Presidents of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Republic of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Republic of Uzbekistan.

- Central Asia is a crucial region for the promotion of India's interests especially in terms of trade and connectivity.
- The leaders conveyed their strong support for a peaceful, secure and stable Afghanistan with a representative and inclusive government. This comes in favour of India's interest concerning its national security.
- India agreed to extend humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people.
- In a historic decision, the leaders agreed to institutionalize the Summit mechanism by holding it every 2 years.
- A secretariat will be set up soon in New Delhi for India-Central Asia taking the relationship further.
- Efforts have been made from both sides to embolden the cultural ties and enhance people to people contact.

India-ASEAN Digital Work Plan 2022

In News

The 2nd ASEAN Digital Ministers (ADGMIN) meeting with India was held on a virtual platform.

About ADGMIN:

- The ASEAN(Association of South-East Asian Nations) Digital Ministers meeting is annually conducted in order to ascertain ways to expand the digital widespread promoting the usage of Information and communication technology.
- The India-ASEAN Digital Work Plan 2022 has been approved for larger collaboration in the areas of emerging digital technologies.
- This involves the telecom ministers from ten ASEAN countries namely, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.
- The dialogue partner countries of the ASEAN were also present in the meeting.
- The discussion centered around strengthening regional digital cooperation in the spirit of digital inclusion and integration.

The India-ASEAN Digital Work Plan 2022

- The work plan includes a system for combating the use of stolen and counterfeit mobile handsets.
- It will also work towards nationwide public internet access.
- Larger emphasis will be given on capacity building and knowledge sharing in emerging areas of Internet of Things, 5G, Advanced Satellite Communication, Cyber Forensics and so on and so forth.

India-UAE Virtual Summit

In News

In a historic move, India and UAE signed the futuristic Comprehensive Economic Partnership (CEPA) during a virtual summit.

The India- UAE trade agreement:

- The free trade agreement aims to boost the trade relations between the two countries to US\$ 100 billion in the next five years.
- This act has been iconic in strengthening the bond between the two friends of history.
- The joint vision statement emphasised on enhanced maritime cooperation, collaborative efforts to fight terrorism and measures to boost trade and investments.

- The signing of CEPA will result in several benefits like promoting businesses, enhancing market access and reduced tariffs.
- Two MoUs have been signed including a MoU between APEDA and DP World and Al Dahra has been signed to set up a food security corridor and MoU between India's Gift city and Abu Dhabi Global Market on cooperation in financial projects and services. This will be a welcoming move to enhance resilience and reliability of food supply chains.
- The two countries also agreed to work together on logistics and services, pharmaceuticals, medical devices, agriculture, agri-tech and steel and aluminium.
- According to CEPA, an extension of zero duty will be given to several sectors comprising 9% of India's exports within five to ten years.

Russia attack on Ukraine

In News

A full-scale invasion of Ukraine was initiated by Russian forces. The Russian activities have been extensively denounced, and they pose a number of issues about whether or not they violated international law.

International Law

- On the concept of non-interference in domestic matters is founded the present international order, which is a fundamental tenet of international relations.
- According to article 2(4) of the United Nations Charter, governments are prohibited from using or threatening to use force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any other state, and they must refrain from doing so. Forcible trespassing on the territory of another state is prohibited under any circumstances, even if it is for a brief or limited purpose such as a 'in and out' operation, according to the Convention. In international law, the Russian war on Ukraine is a violation of the norm of non-intervention, and it constitutes aggression against the country. Aggression is defined by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 3314 (1974) as the use of military force by one state against the sovereignty, territorial integrity, or political independence of another.
- Aggression is also regarded a criminal act under customary international law and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which established the International Criminal Court.
- One of the primary motivations for Russia's use of force against Ukraine is the country's aim to keep Ukraine out of the NATO alliance.
- Furthermore, by resorting to the use of force, Russia has violated article 2(3) of the UN Charter, which mandates that nations settle their differences via peaceful methods in order to maintain international peace and security.

Ukraine Self Defence

- In the event that Russia employs force against Ukraine, Ukraine has the right to defend itself under international law.
- Article 51 of the United Nations Charter grants a state the right to use individual or collective self-defence until the Security Council takes action to restore international peace and security to the situation.
- In this particular instance, it appears improbable that the UN Security Council would reach a conclusion because Russia is a permanent member with veto power.
- Ukraine, on the other hand, has the right, under international law, to request aid from other countries in the form of military support, weapons supply, and so on.
- The Russian government, on the other side, has asserted that it is acting in self-defence. This argument is problematic because Ukraine has made no use of force or issued any similar threats against Russia during this time period.

- Furthermore, simply being a member of a defence organisation such as NATO does not automatically imply a threat of attack towards the country that is a member. As a result, Russia is unable to claim self-defense in this situation as well.

Way Forward

The resumption of the Minsk peace process would be a viable answer to the current situation. Consequently, the West (including the United States and other western countries) should encourage both parties to begin discussions and to honour their promises under the Minsk accord in order to restore relative calm along the border.

Suez Canal toll hike

In news

The Suez Canal Authority increases tolls by 10% for passing ships, in light of the growing crisis in Ukraine.

Details

- Transit fees for liquefied petroleum gas, chemical tankers, and other liquid bulk tankers increased by 10%.
- Vessels carrying vehicles, natural gas and general cargo, as well as multi-purpose vessels, will see an increase of 7%, while a 5% increase will be imposed on oil and crude tankers and dry bulk vessels
- A six percent fee hike had already come into effect earlier this year, though cruise ships and liquefied natural gas carriers were exempt.
- About 10% of global trade, including 7% of the world's oil, flows through the Suez Canal, which connects the Mediterranean and Red seas.

For Egypt, the canal -- which first opened in 1869 -- is a source of both national pride and foreign currency.

Suez Canal

- It is a sea-level waterway running north-south across the Isthmus of Suez in Egypt to connect the Mediterranean and the Red seas.
- The canal separates the African continent from Asia, and it provides the shortest maritime route between Europe and the lands lying around the Indian and western Pacific oceans.
- It is one of the world's most heavily used shipping lanes.
- The canal extends 193 km (120 miles) between Port Said (Būr Sa'īd) in the north and Suez in the south, with dredged approach channels north of Port Said, into the Mediterranean, and south of Suez.
- The canal does not take the shortest route across the isthmus, which is only 121 km (75 miles).
- Instead, it utilizes several lakes: from north to south, Lake Manzala, Lake Timsah, and the Bitter Lakes—Great Bitter Lake and Little Bitter Lake.

Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Plant

In News

A fire had broken out in Europe's largest nuclear power plant located in Zaporizhzhia following fighting between Russian and Ukrainian forces.

Details

- Zaporizhzhia in Enerhodar — a city in the north-western part of Ukraine, close to Kharkiv and about 550 km south-east of Kyiv — is the largest nuclear power plant in Europe and among the 10 largest in the world.
- It accounts for a fifth of the electricity generated in Ukraine.
- The plant has six VVER-1000 pressurised light water nuclear reactors (PWR), each generating 950 MWe (megawatt electric), for a total power output of 5,700 MWe.

- It's nearly three times the size of the Kudankulam nuclear power station — which has a capacity of 2,000MWe, with two operational VVER-1000 units which are the same as the ones at Zaporizhzhia, but of an updated type.

Problem if fire Spreads

- The power plant itself is unlikely to generate the kind of radioactivity that Chernobyl did, but given that it's a pre-Fukushima plant, the safety features and redundancies are not as robust as in the new VVER-based plants, such as the one at Kudankulam.
- The biggest problem is if the fuel pond were to be hit or impacted. It is generally in the vicinity of the nuclear plant's compound, where the spent — or used — fuel is stored. The safety features for the fuel pond are typically not as robust as of the plant itself.

Montreux Convention

In News

Turkey is set to implement an international convention on naval passage through two of its strategic straits, which would allow them to limit the movement of Russian warships between the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea.

Details

- The Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits, also known as the Turkish Straits or the Black Sea Straits, connect the Aegean Sea and the Black Sea via the Sea of Marmara.
- It is the only passage through which the Black Sea ports can access the Mediterranean and beyond.
- Over three million barrels of oil, about three per cent of the daily global supply, mostly produced in Russia, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan, pass through this waterway every day.
- The route also ships large amounts of iron, steel, and agricultural products from the Black Sea coast to Europe and the rest of the world.
- According to the treaty, vessels that Russia decides to bring into the Black Sea or take out, will have to remain there until the end of the war.
- In addition, "warships, including auxiliary vessels, not currently in the Black Sea and not traditionally based there, absolutely may not enter the Black Sea.

About Convention

- According to the 1936 Montreux Convention Regarding the Regime of the Straits, often referred to simply as the Montreux Convention, Turkey has control over both the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits.
- In the event of a war, the pact gives Ankara the right to regulate the transit of naval warships and to block the straits to warships belonging to the countries involved in the conflict.
- Article 19 of the treaty contains an exception for the countries on the Black Sea that can effectively undermine Turkey's power in blocking the Russian warships entering or exiting the Black Sea: "Vessels of war belonging to belligerent powers, whether they are Black Sea Powers or not, which have become separated from their bases, may return thereto.
- That means warships can return to their original bases through the passage and Turkey cannot prevent it.

Humanitarian corridors

In News

The United Nations considers humanitarian corridors to be one of several possible forms of a temporary pause of armed conflict.

Details

- They are demilitarized zones, in a specific area and for a specific time — and both sides of an armed conflict agree to them.
- Via these corridors, either food and medical aid can be brought to areas of conflict, or civilians can be evacuated.
- The corridors are necessary when cities are under siege and the population is cut off from basic food supplies, electricity and water.
- In cases where a humanitarian catastrophe unfolds because the international law of war is being violated — for example through large-scale bombing of civilian targets — humanitarian corridors can provide crucial relief.
- In most cases, humanitarian corridors are negotiated by the United Nations.
- Sometimes they're also set up by local groups. Since all sides need to agree to set up the corridors, there is a risk of military or political abuse.
- For example, the corridors can be used to smuggle weapons and fuel into besieged cities.
- On the other hand, they can also be used by UN observers, NGOs and journalists to gain access to contested areas where war crimes are being committed.
- Access to humanitarian corridors is determined by the parties to the conflict.
- It's usually limited to neutral actors, the UN or aid organizations such as the Red Cross.
- They also determine the length of time, the area and which means of transport — trucks, buses or planes — are allowed to use the corridor.
- In rare cases, humanitarian corridors are only organized by one of the parties to the conflict.
- This happened with the American airlift after the Berlin blockade by the Soviet Union in 1948-1949.

About Corridors

- Humanitarian corridors have been put in place since the mid-20th century.
- For example, during the so-called Kindertransport from 1938 to 1939, Jewish children were evacuated to the United Kingdom from areas under Nazi control.
- Humanitarian corridors were also created during the 1992-1995 siege of Sarajevo, Bosnia and the 2018 evacuation of Ghouta, Syria.

India, Bangladesh, Nepal finalise MoU to boost trade and connectivity

In News

- India, Bangladesh and Nepal finalised an enabling memorandum of understanding (MoU) for implementing the long-gestating Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) Motor Vehicles Agreement (MVA) that is aimed at boosting regional trade and connectivity.
- Bhutan has already announced that it is unwilling to sign this agreement.

Details

The BBIN connectivity project was conceived after the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) failed to agree on a regional motor vehicles agreement at a summit in Nepal in 2014, mainly because of opposition from Pakistan.

About MVA

- The original BBIN MVA was signed by all four countries in June 2015, but after objections in Bhutan over sustainability and environmental concerns, the Bhutanese parliament decided not to endorse the plan.

- As per the agreement, member countries would allow vehicles registered in the other countries to enter their territory under certain terms and conditions. Customs and tariffs will be decided by the respective countries and these would be finalised at bilateral and trilateral forums.
- Asian Development Bank has supported the project as part of its South Asian Subregional Economic Cooperation programme.

Temporary Protection Directive of 2001

In News

Over 1.5 million people fled Ukraine in the first 10 days of fighting, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which has described the displacement as the “fastest growing refugee crisis since the Second World War”.

Details

- Responding to the crisis, EU Member States on March 3 made the unprecedented decision to activate the European Union’s Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001, known as the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD).
- The European Commission describes “temporary protection” under the TPD as an “exceptional measure to provide immediate and temporary protection to displaced persons from non-EU countries and those unable to return to their country of origin”.
- The directive applies when “there is a risk that the standard asylum system is struggling to cope with demand stemming from a mass influx risking a negative impact on the processing of claims.

Why TPD was activated?

- The Commission gives two reasons for doing so. “First, it reduces disparities between the policies of EU States on the reception and treatment of displaced persons in a situation of mass influx. Second, it promotes solidarity and burden-sharing among EU States with respect to receiving large numbers of potential refugees at one time.”
- **Article 1 of Council Directive** 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 underlines that the purpose of the Directive is to both “establish minimum standards for giving temporary protection” to displaced persons as well as to “promote a balance of effort between Member States in receiving and bearing the consequences of receiving such persons”.

About TPD

- As the USSR disintegrated, the 1990s saw multiple instances of armed conflict and ethnic strife in Europe. Yugoslavia disintegrated into its constituent republics amid fighting; Croats and Serbs fought bloody wars in Bosnia; Azerbaijan and Armenia fought over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh;
- As large numbers of people were displaced by these conflicts, the EU felt the need to put in place special procedures to deal with mass influxes of displaced persons.
- The 2001 Temporary Protection Directive provided a tool for the EU to address such situations.
- The war in Ukraine is the first time that the EU has invoked the TPD. It is being seen as another sign of European unity against Russia.

US reaches out to Iran, Venezuela to boost oil supply

In News

The US is reaching out to Venezuela and Iran to boost global crude oil supplies amid a sharp increase in prices owing to sanctions imposed on Russia following its invasion of Ukraine.

Importance of Russia

- Russia is the third largest producer of crude oil, behind America and Saudi Arabia, and the second largest exporter after the Saudis.
- Russia currently exports about 7.5 million barrels of crude oil per day.

What US is doing?

- The US is currently in the process of trying to revive the 2015 Iran nuclear deal under which Tehran had agreed to limit its nuclear program in exchange for relaxations in economic sanctions that restrict oil exports.
- Iran could potentially increase its crude oil from about 1.5 million barrels per day to 4 million barrels per day over a few months.
- The US is also holding talks with Venezuela to ease sanctions that were imposed in 2019.
- Venezuela has indicated that it could ramp up crude oil production if the restrictions are lifted.

India's Position

- Indian diplomats are also in talks with the US to permit ONGC Videsh Ltd (OVL) to allow the company to receive oil cargoes to settle loans to Venezuela's national oil company PDVSA.
- An OVL spokesperson said that the issue was pending with the US Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) "for the waiver of sanctions to lift the debt oil cargo to realize the outstanding dividends to the tune of \$412.82 million.

Biden announces major non-NATO ally status for Colombia

In News

President Joe Biden said that he intends to designate Colombia as a major non-NATO ally, a step that will provide the Latin American nation with benefits in the areas of defense, trade and security cooperation.

About Designation

- The Major non-NATO ally designation does not automatically include any mutual defense pact with the U.S.
- However, the country with that designation will have many military and financial benefits that are not available to other non-NATO countries.

Major Non-NATO ally

- Major non-NATO ally designation was created in 1987 through the addition of section 2350a to Title 10 (Armed Forces) of the U.S. Code.
- Australia, Egypt, Israel, Japan, and South Korea were the first five states that got Major non-NATO ally status.
- These countries received additional military and financial benefits in 1996 through the addition of section 2321k was added to Title 22 (Foreign Relations) of the United States Code.

Benefits

- Entry into cooperative research with the Department of Defense (DoD)
- Participation in certain counter-terrorism exercises
- Delivery of military surplus on a priority basis
- Loans of equipment and materials for development projects
- Permission to use U.S. financing to purchase certain defense equipment
- Speedy export processing of space technology

V-Dem's Democracy Report 2022: India ranked 93rd

In News

The latest edition of Democracy Report was released recently by the V-Dem Institute at Sweden's University of Gothenburg.

Details

- The study was titled 'Democracy Report 2022: Autocratisation Changing Nature?.'
- The report classifies countries into four regime types based on their score in the Liberal Democratic Index (LDI): Liberal Democracy, Electoral Democracy, Electoral Autocracy, and Closed Autocracy.
- Top 5 LDI Countries:
 - Sweden
 - Denmark
 - Norway
 - Costa Rica
 - New Zealand

Findings about India

- It classifies India as an electoral autocracy ranking it 93rd on the LDI, out of 179 countries.
- India is one of the top ten 'autocratisers' in the world says the report.
- India is part of a broader global trend of an anti-plural political party driving a country's Autocratisation.
- Ranked 93rd in the LDI, India figures in the "bottom 50%" of countries.
- In South Asia, India is ranked below Sri Lanka (88), Nepal (71), and Bhutan (65) and above Pakistan (117) in the LDI.

White phosphorus Bombs

In News

Ukrainian police has accused Russian forces of launching phosphorus bomb attacks (chemical weapon) in the Lugansk and Donetsk regions of eastern Ukraine, collectively known as the Donbas.

White Phosphorus

- White phosphorus munitions are weapons that use one of the common allotropes of the chemical element phosphorus.
- White phosphorus is pyrophoric (it is ignited by contact with air), burns fiercely, and can ignite cloth, fuel, ammunition, and other combustibles.
- Apart from this, it is also used in smoke, illumination, and burning elements of tracer ammunition.
- In addition to its offensive capabilities, white phosphorus is a highly efficient smoke-producing agent, reacting with air to produce an immediate blanket of phosphorus pentoxide vapour.

Chemical Weapons

- A Chemical Weapon is a chemical used to cause intentional death or harm through its toxic properties.
- Munitions, devices and other equipment specifically designed to weaponize toxic chemicals also fall under the definition of chemical weapons.

Concerns

- When WP comes in contact with the human skin, it can cause both thermal and chemical burns.

- It can produce several chemicals when it comes in contact with the skin, such as phosphorus pentoxide that reacts with water in the skin and produces phosphoric acid that is highly corrosive.

India's Arctic Policy

In News

Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) Science & Technology released India's Arctic policy titled 'India and the Arctic: building a partnership for sustainable development' today from the Ministry of Earth Sciences Headquarters in New Delhi.

Features of the policy

- India's Arctic policy titled '**India and the Arctic: building a partnership for sustainable development**' lays down six pillars: strengthening India's scientific research and cooperation, climate and environmental protection, economic and human development, transportation and connectivity, governance and international cooperation, and national capacity building in the Arctic region.
- India's Arctic policy would play an essential role in preparing the country for a future where humankind's biggest challenges, such as climate change, can be addressed through collective will and effort.
- India's Arctic policy shall be implemented through an action plan, and an effective governance and review mechanism involving the inter-ministerial Empowered Arctic Policy Group.
- India's engagement with the Arctic dates back to a century when 'Svalbard Treaty' was signed in February 1920 in Paris and, today India is undertaking several scientific studies and research in the Arctic region.
- Indian researchers are monitoring arctic glaciers for their mass balance and comparing them with glaciers in the Himalayan region.
- India has also been actively involved in studies related to the Arctic oceanography, atmosphere, pollution and microbiology.
- Over twenty-five Institutes and Universities are currently involved in Arctic research in India.
- In 2014 and 2016, India's first multi-sensor moored observatory in Kongsfjorden and the northernmost atmospheric laboratory in Gruvebadet, Ny Alesund, were launched in the Arctic region.
- Until 2022, India has successfully conducted thirteen expeditions to the Arctic.

Role of India in Arctic Ocean

- India has a significant stake in the Arctic.
- It is one of thirteen nations holding Observer status in the Arctic Council, a high-level intergovernmental forum that addresses issues faced by the Arctic governments and the indigenous people of the Arctic.
- India's engagement with the Arctic region has been consistent and multidimensional.
- The country maintains that all human activity should be sustainable, responsible, transparent, and based on respect for international laws.

India-Bangladesh co-produced biopic on 'Bangabandhu'

In News

- Renowned director Shyam Benegal has released the poster of the film **Mujib – The Making of a Nation**, a biopic on Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the father of the nation of Bangladesh.
- The film on 'Bangabandhu' is being made under an Audio Visual Co-Production Agreement between the Republic of India and the People's Republic of Bangladesh.
- The legendary filmmaker released the poster, at National Film Development Corporation (NFDC), Mumbai today, 17th March 2022, on the occasion of the 102nd birth anniversary of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman - Father of the nation of Bangladesh

- Mujib, provided the political leadership for the independence of Bangladesh in 1971.
- At the early stage of Mujib's political career, he met Mahatma Gandhi who was a great source of inspiration for him to empower the masses, an inspiration which remained throughout his life.
- Mujib was born in a prestigious Muslim family and grew up in a religious and harmonious atmosphere.
- He was very kind to the poor and was empathetic towards them. He admired Mr. Huseyn Suhrawardy.
- He struggled against the disparity and deprivation between West Pakistan and East Pakistan and against the Pakistani Military rule.
- He was imprisoned for about 11 years in the period 1947 to 1971.
- He strived and achieved the formation of an independent and sovereign state "**Bangladesh**".
- That's why Mujib is known as the Father of the Nation of Bangladesh, as '**Bangabandhu**'.
- He was an iconic personality. His speeches and courage changed the course of history of Bangladesh.

Cast & Crew of the Film Mujib – The Making of a Nation:

- Mr. Arifin Shuvoo, a Bangladeshi film actor and popular television personality plays the role of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.
- The star cast includes Ms. Nusrat Imrose Tisha, Mr. Fazlur Rahman Babu, Mr. Chanchal Chowdhury and Ms. Nusraat Faria.
- The film is written by Mr Atul Tiwari and Ms. Shama Zaidi.

About Bangladesh Film Development Corporation (BFDC)

- The organization was founded in 1959 as the East Pakistan Film Development Corporation which was changed to Bangladesh Film Development Corporation after Bangladesh achieved independence in 1971.
- On 3 April of every year, the National Film Day of Bangladesh is observed.
- The day is organized and celebrated by the corporation.
- The day marks the occasion when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, then Minister of Industries and Commerce of East Pakistan introduced the bill to formulate the East Pakistan Film development corporation.

Major upgrade for India infrastructure along LAC

In News

The infrastructure on the Indo-China border is undergoing a major upgrade, more so in the aftermath of the border row that led to skirmishes with the Chinese troops in Galwan in 2020.

Details

- Under **the vibrant village initiative** under **the border area development programme**, development will be pushed in the border villages by building roads, mobile towers, banks etc.
- Latest border tensions with China at multiple points along **the Line of Actual Control (LAC)** are more serious than past incidents, indicating China's planning and the likelihood of a protracted stand-off.
- Therefore, the creation of infrastructure "would help integrate these areas with the hinterland, create a positive perception of care by the country and encourage people to stay on in the border areas leading to safe and secure borders".

India- China Border:

- India and China share a 3,488 km long boundary. Unfortunately, the entire boundary is disputed. The line, which delineates the boundary between the two countries, is popularly called the McMahon line, after its author Sir Henry McMahon.

- In 1913, the British-India government had called a tripartite conference, in which the boundary between India and Tibet was formalized after a discussion between the Indian and the Tibetans. A Convention was adopted, which resulted in the delimitation of the Indo-Tibetan boundary. This boundary is, however, disputed by China which terms it as illegal.
- In 1957, China occupied Aksai Chin and built a road through it. This episode was followed by intermittent clashes along the border, which finally culminated in the border war of 1962.
- The boundary, which came into existence after the war, came to be known as Line of Actual Control (LAC). It is a military held line.

The Border Area Development Programme (BADP):

- The BADP was launched by the Ministry of Home Affairs in 1986-87 as part of a comprehensive approach to Border Management.
- It was initiated for ensuring balanced development of border areas through development of infrastructure and promotion of a sense of security among the border population.

2nd India Australia Virtual Summit

In News

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and Prime Minister of Australia Hon. Scott Morrison held the 2nd India-Australia Virtual Summit during which they reviewed the multi-faceted relationship between the two countries and exchanged views on regional and global developments.

Details

- Prime Minister Modi thanked Hon. Scott Morrison for the special gesture in returning 29 ancient artefacts to India.
- These artefacts comprise sculptures, paintings and photographs, across centuries, some dating back to the 9th-10th century, from different parts of India
- The artefacts include 12th century Chola bronzes, 11th-12th century Jain sculptures from Rajasthan, 12th-13th century sandstone Goddess Mahisasuramardini from Gujarat, 18th-19th century paintings and early gelatin silver photographs.
- A Joint Statement was issued on the occasion covering various aspects of the deepening Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.
- Both sides also agreed to establish annual summits between the Prime Ministers under the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, thus adding a special dimension to the bilateral relationship.

Finlandization

In News

The French President has suggested **Finlandization** might be a realistic outcome for Ukraine if and when the Russia-Ukraine war ends.

About Finlandization

- Finlandization' refers to the policy of strict neutrality between Moscow and the West that Finland followed during the decades of the Cold War.
- The principle of neutrality was rooted in the Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance (or YYA Treaty, from the Finnish "Ystävyys-, yhteistyö- ja avunantosopimus") that Finland signed with the USSR in April 1948.

Article I of the treaty reads:

- “In the eventuality of Finland, or the Soviet Union through Finnish territory, becoming the object of an armed attack by Germany or any state allied with the latter (meaning, essentially, the United States), Finland will, true to its obligations as an independent state, fight to repel the attack.
- Finland will in such cases use all its available forces for defending its territorial integrity by land, sea, and air, and will do so within the frontiers of Finland in accordance with obligations defined in the present agreement and, if necessary, with the assistance of or jointly with, the Soviet Union.
- In such cases, the Soviet Union will give Finland the help that it requires, subject to mutual agreement between the contracting parties.

4th Session of the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) on the BBNJ

In News

- The fourth meeting of the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC-4) was held in New York to conclude a draft of the instrument on the conservation and sustainable use of marine Biological diversity in areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ).
- The IGC-4 is convened under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

About BBNJ Treaty:

- The “BBNJ Treaty”, also known as the “Treaty of the High Seas”, is an international agreement on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction, currently under negotiation at the United Nations.
- This new instrument is being developed within the framework of the UNCLOS, the main international agreement governing human activities at sea.
- It will achieve a more holistic management of high seas activities, which should better balance the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources.
- BBNJ encompasses the high seas, beyond the exclusive economic zones or national waters of countries.

Bucharest Nine

In News

The envoys to India of nine Eastern European countries called Bucharest Nine jointly wrote to acquaint the Indian public with the basic facts on the ground” about the “premeditated, unprovoked and unjustified Russian aggression in Ukraine”.

About B9

- The “Bucharest Nine” is a group of nine NATO countries in Eastern Europe that became part of the US-led military alliance after the end of the Cold War.
- The B9 was founded on November 4, 2015, and takes its name from Bucharest, the capital of Romania.
- The group was created on the initiative of Klaus Iohannis, who has been President of Romania since 2014, and Andrzej Duda, who became President of Poland in August 2015.
- Members- Romania, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and the three Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation)

In News

- BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) completes 25 years of the journey this year that began in Bangkok in June 1997.
- The fifth summit of BIMSTEC will be held in Colombo on March 30.

About BIMSTEC

- The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is a regional multilateral organisation.
- Its members lie in the littoral and adjacent areas of the Bay of Bengal constituting a contiguous regional unity.
- Out of the 7 members, Five are from South Asia Two are from Southeast Asia.
- BIMSTEC not only connects South and Southeast Asia, but also the ecologies of the Great Himalayas and the Bay of Bengal.
- It mainly aims to create an enabling environment for rapid economic development; accelerate social progress; and promote collaboration on matters of common interest in the region.

karewas

In News

Kashmir's highly fertile alluvial soil deposits called 'karewas' are being destroyed in the name of development, much to the peril of local people.

Details

- These plateaus are 13,000-18,000 metre-thick deposits of alluvial soil and sediments like sandstone and mudstone.
- This makes them ideal for cultivation of saffron, almonds, apples and several other cash crops.
- Kashmir saffron, which received a Geographical Indication (GI) tag in 2020 for its longer and thicker stigmas, deep-red colour, high aroma and bitter flavour, is grown on these *karewas*.
- The fertility of these patches is believed to be the result of their long history of formation.
- When formed during the Pleistocene period (2.6 million years to 11,700 years ago), the Pir Panjal range blocked the natural drainage in the region and formed a lake spanning 5,000 sq km (roughly three times the size of Delhi).

Formation

- Over the next few centuries, the water receded, making way for the valley and the formation of the *karewas* between the mountains.
- Today, the *karewa* sediments not only hold fossils and remnants of many human civilisations and habitations, but are also the most fertile spots in the valley.

About Karewas

- In the Kashmiri dialect, the term Karewa means "elevated table land".
- Firstly, this term was used by Godwin Austin in 1859 and later on by Lydekker in 1878 for unconsolidated to semi-consolidated sand clay conglomerate sequence.
- "Vudr" is the local name for Karewas in Kashmiri language.
- Karewas are the thick deposits of glacial clay and other materials embedded with moraines. These are unconsolidated lacustrine deposits. Lacustrine means "associated with lakes".

36th International Geological Congress to be held in New Delhi

In News

The 36th International Geological Congress (IGC), themed “Geosciences: The Basic Science for a Sustainable Future” will be held in Delhi during 20-22 March, 2022 on a virtual platform.

Details

- The 36th IGC is a joint endeavour of the Ministry of Mines, Ministry of Earth Sciences, Indian National Science Academy and the Science Academies of Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka.
- Described as the Olympics of Geosciences, the IGCs are held quadrennial, under the aegis of the International Union of Geological Congress (IUGS), the Scientific Sponsor of the IGCs.
- They draw participants to the tune of around 5000 - 7000 delegates from all over the world.
- The event would provide a unique platform for knowledge and experience sharing in the field of geosciences and professional networking.
- It would give first-hand information on latest technologies in mining, mineral exploration and management of water, mineral resource and environment.
- 36th IGC will be releasing three commemorative Postage Stamps on the occasion along with the First Day Cover.
- 58 years ago India had hosted the 22nd session of the IGC which was the first IGC on the Asian soil.

IGC

- India, leading its regional partners had bid in the 34th International Geological Congress at Brisbane in 2012 to host the 36th IGC in India in the year 2020.
- India won the bid. The present Congress originally scheduled to be held during 2-8 March, 2020 was postponed due to Covid Pandemic.

IndAus ECTA

In News

The India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (“IndAus ECTA”) was signed by Shri Piyush Goyal, Union Minister of Commerce and Industry, Consumer Affairs, Government of India and Mr. Dan Tehan, the Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment, Government of Australia in a virtual ceremony.

About ECTA

- IndAus ECTA will further deepen the warm and close ties between the people of the two countries by expanding work, study and travel opportunities.
- It will send a powerful signal to our businesses that ‘one of the biggest doors’ is now open as two dynamic regional economies and like-minded democracies are working together for mutual benefit.
- It also delivers a clear message that democracies are working together and ensuring the security and resilience of supply chains.
- The IndAus ECTA, encompassing trade in goods and services, is a balanced and equitable trade agreement, which will further cement the already deep, close and strategic relations between the two countries and will significantly enhance the bilateral trade in goods and services, create new employment opportunities, raise living standards and improve the general welfare of the peoples of the two countries.

Public Emergency in Sri Lanka

In news

Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has declared a nationwide public emergency amidst a spate of protests, including outside his house, over the worst economic crisis in the island nation.

Why emergency was declared?

- Inflation in the country has hit 18.7 percent. Food prices have soared by 30.1 percent.
- Diesel shortages have also sparked outrage across the country.
- Daily 13-hours of a power cut is being imposed as there is no diesel for running the generators.
- The state-run hospitals of the country are also facing shortages of life-saving medicines.
- Sri Lanka's economic condition has taken a hit due to the Covid-19 pandemic, due to which the tourism industry, the country's major source of income, has suffered a lot.

About Emergency

- The tough laws that were invoked give powers to the military to detain and arrest any suspect without trial for long periods of time.
- The citizens of the country are protesting and calling for his resignation as the country is in turmoils.
- The nation is facing severe essential shortages, rice is prices, crippling power cuts, etc.
- In the country, a night-time curfew has been imposed following continuous protests against the President of the country.

Russia warns Sweden and Finland against Nato membership

Why Russia is worried?

- Russia has demanded that NATO guarantees Ukraine will never join the alliance.
- Russia believes that NATO is "encircling" Russia and posing a threat.
- It is also said that NATO missile defence threatens Russian security.
- Above all, NATO is believed to be a U.S. geopolitical project and has always tried to isolate or marginalise Russia.

NATO

- It is an intergovernmental military alliance.
- Established by Washington treaty.
- Treaty that was signed on 4 April 1949.
- Headquarters — Brussels, Belgium.
- Headquarters of Allied Command Operations — Mons, Belgium.

Objectives:

- **Political** – NATO promotes democratic values and enables members to consult and cooperate on defence and security-related issues to solve problems, build trust and, in the long run, prevent conflict.
- **Military** – NATO is committed to the peaceful resolution of disputes. If diplomatic efforts fail, it has the military power to undertake crisis-management operations. These are carried out under the collective defence clause of NATO's founding treaty – **Article 5 of the Washington Treaty or under a United Nations mandate**, alone or in cooperation with other countries and international organisations.

Indo-Finnish Virtual Network Centre on Quantum Computing

In News

India and Finland announced the decision to establish an Indo-Finnish Virtual Network Centre on Quantum Computing.

Details

- Indian side has identified three premier institutes viz **IIT Madras, IISER Pune and C-DAC Pune** for Virtual Network Centre on Quantum Computing.
- He said, the move comes in the wake of the decision taken in the last Joint Committee meeting held in November 2020 to initiate cooperation in new emerging areas like 5G; Quantum Computing and Sustainability by involving, Academia, Industries and Start-ups of the two countries.

India-Finland

- Finland's leading role in clean and green technologies can help India's drive towards sustainable development.
- India and Finland have strong bonding in Science, Technology and Innovation.
- India and Finland are consultative members of the Antarctic Treaty and have active stations in Antarctica.
- Finland would be hosting Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM) in 2023 and India in 2024.
- India Meteorological Department (IMD) and Finnish Meteorological Institute has been cooperating in the field of Atmospheric Environment since 2014.
- Under this collaboration, Air Quality Forecasting models developed by FMI are customized for Indian region resulting in enhanced capability to forecast pollution events from microscale to regional scale so that pollution control authorities can take appropriate action.
- The Finnish Minister also invited India to explore the possibility of deeper cooperation in Finland's Biobank project to mediate high quality human samples to medical research to promote development of new products and services that promote public health.

Falkland Islands

In News

The Government of Argentina will launch a campaign in India demanding negotiation with the United Kingdom to settle the territorial dispute over the Islas Malvinas that are known as the Falkland Islands in the UK.

Issue

- The British, in 1765, were the first to settle West Falkland, but they were driven off in 1770 by the Spanish.
- The British outpost on West Falkland was restored in 1771 after threat of war, but then the British withdrew from the island in 1774 for economic reasons, without renouncing their claim to the Falklands.
- Spain maintained a settlement on East Falkland (which it called Soledad Island) until 1811.
- In 1820 the Argentina Government, which had declared its independence from Spain in 1816, proclaimed its sovereignty over the Falklands.
- However, in 1841, a British civilian lieutenant governor was appointed for the Falklands.
- In February 1982, Argentina's military government invaded the Falklands. This act started the Falkland Islands War.
- The war ended with the surrender of the Argentine forces at Stanley to British troops who had forcibly reoccupied the islands.

- In a referendum held in March 2013, islanders voted nearly unanimously to remain a British overseas territory.
- Despite wars and discussions at the United Nations, the issue of sovereignty remains a point of contention.

Commission for the Dialogue

- The Commission for Dialogue with the United Kingdom on the Falkland Islands was recently inaugurated by India and Argentina.
- The commission seeks to settle the territorial dispute over the Islas Malvinas that are known as the Falkland Islands in the UK.
- The Commission seeks to promote compliance with the resolutions of the United Nations and the declarations of other international fora on the Question of the Malvinas Islands, which call for the resumption of negotiations between Argentina and the United Kingdom.

China's 2020 assault on Indian forces at LAC a warning for all: Australian PM

In News

- The assault on Indian forces along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in 2020 was a warning for all countries and China should commit to resolving this dispute through a dialogue consistent with international law.
- India is also set to participate in Australia's Indo-Pacific Endeavour exercise in October 2022.

LAC

- The Line of Actual Control (LAC) is the demarcation that separates Indian-controlled territory from Chinese-controlled territory.
- **LAC is different from the Line of Control (LoC) with Pakistan:**
- The LoC emerged from the 1948 ceasefire line negotiated by the United Nations (UN) after the Kashmir War.
- It was designated as the LoC in 1972, following the Shimla Agreement between the two countries. It is delineated on a map signed by the Director-General of Military Operations (DGMO) of both armies and has the international sanctity of a legal agreement.
- The LAC, in contrast, is only a concept – it is not agreed upon by the two countries, neither delineated on a map nor demarcated on the ground.
- **Length of the LAC:** India considers the LAC to be 3,488 km long, while the Chinese consider it to be only around 2,000 km.

India- Australia

- **India Pacific Endeavour exercise** Involves exercises and cooperation with 7 countries in the IOR including Sri Lanka, India, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Singapore.
- **AUSINDEX 2019**, the bilateral naval exercise between India and Australia held in April 2019 was also a part of Indo-Pacific Endeavour 2019 of Australia.

First ever high level tour to Gabon

In News

The Vice President, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu began the first ever visit by a high ranking Indian dignitary to Gabonese Republic with a series of high level meetings in the capital city of Libreville.

Details

- Two MoUs were signed namely: establishment of a Joint Commission between the Governments of India and Gabon, and an MoU between the diplomats' training institutes, Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Services and Gabonese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- Trade between India and Gabon crossed US\$ 1 billion in 2021-22 despite the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Gabon was selected as a non-permanent member of UN Security Council for the term 2022-23.
- Gabon was among the first countries to sign and ratify the **International Solar Alliance agreement** and that it plans to have 100% clean energy by 2030.

International Day of UN Peacekeepers 2022

In News

- The International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers is celebrated on 29 May annually for paying tribute to the contributions of uniformed and civilian personnel to the organisation's work.
- The day aims to honour nearly 4,200 peacekeepers who had lost their lives serving under the UN flag since 1948. This includes 135 personnel who lost their lives last year.
- **Theme-** People Peace Progress: The Power of Partnerships.

Historical Background

- The first UN peacekeeping mission called the 'United Nations Truce Supervision Organization' or UNTSO began operations in Palestine on 29 May 1948.
- The decision to observe this day was taken by the General Assembly in its resolution 57/129.
- On 29 May, UN offices, along with the member states and non-governmental organisations, solemnize events to honour fallen peacekeepers.

Significance

- UN Peacekeeping operations observe the day to strengthen bonds with the local populations that have been deployed to serve. For example, school and orphanage visits, sporting events, art and essay competitions, neighbourhood clean ups, photo exhibits, tree plantings, concerts, conferences and workshops are organised on peace issues.
- UN peacekeepers (often referred to as Blue Berets or Blue Helmets because of their light blue berets or helmets) can include soldiers, police officers, and civilian personnel.

Indus water talks between India, Pakistan

In News

The two-day 118th Permanent Indus Commission meeting between India and Pakistan entered its final round with both sides showing positive signs.

Indus Water Treaty

- It is a Water-Distribution Treaty, signed in Karachi on 1960, between India (Pm Jawaharlal Nehru) and Pakistan (President Ayub Khan), brokered by the World Bank.
- Under the provisions of the Indus Waters Treaty, signed between India and Pakistan in 1960, all the waters of the eastern rivers — the Sutlej, Beas, and Ravi — amounting to around 33 MAF (million acre-feet) annually is allocated to India for unrestricted use.
- The waters of western rivers — Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab — amounting to around 135 MAF annually are largely for Pakistan.

Permanent Indus Commission

- The Permanent Indus Commission is a bilateral commission of officials from India and Pakistan, created to implement and manage goals of the Indus Waters Treaty, 1960.
- The Commission according to the treaty must meet regularly at least once a year, alternately in India and Pakistan.

India and Sweden Host Industry Transition Dialogue in Stockholm

In News

India and Sweden hosted the Industry Transition Dialogue today in Stockholm, as a part of their joint initiative i.e. Leadership for Industry Transition (LeadIT).

About LeadIT initiative

- The LeadIT initiative lays specific focus on hard to abate sectors that are key stakeholders in the global climate action and require specific interventions.
- This high level of dialogue has contributed to the UN Conference 'Stockholm+50': a healthy planet for the prosperity of all –our responsibility, our opportunity', taking place on 2 and 3 June 2022 and set the agenda for COP27.
- Japan and South Africa, the latest members of the initiative were welcomed.
- This extends the total membership of LeadIT to 37 including countries and companies together.

Himars

In News

- US president Joe Biden is set to provide Kyiv with advanced rocket systems that can strike with '**precision**' at long-range Russian targets. The \$700 million weapons package is likely to be unveiled on Wednesday.
- According to officials, the weapons have Himars, high mobility artillery rocket systems that can hit targets that are as far away as 80 km (50 miles).

Himars

- HIMARS are medium-range rocket systems.
- HIMARS are a high-tech, lightweight rocket launcher that is wheel mounted, giving it more agility and manoeuvrability on the battlefield.
- Himars is short for "High Mobility Artillery Rocket System."
- The M142 Himars has a range of about 50 miles (80 km) and its GPS-guided rockets have more accuracy than its Russian counterparts.
- It also consists of a faster reload system and the launch systems can be moved quickly from one location to another, hence the "high mobility."
- The M142 consists of one preloaded pod of six 227 mm guided missiles.
- It can also be loaded with an Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS) tactical missile, which has a range of 300 km.

Türkiye

In News

Turkey will now be known as Türkiye at the United Nations, after the intergovernmental body agreed to a formal request for the name change from Ankara.

Details

- Turkey will now be known as Türkiye.
- Domestically, citizens refer to the land as Türkiye, but its anglicised version 'Turkey' was adopted internationally.
- 'Turkey' was adopted following the country's independence in 1923.

Issues with the word – 'Turkey'?

- Turkey government was not pleased with the Google search results that came up for the word 'Turkey'.
- Some of these results included the large bird that is served for Thanksgiving and Christmas meals in North America.
- According to Cambridge Dictionary's definition, the term "turkey" means "something that fails badly" or "a stupid or silly person"

Other Examples

- There are other countries that have changed their names either to drop colonial legacies or rebrand, as is the case with Turkey.
- Some examples include The Netherlands, which was changed from Holland; Macedonia, which changed its name to North Macedonia due to political disputes with Greece; Iran, which changed its name from Persia in 1935; Siam, which changed its name to Thailand; and Rhodesia, which changed to Zimbabwe to drop its colonial legacy.

Preparations afoot for 90th Interpol General Assembly

In News

- Preparations are afoot for the 90th Interpol General Assembly that is to be held in the National Capital later this year.
- The arrangements for the event are being made by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in coordination with other government agencies.

Interpol

- The International Criminal Police Organization, commonly known as **Interpol** is an **international organization** that facilitates worldwide police cooperation and crime control.
- Headquartered in **Lyon, France**, it is the world's largest international police organization, with seven regional bureaux worldwide and a National Central Bureau in all 195 member states.
- Interpol was **conceived** during the first **International Criminal Police Congress in 1914**, which brought officials from 24 countries to discuss cooperation in law enforcement.
- Interpol provides investigative support, expertise, and training to law enforcement worldwide, **focusing** on three major areas of transnational crime: **terrorism, cybercrime, and organized crime**.

India and Interpol

- The CBI is the designated nodal body for the Interpol in India. It works in close coordination with the Interpol and other member countries for the sharing of inputs related to trans-national crimes and persons wanted by enforcement agencies across the world.
- India has been a member since 1956.
- Like any member nation, India maintains a National Central Bureau, which serves as the national platform for cooperation between domestic law enforcement units and the international police community.
- The NCB is the designated contact point for the Interpol.

Organisation of Islamic Cooperation

In News

The United Arab Emirates and the Maldives, counted among India's closest partners, joined criticism from the Islamic world against remarks on the Prophet by the now-suspended and expelled BJP leaders Nupur Sharma and Naveen Kumar Jindal.

About OIC

- It is an international organization founded in 1969, consisting of 57 member states.
- It is the second largest inter-governmental organization after the United Nations.
- The organisation states that it is "the collective voice of the Muslim world" and works to "safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony".
- The OIC has permanent delegations to the United Nations and the European Union.
- Permanent Secretariat is in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

Australia-India Water Security Initiative (AIWASI)

In News

The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, was apprised the Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), Government of India and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Government of Australia for Technical Cooperation in urban water management.

Significance of MoU

- It would strengthen institutional capacities at all levels for urban water management; improve accessibility, affordability & quality of water and sanitation services; promote circular economy of water & water secure cities; encourage climate resilient water management practices; enhance community participation in water management and improve social inclusion through initiatives for accessible infrastructure.
- MoU will enable both sides to learn about technological advancements gained by two nations in key areas of urban water security and will promote exchange of learning, best practices and capacity building of institutions.
- This will help towards realisation of AatmaNirbhar Bharat.

India- Vietnam

In News

Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh held bilateral talks with Vietnam's Minister of National Defence General Phan Van Giang in Hanoi recently.

Details

- The two Defence Ministers signed the '**Joint Vision Statement on India-Vietnam Defence Partnership towards 2030**', which will significantly enhance the scope and scale of existing defence cooperation.
- A Memorandum of Understanding on Mutual Logistics Support was also inked in the presence of both the Ministers. In these times of increasing cooperative engagements between the defence forces of the two countries, this is a major step towards simplifying procedures for mutually beneficial logistic support and is the first such major agreement which Vietnam has signed with any country.
- Both Ministers agreed for early finalisation of \$US 500 million Defence Line of Credit extended to Vietnam.

- The Raksha Mantri announced gifting two simulators and monetary grant towards setting up of Language and IT Lab at Air Force Officers Training School for capacity building of Vietnamese Armed Forces.

India- Vietnam

- India and Vietnam share a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership since 2016 and defence cooperation is a key pillar of this partnership.
- Vietnam is an important partner in India's Act East policy and the Indo-Pacific vision.
- Both countries share a rich history of civilisational and cultural linkages spanning over 2,000 years. India and Vietnam continue to have most trustworthy relations in contemporary times with broader convergence of interests and common concerns.
- Bilateral defence engagements have expanded over a period of time to include wide-ranging contacts between the two countries, including Defence Policy Dialogues, military to military exchanges, high level visits, capacity building and training programs, cooperation in UN Peace Keeping, ship visits and bilateral exercises.

ARIES and NIES

In News

Cabinet approves Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between the National Institute for Environmental Studies, Japan and Aryabhatta Research Institute of Observational Sciences (ARIES), India a Professional Body for joint research on air quality and climate change.

About ARIES

- Aryabhatta Research Institute of Observational Sciences (ARIES) is an Autonomous Research Institute established under the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India.
- ARIES is a centre of excellence for research in Astronomy & Astrophysics and Atmospheric Sciences.
- It carries out research on air pollution and climate change on earth, formation and evolution of sun, stars and galaxies.

About NIES

- The National Institute for Environmental Studies (NIES) is Japan's only research institute that undertakes a broad range of environmental research in an interdisciplinary and comprehensive manner.
- NIES works to produce scientific findings on environmental protection.
- NIES is working on research projects that include consolidating the institute's research foundation through basic research, data acquisition and analysis, preservation and provision of environmental samples.

Nuclear Suppliers Group

In News

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar indicated India's ambition to become a member of the global nuclear high table by joining the Nuclear Suppliers' Group (NSG) despite consistent stonewalling by China.

NSG

- The 48-member NSG is an elite club of countries that deals with the trade-in nuclear technology and fissile materials besides contributing to the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons.
- Brought in 1974– in response to the Indian nuclear test (smiling Buddha).
- It is a Group of nuclear supplier countries that seek to prevent nuclear proliferation by controlling the export of materials, equipment and technology that can be used to manufacture nuclear weapons.

- The NSG first met in November 1975 in London, and is thus popularly referred to as the “London Club”.
- Its guidelines are not binding.

BIMSTEC celebrates its 25th anniversary

In News

The Secretariat of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) in Dhaka celebrated the 25th Anniversary of the regional organisation on BIMSTEC Day.

BIMSTEC

- The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is a multilateral regional organisation established with the aim of accelerating shared growth and cooperation between littoral and adjacent countries in the Bay of Bengal region.
- It has a total of seven member countries- five from South Asia, including Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, and two from Southeast Asia, including Myanmar and Thailand.

Historical Background

- It was founded as BIST-EC, in June 1997, with the adoption of the Bangkok Declaration, with Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand as members.
- It became BIMST-EC (Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation) with the entry of Myanmar in late 1997, And eventually, it was named in its current form, when Nepal and Bhutan became members in 2004.

Significance

- The Bay of Bengal region, was one of the world’s most integrated regions until the early twentieth century.
- The aim of setting up the regional grouping was not to create a new region for cooperation but to revive the connectivity and common interests of the members of the Bay of Bengal region.
- The regional group constitutes a bridge between South and South East Asia and represents a reinforcement of relations among these countries.
- BIMSTEC different from other regional groupings such as SAARC or ASEAN is that it is a sector-driven organisation.
- This means the goals or areas of cooperation are divided between members, for instance, out of the multiple sectors like trade, energy, transport, fishery, security, culture, tourism and so on, India was made responsible for areas like transportation, tourism and Counter-Terrorism earlier.

Challenges

- The first and major challenge, according to foreign policy researchers is a lack of efficiency and “sluggish” pace of BIMSTEC’s progress.
- BIMSTEC secretariat also suffers from inadequate financial and manpower assistance for its operational activities.
- Another criticism is India’s selective interest in BIMSTEC each time SAARC is hamstrung due to Pakistan.
- BIMSTEC members have not adopted a Free Trade Agreement yet, they are involved in multiple bilateral and multilateral free trade, preferential trade and economic cooperation agreements with other countries.

Plenary Session Of International Labour Conference of ILO At Geneva

In News

Union Minister for Labour & Employment Shri Bhupender Yadav addressed the Plenary Session of 110th International Labour Conference (ILC) of ILO at Geneva.

Achievements

- India has in recent years, introduced technology and simplified systems with the objectives that each worker enjoys dignity and choice of employment with social security.
- Our Government is providing a unique Universal Account Number to each worker whether in formal or in informal sector to act as a portable identity for continued enjoyment of rights at work.
- Indian Parliament has recently passed four labour Codes subsuming 29 Central Labour laws which has modernized and simplified the labour laws which have taken into account the future of work and issues of informal sector workers.
- A digital portal in August 2021 was launched to register such workers with the intention to develop a national database.
- About 280 million workers' database has already been created with more than 400 occupations of workers.
- The database would lead to better dissemination of social welfare schemes for informal workers.

Measures During COVID-19

- During Covid-19, India not only provided free vaccination to its entire population, but also extended free delivery of food and food-grains, health services and assured employment.
- Under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee programme, about 72 million households availed work under the scheme from April, 2020 to March, 2021 alone.
- During this period, a new Scheme was started to incentivise employers to create new jobs and to re-employ those who lost their jobs during pandemic period by paying from the budget shares of both employees' and employers' at the rate of 12% of wages.
- In the same period, cash transfers were made directly to bank accounts of 200 million women during Covid-19 pandemic period.
- About 3.2 million street vendors were provided collateral free loans to help them resume their businesses under Swadidhi Scheme.

World Of Work Summit

In News

- Union Minister For Labour & Employment Shri Bhupender Yadav participated in High Level Panel discussion in Geneva, organized by ILO under the World of Work summit on the sidelines of ILC meeting.
- The **theme** of the discussion was "Tackling multiple global crises: promoting human centered recovery and resilience".

Outcome of Meeting

The discussion mainly focussed on multiple challenges that the world of work is facing such as worsening inequalities, demographic realities, unequal technological progress, informality, climate change and what action should be taken by the countries and the international communities to tackle these challenges so as to achieve the goal of human centred, resilient and sustainable recovery.

Measures taken by Indian Government

- e-shram portal for registering the informal workers and establishment of social security fund for financing their social security.
- The government will provide e-SHRAM card to workers with the help of which they can register on the e-SHRAM portal.
- All the e-SHRAM cards will have a unique Universal Account Number (UAN) and the workers can avail various benefits of the social security schemes via this card anytime, anywhere. The 12-digit UAN number in the e-SHRAM card is valid throughout the country.
- Global skill mapping for facilitating mobility of the skilled workforce across the world.

Thailand decriminalizes cannabis

In News

Thailand recently decriminalized cannabis, becoming the first Asian country to remove the ban on the drug.

Details

- It has decriminalized Marijuana with the aim of boosting its agriculture and tourism sectors.
- Under decriminalization, it is no longer a crime in Thailand to grow and trade marijuana and hemp products, or use parts of the plant to treat illnesses.
- In 2018, Canada became the first G20 country to legalize the recreational use of cannabis. Uruguay legalized the recreational use of marijuana for all adults above the age of 18 in 2013.

World Day Against Child Labour 2022

In News

- World Day Against Child Labour is observed on June 12 as a day dedicated to creating awareness about the menace of child labour and human trafficking.
- According to the United Nations, more than 160 million children, some as young as 5, are engaged in child labour across the world.

Historical Background

- June 12 was officially adopted as World Day Against Child Labour in 2002 by the International Labour Organisation, a United Nations body that regulated the world of work.
- The day aims to guarantee a normal childhood to victims of child labour by providing them appropriate support for education, and medical services.

Theme-

- "Universal Social Protection to End Child Labour."
- The theme is dedicated to the cause of increasing investment in social protection systems and schemes to establish solid social protection for protecting children from child labour.

UN report

- In the least developed countries, more than one in every four children of ages 5 to 17, are engaged in labour that is considered detrimental to their health and development.
- While the percentage of children involved in child labour is higher in low-income countries, the numbers are greater in middle-income countries.
- Over 84 million children, 56 per cent of the total those in child labour live in middle-income countries.

- Nine per cent of the total children in lower-middle-income countries are involved in child labour and this number is 7 per cent in the case of children in upper-middle-income countries.
- Geographically, Africa ranks highest among both in the percentage of children in child labour and the absolute numbers- 72 million.

Measures taken by Central Government

- Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act(1986) to prohibit the engagement of children in certain employments and to regulate the conditions of work of children in certain other employments.
- Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2016: The Amendment Act completely prohibits the employment of children below 14 years.
- National Policy on Child Labour (1987), with a focus more on rehabilitation of children working in hazardous occupations and processes, rather than on prevention.
- Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act2000 and amendment of the JJ Act in 2006: includes the working child in the category of children in need of care and protection, without any limitation of age or type of occupation.

Establishment of BIMSTEC Technology Transfer Centre at Colombo

In News

The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has approved a Memorandum of Association (MoA) by India for establishment of Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) Technology Transfer Facility (TTF) at Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Details

- **The main objectives** of the BIMSTEC TTF are to coordinate, facilitate and strengthen cooperation in technology transfer among the BIMSTEC Member States by promoting the transfer of technologies, sharing of experiences and capacity building.
- The TTF shall facilitate transfer of technologies among the BIMSTEC Member States, amongst other things, in the following priority areas Biotechnology, Nanotechnology, Information and Communication Technology, Space technology applications, Agricultural technology, Food processing technology, Pharmaceutical technology automation, New and renewable energy technology automation, New and Renewable energy technology, Oceanography, Nuclear Technology Applications, E-waste and solid waste management technology, Health Technologies, Technologies pertinent to Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation.

Expected outcomes

- Databank of technologies available in BIMSTEC Countries,
- Repository of information on good practices in the areas of technology transfer management, standards, accreditation, metrology, testing and calibration facilities,
- Capacity building, sharing of experiences and good practices in development, and
- Transfer and use of technologies among BIMSTEC countries.

Agreement on Cooperation in the field of youth work among the authorized bodies of the member states SCO

In News

The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, was apprised about the Agreement signed among the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation member states on cooperation in the field of youth work among the authorized bodies of the member states of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).

About the Agreement

- The objective of the Agreement is to strengthen mutual trust, friendly relations and cooperation among young people of SCO member States.
- Recognizing the importance of ensuring the development of youth cooperation as an element of deepening friendly relations among the SCO Member States.
- Seeking to further improve the conditions for youth cooperation based on international experience.
- The areas of cooperation includes; strengthen cooperation in the field of work with youth and public youth organizations (associations) implementing state youth policy, as well as support initiatives aimed at enhancing international youth cooperation.

About SCO

- SCO is a permanent intergovernmental international organisation.
- It's a Eurasian political, economic and military organisation aiming to maintain peace, security and stability in the region.
- It was created in 2001.
- The SCO Charter was signed in 2002, and entered into force in 2003.
- It is a statutory document which outlines the organisation's goals and principles, as well as its structure and core activities.
- The SCO's official languages are Russian and Chinese.

India, Israel, US, UAE are I2U2, summit

In News

- The US President will host a virtual summit with the Prime Minister of India, Israel Prime Minister and UAE President during his visit to West Asia from July 13 to 16.
- The new grouping will be called "I2U2" — "I" for India and Israel and "U" for the US and UAE.

About I2U2

Previously called, the 'International Forum for Economic Cooperation, the group is already being dubbed the 'New Quad' or the 'Middle-Eastern Quad' along the lines of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD).

Quadrilateral Security Dialogue

- The QSD often called the 'Quad' is a strategic dialogue between the United States, India, Japan and Australia.
- The dialogue was started in **2007** in response to increasing Chinese aggression in the South China Sea and was accompanied by one of the largest joint military exercises of the modern era, the Malabar Exercise.

India-Japan hold Finance Dialogue

In News

Mr. Masato Kanda, Vice Minister of Finance for International Affairs, Japan, and Mr. Ajay Seth, Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance, held the **first India-Japan Finance Dialogue** recently.

Details

- The participants exchanged their views on the macroeconomic situation, financial system, financial digitalization and investment environment in both countries, and confirmed that both sides will continue to work closely together as they hold presidency of G20 and G7 next year.
- The participants including private financial institutions also discussed various financial regulation issues towards further expansion of investment in India.
- Both sides agreed to continue discussions for further promoting financial cooperation and strengthening bilateral relations, and agreed to explore holding the next round of the Dialogue in Tokyo.

Juneteenth

In News

In 2021, US President Joe Biden signed a law to commemorate June 19 or Juneteenth as a federal holiday to commemorate the end of slavery after the American civil war (1861-65).

Juneteenth

- Juneteenth– the portmanteau of June and nineteenth– is the oldest nationally celebrated commemoration of the ending of slavery in the US, observed on June 19 every year. It is also known as Emancipation Day or Juneteenth Independence Day.
- On January 1, 1863, then-president Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which declared that “all persons held as slaves” within the states in rebellion “are, and henceforward shall be free.

Significance

- The first Juneteenth celebration started from 1866, with community-centric events such as parades, cookouts, prayer gatherings, historical and cultural readings and musical performances.
- The day has evolved over the years, with people and communities developing their own traditions and customs. For instance, some communities purchased land for celebrating the day, such as Emancipation Park in Houston, Texas.

India- Australia Defence Cooperation

In News

- Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh will hold bilateral talks with Australian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence Mr Richard Marles in New Delhi.
- This is the first high-level visit from Australia after the formation of a new government.

India- Australia

- An MoU on Defense Cooperation has been signed as well as a Joint Declaration on Security Co-operation.
- There are frequent exchanges of visits including at the level of Service Chiefs, regular Naval, Air Force, and Army Talks; joint naval exercises; regular exchanges at each other’s training institutes and seminars.
- **The India-Australia defence relationship now encompasses almost every major function of the military:**

- Strategic dialogues, coordination, and information exchanges.
- Military exercises involving ground, air, and maritime forces.
- Exchanges and training.
- Defense scientific and technological cooperation.

Afghanistan quake kills 1,000 people

In News

A powerful earthquake struck a rural, mountainous region of eastern Afghanistan killing 1,000 people and injuring 1,500 more in one of the country's deadliest quakes in decades.

Earthquake

- These **are large, thin plates** that comprise the Earth's crust and the upper mantle (commonly called the "lithosphere") and are constantly moving.
- Earthquakes occur along fault lines, cracks in Earth's crust where tectonic plates meet.
- They occur where plates are subducting, spreading, slipping, or colliding.

Why Afghanistan?

- Afghanistan is earthquake-prone because it's located in the mountainous Hindu Kush region, which is part of the Alpide belt — the second most seismically active region in the world after the Pacific Ring of Fire.
- Slow collisions between the Indian subcontinent and the Eurasian tectonic plate are thought to be the cause of the extremely-common earthquakes in this region.
- The United States Geological Survey (USGS) has called the Hindu Kush region "one of the most seismically hazardous regions on earth", boasting one of the highest rates of deep earthquakes in the world.

14th BRICS Summit

In News

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi led India's participation at the 14th BRICS Summit, convened under the Chairmanship of President Xi Jinping of China in virtual moment.

Details

- Prime Minister called for strengthening of the BRICS Identity and proposed establishment of Online Database for BRICS documents, BRICS Railways Research Network, and strengthening cooperation between MSMEs.
- India will be organizing BRICS Startup event this year to strengthen connection between Startups in BRICS countries.

BRICS

- BRICS is an acronym for the grouping of the world's leading emerging economies, namely Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.
- In 2001, the British Economist Jim O'Neill coined the term BRIC to describe the four emerging economies of Brazil, Russia, India, and China.
- South Africa was invited to join BRIC in December 2010, after which the group adopted the acronym BRICS.
- The grouping was formalised during the first meeting of BRIC Foreign Ministers' in 2006.
- 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.

2022 UN Ocean Conference

In News

Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) Science & Technology; Dr Jitendra Singh left for Portugal to take part in the “**2022 UN Ocean Conference**” at Lisbon.

About Conference

- More than 130 countries will participate in the UN Ocean Conference.
- **Theme-** Scaling up Ocean Action based on Science and Innovation for the implementation of Goal 14: Stocktaking, Partnerships and Solutions.
- To mobilize action, the Conference will seek to propel much needed science-based innovative solutions aimed at starting a new chapter of global ocean action.
- The ocean covers 70 percent of the Earth’s surface, is the planet's largest biosphere, and is home to up to 80 percent of all life in the world.
- It generates 50 percent of the oxygen we need, absorbs 25 percent of all carbon dioxide emissions and captures 90 percent of the additional heat generated from those emissions.
- It is not just ‘the lungs of the planet’ but also its largest carbon sink - a vital buffer against the impacts of climate change.
- The Ocean Conference, co-hosted by the Governments of Kenya and Portugal, comes at a critical time as the world is seeking to address the many of the deep-rooted problems of our societies laid bare by the COVID-19 pandemic and which will require major structural transformations and common shared solutions that are anchored in the SDGs.

Roe v. Wade ruling

In News

The U.S. Supreme Court overturned the landmark 1973 Roe v. Wade ruling that recognized women's constitutional right to abortion, a decision condemned by President Joe Biden that will dramatically change life for millions of women in America.

About Judgement

- In 1973, in the landmark Roe vs Wade judgment, the Supreme Court of the United States made the right to abortion a constitutional right, establishing a benchmark for abortion laws across the world.
- US Supreme Court struck down laws that made abortion illegal in several states and ruled that abortion would be allowed up to the point of foetal viability, that is, the time after which a foetus can survive outside the womb.
- Foetal viability was around 28 weeks (7 months) at the time of the Roe judgment; experts now agree that advances in medicine have brought the threshold down to 23 or 24 weeks (6 months or a little less).
- Foetal viability is often seen as the point at which the rights of the woman can be separated from the rights of the unborn foetus.
- Abortion laws across the world rely on this metric but those opposing abortions argue that this is an arbitrary timeframe that legislation and the court in Roe adopted.

G7 Summit

In News

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi met the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, H.E. Mr. Olaf Scholz recently on the side lines of the G-7 Summit in Schloss Elmau, Germany.

Details

- India is home to 17% of the world population, accounts for only 5% of global carbon emissions.
- Besides India, countries such as Indonesia, South Africa, Argentina and Senegal have been invited to the summit of seven of the world's largest economies in an effort to strengthen international collaboration on key issues such as climate action, health and energy security.
- India has delivered LED bulbs and clean cooking gas door-to-door and showed millions of tons of carbon emissions can be prevented while ensuring energy for the poor.
- India achieved the target of generating 40% of energy from non-fossil sources nine years ahead of the target of 2030, while the target of blending 10% ethanol in petrol was achieved five months ahead of the target.
- India has the world's first fully solar-powered airport and its railway system will become net zero in this decade.
- India launched the Global Initiative for LiFE campaign on the World Environment Day this year.
- The goal of this campaign is to encourage an eco-friendly lifestyle.
- **WHO** has decided to set up a global centre for traditional medicine in India.
- This centre will be a repository of traditional medicine systems from across the world and encourage research in this area.

G7 Countries

- It is an intergovernmental organisation that was formed in 1975.
- The bloc meets annually to discuss issues of common interest like global economic governance, international security and energy policy.
- The G7 countries are the UK, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the US.
- All the G7 countries and India are a part of G20.
- The G7 does not have a formal constitution or a fixed headquarters.

Iran Nuclear Talks To Resume "Quickly, Immediately"

In News

- Iran and the United States plan to resume indirect talks this week in Qatar.
- Iran's indirect talks with the U.S. on reviving the **2015 nuclear pact or Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action(JCPOA)** will resume soon, the Iranian Foreign Minister.
- The pact appeared close to being revived in March When the EU, which is coordinating negotiations, invited Foreign Ministers representing the accord's parties to Vienna to finalize an agreement after indirect talks between Iran and the US President's administration.

JCPOA

- The JCPOA was the result of prolonged negotiations between 2013 and 2015 between Iran and P5+1 (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States + Germany).
- Under the deal, Iran agreed to significantly cut its stores of centrifuges, enriched uranium and heavy water, all key components for nuclear weapons.

- Iran also agreed to implement a protocol that would allow inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to access its nuclear sites to ensure Iran would not be able to develop nuclear weapons in secret.

US Senate passes historic gun violence bill

In News

The Senate easily approved a bipartisan gun violence bill that seemed unthinkable a month ago, setting up final approval of what will be Congress' most far-reaching response in decades to the nation's run of brutal mass shootings.

Gun Safety Bill

- The bill was passed on June 23, hours after the US Supreme Court ruled that Americans have a constitutional right to carry firearms in public for their safety and self-defence.
- The bill will now be sent to the Democrat-dominated House of Representatives, where it is likely to sail through, after which it will be sent to US President Joe Biden for his approval.
- The bill has been called the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act.
- The bipartisan bill focuses on firearms and improving medical care in the US.
- The bill seeks to ensure strict background checks for gun buyers, especially minors. The bill will also release funds for educational institutions, to expand their mental health resources and make schools safer.

Partners in the Blue Pacific

In News

The U.S. launched a new anti-China "containment" platform on June 24 alongside Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and the UK dubbed "Partners in the Blue Pacific" (PBP).

About PBP

- The PBP is a five-nation "informal mechanism" to support Pacific islands and boost diplomatic, and economic ties in the region.
- **Aim:** To enhance "prosperity, resilience, and security" in the Pacific through closer cooperation. Through the PBP, these countries will direct more resources here to counter China's aggressive outreach.
- "Elevate Pacific regionalism", and forge stronger ties with the Pacific Islands Forum.
- Areas of cooperation: climate crisis, connectivity and transportation, maritime security and protection, health, prosperity, and education".

Importance of Pacific region

- It called the Indo-Pacific the "single most consequential region for America's future".
- **Huge geography:** Spanning a vast stretch of the globe from the west coast of the United States to the western shores of India
- **Huge population:** the region is home to the world's most populous state (China), most populous democracy (India), and largest Muslim-majority state (Indonesia), and includes over half of the earth's population.
- **Military importance:** Among the 10 largest standing armies in the world, 7 reside in the Indo-Pacific; and 6 countries in the region possess nuclear weapons.
- **Trading power:** Nine of the world's 10 busiest seaports are in the region, and 60 per cent of global maritime trade transits through Asia, with roughly one-third of global shipping passing through the South China Sea alone.

India gets elected to the Intergovernmental Committee of UNESCO's 2003

In News

India has been elected as a member of the Intergovernmental Committee of UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage for the 2022-2026 cycle.

Intergovernmental Committee of UNESCO's 2003

- The Intergovernmental Committee of the 2003 Convention consists of 24 members and is elected in the General Assembly of the Convention according to the principles of equitable geographical representation and rotation.
- States Members to the Committee are elected for a term of four years.
- In the past, India has served two terms as a member of the Intergovernmental Committee of this Convention.
- One from 2006 to 2010 and the other from 2014 to 2018.
- For its 2022-2026 term, India has formulated a clear vision for the protection and promotion of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity.
- India ratified the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in September 2005.
- India will focus upon include fostering community participation, strengthening international cooperation through intangible heritage, promoting academic research on intangible cultural heritage, and aligning the work of the Convention with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Functions

- Promoting the objectives of the Convention, providing guidance on best practices, and making recommendations on measures for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage.
- The Committee also examines requests submitted by States Parties for the inscription of intangible heritage on the Lists as well as proposals for programmes and projects.

Significance

- India will have the opportunity to closely monitor the implementation of the 2003 Convention.
- With the aim of strengthening the scope and impact of the Convention, India seeks to mobilize the capacity of different actors worldwide in order to effectively safeguard intangible heritage.

Uber Files

In News

The Uber Files are a leak of gigabytes of data obtained from an anonymous source and shared with the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) and its media partners from 30 countries.

Uber Files

- The Uber Files are a leak of 182 gigabytes of data that were obtained by The Guardian newspaper from an anonymous source and shared with the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) and its media partners from 30 countries, including The Indian Express.
- The dump comprises 124,000 records from the 2013-17 period — mainly internal company emails (83,000), and memos, presentations, and WhatsApp messages.

- The Uber Files show how the ride-hailing start-up begun by Travis Kalanick in San Francisco in 2010 became a global behemoth by harnessing technology, working around laws, and using aggressive lobbying tactics to curry favour with governments during the period of its dramatic expansion.

Kill Switch

- Emails and internal documents reveal that India was among the countries where Uber deployed its unique blocking software, '**Kill Switch**'.
- The '**Kill Switch**' was meant to be used to switch off systems in the event of serious regulatory action, like a tax raid.
- Uber used a software named '**Casper**' and later '**Ripley**'.

Solar Decathlon

In News

Union Minister of State (I/C) Science & Technology; Minister of State (I/C) Earth Sciences; called for promoting StarUps in "**carbon neutral**" building construction and linking them with industry to help India achieve 500GW non-fossil energy capacity by 2030.

Solar Decathlon India

- Solar Decathlon India is a U.S.-India collaboration under an MOU between the Indo-U.S. Science and Technology Forum (IUSSTF) and the US Department of Energy, and is conducted by the Alliance for an Energy Efficient Economy (AEEE) and the Indian Institute for Human Settlements (IIHS).
- Solar Decathlon India is supported by the Department of Science and Technology (DST).
- It is a unique initiative that is building a network of young professionals who can innovate and implement resilient net-zero energy buildings to combat climate change, as well as a network of faculty instructors who can guide innovation and mentor multi-disciplinary projects.

Challenges

- Globally, the construction and operation of buildings account for 38% of the total energy related CO₂ emissions that cause global warming.
- India is experiencing a building boom, and almost 70% of the floor area that India will have in 2050 is going to be new construction in the next 28 years.
- This presents a huge opportunity to make 70% of our buildings net-zero by leveraging new technologies and encouraging the use of local, sustainable building materials.
- Solar Decathlon India is the hub where this opportunity comes together for the real estate industry to explore climate change solutions with students and faculty, and apply the most feasible technology and design innovations on their projects.

The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI)

In News

FAO, International Fund for Agriculture Development, UNICEF, UN world food Programme and WHO have jointly released SOFI 2022.

Major Highlights

- The world is moving further away from its goal of ending hunger (SDG 2: No Hunger), food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms by 2030. (over 800 million were affected by hunger in 2021)

- Over 8% will still face hunger by 2030 even if the global economic recovery is taken into consideration.
- The gender gap in food insecurity is rising: It has continued to rise in 2021 — 31.9 per cent of women in the world were moderately or severely food insecure, compared with 27.6 per cent of men.
- Major reasons are Conflict, supply chain disruption, climate extremes, Disasters, growing inequalities and slow economic recovery after the pandemic.

On India

India has high undernourishment (about 16% of the population), wasting (about 17%), stunting (about 31%) and low exclusive breastfeeding practice (only 58%).

Suggestions

- The report suggested repurposing food and agricultural support to target nutritious foods, to make healthy diets less costly, more affordable and equitably for all.
- Governments could do more to reduce trade barriers for nutritious foods, such as fruits, vegetables and pulses.
- With government and civil society to remove unequal powers within agrifood systems.

Indonesia's New Digital Nomad Visa allows travellers to live tax-free

In News

Indonesia has announced “**Digital Nomad Visas**” for travellers to attract foreign tourists as their earnings come from outside the country.

Provisions of the visa

- The Digital Nomad Visa would allow remote workers to stay in Indonesia, including Bali, tax-free.
- **Benefits:** Economic and spiritual tourism: Indonesia aims to bring in over 3.6 million overseas travellers into the country over the next year to explore spiritual retreats as well as the eco-tourism of Indonesia.
- Italy (can stay in the country for up to 90 days without a visa), Antigua and Barbuda (for digital nomad visa for two years), Barbados (a year-long remote working visa).

Digital Nomads

- Digital Nomads are those who choose to work remotely and independently. Besides working in one place, they chose to spend their earned income in the country they are travelling to.
- It was reported that around 10.9 million American workers described themselves as digital nomads in 2020 which was above 49 per cent from 2019.
- As the pandemic occurred the majority of the work areas were moved on the web, while certain workplaces have started to open, most organisations have declared remote work.

Iran and Belarus are likely to be the two newest additions to SCO

In News

- Iran and Belarus are likely to be the two newest additions to the China and Russia-backed Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)
- India will host the SCO summit next year, and Varanasi has been selected as the SCO region's first “**Tourism and Cultural Capital**”.

Major Highlights

- Iran will become a full member after completing the formalities while Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member states who follow the system of consensus in deciding admission of new members will take a call on Belarus's application.
- China and Russia are looking to frame the grouping as a counter to the West — particularly after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.
- The significance of this round of expansion is that it shows SCO's rising international influence and that the principles of the SCO charter are widely accepted.
- The expansion of NATO is totally different as the SCO is a cooperative organization based on non-alignment and not targeting a third party, while NATO is based on Cold War thinking.

About SCO

- SCO is a permanent intergovernmental international organization.
- It's a Eurasian 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.
- Prior to the creation of SCO in 2001, Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan were members of the Shanghai Five. India and Pakistan became members in 2017.

Varanasi Named First Cultural And Tourism Capital Of SCO

In News

The holy city of Varanasi showcasing India's culture and traditions over the ages will be declared the first "Cultural and Tourism Capital" of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

Significance

- It will become the cultural and tourism capital of the SCO for year 2022-23, as a part of SCO's new rotating initiative that seeks to promote people-to-people ties and tourism among member countries.
- Under the initiative, a city of cultural heritage from member states will be designated as cultural and tourism capital of SCO each year. Varanasi has become the first city to get the title.
- City will be selected from member country, which will take over the Presidency of SCO on rotational basis.
- Title will be given to cities in a bid to highlight its prominence.
- The new initiative of the organisation will be implemented after the Samarkand Summit 2022.

About SCO

- SCO is a Eurasian political, economic and security alliance.
- It is the successor of Shanghai Five, which was established in 1996.
- Formation of SCO was announced on June 15, 2001.
- Following this, the SCO Charter was inked on July 7, 2002 which came into effect on September 19, 2003. Membership of SCO has expanded to 8 countries now, viz., China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Russia, India and Pakistan. India and Pakistan got membership on June 9, 2017.

Biden, Lapid sign Jerusalem Declaration

In News

Recently, US President Joe Biden and Prime Minister of Israel Yair Lapid inked a joint strategic declaration in Jerusalem, which is officially called as “**Jerusalem US-Israel Strategic Partnership Joint Declaration**”.

About Declaration

- In the Jerusalem Declaration, US pledge to use all elements under its national power, to ward off Iran from getting nuclear weapons.
- As a part of declaration, US has affirmed the commitment for working in association with other partners to oppose Iran’s aggression and destabilizing activities, either directly or through proxies and terrorist organizations including Hamas, Hezbollah, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.
- USA and Israel have committed to continue discussions regarding challenges and opportunities in Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- However, US President has affirmed his support of a two-state solution as well to progress toward a reality in which Israelis and Palestinians can get equal measures of security, prosperity and freedom. The United States is set to work with Israel, Palestinian Authority, as well as regional stakeholders to achieve this objective.

EU's options in palm oil row with Malaysia and Indonesia

In News

European Union previously decided to phase out the import of unsustainable palm oil by 2030. Indonesia and Malaysia say the EU’s palm oil restrictions are unfair, “discriminatory”, and “crop apartheid” and challenged the EU in the WTO.

Details

- **Indonesia and Malaysia**, are the world’s two largest palm oil producers, accounting for **90% of the global production**. However, most of it is produced on the plantation by clearing rainforests.
- **ReFuelEU initiative**: EU lawmakers adopted draft rules for the ReFuelEU initiative, which would mean 85% of all used aviation fuel would have to be “sustainable” by 2050.

Palm Oil

- It is an edible vegetable oil derived from the mesocarp (reddish pulp) of the fruit of the oil palms.
- Uses: As a cooking oil, in cosmetics, processed foods, cakes, chocolates, soaps, spreads, shampoo, and biofuel (the use of crude palm oil in making biodiesel is being branded as ‘green diesel’)
- It is inexpensive and produces more oil per hectare as compared to other alternatives such as soybean.
- India is the biggest importer of palm oil (almost 40% of its need)
- Government initiatives: National Mission on Edible Oil-Oil Palm(to boost India’s domestic palm oil production by 3 times (till 2025-26)); Kharif Strategy 2021 for oilseeds; yellow revolution.

India-Singapore 8,100-km Submarine Cable System

In News

The Expert Appraisal Committee under the Ministry of Forests has recommended Coastal Regulatory Zone (CRZ) clearance for the 8,100-KM long Myanmar/Malaysia-India-Singapore Transit (MIST) Submarine Cable System connecting Mumbai and Chennai in India.

MIST

- MIST will directly connect Singapore, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand and India (Mumbai and Chennai) and deliver a design capacity of more than 216 terabits per second (Tbps).
- MIST cable system will provide secure reliable, robust and affordable telecom facilities in Asia.
- The main trunk route is from Tuas (Singapore) to Mumbai (India).
- A submarine cable system consists of a communication cable laid on the sea bed between cable landing stations (CLS) on the land to carry telecommunication signals across stretches of ocean. Submarine cable systems generally use optical fibre cables to carry international traffic.

The ICJ's latest judgment in the case of genocide against Myanmar

In News

- Judges at the United Nations' highest court have dismissed preliminary objections by Myanmar to a case alleging the Southeast Asian nation is responsible for genocide against the Rohingya ethnic minority.
- Myanmar's military launched what it called a clearance campaign in Rakhine state in 2017 in the aftermath of an attack by a Rohingya insurgent group. More than 700,000 Rohingya fled into neighbouring Bangladesh and Myanmar security forces have been accused of mass rapes, killings and torching of thousands of Rohingya homes.
- Amid international outrage at the treatment of the Rohingya, Gambia filed the case with the world court in November 2019, alleging that Myanmar is breaching the genocide convention.

About ICJ

- ICJ was established in 1945 by the United Nations charter and started working in April 1946.
- It is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, situated at the Peace Palace in The Hague (Netherlands).
- Unlike the six principal organs of the United Nations, it is the only one not located in New York (USA).
- It settles legal disputes between States and gives advisory opinions in accordance with international law, on legal questions referred to it by authorized United Nations organs and specialized agencies.

Genocide Convention

- The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Genocide Convention) is an instrument of international law that codified for the first time the crime of genocide.
- According to the Genocide Convention, genocide is a crime that can take place both in times of war as well as in the time of peace.
- The Genocide Convention was the first human rights treaty adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 9 December 1948 and signified the international community's commitment to 'never again' after the atrocities committed during the Second World War.
- 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).

5th Session of India-Egypt Joint Trade Committee

In News

5th Session of India-Egypt Joint Trade Committee and 5th India-Egypt Joint Business Council Meeting held recently in Cairo.

Details

- The 5th India-Egypt JTC took place in the backdrop of robust growth in trade and investment ties between India and Egypt.
- Bilateral trade reached a historic record high of USD 7.26 bn in FY 2021-22 which is an increase of 75% over FY 2020-21.
- Egypt is also one of the largest investment destinations for India in the region with existing Indian investment of USD 3.15 bn.
- Indian companies continue to execute several projects in Egypt.
- **Joint Business Council (JBC)** was jointly organized by FICCI and Egyptian Commercial Services.
- A large business delegation from India is currently visiting Egypt to participate in the JBC and to hold B2B interactions with their Egyptian counterparts.

Significance for India

- India has good relationships with Egypt as well as all the GCC states including Qatar. Such reconciliation and rapprochement between countries in the region could expand the opportunities for India.
- The Gulf region is one of the biggest markets for Indian goods and is the most important supplier of hydrocarbons to its economy. Peaceful relationships between these gas and oil reserve rich states are favourable to catering to the energy needs of India.
- The Gulf countries host more than millions of Indian migrants. They are mostly the workers who carry out development activities and they are the prime sources of remittances to India.

India contributes \$2.5 million to UN RWA for Palestine refugees

In News

India contributed USD 2.5 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

UNRWA

- Established in 1949 with the mandate to provide assistance and protection to about 5.6 mn Palestinian refugees (in West Bank, Gaza Strip, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan)
- Funding: only through voluntary contributions
- India: As a part of the Link West Policy, India has de-hyphenated its relationship with Israel and Palestine in 2018 to treat both the countries as mutually independent and exclusive.
- India is a dedicated donor to UNRWA, having given USD 20 million in support of core UNRWA services to Palestine refugees across the Middle East since 2018.
- The agency was mandated to provide assistance and protection for about 5.6 million Palestinian refugees registered in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan.
- The UNRWA services for Palestinian refugees involve education, health care, relief, infrastructure, camp improvement, protection and microfinance.

India- Egypt Relations

In News

- In a unique move Egypt Post released a commemorative postage stamp to celebrate 75 years of diplomatic relations between Egypt and India.
- Diplomatic relations between India and Egypt began when Egypt recognized India's independence on 18 August 1947, three days after India's independence.

India- Egypt

- Ancient times- India's relations with Egypt began when the trade contacts between the two ancient civilizations grew along the banks of the river Nile and the river Indus.
- Under Nehru's leadership- In 1955, Egypt under Gamal Abdel Nasser and India under Jawaharlal Nehru became the founders of the Non-Aligned Movement.
- During the 1956 War, Nehru stood supporting Egypt to the point of threatening to withdraw his country from the British Commonwealth.
- Friendship Treaty & bilateral relations The two nations became even closer in the 1950s and concluded a historic Friendship Treaty in 1955.
- During the last couple of years, the traditionally strong bilateral relations enjoyed by the two countries have received an impetus with regular exchange of high-level meetings and contacts between the two sides.
- Trade & Commerce- Egypt has traditionally been one of India's most important trading partners in the African continent.
- The India-Egypt Bilateral Trade Agreement has been in operation since March 1978 and is based on the Most Favoured Nation clause.
- Major Egyptian exports to India include- Raw cotton, raw and manufactured fertilizers, oil and oil products, organic and non-organic chemicals, leather and iron products.
- Major imports into Egypt from India are- Cotton yarn, sesame, coffee, herbs, tobacco and lentils.
- Mineral fuel; vehicle parts; Ship, boat and floating structure; cuts of boneless bovine frozen meat; and Electrical machinery and parts are also exported from India.
- Technical and Scientific Cooperation- Technical cooperation and assistance have been a major part of the bilateral relationship.
- Egyptian candidates visit India under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme (ITEC).
- In the field of Scientific Cooperation, ICAR and the Agricultural Research Center of the Ministry of Agriculture & Land of Egypt signed a MoU for cooperation in the field of agricultural research in 1998.
- Cultural Links- The Maulana Azad Centre for Indian Culture (MACIC) was set up in Cairo in 1992
- It aims to promote cultural cooperation between the two countries, through the implementation of the Cultural Exchange Programme (CEP).
- The Centre, in addition to popularizing Indian culture through Hindi, Urdu and Yoga classes and the screening of movies, also organizes cultural festivals.
- 'India by the Nile' festival- It is a cultural festival celebrated annually in Egypt.
- It brings the essence of India through classical, contemporary, performing and visual arts, food and popular culture in a language that amalgamates diverse cultural and artistic strands.
- The festival is produced by Delhi-based M/S Teamwork Arts and supported by ICCR and the Egyptian Ministry of Culture.
- The defence partnership- It is being revived with among other developments the visit of the Indian Navy ship to Egypt, a month-long Air Force exercise and the visit of the Egyptian Air Force chief to India in recent months.

'Chabahar Day'

In News

Ministry of Port, Shipping and Waterways (MoPSW) in association with India Ports Global observed 'Chabahar Day' to mark the Chabahar – Link to INSTC - Connecting Central Asian Markets in Mumbai recently.

Chabahar Port

- It is located on the Gulf of Oman and is only 72 km away from the Gwadar port in Pakistan which has been developed by China.

- The port serves as the only oceanic port of Iran and consists of two separate ports named Shahid Beheshti and Shahid Kalantari.
- It is being considered a gateway to golden opportunities for trade by the three countries with other Central Asian countries in the wake of Pakistan denying transit access to India.
- China is aggressively pursuing its own Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) under the One Belt One Road (OBOR) project. The port can also act as a counter to Pakistan's Gwadar Port, which is being developed with Chinese investment.

INSTC

- The International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC) is the ship, rail, and road route for moving freight between India, Russia, Iran, Europe and Central Asia. It is not a new concept.
- But the current INSTC project was initiated by Russia, India and Iran in September 2000 in St. Petersburg.
- The agreement was signed on 16th May 2002.
- The International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC) is a multi-modal connectivity project establishing transport networks (ship, rail, and road route) for moving freight between India, Russia, Iran, Europe and Central Asia.
- INSTC would enhance accessibility to the landlocked central Asian nations.
- It is not a new concept. This ancient route was used by European, Indian and many other foreign traders to reach out to the Central Asian markets. During the time of the Safavid dynasty, it is estimated that around 10,000 Indian traders were spread across the empire. (Safavids were one of the most significant ruling dynasties of Persia (modern Iran) from 1501 to 1736.)

INSTC

In News

Recently, two 40-ft containers of wood laminate sheets from Russia's Astrakhan port crossed the Caspian Sea and eventually reach Nhava Shiva port in Mumbai. The journey signalled the launch of the International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC).

INSTC

- It is a 7,200-km multi-modal transport corridor that combines road, rail and maritime routes connecting Russia and India via Central Asia and Iran. The corridor is expected to consolidate the emerging Eurasian Free Trade Area.
- The legal framework for the INSTC is provided by a trilateral agreement signed by India, Iran and Russia at the Euro-Asian Conference on Transport in 2000.

Significance

- Reduce freight costs by 30% and the journey time by 40% in comparison with the conventional deep-sea route via the Suez Canal
- Complement East-West axis: INSTC can shape a north-south transport corridor that can complement the east-west axis of the China-led Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
- Bypass Pakistan to access Afghanistan, Central Asia and beyond
- Departure from non-alignment to multi-alignment: E.g., India's working under QUAD, SCO and INSTC.
- 'Chabahar Day' is observed to promote Chabahar – Ministry of Port, Shipping and Waterways (MoPSW) in association with India Ports Global observed 'Chabahar Day' to mark the Chabahar – Link to INSTC – Connecting Central Asian Markets.
- India can now bypass Pakistan to access Afghanistan, central Asia and beyond, 2) A special economic zone around Chabahar will offer Indian companies the opportunity to set up a range of industries; for example, NALCO proposes to set up an aluminium smelter.

India to host UNSC members for special meeting on counter-terrorism in Oct

In News

- India will host diplomats of the 15-nation UN Security Council in October for a special meeting on counter-terrorism.
- The meeting of the Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC), which India is chairing for 2022 as a member of the UNSC, will focus particularly on challenges such as terrorism financing, cyberthreats and the use of drones, said officials.

Major Highlights

- India is expected to highlight cross-border threats from Pakistan and Afghanistan at the meeting, which will come two months before India completes its tenure as an elected member of the UNSC (2021-22).
- Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism: In addition, India has been pushing for the UN members to adopt a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (first proposed in 1996), which is likely to be raised during the meeting.
- Victim of terrorism: The event will showcase India's role as a victim of terrorism as well as a country at the forefront of global counter-terrorism efforts.
- India as President of UNSC: They said the CTC meeting in India could also pave the way for a possible visit to New York by the Prime Minister in December, where India will be the President of the UNSC for the entire month.

ASEAN-India Foreign Ministers' Meeting

In News

ASEAN-India Foreign Ministers' Meeting (AIFMM) was held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

ASEAN- India

- 30 years of India-ASEAN relations and 2022 has been designated as ASEAN-India friendship year.
- Trade: Over 10% of India's overall trade with ASEAN countries (India's 4th largest trading partner)
- Forums: India is a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), Mekong Ganga Cooperation.
- Transport: India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highways, Kaladan Multi-modal Project.
- Security: India's 'Act East Policy' and 'Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)'
- Military exercise: CORPAT (with Indonesia and Thailand); Samudra Shakti (Indonesia); SIMBEX (Singapore)
- Socio-Cultural Cooperation: Inviting ASEAN students to India, Special Training Course for ASEAN diplomats, Exchange of Parliamentarians, etc.
- East Asia Summit (EAS): First held in 2005, the summit is usually attended by the heads of state from ASEAN, Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, Russia, South Korea, and the United States.

Parts of Great Barrier Reef record highest amount of coral in 36 years

In News

According to the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) report, the highest levels of coral cover within the past 36 years have been recorded in the northern and central parts of Australia's Great Barrier Reef (GBR).

Great Barrier Reef

- It is the world's largest and longest coral reef system. It is located in Australia. It is a World Heritage Area since 1981 (the world's first reef ecosystem to be recognised by UNESCO). It is home to 400 types of coral, 1500 species of fish and 4000 types of molluscs.
- Corals are marine invertebrates or animals which do not possess a spine (phylum Cnidaria). They are the largest living structures on the planet.

Coral Reef

- A coral reef is an underwater ecosystem characterized by reef-building corals. Reefs are formed of colonies of coral polyps held together by calcium carbonate.
- Coral Bleaching: Coral bleaching is the process when corals become white due to various stressors, such as changes in temperature, light, or nutrients. Bleaching occurs when coral polyps expel the algae that live inside their tissue, causing the coral to turn white. GBR has faced several mass coral bleaching in the recent past (including the recent one in March 2022)
- Importance of Corals: Coral reefs support over 25% of marine biodiversity even though corals occupy only 1% of the seafloor. Coral reef systems generate \$2.7 trillion in annual economic value through goods and service trade and tourism and other livelihood activities.

U.S. Bill on Climate action

In News

On August 7, the U.S. Senate approved a Bill titled the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) 2022, with a simple majority of 51 to 50.

Provisions of the bill

- The Bill marks the largest American investment aimed toward making the U.S. a leader in clean energy.
- It includes packages worth \$369 billion for the clean energy transition.
- The Bill provides significant investment in renewable energy through heavy tax credits for wind and solar energy projects and electric vehicles.
- Tax deduction to low and middle-income households: It provides a tax deduction to low and middle-income households to go electric and seeks to lower the energy bills of American households.
- It also aims to bolster the domestic production of heat pumps and critical minerals.
- Tax on large and profitable companies to meet the green investment
- It also imposes a fee on methane leaks from oil and gas drilling.
- At the same time, the Bill also aims at more investments in fossil fuels.
- It seeks to expand oil and gas drilling, with the federal government offering land for onshore and offshore drilling with the prerequisite that the entity will develop renewable energy. Thus, it handcuffs the expansion of oil and gas with renewable energy development.

Concerns

- Fossil fuel supporters criticize the bill as it does not take into account the communities that are dependent on the fossil fuel industry for their income.
- A protest by the workers of a coal plant in the state of West Virginia was recorded after their own Senator Joe Manchin agreed to back the bill.
- Climate advocates criticise the bill for coupling the development of renewable energy, which is the cause of global warming, with land leasing for oil and gas drilling.

Additional protocol to Universal Postal Union constitution ratified

In News

The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved the ratification of amendments to the Constitution of the Universal Postal Union (UPU) as contained in the Eleventh Additional Protocol to the Constitution signed during the 27th Congress of the Universal Postal Union held at Abidjan.

About UPU

- It is a UN specialized agency, established in 1874 by the Treaty of Bern (UPU Hq: Bern, Switzerland)
- Aim: For cooperation between postal sector in different countries.
- Members: Currently 192 members (India became its member in 1876).
- Any member or non of the United Nations may become a member of the UPU, provided a non-members' request is approved by at least two-thirds of the member countries of the UPU.

India held first round of talks with NATO

In News

Away from public glare, New Delhi held its first political dialogue with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in Brussels on December 12, 2019.

Significance

- India's talks with NATO hold significance given that the North Atlantic alliance has been engaging both China and Pakistan in bilateral dialogue.
- NATO opened selective training for Pakistani officers and its military delegation visited Pakistan in November 2019 for military staff talks.
- Engaging NATO in a political dialogue would provide India with an opportunity to bring about a balance in NATO's perceptions about the situation in regions and issues of concern to India.
- There is a convergence in the perspectives of both India and NATO on China, terrorism, and Afghanistan, including Pakistan's role in Afghanistan, sources said.
- It is a principal area of conversation in the future, given a substantial common ground with NATO.

NATO

- North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is a military alliance established by the North Atlantic Treaty (also called the Washington Treaty) of April 1949, by the United States, Canada, and several Western European nations to provide collective security against the Soviet Union.
- There are currently 30 member states.
- Original Members- Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and the United States.
- Other Countries- Greece and Turkey (1952), West Germany (1955, from 1990 as Germany), Spain (1982), the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland (1999), Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia (2004), Albania and Croatia (2009), Montenegro (2017), and North Macedonia (2020).

Collective Defence

- Members of NATO are committed to mutual defence in response to an attack by any external party.
- Collective defence lies at the very heart of NATO, "a unique and enduring principle that binds its members together, committing them to protect each other and setting a spirit of solidarity within the Alliance".
- This is laid out in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, the founding treaty of NATO.

- Article 5: “The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all

China, Nepal agree on building a trans-Himalayan network

In News

China and Nepal have agreed to build the so-called Trans-Himalayan Multi-Dimensional Connectivity Network.

About the Network

- The network, under China’s Belt and Road initiative, will involve the building of railways and communication networks.
- The BCIM economic corridor aims to connect Kolkata with Kunming, the capital of the Yunnan province through Myanmar and Bangladesh. It envisages the formation of a thriving economic belt, focusing on cross-border transport, energy and telecommunication networks.
- Under the agreement, China will finance the feasibility study of a China-Nepal cross-border railway.
- Experts from China will visit to Nepal to do surveys in 2022.
- Trans-Himalayan Multi-Dimensional Connectivity network will be constructed under Belt & Road Initiative of China. Under it, railways and communication networks will be constructed.
- The construction of this network was appreciated by Chinese President as switching Nepal “from a landlocked to a land-linked country”.
- The network comprises of multiple transportation infrastructure projects, one such project being “China–Nepal railway”. China-Nepal railway project is at feasibility study stage.

EU Proposal to Revive Nuclear Deal

In News

A European Union proposal to revive the 2015 Iran nuclear deal “can be acceptable if it provides assurances” on Tehran's key demands.

Historical background

- Proposals by the EU can be acceptable if they provide Iran with assurance on the issues of safeguards, sanctions and guarantees, the diplomat said.
- The Islamic Republic has sought to obtain guarantees that no future U.S. president would renege on the deal if it were revived, as then-President Donald Trump did in 2018 and restored harsh U.S. sanctions on Iran.
- The 2015 Pact seemed near revival. But 11 months of indirect talks between Tehran and the Biden administration in Vienna were thrown into disarray chiefly over Iran’s insistence that Washington removes its elite Revolutionary Guards Corps from the U.S. Foreign Terrorist Organization’s list.
- On August 10, the United States charged a Revolutionary Guards member with plotting to murder John Bolton, a national security adviser to Trump, though Washington said it did not believe the charges should affect the nuclear talks with Tehran.

JCPOA

- The JCPOA was the result of prolonged negotiations between 2013 and 2015 between Iran and P5+1 (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States + Germany).
- Under the deal, Iran agreed to significantly cut its stores of centrifuges, enriched uranium and heavy water, all key components for nuclear weapons.

- Iran also agreed to implement a protocol that would allow inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to access its nuclear sites to ensure Iran would not be able to develop nuclear weapons in secret.

Rear Admiral Guillermo Pablo Rios of Argentina appointed leader of UNMOGIP

In News

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

UNMOGIP

- UNMOGIP emerged from N. Security Council Resolution 39 of January 1948 that set up the U.N. Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP).
- The Karachi Agreement of July 1949 firmed up the role of UN-level military observers and permitted supervision of the Cease Fire Line established in Jammu and Kashmir.
- India officially maintains that the UNMOGIP's role was "overtaken" by the Simla Agreement of 1972 that established the Line of Control or the LoC which with "minor deviations" followed the earlier Cease Fire Line.
- Pakistan however did not accept the Indian argument and continued to seek cooperation from the UNMOGIP.
- As a result of these divergent policies, Pakistan continues to lodge complaints with the UNMOGIP against alleged Indian ceasefire violations.
- India has not officially gone to the UNMOGIP since 1972 with complaints against Pakistan.
- In view of the difference of opinion between the two contesting sides – India and Pakistan – the U.N. has maintained that the UNMOGIP could be dissolved only with a decision from the U.N. Security Council.

India- EU Ties

In News

While India celebrates its 75th year of Independence, it also celebrates 60 years of diplomatic relations with the European Union (EU).

India- EU

- 1960s: India was one of the first to establish relations with the European economic community.
- Cooperation agreement (1994): It defined the relationship between India and the EU.
- First India-EU Summit (2000): It marked a watershed in the evolution of the relationship.
- 2004: Strategic partnership
- Joint Action Plan (2005): to enhance trade and investment and bring peoples and cultures together.
- 15th India-EU Summit (2020): It highlighted engagement across these areas:
 - Foreign policy and security cooperation
 - Trade and economy
 - Sustainable modernisation partnership
 - Global governance
 - People-to-people relations.

Defence Cooperation

- India and the EU regularly conduct joint military and naval exercises which reflects their commitment to a free, open, inclusive and rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific.

- France's on-time delivery of 36 Rafale fighter jets and willingness to offer Barracuda nuclear attack submarines to the Indian Navy
- Leading European defence equipment manufacturers are willing to partner with Indian companies aligned with the 'Make in India' programme.

Climate Change

- EU and India also underline their highest political commitment to the effective implementation of the Paris Agreement and the UNFCCC despite US withdrawing from the same.
- India-EU Clean Energy and Climate Partnership was agreed at the 2016 Summit – to promote access to and disseminate clean energy and climate friendly technologies and encourage R&D.
- Energy cooperation is now ongoing on a broad range of energy issues, like smart grids, energy efficiency, offshore wind and solar infrastructure, and research and innovation.
- EU and India also cooperate closely on the Clean Ganga initiative and deal with other water-related challenges in coordinated manner.

FIFA suspends Indian football federation due to third party influence

In News

FIFA has suspended the All India Football Federation (AIFF) with immediate effect due to "undue influence from third parties.

Reason for Suspension

- In May this year, India's Supreme Court disbanded the AIFF (due to issues of mismanagement) and appointed a three-member committee to govern the sport. (Similar to the steps taken for BCCI, after Lodha committee recommendations)
- However, Fifa's rules say its member federations must be free from legal and political interference.
- The suspension will be lifted once an order to set up a committee of administrators to assume the powers of the AIFF Executive Committee has been repealed and the AIFF administration regains full control of the AIFF's daily affairs.

Impact

- The suspension means that the FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup 2022, scheduled to take place in India on 11-30 October 2022, cannot currently be held in India as planned.
- Apart from losing the hosting rights to U-17 Women's World Cup, the national teams will not be able to play in international matches. Even Indian clubs will not be allowed to participate in continental tournaments.
- The men's team is scheduled to play Singapore and Vietnam next month but those matches are now uncertain.
- The senior women's team cannot take part in the SAFF Women's Championship next month, while Gokulam Kerala FC will not be able to take part in the AFC Women's Club Championship next week.

India buys discounted Venezuelan petroleum coke to replace coal

In News

- Indian companies are importing significant volumes of petroleum coke from Venezuela for the first time.
- India's growing appetite for Venezuela's petcoke - a byproduct from oil upgrading and an alternative to coal - is being driven by a scramble for inexpensive fuel to power industries as global coal prices have surged.

Pet Coke

- Petroleum coke (or pet coke) is a final carbon-rich solid material that derives from oil refining
- A tonne of petcoke is more expensive than coal, but produces more energy when burnt. It is generally not used as fuel because of toxic emissions, but is widely used by the cement industry – its largest consumer, as sulphur dioxide emissions, are absorbed by limestone.
- Uses: As fuel in Industries- Cement, Lime, Alumina etc.
- Previously Supreme Court had banned the use of Petcoke in NCR areas (Delhi)
- India, which counts the United States and Saudi Arabia as major petcoke suppliers, received its first-ever cargo from Venezuela at the beginning of 2022

India won't make sovereign commitment on future digital services tax

In News

- India and other developing countries under the G24 grouping have objected to the proposal of making sovereign commitments to not introduce any future digital services tax like equalisation levy.
- The developing countries are of the view that any commitment to not enact future measures should be in the nature of political commitments only.

Digital Tax Scheme

- Government in Finance Bill of 2020-21, imposed a 2% digital service tax on trade and services of foreign e-commerce companies such as Amazon and Walmart-owned Flipkart and others having an annual turnover of ₹2 crores or more.
- Group of 24: It was established in 1971 as a chapter of the Group of 77 of developing countries in order to coordinate on monetary and developmental issues.

Tax Composition

- In order to streamline the global governance of digital companies such as Google, and Facebook, a global tax deal under OECD's two-pillar plan was agreed upon in 2021 (including by India)
- Two pillars- Under pillar 1- All multinational enterprises (with turnover over 20bn Euro and profit of over 10%) will have to relocate part of their profit to the place where they sell their products.
- Under Pillar 2: All enterprises (with revenue over EUR 750mn) will have to give a minimum corporation tax of 15%. It will bring in 'global minimum corporation tax' to be implemented from 2023.
- Equalization Levy- Equalization Levy is a direct tax (of 6%), introduced in India in 2016 to tax foreign firms (such as Google, and Facebook) with now permanent establishments in India but profits from it. It was reaffirmed in Finance Act 2020 and expanded to include non-resident e-commerce operators (such as Amazon), by a new levy of 2% (digital service tax)

India & Iran signs MoU on Seafarers Voyages

In News

India and Iran signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on recognition of Certificates of Competency in Unlimited Voyages to help seafarers from both countries as per the provisions of the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (1978).

International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW) 1978 convention

- It sets qualification standards for masters, officers and watch personnel on seagoing merchant ships.
- STCW was adopted in 1978 by a conference at the International Maritime Organization (IMO) in London and entered into force in 1984.

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

Russia-Ukraine war to further worsen global chip shortage crisis

In News

Russia-Ukraine war has exacerbated (shortage already existed after COVID induced shutdown) the chip crisis as the supply of key ingredients such as Palladium and Neon has been affected.

Palladium

- Palladium is a rare and lustrous silvery-white metal discovered in 1803.
- Uses: It is used in fuel cells, catalytic converters (to clean toxic gas from the exhaust of the vehicle), in the semiconductor industry and in jewellery and dental fillings.
- Palladium is often used as an alternative to gold in making various devices as the metal is highly malleable and resistant to corrosion.
- Palladium is used in nearly all electronic devices, and the metal is a key to make chipsets and circuit boards. It is used to make Multi-Layer Ceramic Capacitors (MLCCs), which are important to make smartphone screens, stereo systems, and power circuit breakers.
- The rare metal is considered to be softer than gold, but is still much harder and durable than the yellow metal.
- Russia controls 44% of global palladium

Neon

- Neon is a colourless, odourless, inert gas with about two-thirds the density of air.
- Uses: It is used to make high-voltage indicators and switching gear, making chips, lightning arresters, diving equipment, cryogenic refrigerants (in liquid form) and lasers.
- Ukraine supplies 70% of neon supplies

Present status

- Russia controls 12 per cent of the global crude oil production, 17 per cent of natural gas, 5.2 per cent of coal, 4.3 per cent of copper, 6.1 per cent each of aluminium and nickel, 15 per cent of zinc, 9.5 per cent of gold, 5.4 per cent of silver, 14 per cent of platinum, 44 per cent of palladium and 11 per cent of wheat.
- On the other hand, Ukraine meets as much as 70 per cent of the global neon demand.
- During the 2014-15 Russia-Ukraine war, neon prices went up by several times, indicating how serious this can be for the semiconductor industry.

Spectrographic Investigation of Nebular Gas (SING) Project

In News

Tension between India and China since May 2020 is worrying Indian astrophysicists involved in an ambitious project to install an India-made spectroscope aboard the developing Chinese space station, Tiangong.

SING Project

- The SING project would be the first space-collaboration involving India and China, and primarily deals with sending and positioning a spectrograph, an instrument that splits light into constituent frequencies and wavelengths, to study ultraviolet radiation.
- This will help analyse the make-up and sources of interstellar gas in the region that swept by the space station as it orbits around the earth.
- The Chinese T-shaped Tiangong space station, when complete, is expected to be around 20% as massive as the International Space Station, or about 460 tonnes on Earth.
- The space station consists of three modules, two of which have already been launched in April 2021 and July this year, respectively.
- The third is expected to be launched this October. It will be only the second such station after the International Space Station in orbit.
- India and China have been collaborators in the past on research projects such as the Giant Metre Wave Radio Telescope, a Pune-based observatory that's employed by astrophysicists across the world to study radiation at metre-scale resolutions to observe and analyse stars and galaxies.

Nepal urges India to suspend recruitment of Gorkha soldiers under Agnipath scheme

In News

- Nepal has urged India to suspend the recruitment of Gorkhas to the Indian Army under the newly introduced Agnipath scheme.
- There are concerns about the future of Gorkha recruits when they retire after four years, and the impact of these out-of-job young men — all in their twenties — on society.

About Gorkhas

- The name "Gurkha" comes from the hill town of Gorkha from which the Nepalese kingdom had expanded. It has been dominated by four ethnic groups- Gurungs and Magars from central Nepal, the Rais and Limbus from the east.
- Recruitment of Gorkhas from Nepal began in the British Indian army after the Treaty of Sagauli was signed in 1816 between the government of Nepal and the British East India Company.
- It became a tripartite arrangement in November 1947 after India became independent and Gorkhas in Nepal were given a choice to serve in the Indian Army or go to the UK.
- India currently has 43 Gorkha battalions serving in seven regiments
- Apart from India, the UK also recruit soldiers from Gorkhas.

China pledges support to Sri Lanka at UNHRC session

In News

In the upcoming UN Human Rights Council session in Geneva, where a resolution on Sri Lanka is expected to be tabled, China has said it would "continue to support" Sri Lanka in international fora on the Human Rights issue.

Issue

In the March 2022 session, the 'Core Group' on Sri Lanka, comprising the United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Germany, North Macedonia, Malawi and Montenegro, noted in a statement that: surveillance and intimidation of civil society persist, and detentions, threats and intimidation of journalists and human rights defenders continue.

UNHRC

- It was reconstituted from its predecessor organization, the UN Commission on Human Rights to help overcome the "credibility deficit" of the previous organization.
- Headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.
- The UNHRC has 47 members serving at any time with elections held to fill up seats every year, based on allocations to regions across the world to ensure geographical representation.
- Each elected member serves for a term of three years.
- Countries are disallowed from occupying a seat for more than two consecutive terms.
- The UNHRC passes non-binding resolutions on human rights issues through a periodic review of all 193 UN member states called the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

India, Bangladesh finalise MoU on sharing of water of Kushiara river

In News

India and Bangladesh have finalised the text of an agreement on interim sharing of the water of the Kushiara river.

About MoU

- In this meeting, the two countries discussed many issues of mutual interest, including river water sharing of rivers, sharing of flood data, focus on river pollution, joint study on sedimentation management, river bank protection between the two countries. tasks etc.
- All aspects of issues related to Ganga, Teesta, Manu, Muhuri, Khowai, Gumti, Dharla, Dudhkumar etc. other rivers were also discussed during this meeting.
- Meanwhile, both sides welcomed the finalization of the design of Feni River Water Harvesting Site and its technical infrastructure to meet the drinking water requirements of Sabroom Town, Tripura.

Kushiara River

- The Kushiara River forms the Indo-Bangladesh border as a branch of the Barak River when it separates from the Surma, another branch of the Barak.
- After flowing some distance in Bangladesh, it meets again with Surma river and this combined river is now called Meghna river.
- Manipur, Mizoram and Assam receive water through this river in India.

Joint River Commission

- The Joint River Commission between India and Bangladesh was formed in the year 1972 under the peace treaty, through which issues of mutual interest on the border, border rivers can be resolved.
- The JRC is headed by the Ministers of Water Resources of both the countries.

International Day Against Nuclear Tests

In News

The International Day Against Nuclear Tests is observed across every year across the world on 29 August with aim to raise awareness about the effects of nuclear weapon test explosions or any other nuclear explosions.

Historical Significance

- It was officially proclaimed by United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) by unanimously adopting Resolution 64/35 in December 2009 initiated by Kazakhstan with support of large number of sponsors and cosponsors.
- It was observed for first time in 2010 and since then observed annually to galvanize necessity of banning nuclear weapon tests.
- It seeks to commemorate closure of Semipalatinsk Nuclear Test site (also known as The Polygon) on 29 August 1991.
- This nuclear test site was the primary testing venue for nuclear weapons of then Soviet Union.
- It is located on steppe in northeast Kazakhstan (then Kazakh SSR part of USSR), south of valley of the Irtysh River.

Former German Chancellor Angela Merkel wins UNESCO Peace Prize 2022

In News

Former German Chancellor Angela Merkel was awarded UNESCO Peace Prize for her 'efforts to welcome refugees'.

About the prize

- In accordance with the Charter of UNESCO, the prize is given to living individuals who have made a significant contribution to maintaining and safeguarding peace.
- The 2022 Félix Houphouët-Boigny-UNESCO Peace Prize for her "courageous decision in 2015 to welcome more than 1,2 million refugees, notably from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Eritrea

About UNESCO Peace Prize

- Formally known as the Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize, the UNESCO Peace Prize was constituted in 1989 under the United Nations Charter and the UNESCO Constitution.
- The prize is awarded to a person, an organization or a private or governmental body for making a significant contribution for "promotion, study, safeguarding, or maintenance of peace."
- The prize has been named after Félix Houphouët-Boigny, the late former president of Côte d'Ivoire.

UN High Seas Treaty

In News

Diplomats from around the world have failed to reach agreement on a United Nations treaty designed to protect marine life on the high seas.

About UN High Seas Treaty

- Also referred to as the 'Paris Agreement for the Ocean', the treaty to deal with Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction has been under discussion for several years.
- The proposed treaty concerns the ocean existing beyond the Exclusive Economic Zones that lie from the coast of a country to about 200 nautical miles or 370 km into the sea, till where it has special rights for exploration. Waters beyond that are known as open seas or high seas.
- A proposed treaty would set rules for protecting biodiversity in two-thirds of the world's ocean areas that are outside of national jurisdictions.
- Talks centered on how to share benefits from marine life, establish protected areas, prevent harm from human activity on the high seas and to help poor countries gain the skills and means for ocean exploration.

UNCLOS

- The treaty was to be negotiated under the UNCLOS of 1982 which governs the rights of countries regarding marine resources.
- Currently, there is no treaty for conserving the health of vast swathes of the earth's oceans, a UN resolution in 2017 decided to rectify this while setting 2022 as the deadline.
- Having no law has resulted in overexploitation of the High seas by countries: using large-scale drilling and trawling operations for catching fish and mining
- High Ambition Coalition (consisting of more than 100 countries including India, the US, and the UK), came about (because of delay in the high sea treaty) and put the focus on '30x30' goals – protecting 30% of the ocean by 2030.

Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina Arrives In India

In News

On the occasion of, Sheikh Hasina's much-anticipated visit to India, countries are expected to sign at least one major river agreement.

India- Bangladesh

- India and Bangladesh are expected to sign an interim agreement of sharing of the Kushiya river water.
- Sixth largest trading partner: Bangladesh is India's sixth largest trade partner with bilateral trade rising from \$2.4 billion (two point four) in 2009 to \$10.8 billion in 2020-21.
- Bangladesh imports critical industrial raw materials from India on which its exports are reliant.
- Bangladesh's exports could rise 182% under a free trade agreement.
- This could become 300% if combined with trade facilitation measures and reduced transaction costs.
- Bangladesh also could improve several manufacturing industries by leveraging Indian expertise in service sectors.

Connectivity

- Both countries jointly inaugurated the newly restored railway link between Haldibari (India) and Chilahati (Bangladesh).
- Agreed to an early operationalization of the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) initiative Motor Vehicles Agreement through the expeditious signing of the Enabling MoU
- The second addendum to the Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade (PIWTT) was signed recently
- Kolkata-Dhaka-Agartala Bus Service also launched in 2015. This reduced the distance between Kolkata and Agartala from 1,650 km to just 500 km.

The Teesta river water dispute

- The 2011 interim deal aims to share the Teesta river water between India and Bangladesh about 42.5 per cent and 37.5 per cent respectively.
- But, the state of West Bengal object to this demand and never signed the deal, and strain in this issue goes on.

China's Role

- China has been actively pursuing bilateral ties with Bangladesh.
- Bangladesh had successfully approached China for a mega project to enhance the Teesta river water flow.
- Bangladesh also requires China's support in resolving the Rohingya refugee crisis.
- Bangladesh is the second biggest arms market for China after Pakistan.

India, Bangladesh ink first water-sharing pact in 25 years

In News

- India and Bangladesh signed an interim water sharing agreement for Koshiyara river, the first such pact since the signing of the Ganga water treaty in 1996.
- India and Bangladesh signed a memorandum of understanding on sharing of waters of Koshiyara river, a pact that will benefit people residing in southern Assam and the Sylhet division of Bangladesh.

Teesta River Dispute

- Teesta is a 414 km long river flowing from India to the Bay of Bengal through Bangladesh. Almost half a dozen districts in West Bengal is dependent on this river.
- Teesta river provides livelihood to approximately 73% of Bangladesh population as per a report furnished by Asia Foundation in 2013.
- In 1983 a deal was proposed for equitable sharing but the implementation hit a roadblock. The mean annual flow of the river is 60 billion cubic metres. A significant amount of it flows during the monsoon season i.e. between June to September. During lean season i.e. from October to May, the flow is only 500 million cubic metres per month.
- In the month from December to March, Bangladesh wants 50% of the water supply, whereas India has claimed a share of 55%.
- In 2011, the agreement did not fructify due to objections from West Bengal Chief Minister. As per the constitution of India, Water is a state subject and approval of all the stakeholders is required for the deal to go ahead.
- In 2019 External Affairs Minister of India had a meeting with his Bangladesh counterparts and they were still unable to reach a consensus on the water-sharing agreement.

India- Bangladesh

- Both enjoy a robust relationship. Bangladesh's crackdown against anti-India outfits has helped the Indian government maintain peace in the eastern and Northeast states.
- India also grants 15 to 20 lakh visas every year to Bangladesh nationals for medical treatment, tourism, work and just entertainment.
- Bangladesh is India's biggest trade partner in South Asia. In 2018-19, India's exports and imports with Bangladesh stood at USD 9.21 billion and USD 1.04 billion respectively.
- Bangladesh has been a key partner for India in the Neighbourhood First Policy. Know about India's Foreign Policy on the given link.
- Both have cooperated on pandemic-related moves. Bangladesh supported India's call for a regional (SAARC) emergency fund for fighting Covid-19 and declared a contribution of USD 1.5 million in March 2020. Check out the details on the South Asian Association for Regional Corporation- SAARC on the linked page.
- The first trial run for trans-shipment of Indian cargo through Bangladesh to Northeast states under a pact on the use of Chittagong and Mongla ports took place in July 2020.

Origin of Teesta

- It originates from Tso Lhamo lake in Sikkim.
- This lake is at an altitude of 5,330 metres. This lake is 118 km from Darjeeling.
- As per some sources, in addition to Tso Lhamo, even Teesta Khangse Glacier is the source of origin of Teesta river.
- It is located at an altitude of approximately 7000 metres.

Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons(NPT)

In News

The Tenth Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) concluded last week in New York.

NPT

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

India's Nuclear Development

- Nuclear programme of India was initiated in the late 1940s under the guidance of Homi J. Bhabha.
- The first nuclear explosion undertaken by India in May 1974.
- India conducted a series of nuclear tests in May 1998, demonstrating its capacity to use nuclear energy for military purposes.
- After the 1998 tests, India enunciated a doctrine of 'No First Use' (NFU) of nuclear weapons which was formally adopted in January, 2003.
- It says that nuclear weapons will only be used in retaliation against a nuclear attack on Indian territory or on Indian forces anywhere.

Three Indian cities join UNESCO network of learning cities - List

In News

- Warangal and two cities from Kerala have joined the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC) in recognition of their outstanding efforts to make lifelong learning a reality for all at the local level.
- Warangal in Telangana, Thrissur and Nilambur are among the 77 cities from 44 countries which have joined this network of the world body.

Key Details

- Warangal is the second UNESCO recognition for Telangana. Earlier, Ramappa Temple in Mulugu district was included in the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites.
- This time, Ukraine's capital Kyiv, South African city Durban and UAE city Sharjah have been included in this list of UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities.
- In the year 2022, 77 cities from 44 countries of the world including India have been included in this list.
- The inclusion of these cities will encourage exchange of ideas with other cities and share among themselves the methods of systems already implemented in these cities.

Nilambur (Kerala)

- Nilambur is a famous eco-tourism destination in Kerala. Majority of the population here is dependent on agriculture and allied industries.

- With Nilambur included in this list, sustainable development through community ownership, gender equality, inclusivity will be further promoted.
- As well as creating employment opportunities in the city and achieving the goals of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Warangal

- Warangal is a city with rich cultural heritage of Telangana.
- It is a major tourist destination of the state. More than 32 lakh tourists visit here every year.
- The economy of Warangal mainly depends on agricultural and industrial centres.
- The development of this city will further accelerate after it is included in the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities.

UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities

- Launched in 2013, the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC) is an international policy based network.
- It aims to ensure the development of all learning cities by sharing ideas and arts with other cities. So far, 294 cities from 76 countries are included in this list.
- The network supports the achievements of all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), but primarily focused on **SDG 4** ('Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all) and SDG 11 (making human habitats sustainable, inclusive, safe).

US exempts India from CAATSA

In News

The US House of Representatives passed a legislative amendment that exempts India from economic sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA).

CAATSA

- CAATSA is a law that came into effect in the US in 2017, and was meant to punish countries having deep engagements with Russia, North Korea, and Iran using economic sanctions.
- It said countries having a "significant transaction" with Russian intelligence and military agents will be subject to at least five kinds of sanctions.
- Ordinary transactions will not invite sanctions, and the decision of who has sanctions imposed on them comes down to the interpretation of "significant transaction".
- This is one of the various waivers or exemptions mentioned, such as the transaction not affecting US strategic interests, not endangering the alliances it is a part of, etc.
- **Section 231 of the law** notifies 39 Russian entities, including all the major defence companies like Rosoboronexport, Sukhoi Aviation, Russian Aircraft Corporation MiG, transactions with whom could invite sanctions.
- Almaz-Antey Air and Space Defence Corporation JSC, who have made the S-400 system, are in this list.

Why did the US enact CAATSA?

- The US flagged issues of Russia's alleged interference in its 2016 Presidential elections and its role in the Syrian war as some of the reasons for punishing engagement with it.
- Former US President Donald Trump, who was accused of "colluding" with Russia in the elections and during whose term CAATSA came into effect, called the Act "seriously flawed".

Maitree Super Thermal Power Project

In News

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina jointly unveiled Unit-I of the Maitree Super Thermal Power Project .

Maitree Thermal Power Project

- It is located at Rampal in Bagerhat district of Khulna division of Bangladesh.
- The 1320 (2×660) MW coal-fired power plant is being set up at a cost of approximately \$2 billion.
- The project is being developed under India’s concessional financing scheme and will add 1320 MW to Bangladesh’s national grid.
- It is being built by Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL) for Bangladesh-India Friendship Power Company Private Limited (BIFPCL).
- The first unit of this super thermal power plant will go into commercial operation in early October and will be a major breakthrough in the growing cooperation in the Bangladesh-India power sector.
- Unit-II of the power plant, also known as the Rampal coal-fired power project, is expected to be commissioned early next year.
- Once both the units of this mega power plant are commissioned, Maitree Super Thermal Power Project will be one of the largest power plants in Bangladesh.

Other Agreements

An important agreement was also signed on the sharing of the waters of the Kushiara River to benefit the Sylhet region of Bangladesh and the southern Assam region of India.

Queen Elizabeth II

In News

Britain’s longest reigning monarch, Queen Elizabeth II, died on September 8 at the age of 96.

Queen Elizabeth II

- Elizabeth Alexandra Mary Windsor on April 21, 1926, in Mayfair, central London.
- She is the first child of the Duke and Duchess of York, who will become King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother.
- In 1947 Princess Elizabeth married Prince Philip at Westminster Abbey.
- Their first child, Prince Charles, was born in 1948. A daughter, Anne, arrived in 1950, followed by Andrew in 1960 and Edward in 1964.
- She was crowned at Westminster Abbey on June 2, 1953, in front of 8,500 assembled guests.
- On February 6, she became the first monarch in British history to rule for 70 years.

Volker Turk appointed new UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

In News

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres appointed Volker Turk of Austria as the next United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, following approval by the General Assembly.

Volker Turk

- Volker Turk holds a doctorate in international law from the University of Vienna and a Master of Law from the University of Linz, Austria.
- He is proficient in many languages. He has good command over English, French and German languages along with a working knowledge of Spanish.
- Turk has held several key positions during his career. He also served as Director of the Department for International Security from 2009 to 2015, including as the United Nations High Commissioner for the UNHCR Agency.
- Volker Turk currently works in the office of Antonio Guterres as Under-Secretary-General for Policy.
- Prior to this, Turk was the Assistant High Commissioner for Security at the United Nations Refugees, UNHCR in Geneva, where he played a key role in the development of the historic Global Compact on Refugees.

UN Human rights commissioner

- The High Commissioner is the principle official who speaks out for human rights across the whole UN system. It strengthens human rights mechanisms, enhance equality & fight discrimination in all its forms. The Office was created in 1993.
- It also strengthens accountability & the rule of law and widens the democratic space & protecting the most vulnerable from all forms of human rights abuse.
- He/she is mandated to promote and protect the universal exercise and full realization of human rights, across the world, as established in UN Charter.

G-20 COUNTRIES

In News

The 17th G20 Heads of State and Government Summit will happen in November in Bali, Indonesia. After Indonesia, India will assume the presidency of G20 from December 2022.

G20 Presidency

- India will have the opportunity to assume centre stage in proposing and setting the global agenda and discourse.
- **Global economic growth:** The G20 holds a strategic role in securing global economic growth and prosperity as it represents more than 80% of the world's GDP.
- **Leadership potential:** The country's leadership potential and diplomatic foresight in organizing such a big event and in arriving at meaningful outcomes will be tested.

Lessons needs to be taken from Indonesia

- Indonesia has focused on three key pillars-
- Global health architecture
- Sustainable energy transition
- Digital transformation.
- India can find a common ground for setting its G20 agenda by addressing issues of global concern.
- Domestic and regional issues: It needs to promote its specific priorities related to domestic and regional issues such as economic recovery, trade and investment etc
- Greater cooperation with many G20 members: such as the European Union, the U.K., and Canada, thereby accelerating their coordination on realizing free trade agreements.
- Invite and engage countries from Africa and South America: To ensure better and more balanced representation at the G20.

G20

- The G20 was formed in 1999 in the backdrop of the financial crisis of the late 1990s that hit East Asia and Southeast Asia in particular.
- Its aim was to secure global financial stability by involving middle-income countries.
- The first G20 Summit took place in 2008 in Washington DC, US.
- Its prominent members are: Australia, Brazil, China, France, Germany, India, Japan, Republic of Korea, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, the UK, the US, and the EU. Spain is invited as a permanent guest.
- Together, the G20 countries include 60 per cent of the world's population, 80 per cent of global GDP, and 75 per cent of global trade.

Renee Wegrzyn Slated to Lead New Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health

In News

The US President Joe Biden appointed Dr Renee Wegrzyn as the inaugural director of the ARPA-H (Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health).

Dr Renee Wegrzyn

- Dr Renee Wegrzyn, a biologist and former government scientist, was appointed as the first ever director of the newly created Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health (ARPA-H).
- The ARPA-H Director's tenure would last for five years.
- The purpose of the ARPA-H is to seek innovative solutions to biomedical problems.
- It would support highly risky but rewarding researches in the life sciences.
- It was established to emulate the US Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), which had played a key role in the rapid development of defence technologies by awarding contracts to risky projects, which can be withdrawn abruptly if the researchers do not meet the desired milestone.
- Dr Renee Wegrzyn served as the programme manager at the DARPA for more than 5 years, working in projects that used synthetic biology to counter infectious diseases and boost biosecurity.
- Though ARPA-H has a new director, the agency's foundational details are currently lacking.
- The US Congress had allocated ARAP-H just 1 billion USD for 2022. The Biden Administration had requested a budget of 6.5 billion USD.

The Eastern Economic Forum

In News

- Russia hosted the seventh Eastern Economic Forum (EEF) Vladivostok from September 5 to 8.
- The four-day forum is a platform for entrepreneurs to expand their businesses into Russia's Far East (RFE).

About EEF

- The EEF was established in 2015 to encourage foreign investments in the RFE.
- The EEF displays the economic potential, suitable business conditions and investment opportunities in the region.
- Agreements signed at the EEF increased from 217 in 2017 to 380 agreements in 2021, worth 3.6 trillion roubles.
- As of 2022, almost 2,729 investment projects are being planned in the region. The agreements focus on infrastructure, transportation projects, mineral excavations, construction, industry and agriculture.

Major Investors in Forum

- China is the biggest investor in the region as it sees potential in promoting the Belt and Road Initiative and the Polar Sea Route in the RFE.
- China's investments in the region account for 90% of the total investments.
- China is also looking to develop its Heilongjiang province which connects with the RFE.

Japan

- Japan is another key trading partner in the Far East. In 2017, Japanese investments through 21 projects amounted to \$16 billion.
- Under Shinzo Abe's leadership, Japan identified eight areas of economic cooperation and pushed private businesses to invest in the development of the RFE.

Objective

- The primary objective of the EEF is to increase the Foreign Direct Investments in the RFE.
- The region encompasses one-third of Russia's territory and is rich with natural resources such as fish, oil, natural gas, wood, diamonds and other minerals.
- The sparse population living in the region is another factor for encouraging people to move and work in the Far East.
- The region's riches and resources contribute to five per cent of Russia's GDP.
- But despite the abundance and availability of materials, procuring and supplying them is an issue due to the unavailability of personnel.
- The RFE is geographically placed at a strategic location; acting as a gateway into Asia.

EEF and IPEF

- The U.S.-led Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) and the EEF are incomparable based on its geographic coverage and the partnership with the host-countries.
- India has vested interests in both the forums and has worked towards balancing its involvement.
- India has not shied away from investing in the Russia-initiated EEF despite the current international conditions.
- The IPEF also presents an ideal opportunity for India to act in the region, without being part of the China-led Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership or other regional grouping like the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership.
- The IPEF will also play a key role in building resilient supply chains. India's participation in the forum will help in disengaging from supply chains that are dependent on China and will also make it a part of the global supply chain network.

Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF)

It was announced in 2021 to set regional standards for cooperation and to encourage regional economies to "decouple" from the Chinese market by leading them to alternative supply chains.

India, France agree to expand cooperation on Indo-Pacific body

In News

India and France agreed to set up an Indo-Pacific trilateral framework to roll out development projects, decided to expand strategic cooperation and vowed to work closely to deal with pressing global challenges such as food crisis triggered by the Ukraine war.

Areas of cooperation

- India and France have decided to resume cooperation under the India-France-Australia trilateral mechanism and India-France-UAE Trilateral Framework.
- Defence: Exercise Shakti (Army), Exercise Varuna (Navy), and Exercise Garuda (Air Force). French Rafale multi-role combat aircraft, Scorpene submarines in India.
- Economic relations: The India-France Administrative Economic and Trade Committee (AETC)
- Space: “Joint Vision for Space Cooperation”, India and France have signed an agreement for the cooperation on Gaganyaan Mission.
- Civil nuclear cooperation was signed between India and France in 2008; the 9,900 MW Jaitapur Nuclear Power Project (JNPP)

Israel, UAE and Bahrain Abraham Accord

In News

It has been two years of the Abraham Accords. It has helped not only the member nations but has also provided various benefits to India as well.

Background

- Mohammed Soliman, An Egyptian scholar, was the first to propound the idea of the “Indo-Abrahamic Accord” and its trans-regional implications to the west of India.
- The first meeting between the foreign ministers of India, Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States is being widely called as a new QUAD or QUAD of the Middle East on the lines of the Abraham Accord.

Abraham Accord

- The Abraham Accord between Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain is mediated by the USA. It is the first Arab-Israeli peace deal in 26 years.
- There were the only two peace deals between Israel and the Arab States in more than a quarter of a century.
- Egypt was the first Arab State to sign a peace deal with Israel in 1979.
- Jordan signed a peace pact in 1994.
- As per the agreements, the UAE and Bahrain will establish:
- Embassies and exchange ambassadors.
- Working together with Israel across a range of sectors, including tourism, trade, healthcare and security.
- The Abraham Accords also open the door for Muslims around the world to visit the historic sites in Israel and to peacefully pray at Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, the third holiest site in Islam.
- In the Islamic tradition, the Kaaba in Mecca is considered the holiest site, followed by the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, and Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem.

Significance for India

- The discovery of new hydrocarbon resources in the eastern Mediterranean, has renewed territorial disputes between Turkey and Greece, and the Turkish quest for regional dominance has drawn Greece and the UAE closer thereby paving way for India's participation in the region.
- Abraham Accords have improved the regional connectivity between the member countries. This regional connectivity has also helped Indians. For example, the Indian diaspora in the Gulf can now fly directly from the UAE to Israel or from Israel to Bahrain.
- Beyond trade, there is potential for India, UAE, and Israel to collaborate in many areas — from space to defence technology.

- The new “Quad” in the Middle East is likely to be India’s only new coalition in the region. The feasibility of a non-ideological engagement with the Middle East by bridging the Arab- Israeli rift.
- This engagement will open the door for extending the collaboration with other regional partners like Egypt, having much more impact in the region.
- Agreement opens the doors to the first big rapprochement between traditional adversaries in West Asia— Israel and the Arab This would open new doors for India’s engagement in the region.

UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador

In News

United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) appointed Vanessa Nakate, a 25--year--old climate activist from Uganda as the Goodwill Ambassador of the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF).

About Nakate

- Nakate began her activism in January 2019 with a protest with her siblings and cousins on the streets of Kampala, inspired by Greta Thunberg.
- She continued to protest every week, becoming a well-known face in a movement of young people “striking” for the climate around the world.
- In 2020 she came to further global prominence when she was cropped out of a news photo she appeared in alongside Thunberg and other white climate activists.
- Nakate’s response to the incident, in which she said the news outlet “didn’t just erase a photo, you erased a continent”.

Global Scenario

- Globally half the world’s 2.2 billion children live in one of the 33 countries, classified by UNICEF’s Children’s Climate Risk Index as “extremely high-risk” of the impacts of climate change.
- According to UNICEF, the top 10 countries are all in Africa.

UNICEF

- UNICEF was created in 1946 as International Children’s Emergency Fund (ICEF) by UN relief Rehabilitation Administration to help children affected by World War II.
- UNICEF became a permanent part of the United Nations in 1953.
- The name was shortened to United Nations Children Fund but it is still referred to as UNICEF.
- It is mandated by the United Nations General Assembly to advocate for the protection of children's rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential.
- UNICEF is guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989.
- It strives to establish children's rights as enduring ethical principles and international standards of behaviour towards children.
- Awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1965 for “promotion of brotherhood among the nations”.

Kazakhstan to hold 6th CICA Summit in October

In News

Kazakhstan has invited Indian PM to the CICA summit (Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia).

About CICA

- It is a forum aimed at enhancing cooperation through elaborating multilateral approaches toward promoting peace, security and stability in Asia.
- Confidence building in Economic, environmental, human, new challenges and threats, military etc.
- It was founded in 1999 and is a multi-national forum of countries having a part of its territory in Asia. India is among its 27 members.

Kazakhstan

- The region is not only rich in mineral resources but also pursuing a balanced and multi-vector foreign policy and this aroused the interest of all world powers.
- Seeing the huge potential of Central Asia, including due to its geographical proximity to Afghanistan, leading international actors have established mutually beneficial platforms for deepening cooperation with these countries.

2023 International Year of Millets

In News

Karnataka's initiative as well as the Centre's efforts to get international recognition for these nutrient-rich crops have yielded results with the United Nations (U.N.) declaring 2023 as the International Year of Millets.

Significance of millets

- Cheap and more nutritious. E.g. Ragi has the highest calcium content and high iron content can fight the high prevalence of anaemia.
- Climate Resilient: they are known as hardy and drought-resistant crops, which has to do with their
- Economic Security: low investment for inputs
- Against Health Issues: Millets are gluten-free and have a low glycemic index (glucose level) and therefore can help in tackling lifestyle problems and health challenges such as obesity and diabetes.
- Millets have antiaging and antioxidant

Govt. Measures

- Government declared (in 2018) millets as "Nutri-Cereals", considering their "high nutritive value" and also "anti-diabetic properties".
- The 2018 year: 'National Year of Millets'.
- Increase in MSP for millets
- Government has included millets in the public distribution system (PDS) and POSHAN Abhiyan.
- Millet Mission (under the National Food Security Mission): It will help develop farm-gate processing and empower farmers using FPOs.
- Kerala State Agriculture Department: Millet Village scheme
- Millet Startup Innovation Challenge
- A contest for designing a comic story, with the theme 'India's Wealth, Millets for Health'
- SCO: India proposed to organize the "Millet Food Festival"

International Day of Peace 2022

In News

- The 'International Day of Peace' is observed on September 21 around the world.

- The day is observed and has been devoted by the United Nations General Assembly to strengthening the ideals of peace, through observing 24 hours of non-violence and cease-fire.

Objective

- Its main objective is to create a world where compassion and empathy overcome suspicion and hatred.
- **The theme for 2022** is “End racism. Build peace.” It aims to eradicate racism and put an end to race-based discrimination.
- It highlights the plights faced by people who were displaced by conflicts because of racism.
- It also recognized the issues faced by certain racial groups during the COVID-19 pandemic and the effect on certain races during the economic crisis.
- This year, International Day of Peace was observed on September 16, 2022 at the UN Headquarters in New York.
- The programme commenced with the traditional Peace Bell Ceremony at the Peace Garden.

Peace bell

- The Peace Bell was donated by the United Nations Association of Japan in June 1954.
- It was created as a symbol of hope for peace.
- The bell was made from coin and medals donated by the representatives of member states, the Pope and people, including children from 60 countries.
- The bell tower was modelled based on the Hanamido (a temple decorated with flowers) that symbolizes the place where Buddha was born.
- It is rung twice a year – once at the Vernal Equinox and on the occasion of the International Day for Peace.

20th Meeting of Prosecutors General of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)

In News

- The 20th Meeting of Prosecutors General of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Member States was held in Astana, Kazakhstan.
- A Protocol incorporating the deliberations of the 20th meeting of Prosecutors General of the SCO Member States was signed and adopted by the SCO Member States.

About the protocol

- To strengthen cooperation between the Prosecutor General's Offices of the SCO Member States with respect to the recovery of the proceeds of crime particularly in money laundering.
- To develop cooperation between the prosecutor's offices of the SCO member states at international institutions and forums on issues related to combating economic crimes like money laundering, search, seizure and recovery of the proceeds of crime from states.
- To use the forums of bilateral and multilateral gatherings to discuss about ways to strengthen the systems in place to combat economic crimes particularly money laundering.
- To continue the exchanging of information on domestic laws governing search seizure and recovery of proceeds of crime. State's experiences in their prevention as well as references, methodological, information-analytical, scientific and other materials in the field of combating economic crimes.
- To develop cooperation between the Prosecutors General offices of the SCO member states in the field of training and advanced training of prosecutors and employees of other law enforcement agencies whose competence includes issues of combating economic crimes.
- To conduct and participate in bilateral and multilateral events on combating economic crimes, search, seizure and recovery of proceeds of crime from states.

About SCO

- SCO is a permanent intergovernmental international organization.
- It's a Eurasian 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.
- Prior to the creation of SCO in 2001, Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan were members of the Shanghai Five.
- Shanghai Five (1996) emerged from a series of border demarcation and demilitarization talks which the four former Soviet republics held with China to ensure stability along the borders.
- Following the accession of Uzbekistan to the organization in 2001, the Shanghai Five was renamed the SCO.
- India and Pakistan became members in 2017.
- On 17th September, 2021, it was announced that Iran would become a full member of the SCO.

Quad signs Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief partnership guidelines

In News

The Quad grouping decided to expand their scope of partnership with the signing of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) partnership guidelines during a ministerial meeting hosted by the US on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in New York.

Major Highlights

- The signing took place during the QUAD foreign ministers' meeting held at the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in New York.
- The HADR partnership was announced during the Quad Leaders' Tokyo Summit on May 24, 2022 as part of the grouping's shared vision of free and open Indo-Pacific.
- These guidelines trace their origins to the 2004 ad hoc Tsunami Core Group, which sought to strengthen international response during the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami.
- These guidelines aim to respond to disasters occurring in the Indo-Pacific region.
- The partnership will act as a dedicated framework for QUAD countries and help them boost coordination during disaster response operations.
- It will improve the QUAD countries' capacity and capability, interoperability and operational synergy during the disaster response.
- This partnership allows the QUAD alliance to provide joint or coordinated individual assistance in crisis preparation, crisis response or post-crisis review phases of the disaster response.

Quad grouping

- Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) is the informal strategic dialogue between India, USA, Japan and Australia with a shared objective to ensure and support a "free, open and prosperous" Indo-Pacific region.
- The idea of Quad was first mooted by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007. However, the idea couldn't move ahead with Australia pulling out of it, apparently due to Chinese pressure.
- In December 2012, Shinzo Abe again floated the concept of Asia's "Democratic Security Diamond" involving Australia, India, Japan and the US to safeguard the maritime commons from the Indian Ocean to the western Pacific.
- In November 2017, India, the US, Australia and Japan gave shape to the long-pending "Quad" Coalition to develop a new strategy to keep the critical sea routes in the Indo-Pacific free of any influence (especially China).

77th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

In News

- 77th Session of the United Nations General Assembly is going to take place in New York City, USA.
- The theme of the 77th UNGA is 'A Watershed Moment: **Transformative Solutions to Interlocking Challenges**'.

UNGA

- The United Nations General Assembly is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations.
- It serves as the main deliberative, policymaking, and representative organ of the UN. Chapter IV of the United Nations Charter provides for its powers, composition, functions, and procedures.
- External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar is going to participate in the 77th Session of the United Nations General Assembly.
- He will also host a Ministerial meeting of the G4 – India, Brazil, Japan, and Germany – as well as participate at the High Level Meeting of the L-69 Group on 'Reinvigorating Multilateralism and Achieving Comprehensive Reform of the UN Security Council'.
- The L-69 Group consists of developing countries from Asia, Africa, Latin America, Caribbean and Small Island Developing States, focused on reforms of the UN Security Council.

Functions of UNGA

- It is responsible for the approval of the UN budget, appointing the non-permanent members to the Security Council, appointing the UN secretary-general, receiving reports from other parts of the UN system, and making recommendations through resolutions.
- The UNGA is the only UN organ wherein all member states have equal representation.
- Each year, the General Assembly elects five non-permanent members of the Security Council for two-year terms, 18 members of the Economic and Social Council for three-year terms, and 14–18 members of the Human Rights Council for three-year terms.
- It also elects the President of the next General Assembly session.
- The UN General Assembly meets under its president or the UN secretary-general in annual sessions at the General Assembly Building, within the UN headquarters in New York City, USA.
- These meetings generally runs from September to part of January until all issues are addressed.
- It can also reconvene for special and emergency special sessions.
- The first session of the UNGA was convened in 1946 in London and included representatives of the 51 founding nations.

UNGA Members

- All 193 members of the United Nations are members of the UNGA. Holy See and Palestine are observer states.
- The United Nations General Assembly may also grant observer status to an international organization or entity.
- For example, International Solar Alliance has been granted Observer status at the UNGA.
- Such an observer status entitles the entity to participate in the work of the United Nations General Assembly, though with limitations.

Quad grouping

- Quad is a grouping of four democracies –the US, India, Australia and Japan.

- Being democratic nations and sharing common interest of free maritime trade and security, they find it suitable to join a common platform.
- Quad aims to ensure and support a “free, open and prosperous” Indo-Pacific region.
- The idea of Quad was first mooted by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007.

Giorgia Meloni

In News

Giorgia Meloni, head of the nationalist Brothers of Italy party, won the election and is all set to become the first Prime Minister at the head of its most right-wing government since World War II.

Giorgia Meloni

- Meloni is one of the co-founders of Brothers and has led this political party since 2014.
- She has been the President of the European Conservatives and Reformist Party since 2020.
- She has opposed abortion, euthanasia and to partnership, marriages and parenting by same-sex couples.
- She also opposed receiving of non-European migrants and multi-culturalism and has been accused of xenophobia and Islamophobia.
- She advocated for a naval blockade to prevent migrant boats from leaving North African shores and proposed screening potential asylum seekers in Africa instead of Europe.
- She supports NATO but favored close ties with Russia before the 2022 Ukrainian crisis.
- She condemned Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and has pledged to provide military aid to Ukraine.
- She is a critic of the European Union for its bureaucratic red-tapism. She vowed to put Italy’s national interest first if it clashes with the policies of the European Union.

India-Africa Security Fellowship Programme

In News

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

About Programme

- MP-IDSA, the knowledge partner for the IADD, will host the Fellowship Programme.
- The fellowship will give an opportunity to African scholars to pursue research on defence and security issues in India.
- The fellows would be attached with the MP-IDSA for a period of 1-3 months.
- A stipend would also be provided to the scholar.

Pakistan is off FATF’s grey list

In News

Pakistan is off the ‘grey list’ of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) after four years.

Benefits

- Pakistan can receive a reputational boost and get a clean bill of health from the international community on terrorist financing.
- Increase in overseas investment in the country.
- Pakistan is no longer subject to FATF's increased monitoring process.

FATF

- The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is an inter-governmental body established in 1989
- It is a “policy-making body” which works to generate the necessary political will to bring about national legislative and regulatory reforms in various areas.
- The FATF Secretariat is housed at the OECD headquarters in Paris

Roles and functions

- Initially, it was established to examine and develop measures to combat money laundering.
- In October 2001, the FATF expanded its mandate to incorporate efforts to combat terrorist financing, in addition to money laundering.
- In April 2012, it added efforts to counter the financing of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.
- Composition: it currently comprises 37 member jurisdictions and 2 regional organisations. It also has observers and associate members.

Black and Grey list

- **Black List:** Countries known as Non-Cooperative Countries or Territories (NCCTs) are put on the blacklist. These countries support terror funding and money laundering activities.
- Currently, it includes countries like Iran, Myanmar and North Korea.
- **Grey List:** Countries that are considered a safe haven for supporting terror funding and money laundering are put on the FATF grey list. This inclusion serves as a warning to the country that it may enter the blacklist.
- After, Pakistan’s delisting, 23 countries remain under watch including countries like the Philippines, Syria, Yemen, the United Arab Emirates.

Missed chances on India-China border

In News

- The boundary dispute that led to the 1962 war with China remains unresolved.
- This year is the 60th anniversary of the war.

Reasons of war

- The border between India and China remain disputed from pre-independent India
- In the eastern sector, the McMahon Line had been drawn in 1914 without even a survey and taking China into confidence.
- Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh: The main reason for the Indo-China war was a dispute over the sovereignty of the widely separated Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh border regions.
- Claim over territories: India claimed Aksai Chin to be part of Ladakh whereas China claimed it as part of Xinjiang.
- India’s intelligence failure: India remained unaware that this area was already in use by China.
- The Chinese built a 220-km-long road there only after the completion of the project was announced in 1957.

Result of war

- India had misguided optimism about the ‘moral’ superiority and peaceful intentions of the Chinese leadership: It resulted in a weak Indian Army that was ill-prepared and ill-equipped to face the realities of hard power.
- Underestimation of the strength of the Indian Air Force (IAF): which resulted in its offensive fleet not being used.
- Political interference in affairs was purely military mismanagement of events from the top.

- China emerged victorious. It occupied a large part of Ladakh and Arunachal but eventually returned to territories occupied in Arunachal but retained control of about 38,000 square kilometres of Aksai Chin in Ladakh.

India 4th ranked in Indo-Pacific

In News

India ranks fourth among 12 Indo-Pacific nations in self-reliant arms production capabilities, according to a study released this month by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

Major observations

- China tops the list, Japan is second, South Korea is in third place, and Pakistan is number 8.
- India is ranked as the second-largest importer of arms for its armed forces in 2016-20.
- Of India's total volume of procurement in 2016–20, 84 per cent was of foreign origin.
- The study says India is highly dependent on imports of complete foreign major arms, including many produced under licence or as components for its domestic production.
- China remained the world's fifth largest arms importer in 2016-20.
- Domestic production accounted for 92 per cent of total procurement.
- After China, Japan and South Korea, India is ranked fourth. Taiwan, Australia and Singapore rank fifth, sixth and seventh.
- Pakistan is ranked eighth, followed by Indonesia (rank 9), Malaysia (rank 10) and Thailand (rank 11).

'Scorched earth' tactics

In News

Russia has been alleged to be using “energy and hunger” as weapons as part of its “scorched earth tactics” on Ukraine and Europe.

About Scorched Earth tactics

- It is a strategy that seeks to deplete the enemy's resources to sustain warfare and break their morale by inflicting heavy hardships on combatants and non-combatants alike.
- Harming civilians as part of this strategy has been banned under the **1977 Geneva Convention**.
- E.g., In World War II, the Russian army destroyed telegraph networks and electrical and industrial resources when invaded by Germany.
- In India, Maratha leader Chhatrapati Shivaji was known for their scorched earth tactics.
- **Geneva Convention 1977**- is a set of rules (set in 1949) that prescribe guidelines for combatant behaviour during a war.
- India is a party to the Geneva Convention.

Lula da Silva – New President of Brazil

In News

The leftist leader Lula da Silva recently made a comeback as the new President of Brazil after defeating incumbent far right President Jair Bolsonaro.

About Lula De Silva

- Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, popularly known as Lula, served as the President of Brazil for two terms between 2002 and 2010.
- During his previous tenures as the president, Brazil witnessed a massive economic growth and large-scale implementation of social welfare programmes that raised millions of people out of poverty.
- The most popular of these social welfare programmes is the Bolsa Familia.
- It provided cash to poor families if they send their children to schools and get them to undergo regular health check-ups. Lula left office since the laws in the country did not allow third consecutive presidential term.

Background

- Lula started education only when he was 10 years old. He was forced to drop out after grade 5 because of the need for full-time job as a metalworker.
- He was elected as the leader of workers' union in 1975.
- He led large-scale labour protests against military regime in Brazil.
- In 1980, he cofounded the Workers' Party (PT), which later went on to become the main left-wing political party in the country.

Significance

- The victory of Lula in this recent election indicates the leftist shift in Latin American politics.
- This shift began with the 2018 election victory of Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador of Mexico.
- This was followed by victories for Alberto Fernandez in Argentina in 2019, and Gabriel Boric in Chile, Pedro Castillo in Peru, and Gustavo Petro in Colombia.
- With Lula's election win, Latin America's 6 largest economies will be under the control of leftist politicians.
- India is expected to have improved ties with Brazil under Lula.
- He visited India as the Chief Guest to the 2004 Republic Day parade and again in 2007 and 2008.
- He hosted former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in 2006 and 2010 and former Indian President Pratibha Patil in 2008.

Friendshoring

In News

Recently, the US secretary of treasury has pushed for "friendshoring" to diversify trade away from countries that are present at geopolitical risk.

Friendshoring

- Friendshoring is a strategy where a country sources the raw materials, components and even manufactured goods from countries that share its values. The dependence on the countries considered a "threat" to the stability of the supply chains is slowly reduced.
- It is also called "allyshoring".
- For the US, Russia has long presented itself as a reliable energy partner, but in the Ukraine war, it has weaponized the gas against the people of Europe.
- It's an example of how malicious actors can use their market positions to try to gain geopolitical leverage or disrupt trade for their own gain.
- Friend-shoring or ally-shoring has become a means for the US to influence firms to move their sourcing and manufacturing sites to friendly shores—often back to the same shores in the case of the US.

- The purpose of Frienshoring is to insulate countries' supply chains from less like-minded nations, such as China in case of the US.

Implications

- Friendshoring may push the world towards a more isolated place for trade and reverse the gains of globalization. It is a part of the "deglobalisation" process.
- After the global economy has been influenced by the years-long lockdown of Covid-19, any form of protectionism will further disrupt the already unstable global supply chain.
- This new form of protectionism will not be conducive to globalization while affecting the global supply chain and economy. And in the long term, this could backfire if a company relies on some country—for lithium for batteries, say, or precious metals for computer chips—feels alienated.

US New National Security Strategy Has Been Released

In News

- The United States has launched its National Security Strategy (NSS).
- All U.S. Presidents are mandated by the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 to bring out their NSS and to communicate the executive's vision of national security to the legislative.

About NSS

- The NSS takes both a long-term and an immediate view of the China threat and the challenges emerging from Beijing.
- While it seeks to outline a joint strategy to tackle external challenges for the U.S. by out-competing China and constraining Russia, it is asymmetrically tilted in its focus on threats from China despite an active war in which Russia is involved.
- The Biden administration places competition with China at the centre of its decadal outlook, which is increasingly global in character and most pronounced in the Indo-Pacific region across a range of domains such as the economy, technology, development, security, global governance and diplomacy.
- The NSS is clear about the opposition to any unilateral change to Taiwan's status by China, portending a contested Indo-Pacific region between China on one hand and a host of democratic partners on the other.

India as Long-Term Partner

- The Biden administration's NSS identifies India as both a bilateral and multilateral partner in the Indo-Pacific, but, more importantly, its status as the largest democracy and a major defence partner.
- As India looks to diversify and indigenise its defence needs in the medium and long term, the NSS lays out the space for partnership between India and the U.S.
- India's partnership in the Indo-Pacific has been assessed as critical in building a "lattice-work of strong, resilient and mutually reinforcing relationships" through regional partnerships such as the Quad (India, Australia, Japan, the U.S.) and the I2U2 (India, Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and the U.S.).

Biden's NSS serves three broad purposes

- Strategic vision: It completes the **strategic** vision by the Interim National Security Strategic Guidance released in March 2021
- Seeks to provide further clarity and direction on various policy verticals by the Biden administration
- Marks the end of political expectations about presidential doctrines in the U.S.

Russia Pulls Out Of Black Sea Grain Deal

In News

Russia has decided to call off the UN-brokered Black Sea grain deal which has seen more than 9 million tons of grain exported from Ukraine and brought down global food prices.

Black Sea grain Initiative

- The Black Sea Grain Initiative was an agreement between Russia and Ukraine with Turkey and the United Nations.
- It sought to create a safe passage of food grains exported from Ukraine, which is currently in war with Russia.
- Under this agreement, export of grain, food and fertilizers will be allowed to resume from Ukraine via a “safe maritime humanitarian corridor” from three key Ukrainian ports i.e., Chornomorsk, Odesa, and Yuzhny/Pivdennyi.

Why the deal was signed?

- Ukraine exports around 45 million tonnes of grain to the global market each year.
- However, after Russia launched military campaign in February 2022, Ukraine was left with large amount of grains stored in silos unable to be transported to other parts of the world.
- This has severely affected the global supply of grains. With the energy prices and food prices increasing because of the conflict, many countries, especially those in Africa, were at the brink of famine.
- The Black Sea Grain Initiative sought to address these issues.

IAEA says no sign of 'dirty bomb' work at Ukrainian sites

In News

The UN's nuclear watchdog International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) recently initiated investigations on Russia's allegations accusing Ukraine of producing dirty bombs.

Dirty Bomb

- Dirty bomb is a conventional explosive device laced with toxic materials.
- Unlike a nuclear weapon, it does not cause atomic explosion. Rather, it spreads radioactive, biological or chemical wastes after explosion.
- This weapon will not cause an immediate health impact since people in the affected region can escape from being exposed lethal dose of radiation.
- However, economic impact could be severe due to the high costs incurred during the evacuation process.
- Sometimes, the whole city or an urban region would be abandoned if it is hit by a dirty bomb.

IAEA

- Widely known as the world's “Atoms for Peace and Development” organization within the United Nations family, the IAEA is the international centre for cooperation in the nuclear field.
- The IAEA was created in 1957 in response to the deep fears and expectations generated by the discoveries and diverse uses of nuclear technology.
- Headquarter: Vienna, Austria.
- Objective- The Agency works with its Member States and multiple partners worldwide to promote safe, secure and peaceful use of nuclear technologies.
- In 2005, it was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their work for a safe and peaceful world.

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)

In News

In a reference to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), at a virtual meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), India's External Affairs Minister recently reiterated that connectivity projects (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)) should respect sovereignty and territorial integrity.

CPEC

- Launched in 2015, the CPEC is the flagship project of the multi-billion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a pet project of Chinese President Xi Jinping, aimed at enhancing Beijing's influence around the world through China-funded infrastructure projects.
- The 3,000 km-long China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) consists of highways, railways, and pipelines.
- CPEC eventually aims at linking the city of Gwadar in South Western Pakistan to China's North Western region Xinjiang through a vast network of highways and railways.
- The proposed project will be financed by heavily-subsidised loans that will be disbursed to the Government of Pakistan by Chinese banks.

Importance

- The agreement is aimed at boosting Chinese investment in Pakistan as well as transferring Chinese industrial capacity.
- The framework will promote industrialisation and development of economic zones, and initiate, plan, execute, and monitor projects, both in the public as well as the private sectors.
- The corridor links Xinjiang with Gwadar and also passes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) where China is investing in a number of projects.
- CPEC's early-harvest projects had transformed Pakistan's economic landscape, thus laying a solid foundation for sustainable economic growth.

Concerns

- As the project passes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) it violates universally accepted international norms, principles of openness, transparency and equality
- Pakistan and China, during a recent CPEC Joint Working Group (JWG) meeting had decided to extend CPEC to interested third countries (most probably Afghanistan).
- A China that is more accepted and integrated into the rest of the global economy will have a stronger voice in the UN and with individual nations, which may be bad news for India's bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council.
- Given the hype surrounding the benefits that the CPEC will bring to the region, several experts argue that India must engage with China and Pakistan creatively.

Way Forward

- At this moment, India must develop a holistic outlook based on a serious reassessment of the possible benefits and drawbacks of the CPEC project.
- India could expedite work on its own strategic projects, such as the BCIM (Bangladesh, China, India, and Myanmar Economic Corridor), Chabahar Port and the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor.

Year 2022 declared as ASEAN-India Friendship year

In News

Commemorating the 30th anniversary of its dialogue relations, in a significant development, ASEAN and India announced the elevation of the existing Strategic Partnership to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

India- ASEAN

- The year 2022 has been declared as the ASEAN-India Friendship year, as ASEAN and India commemorate 30 years of partnership.
- A series of events has been planned to celebrate the occasion throughout the year.
- As a part of this programme, Indian media delegation is on a visit to Singapore and Cambodia under the ASEAN-INDIA Media exchange programme from 8th November to 13th November.

ASEAN

- The Association of Southeast Asian Nations is a regional organization which was established to promote political and social stability amid rising tensions among the Asia-Pacific's post-colonial states.
- The motto of ASEAN is "One Vision, One Identity, One Community".
- 8th August is observed as ASEAN Day.
- ASEAN Secretariat – Indonesia, Jakarta.

ASEAN agrees 'in principal' to admit Timor-Leste

In News

The ASEAN members agreed in principle to admit East Timor as the 11th member of the bloc.

About East Timor

- Timor Leste or East Timor is a half-island nation in the eastern Lesser Sunda Islands.
- It is situated at the southern extreme of the Malay Archipelago.
- It occupies the eastern half of the Island of Timor.
- It is bounded by the Timor Sea to the southeast, the Wetar Strait to the north, the Ombai Strait to the northwest and the western Timor (part of Indonesian territory) to southwest.
- East Timor that was previously part of Indonesian territory. Indonesia occupied the island nation in 1976.
- It was recognized by the United Nations in 2002. This makes it the youngest democracy in Asia.
- East Timor was granted observer status at ASEAN meetings, including summit plenaries, until it is formally inducted into the regional bloc.

ASEAN

- The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a regional bloc founded on August 8, 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand.
- Its member states are Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.
- East Timor was added as a new member of this regional grouping.

LeadIT Summit 2022

In News

India and Sweden hosted the LeadIT Summit recently on the side-lines of COP27.

About the Summit

- The LeadIT (Leadership for Industry Transition) initiative focuses on low carbon transition of the hard to abate industrial sector.
- The Leadership Group for Industry Transition (LeadIT) gathers countries and companies that are committed to action to achieve the Paris Agreement.
- It was launched by the governments of Sweden and India at the UN Climate Action Summit in September 2019 and is supported by the World Economic Forum.
- LeadIT members subscribe to the notion that energy-intensive industry can and must progress on low-carbon pathways, aiming to achieve net-zero carbon emissions.

Baliyatra

In News

- Recently, the Prime Minister in his address to the Indian diaspora in Bali on the sidelines of the G20 summit mentioned the annual Baliyatra on the banks of the Mahanadi in Cuttack that commemorates age-old links between ancient Kalinga and Southeast Asia.
- Baliyatra of year 2022 also found a place in the Guinness World Records for achieving an impressive feat of origami, the creation of beautiful paper sculptures.

About Baliyatra

- Baliyatra, literally ‘voyage to Bali’ is one of the country’s largest open-air fares.
- Baliyatra is a week-long event which begins on Kartik Purnima (full moon night in the month of Kartik)
- It is organised every year to commemorate the 2,000-year-old maritime and cultural links between ancient Kalinga (today’s Odisha) and Bali and other South and Southeast Asian regions like Java, Sumatra, Borneo, Burma (Myanmar) and Ceylon (Sri Lanka).
- According to historians, popular items of trade between Kalinga and Southeast Asia included pepper, cinnamon, cardamom, silk, camphor, gold, and jewellery.
- The Bali Yatra celebrates the ingenuity and skill of those expert sailors who made Kalinga one of the most prosperous empires of its time.

Kalinga- Bali

- The Kalinga Empire (present-day Odisha) is known for its glorious maritime history. Due to the geographical location of Kalinga, this area saw the growth of ports as early as the 4th and the 5th century BC.
- Some of the famous ports, Tamralipti, Manikpatna, Chelitalo, Palur and Pithunda allowed India to connect with other countries via the sea. Soon, the Kalingas had trade links with Srilanka, Java, Borneo, Sumatra, Bali and Burma.
- Bali formed a part of the four islands that were collectively called the Suvarnadvipa, today known as Indonesia.
- The Kalingas constructed large boats called the ‘Boitas’ and with the help of these, they traded with the Indonesian islands.
- The Bay of Bengal was once known as the Kalinga Sea as it was thronged by these ships.
- The dominance of the Kalingas over the sea routes can be understood from the fact that Kalidasa in his Raghuvamsa referred to the King of Kalinga as ‘**The Lord of the Sea**’.
- The Kalingas frequently traded with the island of Bali. The trade-in commodities also led to the interchange of ideas and beliefs.
- Odia merchants formed settlements in Bali and influenced its culture and ethics which led to the growth of Hinduism in the region.

Keen Sword 23

In News

Japan and the United States began a major joint military exercise in southern Japan as the allies aim to step up readiness in the face of China's increasing assertiveness and North Korea's intensifying missile launches.

About the Exercise

- Exercise Keen Sword is a joint and bilateral field training exercise between the US military and the Japan Self-Defence Force.
- It is held once in two years to boost the preparedness and interoperability between the military personnel of Japan and the United States.
- This biennial exercise has been held since 1986.
- This exercise provides opportunities for the US military and the JSDF to train together across various mission areas in realistic scenarios.
- Its ultimate goal is to build credible deterrence amid growing Chinese aggression in the region.
- It aims to create comprehensive scenarios to challenge the critical capabilities required to support the security of Japan and the stability of the Indo-Pacific.
- The exercise includes several anti-submarine warfare and surface gunnery events that will help the Pacific partners to improve their joint and advance multilateral tactics.
- It also focuses on responding to ballistic missiles and new threats like operations in space and cyberspace.

Significance

- The exercise comes amid the Chinese military's growing presence near Taiwan, the neighbouring country of Japan.
- Also, the Chinese vessels are continuously trespassing into the Japanese territorial waters close to the Senkaku Islands in the Indo-Pacific.
- The Senkaku Islands are Japanese-controlled, uninhabited islands in the East China Sea. China is currently claiming that these islands are part of its territory.

India launches official website of SCO for 2023-“For a SECURE SCO”

In News

India has launched the official website of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) as it will host the next SCO summit as a chairman of organisation in 2023.

Theme of SCO

- The theme of the event is “For a SECURE SCO”.
- ‘S’ for security for citizens, ‘E’ for economic development, ‘C’ for connectivity in the region, ‘U’ for unity, ‘R’ for respect of sovereignty and integrity, and ‘E’ for environment protection.
- India received the SCO rotating presidency in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. India will hold the presidency of the grouping for a year until September 2023.

About

- SCO is a permanent intergovernmental international organization.
- It's a Eurasian 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.
- Prior to the creation of SCO in 2001, Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan were members of the Shanghai Five.
- Shanghai Five (1996) emerged from a series of border demarcation and demilitarization talks which the four former Soviet republics held with China to ensure stability along the borders.
- Following the accession of Uzbekistan to the organization in 2001, the Shanghai Five was renamed the SCO.
- India and Pakistan became members in 2017.
- On 17th September, 2021, it was announced that Iran would become a full member of the SCO.

Significance

- From a regional perspective, amidst the tensions over the Sino-Indian border and politically unstable neighbourhood, being the first South Asian country host of SCO, how India would project itself would be significant for the region.
- From a geopolitical perspective, New Delhi could be seen renewing its policy towards Central Asia which also implies a change in understanding of the extended territorial neighbourhood. Consequently, the upcoming presidency would be significant for New Delhi's reach toward Central Asian countries.
- The SCO presidency is preceded by India's non-permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council and would be followed by India hosting the G-20 summit. Thus, the tenure will reflect any continuity or change in New Delhi's understanding of multilateralism and its behaviour in international and regional organisations.

4th edition of Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue

In News

Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue (IPRD) 2022 will be held from November 23 to 25 this year.

About IPRD

- The Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue (IPRD) is the apex international conference organized by the Indian Navy every year.
- The National Maritime Foundation (NMF) is the Indian Navy's knowledge partner and chief organizer of this dialogue.
- The first two editions were held in the years 2018 and 2019 respectively in New Delhi. The 2020 edition of the IPRD was canceled because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The third edition was held in 2021 in virtual mode.
- The aim of this annual dialogue is to assess the opportunities and challenges that emerge within the Indo-Pacific.
- It provides a common platform to discuss topics related to the geopolitical developments that are affecting the maritime domain of the Indo-Pacific.

IPRD 2022

- The IPRD 2022 will be held in New Delhi based on the theme 'Operationalising the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)'.
- The concept of IPOI seeks to promote regional, inclusive cooperation based on seven inter-connected pillars – maritime security, maritime ecology, maritime transport, capacity building and resource sharing, and science, technology and academic cooperation.

About NMF

- The National Maritime Foundation (NMF) is India's first maritime think-tank established in 2005 to conduct independent and policy-relevant research on all topics related to the maritime sector.
- Its main mandate is to create maritime awareness amongst India's policymakers, academia, and civil society.

Chin-Kuki-Mizo refugees

In News

The on-going conflict between Bangladeshi security forces and the Kuki-Chin National Army (KNA) triggered an influx of refugees from the Kuki-Chin community to the Indian state of Mizoram.

About KNA

- The Kuki-Chin National Army (KNA) is the armed wing of the Kuki-Chin National Front (KNF) – a separatist group that was established in 2008 to create a separate state in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in Southern Bangladesh.
- The KNF claims that all members of the Bawm, Pungkhua, Lushai, Khumi, Mro, and Khyang ethnic groups are part of the greater Kuki-Chin race.
- Also known as the Bawm Party, this group is having close relationships with rebel groups in Northeast India and Myanmar.

About Issue

- The Kuki-Chin National Front (KNF) is an ethnic separatist organisation that claims to represent the interests of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo communities living in the area.
- The KNF emerged around 2008, with the demand of a separate state in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.
- The Kuki-Chin National Army (KNA), the armed wing of the KNF, is fighting soldiers of the Bangladesh Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) in the CHT.
- The KNF claims all members of the Bawm, Pungkhua, Lushai, Khumi, Mro, and Khyang ethnic groups belong to a greater Kuki-Chin race.
- **Deal** - The amir of the Jama'atul Ansar, Md Anisur Rahman alias Mahmud and the KNF chief Nathan Bom had "struck a three-year agreement" at the beginning of 2021.
- As per the deal, the KNF was providing shelter, training and other support to the militants.
- In return, the militant outfit was giving the KNF Bangladeshi Taka 3 lakh per month and the expenditure for food".
- The Zo Reunification Organisation (ZORO) had told that the Bangladesh Army has entered into a secret pact with Myanmar-based Arakan Army to launch joint operations against KNA.

Refugee problem in Mizoram

- From Bangladesh - The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) is an impoverished hilly, forested area that is found in the Khagrachari, Rangamati, and Bandarban districts of Bangladesh.
- It borders Mizoram to the east, Tripura to the north, and Myanmar to the south and southeast.
- A significant portion of the population is tribal, and culturally and ethnically different from the majority Muslim Bangladeshis.
- The tribal population of the CHT has ethnic links with tribal populations in the adjacent areas of India, mainly in Mizoram.
- From Mizoram - Mizoram is already hosting about 30,000 refugees who have been fleeing fighting in Myanmar's Chin state since July-August 2021.

- A pro-democracy civilian resistance group called the Chin Defence Force has been fighting the forces of the junta ever since the military coup of February 2021.

Russia's 'Arctic power' with launch of nuclear icebreakers

In News

Recently, Russia touted its Arctic power at a flag-raising ceremony and dock launch for two nuclear-powered icebreakers that will ensure year-round navigation in the Western Arctic.

Significance

- For Russia, it is essential to study and develop the Arctic, to ensure safe, sustainable navigation in this region, and to increase traffic along the northern sea route.
- The development of this most important transport corridor will allow Russia to more fully unlock its export potential and establish efficient logistics routes, including to South East Asia.
- For Russia, the opening of the Northern Sea Route will cut down time to reach Asia by up to two weeks compared to the current route via the Suez Canal.
- The Arctic region has rich deposits of coal, gypsum and diamonds and also substantial reserves of zinc, lead, placer gold and quartz. Greenland alone possesses about a quarter of the world's rare earth reserves.
- The Arctic already supplies the world with roughly 10% of its oil and 25% of its natural gas, mostly from onshore sources. It is also estimated to hold 22% of the Earth's undiscovered oil and natural gas reserves.
- The Arctic helps circulate the world's ocean currents, moving cold and warm water around the globe.

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.

About Arctic

- The Arctic is a polar region located at the northernmost part of Earth.
- Land within the Arctic region has seasonally varying snow and ice cover.
- It consists of the Arctic Ocean, adjacent seas, and parts of Alaska (United States), Canada, Finland, Greenland (Denmark), Iceland, Norway, Russia, and Sweden.

India and Arctic

- In March 2022, India unveiled its first Arctic policy titled: 'India and the Arctic: building a partnership for sustainable development'.
- India is also one of the 13 Observers in the Arctic Council, the leading intergovernmental forum promoting cooperation in the Arctic.
- The Arctic Council is an intergovernmental body that promotes research and facilitates cooperation among Arctic countries on issues related to the environmental protection and sustainable development of the Arctic region.

Veteran Oppn Leader Anwar Ibrahim Sworn in as Malaysia's PM

In News

Malaysia's long-time opposition leader, Anwar Ibrahim was sworn in as the country's prime minister recently.

Anwar Ibrahim

- Anwar Ibrahim is a veteran politician in Malaysia who started his political career as a student activist.
- He founded the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM) in 1971.
- In the early days of his political career, Ibrahim led protests against rural poverty and other socio-economic challenges afflicting the country.
- He later joined the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) party and became the finance minister.
- During his tenure as a finance minister, he independently implemented various political decisions that helped Malaysia weather the impact of the Asian financial crisis.
- However, when the 1990s financial crisis exacerbated, Ibrahim was fired and arrested for corruption and sodomy – a crime in Malaysia. His arrest triggered large-scale protests.
- When his conviction was overturned in 2004, Anwar Ibrahim returned to politics and led his own reformist party that almost defeated the UMNO in the 2013 elections.

China Holds First China-Indian Ocean Region Forum Without India

In News

China organized the first high-level China-Indian Ocean Region Forum on Development Cooperation, with 19 countries from the region except for India.

About the meeting

- Theme: Shared Development: Theory and Practice from the Perspective of the Blue Economy.
- Participating Countries- Indonesia, Pakistan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal, Afghanistan, Iran, Oman, South Africa, Kenya, Mozambique, Tanzania, Seychelles, Madagascar, Mauritius, Djibouti, Australia and representatives of 3 international organisations were present.
- India was reportedly not invited.
- China proposed to establish a marine disaster prevention and mitigation cooperation mechanism between China and countries in the Indian Ocean region.
- China expressed its willingness to provide necessary financial, material, and technical support to countries in need.

Issues

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

About IORA

- It was established in 1997 and is a regional forum that seeks to build and expand understanding and mutually beneficial cooperation through a consensus-based, evolutionary and non-intrusive approach.
- IORA has 23 member states and 9 Dialogue Partners.
- Members: Australia, Bangladesh, the Comoros, France, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Oman, Seychelles, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

- China is a dialogue partner in the IORA.
- The IORA Secretariat is based in Mauritius.

Udaipur to Host First G20 Sherpa Meeting in India

In News

Udaipur is gearing up to host the first G20 Sherpa Meeting in India from 4 to 7 December. The meeting is aimed at fostering growth and building bonds amongst the member nations.

G20 Sherpa meeting

- The Sherpa Meeting of the G20 Summit is a preliminary meeting of the government representatives before the main G20 Summit.
- Here the representatives of the member nations hold discussions to firm up possible agreements.
- The final decisions are taken at the G20 summit by the Heads of States.
- Ahead of the main G20 Summit, the Sherpas meeting ensures that the time and resources required at the time of negotiations of the larger heads of state at the final summit are minimized.
- The G-20 Sherpa meeting will be presided by the Indian Sherpa Amitabh Kant.

G20 & India's Presidency

- Group of 20 or G-20 is a multilateral organisation of 19 countries and the European Union was set up in 1999.
- India has been a member of the G20 since its inception in 1999.
- India will be holding the G20 Presidency from 1 December 2022 and will convene the G20 Leaders' Summit in 2023 for the first time.
- India as a host nation will set the agenda of the G-20 summit meeting to be held in September 2023 in New Delhi.

About Udaipur

- It was founded in 1559 by Udai Singh II of the Sisodia clan of Rajput's. It is popularly known as the "City of Lakes". It has seven lakes surrounding the city.
- Fateh Sagar Lake,
- Lake Pichola. Udaisagar Lake,
- Jaisamand Lake (Dhebar Lake),
- Rajsamand Lake,
- Badi Lake (Jiyan Sagar),
- Doodh Talai (Milk Pond),
- Swaroop Sagar Lake (Khumaria Talab).

India Assumes Presidency Of UN Security Council For December

In News

On 1st December, India assumed the monthly rotating presidency of the UN Security Council (UNSC) for the second time in its two-year tenure as an elected member of the Council in 2021-22.

About the presidency

- This is the second time of monthly presidency in India's two-year tenure as an elected member of the Council in 2021-22.

- India had earlier assumed UNSC presidency in August 2021.

Two signature events at the ministerial level

- Reformed Multilateralism- India will hold a “high-level open debate” on “Maintenance of International Peace and Security: New Orientation for Reformed Multilateralism” at the Security Council.
- New Orientation for Reformed Multilateralism (NORMS) envisages reforms in the current multilateral architecture, with the UN at its centre, to make it more representative and fit for purpose.
- Counter-Terrorism- The theme of this event is “Threats to International Peace and Security Caused by Terrorist Acts: Global Approach to Counter Terrorism — Challenges and Way Forward”
- The threat of terrorism is grave, universal and transnational in character, this briefing intends to underscore the necessity of collective and coordinated efforts to combat the menace of terrorism.
- The briefing will provide an opportunity for (UNSC) members to build on the recent deliberations of the Security Council’s Counter-Terrorism Committee meeting.

About UNSC

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

Composition

- The UNSC is composed of 15 members: 5 permanent and 10 non-permanent.
- Five permanent members: China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States.
- Ten non-permanent members: Elected for two-year terms by the General Assembly.
- Five from African and Asian States,
- One from Eastern European States,
- Two from Latin American States,
- Two from Western European and other States.

Japan unveils historic \$320 billion military build-up since World War II

In News

Japan recently unveiled its biggest military build-up since World War Two with a \$320 billion plan that will buy missiles capable of striking China.

About the plan

- The five-year plan, which is to be implemented with a total budget of 320 billion USD, will make Japan the third-largest military spender in the world after the United States and China.
- The catalyst for this decision may probably be Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and Beijing’s growing belligerence, which indicates the possibility of China capturing Taiwan in the future.
- There is also the threat of China’s claim over the uninhabited Senkaku Islands and the possibility of the Chinese takeover of those islands.

- Kishida's plan will double defence outlays to about 2% of gross domestic product over five years, blowing past a self-imposed 1% spending limit that has been in place since 1976.
- It will increase the defence ministry's budget to around a tenth of all public spending at current levels.

Significance

- Article 9 states that “the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes.
- A 2012 report by the International Institute for Strategic Studies found that Japan has the sixth-best funded defence forces in the world.
- As part of its overall security strategy, Japan is planning to boost its long-range strike capability with both imported and indigenous long-range weapons.
- This indicates that Japan is planning to maintain close ties with the United States and other like-minded countries, especially those in the Indo-Pacific.

India assumes chairmanship of the Wassenaar Arrangement

In News

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

Wassenaar Agreement

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

Objectives

- The group works by regularly exchanging information in respect of technology, both conventional and nuclear-capable, that is sold to, or denied to countries outside the grouping.
- This is done through maintenance and updating of detailed lists of chemicals, technologies, processes and products that are considered militarily significant.
- It aims at controlling the movement of technology, material or components to countries or entities which undermine international security and stability.

Significance

- The timing of India's WA chairmanship coincides with a recent increase in country's anti-terrorism position in international bodies.
- India is also actively engaging global stakeholders in curbing terrorist financing.
- As a chair of the plenary, India would be in a position to steer discussions of the group to further strengthen the export controls to prevent arms diversion to terrorists or to sovereign nations supporting terrorism.

- Strengthening the licensing and enforcement practices under the WA and adoption of new export controls in areas like flight technology, interception technology and digital investigation tools will pave the way for the creation of a strong anti-proliferation framework for South Asia.
- India can play a significant role in democratising access to technologies and processes that can serve as crucial building blocks for the newly emerging defence and space manufacturing sectors in India.

EU's Ursula von der Leyen tops Forbes' list of world's most powerful women

In News

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has topped Forbes' annual list of the world's most powerful women, with European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde in second.

2022 winners List

- The 2022 list consists of innovators and instigators who are leading the world to defy the conventional power structures, and create a lasting impact in every sphere of influence.
- The list is topped by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, who is currently representing 27 EU member states and their 450 million constituents.
- The 100th position is held by Iran's Mahsa Amini. She is the first to be included in the list posthumously. Amini lost her life in September this year while in the custody of Iran's morality police.
- Six Indian women featured on the 2022 list. These include Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Biocon Executive Chairperson Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, Nykaa founder Falguni Nayar, HCLTech Chairperson Roshni Nadar Malhotra, Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) Chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch and Steel Authority Of India Chairperson Soma Mondal.

Equal Access to Green Cards for Legal Employment (EAGLE) Act of 2022.

In News

- The White House supported US Congress to pass a law that seeks to eliminate the per-country quota on green cards to allow US-based employers to focus on hiring people based on merit and not birthplace.
- The House of Representatives is scheduled to vote on the Equal Access to Green Cards for Legal Employment (EAGLE) Act of 2022.

EAGLE Act

- Eliminate a per-country cap on employment-based green cards — a policy that disproportionately affects Indian immigrants
- If passed, this legislation would phase out the per-country caps over the course of nine years to ensure that eligible immigrants from less populated countries are not excluded
- It will allow individuals who have been waiting in the immigrant visa backlog for two years to file their Green Card applications
- Scrap the discriminatory system- The per-country cap on Green Cards is a relic of a discriminatory system that excluded Asian immigrants entirely in the past

Existing Rules

- Under existing rules, the US issues only 1.4 lakh green cards every year and there is a 7% cap on every country. This means just 9800 people per country are eligible for Green cards.
- If applicants from one country overshoot the cap, this results in a backlog.

- The petitions for Green cards beyond the cap are not considered until their petition falls within the initial 7% per country cap.

Benefits

- Will reduce the immigrant visa backlog
- Indian-Americans is set to benefit
- employers can focus on hiring people based on merit, not their birthplace
- The bill would also keep families together by ensuring that children of employment-based immigrants do not age out of dependent status

Presidency of G20, SCO, UNSC in 2022

In News

- India assumed the presidency of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on 1st December 2022.
- On the same day, the country also assumed the presidency of G20.

Focus of India as UNSC President

- India will focus on two major themes-
- **First** will be an all-encompassing theme focused on building a new orientation towards reformed multilateralism,
- while the **second theme** will focus on an approach towards global counter-terrorism.

G20 and its Objectives-

- The G20 or Group of 20 functions as an intergovernmental meeting, where states participate in discussions on different aspects of the global economy.
- It was formed during the 1990s when Southeast Asian economies were witnessing a financial crisis.
- It had a tremendous impact in the year 2008, when it helped reduce global panic caused by a restrained economy and restore economic growth.
- The meeting includes the European Union, and some of the world's largest economies among other nations. Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, EU, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, UK and USA comprise the G20.
- These countries, at present, "account for more than 80% of world GDP, 75% of global trade, and 60% of the global population.

just transition initiative

In News

Kenya and South Africa have announced an initiative to end plastic pollution in a way that is as fair and inclusive as possible to everyone concerned.

About the Initiative

- The Just Transition Initiative aims to phase out plastic in an inclusive manner so that the transition does not adversely affect the concerned stakeholders.
- It aims to create decent jobs for waste-pickers and other workers in the plastic value chain.
- The just transition means addressing the needs of everyone involved in the plastic value chain, including those employed under the informal and cooperative settings and recognizing their fundamental human dignity and historic contribution.

- It involves increasing the social and economic opportunities of ending plastic pollution while minimising and carefully addressing all challenges associated with the shift from plastic usage.

Why this initiative was launched?

- According to scientific research, humanity produces some 460 million metric tonnes of plastic each year.
- If actions are not taken against this, the plastic waste is expected to triple by 2060.
- A UNEP study found that over 14 million metric tonnes of plastic enters and damages aquatic ecosystems each year.
- The greenhouse gas emissions caused by plastics is expected to account for 15 per cent of the total emissions allowable by 2050 if the global warming is expected to be maintained at 1.5°C.

'Grammar's greatest puzzle'

In News

In his PhD thesis, Cambridge scholar Dr Rishi Rajpopat claims to have solved Sanskrit's biggest puzzle—a grammar problem found in the 'Ashtadhyayi', an ancient text written by the scholar Panini towards the end of the 4th century BC.

About Panini

- Panini probably lived in the 4th century BC, the age of the conquests of Alexander and the founding of the Mauryan Empire.
- He has also been dated to the 6th century BC, the age of The Buddha and Mahavira.
- He likely lived in Salatura (Gandhara), which today would lie in north-west Pakistan.
- Panini was probably associated with the great university at Taksasila, which also produced Kautilya and Charaka, the ancient Indian masters of statecraft and medicine respectively.

About Ashtadhyayi

- 'Ashtadhyayi', or 'Eight Chapters' - Panini's great grammar
- It is a linguistics text that set the standard for how Sanskrit was meant to be written and spoken.
- The Ashtadhyayi laid down more than 4,000 grammatical rules, couched in a sort of shorthand, which employs single letters or syllables for the names of the cases, moods, persons, tenses, etc. in which linguistic phenomena are classified.

What actually the problem is?

- Ashtadhyayi delves deep into the language's phonetics, syntax and grammar.
- It also offers a 'language machine', where you can feed in the root and suffix of any Sanskrit word, and get grammatically correct words and sentences in return.
- To ensure this 'machine' was accurate, Panini wrote a set of 4,000 rules dictating its logic.
- But as scholars studied it, they found that two or more of the rules could apply at the same time, causing confusion. To resolve this, Panini had provided a 'meta-rule' (a rule governing rules), **which had historically been interpreted as:**
- 'In the event of a conflict between two rules of equal strength, the rule that comes later in the serial order of the 'Ashtadhyayi' wins'.
- However, following this interpretation did not solve the machine's problem.
- It kept producing exceptions, for which scholars had to keep writing additional rules.

Solution

- In his thesis titled 'In Panini We Trust', Dr Rishi Rajpopat took a simpler approach, arguing that the meta-rule has been wrongly interpreted throughout history; what Panini actually meant, was that for rules applying to the left and right sides of a word, readers should use the right-hand side rule.
- Using this logic, he found that the 'Ashtadhyayi' could finally become an accurate 'language machine', producing grammatically sound words and sentences almost every time.
- The discovery now makes it possible to construct millions of Sanskrit words using Panini's system.

Global Tax

In News

European Union members have agreed to implement a minimum tax rate of 15% on big businesses in accordance with Pillar 2 of the global tax agreement framed by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 2021.

Global Minimum Tax Rate

- The global minimum corporate tax rate, or simply the global minimum tax, is a minimum rate of tax on corporate income internationally agreed upon and accepted by individual jurisdictions. Each country would be eligible for a share of revenue generated by the tax.
- The aim is to reduce tax competition between countries and discourage multinational corporations (MNC) from profit shifting to achieve tax avoidance.
- 136 countries had agreed on a plan to redistribute tax rights across jurisdictions and enforce a minimum tax rate of 15% on large multinational corporations.
- It is estimated that the minimum tax rate would boost global tax revenues by \$150 billion annually.

Need for such a tax

- Corporate tax rates across the world have been dropping over the last few decades as a result of competition between governments to spur economic growth through greater private investments.
- Global corporate tax rates have fallen from over 40% in the 1980s to under 25% in 2020, due to global tax competition that was kick-started by former U.S. President Ronald Reagan and former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s.
- The OECD's tax plan tries to put an end to this "race to the bottom" which has made it harder for governments to shore up the revenues required to fund their rising spending budgets. The minimum tax proposal is particularly relevant at a time when the fiscal state of governments across the world has deteriorated as seen in the worsening of public debt metrics.
- The global minimum tax is expected to generate around \$150 billion in new global tax revenues annually. The cumulative impact is that tax havens would no longer exist since taxes avoided in the haven would be collected at home.
- This means that if a company's earnings go untaxed or lightly taxed in one of the tax havens, their home country would impose a top-up tax that would bring the effective rate to 15%.

Impact on India

- India loses about \$10 billion to tax abuse through profit shifting every year — the second-largest tax revenue loss in Asia. India had already taken measures like equalisation levy, SEP rules, and the latest digital services tax to minimise tax evasion by foreign corporates.
- India had also gotten into Tax Information Exchange Agreements (TIEAs) with tax havens for access to information on tax enforcement. The enactment of GMCT requires India to take down these policies and switch to the proposed two-pillar international norms.

- Norms to put an end to tax evasion by corporates have been sought out by governments across the world. The GMCT has now given fresh hopes of fighting tax evasion globally.

India's 1st lithium-ion cell factory inaugurated in Andhra Pradesh

In News

The Minister of State for Electronics and Information Technology, Rajeev Chandrasekhar has launched the pre-production run of India's first lithium-ion cell manufacturing facility at Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh.

About Lithium cell plant

- This is the first time a real manufacturing operation for lithium-ion cells is happening in the country.
- The 15,000 sq mt lithium cell factory has come up on a 30-acre site with a Phase-1 investment of ₹165 crore.
- It will have an initial capacity of 270 MWh and can produce 20,000 cells of 10Ah capacity every day.
- The company has technical tie-ups with China-based Tianjin Lishen and BPI.
- Phase-1 production will cater to consumer electronics and digital products such as power banks, mobile phones, and wearable devices.
- The factory's capacity can serve about 60 per cent of the current requirement for power banks in India.
- The Phase-1 capacity can fetch a revenue of about ₹400-450 crore a year
- Presently, India is completely importing lithium-ion cells from China, South Korea, Vietnam, and Hong Kong. These imports would be in the range of ₹15,000-₹20,000 crore.
- Under Phase 2 and 3 expansion, the company will commence the establishment of additional capacity for energy storage systems and electric vehicles.
- This will entail an investment of ₹635 crore, taking the total investment to about ₹800 crore, and the total employment will increase to about 800.
- The company said it will produce cells based on OEM requirements with capacities ranging from 50 mAh to 10,000 mAh.

Spain, Scotland pass Gender Recognition Reform Bill

In News

- Scotland lawmakers have passed the Gender Recognition Reform Bill, which will now make it easier for above 16 years to legally change their gender.
- The passage of the controversial bill also removes the need for a medical diagnosis of gender dysphoria to obtain the certificate.

Spain Gender Recognition Bill

- The new Spanish law requires minors aged 12 and 13 years to receive the judge's authorization to change their gender.
- Those minors aged between 14 and 16 years will have to be accompanied by their parents or legal guardians.
- Up until now, Spanish transgender people are required to be diagnosed with gender dysphoria, which refers to the psychological condition of not feeling a match between one's biological sex and gender identity.
- Under the new legislation, any individual applying for a Gender Recognition Certificate must have lived full-time in the declared identity for 3 months (6 months in case they are aging between 16 and 17 years).
- The Bill has lowered the minimum eligibility age from 18 years to 16 years of age. It proposes a 3-month "reflection period" during which time the applicants can change their minds.
- It allows people aged 16 years and above to change their legal gender markers without medical supervision.

- The bill also proposes to ban the conversion therapies that seek to suppress sexual orientation or gender identity. It also seeks to impose fine and punishment on people attacking individuals belonging to LGBTQ community.

Scotland Gender Recognition Bill

- The passing of the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) bill makes Scotland the first country in the United Kingdom to approve the self-identification process for changing gender.
- It makes it easier for people as young as 16 years of age, to change their legally recognized gender.
- It also has similar features as that of Spain's Gender Recognition Reform Bill.

Indian System for Gender Identification

- In India, the transgender people's rights are governed by the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 and the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Rules, 2020.
- Under these rules, an application declaring gender is submitted to the District Magistrate.
- The individual applying for gender identification is not required to undergo medical examination for declaring the desired sex.
- The District Magistrate can process the application based on the affidavit submitted declaring the gender identity of an individual without medical or physical examination and provide an identification number to the applicant, which can be used as a proof of the application.

Russia, China Hold Joint Naval Drills In East China Sea

In News

Russian and Chinese warships recently practised joint action in the East China Sea, continuing a series of drills that reflect a growing defence cooperation between the two countries.

About the Joint Exercise

- The Varyag missile cruiser, the Marshal Shaposhnikov destroyer and two corvettes of Russia's Pacific Fleet were taking part in the drills.
- China has deployed two destroyers, a diesel submarine and several others ships for the exercise.
- The main goal of the drills is to strengthen naval cooperation between the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China and to maintain peace and stability in the Asia Pacific region.
- This joint exercise is directed at demonstrating the determination and capability of the two sides to jointly respond to maritime security threats and further deepen the China-Russia comprehensive new-era strategic partnership of coordination.

Benin Bronzes

In News

Germany has returned 20 Benin Bronzes that were looted in the 19th century to Nigeria at a ceremony that was held in Abuja, the country's capital recently.

Benin Bronzes

- From intricately decorated cast plaques to animal and human figurines, the Benin Bronzes are a group of over 3,000 sculptures and artworks from the ancient Kingdom of Benin in present-day Nigeria, which dates back to at least the 16th century.

- These historical pieces were looted by British colonial forces during their infamous raid on Benin City in 1897.
- Several of these pieces had been specially commissioned for the kings or Obas, and Queen Mothers of the kingdom.
- These artefacts provide insight into the culture of the Benin Kingdom as well as its relationships with neighbouring states.
- Some of these pieces also point to the kingdom's relationship with Europeans.
- They were looted by British colonial forces during the infamous raid on Benin City in 1897.
- These items will be displayed in a pavilion, which is being built in Benin City, next to the under-construction Edo Museum of West African Art — the ambitious project is being designed by the renowned British-Ghanaian architect Sir David Adjaye.

Other Looted Artefacts

- The Koh-i-Noor diamond, one of the largest and perhaps the most storied diamonds in the world, which was taken away by the British East India Company in 1849 and is now part of the British crown jewels.
- The other well-known example is the Rosetta Stone. Currently displayed at the British Museum, it is an ancient Egyptian stone that features the inscriptions that formed the basis of Egyptology itself.
- The stone was discovered by the army of Napoleon Bonaparte near the town of Rashid (Rosetta) in 1799 during the emperor's campaign to conquer Egypt.
- It was passed on to the British after they defeated the French in 1801.

Bomb Cyclone

In News

An intense blizzard/snowstorm/bomb cyclone is wreaking havoc across the United States and Canada.

Bomb Cyclone

- The amount of pressure loss within the low-pressure mass must be at least 24 millibars in 24 hours to be considered a bomb cyclone.
- As a result, the gradient between the two air masses, or pressure differential, increases quickly, strengthening the winds. Bombogenesis is the name given to this process of fast intensification.
- A cyclonic effect is created by the earth's rotation and the wind's movement.
- It is anticlockwise in the Northern Hemisphere, when viewed from above.
- All of the elements for a bomb cyclone were present over the Great Lakes, as the meandering polar vortex collided with unusually warm air to the east.
- As a severe storm weakened near the Great Lakes, it sparked blizzard conditions, including intense winds and snow, due to the rapid drop in atmospheric pressure.
- From the Canadian Great Lakes to the Rio Grande at the Mexican border, there may be extreme weather.

India-Bangladesh Friendship pipeline

In News

The India-Bangladesh Friendship pipeline (IBFPL) will start supplying diesel to Bangladesh on an experimental basis for June this year.

About IBFPL

- The 130-km India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline (IBFPL) project aims to import oil products from the Siliguri Marketing Terminal in West Bengal.
- As currently, fuel oil imported by Bangladesh is first unloaded from ships at the country's main seaport in Chattogram district and then transported to other parts of the country by tankers, which is time-consuming and costlier.
- India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline (IBFPL) project will enable fuel oil products to be exported from India's Siliguri Marketing Terminal in West Bengal State to Bangladesh.
- The IBFPL will export fuel from Assam-based Numaligarh Refinery Limited (NRL) via the Siliguri Marketing Terminal to Bangladesh.
- The capacity of the 130km oil pipeline will be one million metric tonnes per annum.
- According to the Dhaka-Delhi agreement, fuel oil would be transported for 15 years through the pipeline in the first phase and the term would be extended on the consensus of the countries.

Indus Waters Treaty

In News

India has issued a notice to Pakistan for modification of the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) that was brokered by the World Bank to facilitate the sharing of water of the Indus River system between the two countries.

Indus water treaty

- The Indus river basin has six rivers- Indus, Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas and Sutlej
- These rivers originate from Tibet and flow through the Himalayan ranges to enter Pakistan, ending in the south of Karachi.
- In 1947, the line of partition, aside from delineating geographical boundaries for India and Pakistan, also cut the Indus river system into two.
- Both the sides were dependent on water from the Indus river basin to keep their irrigation infrastructure functional and therefore, equitable distribution was needed.
- Initially, the Inter-dominion accord of May 1948 was adopted.
- According to this, both countries, after meeting for a conference, decided that India would supply water to Pakistan in exchange for an annual payment made by the latter.
- This agreement however, soon disintegrated as both the countries could not agree upon its common interpretations.
- In 1951, in the backdrop of the water-sharing dispute, both the countries applied to the World Bank for funding of their respective irrigation projects on the Indus and its tributaries.
- This is when the World Bank offered to mediate the conflict.
- Finally in 1960, after nearly a decade of fact-finding, negotiation, proposals by the World Bank and amendments to them, an agreement was reached between the two countries.
- The Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) was signed by former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and then President of Pakistan, Ayub Khan.
- The former Vice President of the World Bank, W.A.B. Iliff, also signed it.

Provisions of the treaty

- The treaty prescribed how water from the six rivers of the Indus River System would be shared between India and Pakistan.
- It allocated the three western rivers—Indus, Chenab and Jhelum—to Pakistan for unrestricted use.
- Barring certain non-consumptive, agricultural and domestic uses by India.

- The three Eastern rivers—Ravi, Beas and Sutlej—were allocated to India for unrestricted usage.
- This means that 80% of the share of water or about 135 Million Acre Feet (MAF) went to Pakistan, while leaving the rest 33 MAF or 20% of water for use by India.
- It also required both the countries to establish a Permanent Indus Commission constituted by permanent commissioners on both sides.
- The functions of the commission include serving as a forum for exchange of information on the rivers, for continued cooperation and as the first stop for the resolution of conflicts.
- While Pakistan has rights over the waters of Jhelum, Chenab and Indus.

Iran tests military drones in wargame near Strait of Hormuz

In News

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

Strait of Hormuz

- The Strait of Hormuz is located at the mouth of the Persian Gulf and is crucial to global energy supplies, with about a fifth of all oil traded at sea passing through it.
- The waterway separates Iran and Oman, linking the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea.
- The Strait is 33 km wide at its narrowest point, but the shipping lane is just three km wide in either direction.
- Most crude exported from Saudi Arabia, Iran, the UAE, Kuwait and Iraq – all members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) – is shipped through this waterway.
- It is also the route used for nearly all the Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) produced by the world's biggest LNG exporter, Qatar.

Austria Inks Pact with India to Return 'Illegal Migrants'

In News

Austria and India have signed a comprehensive migration and mobility partnership agreement that will facilitate the return of illegal migrants back to their country.

About MPPA

The main objective of the MPPA is to provide for the equal treatment of nationals of both Parties in similar situations, while also ensuring that the provisions of the Agreement do not prejudice the application of national laws on the stay of foreigners on all points not dealt with in the Agreement.

Significance

- It will help to curb illegal migration between India and Austria.
- In light of the sharp increase in illegal migration that Austria faced last year, including over 15,000 illegal migrants from India with practically no chance of asylum, the Agreement is seen as a useful tool to combat illegal migration together, as it enables the swift return of illegal migrants.

India to take over Asian Pacific Postal Union leadership

In News

India will take over the leadership of the Asian Pacific Postal Union (APPU) from this month.

About APPU

- Asian Pacific Postal Union (APPU) is an intergovernmental organisation of 32 member countries of the Asia-Pacific region.
- APPU is the only restricted union of the Universal Postal Union (UPU) in the region, which is a specialised agency of the United Nations.
- The goal of APPU is to extend, facilitate and improve postal relations between member countries and to promote cooperation in the field of postal services.
- As the regional center for various UPU projects, APPU also takes the lead in ensuring that all technical and operational projects of the UPU are fulfilled in the region so that the region is integrated into the global postal network in the best possible way.
- Secretary general leads the activities of the Union and is also the director of the Asian Pacific Postal College (APPC) which is the largest inter-governmental postal training institute in the region.
- **Headquarter-** Bangkok(Thailand)
- The Asia Pacific region generates around half of the global mail volume and has around one-third of the global postal human resource.
- This is the first time an Indian is leading an international organization in the postal sector.

India to host virtual 'Voice of Global South Summit'

In News

India announced recently it will host a virtual summit of developing countries next week to learn about their developmental challenges and priorities.

Global South Summit

- The Voice of Global South Summit, with the theme “**Unity of Voice, Unity of Purpose**”, will bring together countries of the Global South on a common platform .
- More than 120 countries are being invited to the summit, which will have two sessions for heads of State and government to be chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- The Summit is India's endeavour to provide a common platform to deliberate on these concerns that affect the developing nations.
- India will work to ensure that the valuable inputs generated from partner countries in the Voice of Global South deliberations receive due cognizance globally.
- India's ongoing G20 Presidency provides a special and strong opportunity to channelise these inputs into the deliberation and discourse of the G20.

U.S. 'Title 42' immigration policy

In News

The United States announced recently that it will extend COVID-19 pandemic-era restrictions, known as Title 42, to expel migrants from Nicaragua, Cuba and Haiti caught crossing the U.S.-Mexico border back to Mexico.

Title 42 Policy

- It is an immigration policy that was implemented by the U.S. health authorities in March 2020, during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The policy was implemented to allow border agents to rapidly send migrants crossing the U.S.-Mexico border back to Mexico or other countries.

Supreme court Rulings

- The CDC announced in April 2022 that it would end Title 42, stating that it was no longer needed to limit the spread of COVID-19 in light of vaccines and other medical advances.
- But a federal judge in Louisiana blocked the termination after a legal challenge brought by a group of two dozen U.S. states with Republican attorneys general who argued that increased migration would saddle their states with costs.
- After the Supreme court intervened and ruled to keep the policy in place as they consider the case, the Biden administration announced that it would be expanding Title 42 to include Nicaragua, Cuba, and Haiti.
- The expanding of the Title 42 policy will have significant consequences on migrants from these countries who will be blocked from seeking asylum in the United States.
- The legality of this policy expansion is also questionable and will likely be challenged in the courts.

Giving to Amplify Earth Action (GAEA)

In News

The World Economic Forum, in partnership with over 45 organizations, has launched the Giving to Amplify Earth Action (GAEA) initiative.

About GAEA Initiative

- It aims to leverage philanthropic capital to help drive the trillion dollar investments needed to tackle climate change and nature loss.
- It aims to deliver a new wave of public, private and philanthropic partnerships (PPPPs) that could help unlock trillions of dollars of financing for new low carbon and biodiversity protection projects globally.
- GAEA will now work with its founding members across three main objectives, which include working with leaders from the public, private, and philanthropic sectors to identify and target climate and nature solutions where they are best positioned to play a catalytic role;
- Pilot and refine funding models that can support PPPP interventions; and scale up and replicate successful approaches in new sectors and regions.

About WEF

- The World Economic Forum (WEF) is a Swiss non-profit organization that brings together leaders to discuss global issues.
- Founded in 1971 by Klaus Schwab
- Mission is to “improve the state of the world” by shaping global, regional, and industry agendas.
- WEF’s activities include publishing research reports, hosting events, and providing a platform for collaboration.

US launches programme allowing private ‘sponsorship’ of refugees

In News

The United States is launching a new programme that will allow groups of people and organisations in the US to “sponsor” refugees seeking sanctuary in the country.

About Welcome corps scheme

- It is a new initiative from the US government to provide support for refugees arriving in the country under the USRAP.

- Initially, the scheme will only be open to those refugees who have been approved by the US government and the goal is to get at least 1000 Americans to sponsor the refugees.
- The model is similar to the one used in Canada, known as the “**Refugee Cap**” program.
- The Welcome Corps scheme is seen as an effort by the Biden Administration to address these criticisms and provide support to refugees in a more direct way.
- The goal is to get at least 10,000 Americans to come forward as private sponsors for at least 5,000 refugees in the first year of the programme, which is similar to a model used in Canada.

UNESCO dedicates International Day of Education 2023 to Afghan girls, women

In News

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has decided to dedicate the International Day of Education 2023 to Afghan girls and women.

About the event

- On the occasion of the International Day of Education, on 24 January, UNESCO is hosting an event at the United Nations in New York.
- Currently, 2.5 million (80%) of school-aged Afghan girls and young women are out of school, 1.2 million of whom were denied access to secondary schools and universities following the decision of the de facto authorities.
- Since August 2021, UNESCO has adapted its interventions to support the continuity of education in challenging circumstances.
- The girls in Afghanistan are deprived of secondary education has cost the country's economy at least USD 500 million over the past 12 months, which amounts to 2.5 per cent of GDP.

China builds new dam in Tibet that could affect flows downstream

In News

China is building a new dam in Tibet on a tributary of the Ganga, close to the tri-junction of its borders with India and Nepal, that could be used to control the flow of water downstream.

About the Dam

- The Mabja Zangbo River flows into Nepal's Ghaghara or the Karnali River before it joins the Ganga River in India.
- 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 images clearly depict the obstruction of the river's path, the formation of a reservoir and an embankment-type dam.
- An airport is being constructed nearby as well.

Issues

- China can use this dam to not only divert but also store water which could lead to a scarcity in the regions dependent on the Mabja Zangbo river and also lead to lower water levels in rivers such as the Ghaghara and the Karnali in Nepal.

- Dams close to the border could be used by China to strengthen its claim on the disputed areas in the region.

Brahmaputra river

- The Yarlung Tsangpo is one of the world's largest transnational river systems.
- Originating in the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau in southwest China, it flows 2,900 kilometers across southern Tibet via the Himalayas, entering India, where it is called the Brahmaputra, through Assam and Arunachal Pradesh (which China claims as South Tibet).
- Many of the river's tributaries begin in China, while others start in Bhutan.
- The Brahmaputra is the most important of the rivers that transverse the Sino-Indian border.
- For both India and China, two of the world's most populous countries, the Brahmaputra is essential to their socioeconomic development.
- The river accounts for nearly 30 percent of India's freshwater resources and 40 percent of its total hydropower potential.

Bengaluru all set to host the first G20 Energy Transition Working Group Meeting

In News

- The first G20 Energy Transition Working Group (ETWG) Meeting under India's Presidency will be held in Bengaluru.
- The meeting will have over 150 participants including G20 member countries, nine special invitee guest countries – Bangladesh, Egypt, Mauritius, Netherlands, Nigeria, Oman, Singapore, UAE and Spain.

About ETWG

- The first ETWG meeting will focus on six priority areas.
- Energy transition through addressing technology gaps
- Low-cost financing for energy transition
- Energy security and diversified supply chains
- Energy efficiency, industrial low carbon transitions and responsible consumption,
- Fuels for Future (3F) and
- Universal access to clean energy and just, affordable, and inclusive energy transition pathway
- Leading international organizations such as The World Bank, Asian Development Bank, United Nations Development Program (UNDP), International Energy Agency (IEA), Clean Energy Ministerial (CEM), United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), International Solar Alliance (ISA) will be part of the Meeting.

India and G20

- The G20 Presidency for 2023 will pass to India. India will take over the G20 Presidency on December 1st, 2022.
- India will host nearly 200 meetings in 32 different sectors at various places all over the nation while it holds the G20 presidency.
- **G20 Theme:** "Vasudhaiva Kutumba-Kam," or "One Earth, One Family, One Future," is the focus of India's G20 Presidency.
- India will work to ensure that there is "just one world," not a "first world or third world."
- The G20 Theme embodies India's efforts to realise its vision of uniting the entire world in pursuit of a common goal and a better future.