

CURRENT AFFAIRS

WEEKLY

WEEK-2
NOVEMBER
2020

MAINS

- GS-I** ● La Niña Weather Phenomenon
- GS-II** ● Breaking the Balance of Power Trap
 - Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)
- GS-III** ● Education Pivot in India's Cooperation with BIMSTEC Countries
 - Fulfilling the SDG on Zero Hunger: A Progress Report on BIMSTEC Nations
 - U.S. has officially left the Paris Agreement
- GS-IV** ● Right to protest and Ethics

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 - On People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration
 - Three-Judge Panel of Madras HC Questions Validity of Special Courts To Try MPs, MLAs
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- ECONOMY** ● A secure future for Platform Workers
- ENVIRONMENT** ● More than 100 beached whales saved off Sri Lanka 8. The Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM)
 - WWF identifies 100 cities, including 30 in India, facing 'severe Water Risk' by 2050
- SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY** ● Fast Radio bursts detected in the Milky Way for the first time

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The current affairs articles are segregated from prelims and mains perspective, such separation is maintained in terms of structure of articles. Mains articles have more focus on analysis and prelims articles have more focus on facts.

However, this doesn't mean that Mains articles don't cover facts and PT articles can't have analysis. You are suggested to read all of them for all stages of examination.

CURRENT AFFAIRS ANALYST

WEEK- 2 (NOVEMBER, 2020)

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SECTION: A

(MAINS)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

LA NIÑA WEATHER PHENOMENON IS BACK

CONTEXT

The La Niña weather phenomenon is back in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean after nearly a decade's absence, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) said in its latest Global Seasonal update.

What is La Niña?

- La Niña means the large-scale cooling of ocean surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean, together with changes in the tropical atmospheric circulation, namely winds, pressure and rainfall.
- It has the opposite impacts on weather and climate as El Niño, which is the warm phase of the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO).

How is the strength of La Niña decided?

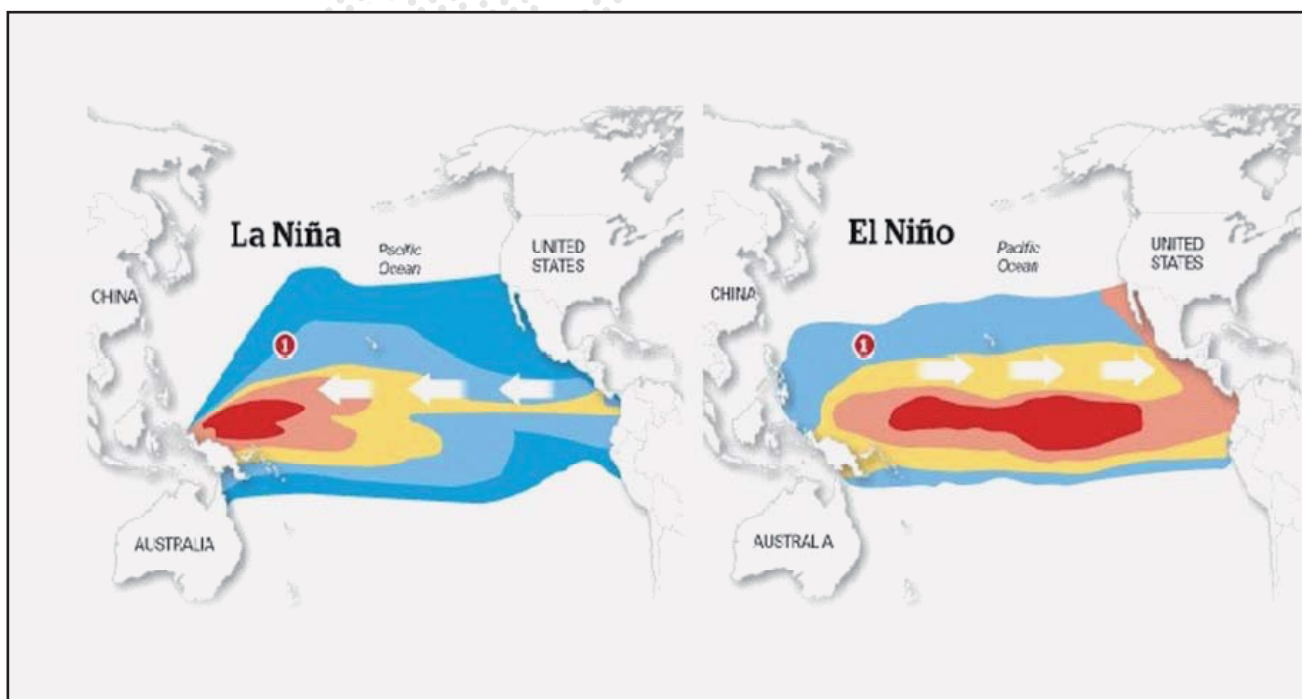
- The strength of a La Niña is determined by the degree of the sea surface temperature cool anomaly.
- Sea surface temperatures which are below average by a large margin rank a La Niña as strong.
- Whereas, sea surface temperatures that are slightly below average, which would rank a La Niña as weak.
- The El Niño and La Niña are important because of the impacts to the global moisture and circulation patterns, especially impacting the northern hemisphere in the winter.
- What causes La Niña?

- Lower sea surface temperatures:** La Niña is caused by a build-up of cooler-than-normal waters in the tropical Pacific, the area of the Pacific Ocean between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn.
- Stronger easterly trade winds:** Easterly trade winds are to be blamed for partly causing La Niña. El Niño is the opposite of La Niña. This occurs when the easterly trade winds become weaker and, in some cases, blows in the opposite direction. The Pacific Ocean during El Niño becomes warm, gains heat and pushes eastward.
- Upwelling:** Unusually strong, eastward-moving trade winds and ocean currents bring this cold water to the surface, a process known as upwelling.

What are the effects of La Niña?

Both El Niño and La Niña affect patterns of rainfall, atmospheric pressure, and global atmospheric circulation.

- Increased rainfall:** La Niña can contribute to increased rainfall. Rainfall associated with the summer monsoon in Southeast Asia tends to be greater than normal, especially in northwest India and Bangladesh. This generally benefits the



Indian economy, which depends on the monsoon for agriculture and industry.

- **Catastrophic floods:** However, strong La Niña events are associated with catastrophic floods in northern Australia.
 - The 2010 La Niña event correlates with one of the worst floods in the history of Queensland, Australia. More than 10,000 people were forced to evacuate, and damage from the disaster was estimated at more than \$2 billion.
 - La Niña events are also associated with rainier-than-normal conditions are over southeastern Africa and northern Brazil.
- **Decreased cloud production:** La Niña is also characterized by higher-than-normal pressure over the central and eastern Pacific. This results in decreased cloud production and rainfall in that region.
- **Drier than normal condition:** This phenomenon also causes drier conditions across equatorial East Africa
- **Improved marine ecosystem:** La Niña usually has a positive impact on the fishing industry of western South America. Upwelling brings cold, nutrient-rich waters to the surface. Nutrients include plankton eaten by fish and crustaceans. Higher-level predators, including high-value fish species such as sea bass, prey on the crustaceans.

El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) cycle

- The ENSO is an irregular periodic variation in the surface temperature of the water and winds over the Pacific Ocean.
- Aside from the sea-surface temperature of the Pacific Ocean, the ENSO has an impact on rainfall, temperature and wind patterns across the world.
- While La Niña is referred to as the cold phase of ENSO, El Niño is the warm phase of ENSO.
- Both La Niña and El Niño are deviations from the normal surface temperatures of the Pacific Ocean.
- Under La Niña conditions, winds blow the warm surface water of the Pacific Ocean westwards on the ocean's surface from South America to Indonesia.
- As the warm water moves, the cold water rises to the surface, which causes water in the eastern Pacific to be colder than normal.
- Climate-wise, in a La Niña year, winds blow much stronger during the winter, which makes the water near the equator a few degrees colder than normal.
- This change in the ocean's temperature impacts the weather across the world.

- La Niña and El Niño usually last between 9 and 12 months. While their frequency is fairly irregular, they take place every two to seven years. Typically, El Niño occurs more frequently than La Niña.

What will be the impacts?

- **Cooler sea surfaces:** La Niña will result in sea surface temperatures between two and three degrees Celsius cooler than average. However, 2020 is on track to be one of the warmest years on record and 2016-2020 is expected to be the warmest five-year period on record.
- **Affect on patterns:** La Niña could last into 2021, affecting temperatures, precipitation and storm patterns in many parts of the world.
- There is a high possibility (90 per cent) of tropical Pacific sea surface temperatures remaining at La Niña levels through the end of 2020 and maybe through the first quarter of 2021 (55 per cent).
- **Strong events:** The La Niña of 2020 is expected to be moderate to strong. The last time there was a strong La Niña event, was in 2010-2011, followed by a moderate event in 2011-2012. There were a series of floods in Pakistan and Northwest India in 2010 that were attributed to the weather phenomenon.
- What does that mean for Africa, Asia?
- The Horn of Africa and central Asia will see below average rainfall due to La Niña.
- East Africa is forecast to see drier-than-usual conditions, which together with the existing impacts of the desert locust invasion, may add to regional food insecurity.
- La Niña could also lead to increased rainfall in southern Africa. This was indicated by some recent seasonal forecast models.
- La Niña could also affect the South West Indian Ocean Tropical Cyclone season, reducing the intensity.
- Southeast Asia, some Pacific Islands and the northern region of South America are expected to receive above-average rainfall.

Impact of La Niña in India

- In India, La Niña means the country will receive more rainfall than normal, leading to floods.
- There are episodes of "frost in Mahabaleshwar" and "cold waves in hilly parts of Tamil Nadu and so on" can be associated with a La Niña.
- A La Niña can affect India's winter. The winds during the winter are from the northeast near the land surface and this is accompanied by **Southwesterly Jet** in the upper atmosphere.

- During an El Niño, this jet is pushed southward and this allows more western disturbance to bring rain and snow into northwestern India.
- But a La Niña actually produces a more north-south low pressure system which brings in Siberian air and the cold wave can extend much further south.

© CONCLUSION

2020 is already trending as one of the top two warmest years on record. Perhaps a cooling influence from an emerging La Niña will keep it out of the top spot, but will likely still be in the top 3 at least. Top spots on the warmest years list used to be reserved for the strong El Niño years, but human influences have long since overwhelmed the planet's natural temperature regulators.



BREAKING THE BALANCE OF POWER TRAP'

CONTEXT

As the ongoing negotiations between India and China fail to end the impasse in Ladakh, the demand for New Delhi to play the "Tibet card" to force Beijing to disengage is gaining salience. India briefly opened the card by deploying the Special Frontier Force (SFF), consisting of Tibetan refugees, to capture crucial heights along the southern bank of the Pangong Lake.

◎ BACKGROUND

- Tensions between India and the People's Republic of China (PRC) have remained high ever since violent clashes occurred in the Galwan Valley region in mid-June, resulting in the deaths of 20 Indian Army soldiers and an undisclosed number of People's Liberation Army (PLA) troops.
- A significant new development occurred on the night of August 29-30, when the Indian Army took control of strategic heights at the southern bank of the **Pangong Tso**, a lake in eastern Ladakh that straddles the Line of Actual Control (LAC), the de facto border between India and China.
- The operation was significant: it was the first time since the eruption of tensions along the LAC in May that the Indian Army preempted the Chinese from unilaterally altering the status quo.
- Participating in this operation alongside regular Indian Army units were soldiers of the **Special Frontier Force (SFF)**, an elite paratrooper unit that draws its personnel mainly from among the Tibetan exile community in India.
- Tibet has been a perennial pet cause for the country's right-wing conservatives and liberals alike since 1950, when the Chinese Communist Party entered to extend its rule over the Tibetan territory.
- Both have ensured that Tibet's freedom remains entrenched in the Indian public mind as a nationalist cause.
- Tibet is more of a political rather than a security problem for India. Tibet was one small element in the British strategy to preserve and expand its empire.

◎ ANALYSIS

What is the Special Frontier Force (SFF)?

- The SFF was raised by the **Intelligence Bureau** in the immediate aftermath of the **1962 China-India war**.
- The covert outfit recruited Tibetan exiles (now it has a mixture of Tibetans and Gorkhas) and was initially named **Establishment 22** (Major Gen Sujjan Singh Uban, an Artillery officer who

raised the group, named it after the 22 Mountain Regiment he commanded).

- SFF units, also known as Vikas battalions, come under the direct purview of the **Cabinet Secretariat**.
- It is operationally involved with the Army.
- The force and is headed by a **Major General** rank Army officer, who serves as **Inspector General** of the SFF.
- The SFF has played an important role in multiple military operations — from the 1971 India-Pakistan war to the 1999 Kargil battle — but has largely functioned under the shadows.

India, China, and the Tibetans

- India and China became neighbors only after the PRC's annexation of Tibet in 1950.
- Underlying India and China's differences on their border are their varying perceptions of the **1913-1914 Simla Convention**, which established the **McMahon Line**—the border demarcation between Tibet and then-British India, and currently the northern border of the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh.
- The PRC maintains that Tibet was not a sovereign state and therefore not a legitimate signatory to the agreement reached on the McMahon Line, which India treats as its legal national border with China.
- Complicating the border issue and bilateral relations is the status of the Tibetans.
 - ▶ In 1959, when the PLA crushed an uprising in Lhasa, the 14th Dalai Lama and tens of thousands of his Tibetan followers fled to India.
 - In the decades since, several waves of Tibetans have crossed into India.
 - There are around 100,000 Tibetans living in India today, and the headquarters of the Tibetan government-in-exile—the Central Tibetan Authority (CTA)—is situated in the northern Indian city of Dharamsala.
- This puts India squarely in the middle of the China-Tibet conflict.

Quick history of Tibet

- Until 1949, Tibet was an independent Buddhist nation in the Himalayas which had little contact with the rest of the world.
- It existed as a rich cultural storehouse of the Mahayana and Vajrayana teachings of Buddhism.
- Religion was a unifying theme among the Tibetans -- as was their own language, literature, art, and world view developed by living at high altitudes, under harsh conditions, in a balance with their environment.
- The peaceful buddhist country of Tibet was invaded by Communists China in 1949. Since that time, over 1.2 million out of 6 Tibetans have been killed, over 6000 monasteries have been destroyed, and thousands of Tibetans have been imprisoned.
- In Tibet today, there is no freedom of speech, religion, or press and arbitrary dissidents continue.

Assessing India's foreign policy in the British era

- The Indian strategic elite (opposed to Jawaharlal Nehru's China policy from 1950 to 1955) pitched for Tibet to be the lynchpin of India's foreign policy.
 - ▶ The elite did not claim the Tibetan land, but they wanted to deny it to China.
- The British strategy was never designed to keep China out of Tibet.
- The **1904 military invasion** of Tibet, led by **Francis Younghusband**, exposed the fallacy of Tibet's richness.
- The British understood the futility of annexing or making financial commitments to manage Tibet.
- Even the king of Nepal, when asked to provide military support to Lhasa, refused the British request by stating the "game would not be worth the candle".
- The British did not want to take direct control of Tibet. Their strategy was to prevent the Russians from moving into Tibet.
- Since Nepal was not inclined to expend its resources in managing Tibet, therefore, the best option for the British was to allow the Chinese to handle Tibet, but with truncated sovereignty, which was clearly termed as "suzerainty."

Independent India's strategy

- Independent India's obsession with Tibet began after the arrival of communism in mainland China, in 1949.

- The Indian centre-right political class in collaboration with the Americans revived the Tibet issue from where the British had left.
- Initially, Nehru, in tune with the British Commonwealth policy of appeasing Mao Zedong's China, resisted interfering in Tibet and refrained from generating unnecessary animosity against communist China.
- However, in the mid-1950s, as the United States (US) became directly involved in fomenting rebellion in Lhasa, Nehru capitulated and provided moral and material support to the Americans, thus compromising his external policy of non-alignment, and the China policy based on the Panchsheel principles landed up on the chopping block.
- Almost the entire political class in India was gung-ho for giving asylum to the Dalai Lama and quasi-alignment with the US against China.

India-China & the military debacle

- It is in this period that a road from Aksai Chin, connecting Xinjiang to Tibet, became an all-important security concern for the Indians.
- Suddenly, the India-China borders became contentious.
- Former Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai, during his visit to India in 1960, offered to recognise the McMahon Line boundary in the east in return for India accepting China's claim in the west.
- India rejected the proposals and got sucked into fighting a frivolous war.
- The military debacle, however, brought a political windfall for the floundering Indian right-wing.
- The anti-emergency movement led by Jayaprakash Narayan (JP) against Indira Gandhi was not the first opening that the RSS and Jana Sangh got to gather legitimacy and enter the mainstream political framework.
 - ▶ It is in the early 1950s that JP started forging the liberal-conservative alliance using the pretext of the communist takeover of Tibetan territory.
 - ▶ The right wing with limited involvement in India's freedom struggle saw the border crisis as an opportunity to prove its nationalist credentials.
- Ever since then, both Tibet and border issues with China have continued to act as a glue binding the conservatives and liberals into a single political strand.
- The defeat in the 1962 war continues to linger in the Indian psyche simply because it serves a political purpose, just as Kashmir continues to be

milked by Pakistani military elite to sustain their political power.

- ▶ Then PM Jawahar Lal Nehru's forward policy to define the Indian border with the Tibet Autonomous Region of China, the decision to provide shelter to 14th Dalai Lama after he crossed over on March 31, 1959, was one of the key reasons behind the 1962 border war.
- **Politics of Balance of Power**
- Tibet has as much traction in India's strategic discourse as Kashmir receives in Pakistan.
- Tibet and Kashmir have been the chief reason for the disruption of peace in the region for the last seven decades and for the lingering Anglo-American imperial influence.
- New Delhi and Islamabad's obsession with Tibet and Kashmir, respectively, is bizarre, especially when both have enough domestic problems—poverty, social strife, and inequality—to tackle.
 - ▶ Kashmir provides the *raison d'être* for Pakistani military elite; however, what motivates the Indian elite's preoccupation with Tibet is not clear.
- Unlike Pakistan that obdurately clings to exploiting the Kashmir card, India has been wiser to understand the explosive potential of the Tibetan issue.
- A good example of subcontinental balancing was observed in 1998.
- After the **Pokhran-II nuclear tests**, George Fernandes, the then defence minister and the poster boy of liberal-conservative bonhomie, declared China as "enemy number one."
- His pronouncements were aimed at signalling to Washington that India was ready to balance China.
- A few days after the Indian tests, Pakistan tested its nuclear capability, but the US, the non-proliferation evangelist, conveniently turned a blind eye, thus restoring the nuclear balance in the region.
- The paradox is that the Indian government, a victim of BoP, expediently subscribes to the theory and considers it useful against China.
- Ironically, of late, China has also entered the BoP fray in the region and it is emulating the US in exploiting Pakistan to balance India.
- India and Pakistan, the second and the 11th biggest arms importers in the world in the period 2014–19, respectively, are incessantly involved in proving the efficacy of BoP theory right, paying scant regard to the fact that contested borders and fractured regional peace are the Anglo-American imperial management tools.

What is India's official position on Tibet?

- Prime Minister Nehru signed the **Panchsheel Agreement** with China for trade between India in Tibet in 1954, based on non-interference in each other's internal affairs.
- Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee recognised the **Tibetan Autonomous Region** as a part of China in 2003.
 - ▶ Vajpayee was a visionary and he did not kowtow to China to have his name engraved in history. He understood how milking the Tibetan issue would curtail strategic autonomy and suck India deeper into the ensuing Sino-US rivalry.
- However, despite New Delhi's official position on Tibet, many in India continue to consider China as an imperial power in the occupation of Tibet.

India & Tibet's connection

India and Vietnam, with historical roots in the common struggle for liberation from colonial rule and the national struggle for independence, share traditionally close and cordial bilateral relations.

- **Strong cultural integrity:** The geographic contiguity of India and Tibet provided strong cultural integrity for extremely long periods of time as Tibet housed India's most revered Lord Shiva and Mata Parvati.
- **Buddhist heritage:** Another strongest bond which binds Tibet and India together is the Buddhist heritage.
- **Diaspora:** India has the largest Tibetan population in exile, the Dalai Lama calls himself a proud son of India.
- **Bilateral relations:** There are several bilateral mechanisms at different levels between India and Vietnam.
- **Investment:** India's investments in Vietnam are estimated at around US\$ 1.9 billion including investments routed through third countries. As of 2019, Vietnam has six investment projects in India with total estimated investment of US\$ 28.55 million, primarily in the areas of pharmaceuticals, information technology, chemicals and building materials.
- **Cultural cooperation:** The Swami Vivekananda Indian Cultural Centre was established in Hanoi in September 2016 to promote a comprehensive understanding of India and to foster closer links between peoples of both countries through cultural exchanges.
- The strategic importance of Tibet cannot be overemphasised. It is the roof of the world, with vast mineral and natural resource

© CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Given China's extreme prickliness on the Tibet issue, India's use of the "Tibet card" is unlikely to prompt or pressure it to vacate territories on the Indian side of the LAC that it occupied in recent months. Rather, Beijing will see it as a provocation—a move aimed

not just at embarrassing it, but also weakening its control over Tibet. Unlike earlier Indian attempts at projecting New Delhi's closeness to the Dalai Lama, the SFF poses a real threat to China, as it could inspire young Tibetans to once again rebel against Beijing. India can expect a strong rejoinder from China in the coming time.



TREATY ON THE PROHIBITION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS (TPNW)

CONTEXT

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), or the Nuke Ban Treaty, is set to enter into force soon.

◎ BACKGROUND

- In 2016, the U.N. General Assembly decided to hold a conference for the negotiation of the treaty.
- The conference took place in March 2017.
- The treaty was subsequently adopted at the United Nations on July 7, 2017 and was opened for signature by the U.N. Secretary General on September 20, 2017.
- When Honduras ratified the treaty in late October, it reached the requisite 50 ratifications, and is set to enter into force on January 22, 2021.
- ▶ All other NPT members are obligated, subject to safeguards monitored by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), not to acquire nuclear weapons.
- Similarly, members of the TPNW are obligated not to acquire nuclear arms subject to IAEA safeguards, and the importance of the NPT to international peace and security is recognized in the preamble to the TPNW.
- But the TPNW goes further than the NPT: Any member of the TPNW is barred from "inducing" a state to use or threaten nuclear weapons on its behalf.

◎ ANALYSIS

What is TPNW?

- The TPNW contains provisions that prohibit states from participating in any nuclear weapons-related activities including development, testing, possession, stockpile, use, or threat of use of nuclear weapons.
- Signatories are required "to prevent and suppress any activity prohibited under the TPNW undertaken by persons or on territory under its jurisdiction or control."
- The Treaty also obliges States parties to provide adequate assistance to individuals affected by the use or testing of nuclear weapons, as well as to take necessary and appropriate measure of environmental remediation in areas under its jurisdiction or control contaminated as a result of activities related to the testing or use of nuclear weapons.
- In contrast, some 30 members of the NPT are in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or other alliances in which US nuclear weapons are explicitly part of defense postures.
- US nuclear weapons are even stationed on the territory of five NATO states, a practice specifically barred by the TPNW.
- So far, no member of a nuclear alliance has signed or ratified the TPNW, nor have any of the nine nuclear-armed states (the five NPT nuclear weapon states plus India, Israel, North Korea, and Pakistan).

The TPNW & the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)

- The NPT has 191 states parties, making it one of the most widely subscribed to international agreements.
 - ▶ Five states parties (China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, United States) are acknowledged to possess nuclear weapons pending their elimination pursuant to Article VI of the treaty.

What are nuclear weapons? Which countries possess them?

- Nuclear weapons release huge amounts of radiation - which can cause radiation sickness - so their actual impact lasts longer than the blast.
 - ▶ They have only ever been used twice in history - against Japan in 1945 during World War II where they caused huge devastation and enormous loss of life.
- The radiation from the bomb dropped on the city of Hiroshima lasted several months and killed an estimated 80,000 people.

- And the bomb dropped on **Nagasaki** killed more than 70,000 people.
 - They haven't been detonated in war since then.
- Nine countries currently have nuclear weapons: the US, UK, Russia, France, China, India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea.

What is India's stand on the treaty?

India had rejected the treaty for two main reasons.

- **Not negotiated in the right forum:** First, because it was not negotiated in the right forum or in the right manner.
 - India believes that the appropriate forum for negotiating complex dimensions of nuclear elimination is the Conference on Disarmament, a UN body comprising 65 nations, that follows consensus-based decision making. India considers it critical to take all stakeholders along on this subject.
 - Not doing so could result in an outcome unacceptable to key players, as seems to have happened with the TPNW.
- **Lack of attention to important areas:** India's second criticism has been on lack of attention to issues of verification and compliance.
 - The treaty exhorts NWP to join by removing nuclear weapons "from operational status immediately and to destroy them in accordance with a legally binding, time-bound plan..."

- However, these terminologies are not defined. Nor does the treaty establish who would monitor and certify progress of elimination as per schedule, or how non-compliance would be addressed.

With such fundamental questions left unanswered, India found the treaty insufficient to promote real disarmament.

◎ CLOSURE

Movement towards nuclear elimination may best be started through steps that seek to reduce the salience of nuclear weapons. Human nature rebels against giving up anything to which it attaches value. So, by reducing the worth of nuclear weapons, nations may be persuaded to eliminate their arsenals. Such value reduction may be possible by encouraging doctrines that constrict the role of nuclear weapons to nuclear deterrence alone; by showcasing the military futility of use of such weapons; by universalising no first use; or, by first prohibiting the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. As weapons fall into disuse as a result of these measures, their elimination will become possible.

- The occasion of entry into force of the TPNW can be best utilised to give serious thought to steps that help attain its deeper objective. This would be in the interest of all states—nuclear and non-nuclear.

EDUCATION PIVOT IN INDIA'S COOPERATION WITH BIMSTEC COUNTRIES

CONTEXT

It is argued that nurturing the education link within BIMSTEC can play a transformative role in augmenting people-to-people contact and cementing a more fruitful regional connectivity.

◎ BACKGROUND

- Education and culture have historically provided essential links of connectivity between India and the member states of BIMSTEC.
- The Jataka tales, scriptures, inscriptions, palm-leaf records and accounts of foreign travellers testify to Takshashila, Nalanda and Vikramshila attracting scholars from the region in ancient times.
- While progress has been achieved—to which India has contributed considerably—there remains plenty of unfulfilled potential.*
- BIMSTEC not only connects South and South-East Asia, but also the ecologies of the Great Himalayas and the Bay of Bengal. With shared values, histories, ways of life, and destinies that are interlinked, BIMSTEC represents a common space for peace and development. For India, it is a natural platform to fulfill our key foreign policy priorities of "Neighbourhood First" and "Act East".

- Its members include Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand.
- It came in existence in 1997 through the Bangkok Declaration.
- Initially, it was formed with four Member States with the acronym 'BISTEC' (Bangladesh, India, Sri-Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation). In 1997, Myanmar joined it and in 2004, Nepal and Bhutan became its members.

◎ ANALYSIS

India-BIMSTEC

- This organization has been very significant for India with the point of view of regional cooperation after the China's influence in countries around Bay of Bengal, reduction of significance of SAARC after the difference between India and Pakistan.*
- The organization is also relevant to fulfill the political and economic developments through its various East concentrated policies such as Act East policy.*
- India is also leading some of the crucial causes in terms of Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime, Transport and Communication, Tourism and Environment and Disaster Management.*

BIMSTEC

- The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is a regional multilateral organization with 7 members.
- Its members lie in the littoral and adjacent areas of the Bay of Bengal forming a regional unity among the member states.

A significant pivot around Education

- Since Independence, India became the world's second-largest provider of higher education and continued to attract students from the BIMSTEC countries.
- The maximum number of students come from Nepal followed by Bangladesh and Bhutan.
- Bhutan**- Approximately 4,000 Bhutanese students currently study in undergraduate courses in Indian universities. These students are either self-financed or dependent on Indian government scholarships.
- Bangladesh**- "Education for All," outlined in the Statement of Intent of 7 June 2015, made India and Bangladesh allies in education. A high-level India-Bangladesh Education Dialogue, with representatives from the government, academia and business, promotes strategic institutional partnerships in science, engineering, social sciences, humanities, and gender studies.
- Myanmar**- In 2012, the then, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Myanmar explored stronger educational cooperation between the two countries. India proposed a new LoC of US\$500 million to Myanmar for fostering bilateral linkages, partly to support educational links and assist Myanmar in capacity-building.
- Nepal**- Through the Indian embassy in Kathmandu, India provides around 3,000 scholarships/seats annually to Nepalese nationals, for studying at plus-2 level, as well as for undergraduate and postgraduate courses in engineering, medicine, agriculture, pharmacology, veterinary sciences, computer application, business administration, music, and fine arts.
- Sri-Lanka**- "India-Sri Lanka Knowledge Initiative" was launched following Sri Lankan

President Mahinda Rajapaksa's visit to India during 8–11 June 2010. India offered Sri Lanka the use of its satellites for societal services.

- **Thailand**—By 2017–18, the Government of India was offering 75 scholarships to Thai students under its various schemes. Additionally, there are Thai students who fund their own studies in India.

A better cooperation is needed

- BIMSTEC was conceived as a regional grouping to "provide a fertile ground for cooperation" and be "a source of sharing and learning among members of the group, for which educational cooperation remains the *sine qua non*."
- Unfortunately, a viable and effective mechanism is yet to be developed for cooperation between the BIMSTEC nations within a regional framework.
- India could start a new initiative for education cooperation within the region, drawing lessons from the bilateral education relationships that already exist within the group.
- New Delhi could begin regarding BIMSTEC as an alternative to SAARC whose progress is stalled by tensions involving Pakistan.
- This is particularly required at a time when China is seeking to draw in its net four of India's BIMSTEC's neighbouring partners—Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar and Sri Lanka.
- It was perhaps in this context of this perceived necessity for India to provide a leadership to the organization.
- New Delhi must recognise this and take corrective measures, so that the current share of 47,427 foreign students among the 37.4 million enrolled students in the country's higher education sector

can be significantly increased, especially from the BIMSTEC countries.

Significance of the cooperation

- This brief examined trends and mechanisms at the bilateral level to extrapolate the benefits of cooperation amongst the BIMSTEC nations in the area of education, and explore the unfulfilled potential of such linkages.
- Such educational links will not only contribute to sustainable development in the region but also aid cultural reconnection.
- The knowledge sharing around education and technology would work well in the favour of India and BIMSTEC as well.
- In this context, fostering educational cooperation within the BIMSTEC can play a transformative role in enhancing people-to-people contact, as well as creating closer and more constructive regional links.
- The imperative is to make BIMSTEC a dynamic regional grouping whose successes can produce a multiplier impact on world politics.

◎ CONCLUSION

BIMSTEC brings together 1.5 billion people – 21% of the world population, and a combined GDP of over US\$ 2.5 trillion. In the view of the current perspective of global protectionism and over-nationalism, this organization can help India to harness the regional potential and to lead the sub-region. Still, a lot more areas are lying ahead for cooperation and mutual benefit with education and culture among one of them. India should be more proactive in helping BIMSTEC address these gaps in the coming years to make it a more dynamic regional grouping.

FULFILLING THE SDG ON ZERO HUNGER: A PROGRESS REPORT ON BIMSTEC NATIONS'

CONTEXT

- In 2019, BIMSTEC reiterated SDG goals, noting that “agricultural cooperation among BIMSTEC Member States can contribute to food and nutritional security, farmers’ prosperity, job creation, poverty alleviation and enhanced agricultural trade and investment.”
- Here is the assessment of the progress (or lack of it) that the BIMSTEC states have achieved in reducing poverty, and promoting food security and nutrition outcomes.

◎ BACKGROUND

- In 2015, all United Nations member states adopted the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which are especially relevant for South Asian countries whose development challenges are daunting.
- The countries of BIMSTEC, or the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation, are working to translate the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into action plans to ensure access to adequate and nutritious food.
- They are transforming their food systems based on their priorities and capacities to fulfill, in particular, the **2030 SDG Goal 2** that aims to “end hunger, achieve food security, and promote sustainable agriculture.”
- There are crucial gaps, however, and the BIMSTEC states need transformative action to overcome them.

◎ ANALYSIS

Poverty, Food Security and Nutrition

- Across the world, those who live in poverty suffer from food insecurity, and lack of education, healthcare, and other essential needs.
- The World Bank estimates that 40 to 60 million people will fall into extreme poverty in 2020, with incomes under US\$1.90 per day.
- The global poverty rate could rise to nine percent in 2020, or a 0.4-percent increase from 2019.
- This is the result of various factors including the burgeoning global population and resulting scarcity of resources, as well as the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation

- The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is a subregional forum established in 1997.
- The member states include:
 - ▶ five from South Asia (India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka)
 - ▶ two from Southeast Asia (Myanmar and Thailand)
- The 4th BIMSTEC summit in 2018 identified 14 pillars of cooperation, including agriculture, public health, poverty alleviation, and climate change.
 - ▶ It also called for intensifying cooperation towards attaining food and nutrition security in the region.
- All of the BIMSTEC countries are categorised as either low- or middle-income.
 - ▶ The majority of the poor in these countries live in rural areas, lack formal education, and are often employed in the agricultural sector.
 - ▶ Large populations in these countries continue to lack adequate access to education, healthcare, electricity, sanitation, and clean drinking water, and have low levels of nutrition and overall health.
 - ▶ Indeed, by 2018 data, more than half of all stunted children under the age of five live in Asia.
 - ▶ South Asian countries, overall, account for 36 percent of those living in extreme poverty in the world and suffer from various other deprivations and development gaps.
 - ▶ Twelve percent of the Asian region’s population, or 490 million people, are undernourished, most of them from South Asia.

- Given that South Asia is home to these large populations of the global poor, achieving the global SDGs becomes an impossible task without progress in the region.

Which regions have the highest poverty rate?

- The poverty rate in the region, however, is still considerably higher (based on 2013 figures) than those of East Asia, the Pacific, Eastern Europe, Central Asia, the Middle East, and North America.
- Asia, a facet of poverty that has become magnified in recent years is its being highly urban.
- In most of developing Asia, such as in India, Bangladesh, and other BIMSTEC member countries, urbanisation has been accompanied by the growth of slums, worsening living conditions, increasing food insecurity, and severe pollution risks.
- According to the UN-Habitat, Asia has 60 percent of the world's slum population, excluding the many more who live in slum-like conditions that are not officially categorised as such.
- The BIMSTEC region remains among the poorest in the world. World Bank data on Poverty Headcount Ratio records a high of 25.2 in Nepal, followed by 24.8 and 24.3 in Myanmar and Bangladesh, respectively.
- India is at 21.9**, Thailand, 9.9; Bhutan, 8.2; and Sri Lanka, 4.1. Per capita GDP is low and other socioeconomic indicators of poverty remain high.

Issues

- Stunting:** Stunting rates to be highest in India at 38 percent, followed by Bangladesh and Nepal (36 percent) and Bhutan and Myanmar at 34 and 29 percent, respectively.
- Wasting:** Another indicator of malnutrition, wasting, is highest in India, and has not improved for the past decades.
- Overweight:** Overweight in under-five children is also a cause of concern. Bhutan and Thailand, at eight percent of under-five children, have the highest incidence in the region.
- Anaemia:** There is a high prevalence of anaemia in women (15-49 years) in most of the BIMSTEC countries. India tops the list at 51 percent, followed by Myanmar (46 percent) and Bangladesh (40 percent).

Assessing the health outcomes

- Child Health:** Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand have all improved in their rankings of under-five mortality rates since 1990.
 - The greatest progress has been seen in Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal.
 - Both India and Myanmar have gone from fourth and fifth rank, respectively, amongst BIMSTEC members in 1990, to being second and first in 2015.
- Maternal Health:** Across all seven BIMSTEC countries, there has been a steady decline in the maternal mortality rate.
 - Nepal saw the greatest decline in maternal mortality from 553 per 100,000 live births in 2000 to 186/100,000 live births in 2017.
 - Overall, the gradual decline in maternal mortality across the BIMSTEC member states in the past two decades, indicates the level of growth and development in their healthcare delivery.
- Water, Sanitation, Hygiene:** In terms of sanitation, some BIMSTEC countries have made more significant progress than others.
 - India and Nepal have increased the percentage of people using at least basic sanitation services by 43 percent and 46 percent, respectively.
 - Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Thailand have also made steady improvements in the proportion of their populations accessing basic sanitation services.
 - Myanmar, however, has seen a regression. Myanmar's health system is financed largely by the government.

What is the progress on SDGs?

- Most recent available data suggest that the South Asian region, comprising the majority of BIMSTEC members, is far from being on-track in accomplishing the SDGs.
- Indeed, the fulfillment of these goals has little correlation with both levels of per capita income and degree of development, as seen in the case of India.
 - As the largest and most diversified economy in the region, it unfortunately has recorded poorer performance compared to its fellow BIMSTEC members.
- Bhutan and Nepal, for example—both with lower levels of development than India—have achieved significantly greater progress towards the SDGs.

- The only SDG which all BIMSTEC states appear to be on-track to achieving is the goal of **eliminating poverty**, the metric for which is living below a minuscule \$1.90 per day.
- In all other goals, all BIMSTEC countries have recorded moderate progress that is inadequate for meeting the goals by 2030.
- With the current rate of progress in the region, overall, 14 out of the 17 SDGs will be missed by the BIMSTEC countries by 2030.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has only enhanced the risks of falling short. According to the *Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020*, the 15-year effort of people across the globe attempting to achieve the 17 SDGs was already off-track by the end of 2019.
- Among the BIMSTEC countries, **Thailand is the best performer with a score of 74.5; the poorest is India at 61.9.**

Why South Asia is important for SDG?

- The 17 SDGs and the 169 specific targets are particularly relevant for South Asia—after all, the region is home to a huge 36 percent of the world's impoverished, and nearly half of all undernourished children.
- With South Asian countries, including member states of BIMSTEC, holding such a weight on their shoulders, global progress on the SDGs cannot be achieved without success in the region.
- It is a difficult task, given that South Asia, and particularly India, failed to meet the predecessor Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Government Policies on Nutrition:

- **Nepal:** In 2018, Nepal enacted the **Multi-Sector Nutrition Plan-II**, with the aim of improving maternal, adolescent, and child nutrition by scaling up essential nutrition interventions to improve nutritional status of under-five children, lower incidence of low birth weight, and reduce energy-deficiency in women.
- **Bhutan:** Bhutan articulates its development plans every five years. Currently on their 12th five-year plan, Bhutan aims to achieve 16 "national key result areas" that are based on regional and international commitments, including the UN SDGs.
 - Bhutan's food and nutrition security policy, enacted in 2014, acknowledges the need for a multisectoral approach to ensuring nutrition security.
- **Bangladesh:** Bangladesh enacted its **National Nutrition Policy** in 2015 with the goal of preventing and controlling malnutrition, and improving nutritional status especially of the women and children.
- **Sri Lanka:** As a country in economic transition, Sri Lanka is also undergoing a nutrition transition and faces a triple burden: overnutrition, undernutrition, and micronutrient deficiencies.
 - Since the UN adopted the 2030 SDGs, Sri Lanka has seen progress in their food insecurity issues through the **Thripasha Program** that was introduced long ago, in 1970.
- **Thailand:** Since adopting the SDGs, Thailand has integrated a framework for food security in its policies with a National Food Safety and Nutrition plan.
- **India:** India's national nutrition strategy is critical if the country is to achieve the SDGs.
 - **High levels of maternal and child undernutrition** have continued in India despite efforts from the government and legislators' policy, plan and programme commitments.
 - The **National Nutrition Strategy**, first adopted in 1993, has been committed to ensuring that every child, adolescent girl, and woman achieves optimum nutritional status.
 - In addition to the improvements seen in India's overall nutritional status as a result of the national strategy, the **Poshan Abhiyan programme (National Nutrition Mission)** has also been an effort in the right direction.
 - The policy aims to set up an information and communications monitoring system in which the nutritional status of populations across the country could be tracked more efficiently.
- **Myanmar:** Myanmar is on-course to meet global targets for under-five underweight and exclusive breastfeeding for infants, but is still off-track in the other nutritional indicators.
 - The National Plan of Action for Food and Nutrition (NPAFN) was adopted by Myanmar with the goal of ensuring adequate access to food that is safe and well-balanced.

What needs to be done?

- **Comprehensive efforts to ensure food availability:** There is a need for sustainable and resilient food systems to achieve the goal of zero hunger. This can be achieved by comprehensive efforts to ensure food is available to all.
- **Innovative strategy:** There is a need for a renewed focus and innovative strategies to build capabilities both at the individual and community level.

- **Using experiences and models:** Countries can learn from each other's successes and scalable models to ensure food systems that deliver improved nutrition and sustainable and resilient communities.
- **More focus on investment:** Investment in nutrition, along with a multi-sectoral approach that includes both nutrition-sensitive interventions (healthcare, water, sanitation) and nutrition-specific ones that empower women—will help end all forms of malnutrition in the long run.

◎ CONCLUSION

The BIMSTEC countries are not on-track to achieve the SDG of Zero Hunger by 2030. There is hardly any doubt that achieving the SDGs will be a far-fetched goal without ending hunger and malnutrition. An integrated approach is required in response to the diverse and interconnected causes of hunger and malnutrition.



U.S. HAS OFFICIALLY LEFT THE PARIS AGREEMENT

CONTEXT

The United States has officially withdrawn from the Paris Agreement, the landmark international accord to keep climate change in check and limit future greenhouse gas emissions.

◎ BACKGROUND

- After a three-year delay, the US has become the first nation in the world to formally withdraw from the Paris climate agreement.
- President Trump announced the move in June 2017, but UN regulations meant that his decision only takes effect from now onwards.
- The delay is down to the complex rules that were built into the Paris agreement to cope with the possibility that a future US president might decide to withdraw the country from the deal.
- The US could re-join it in future, should a president choose to do so.

◎ ANALYSIS

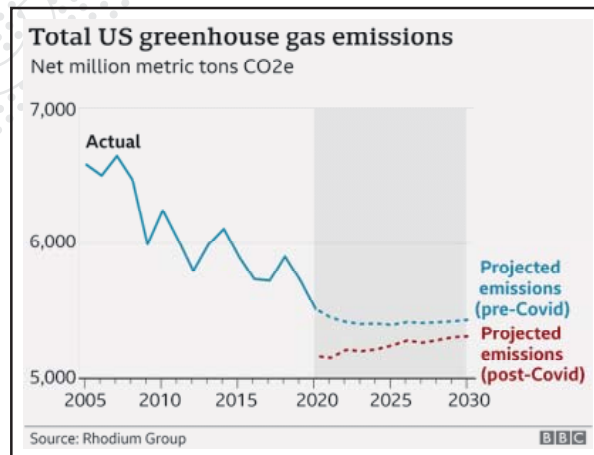
What is Paris Agreement?

- The landmark deal, struck in 2015, aims to limit global warming to "well below" 2 °C above pre-industrial temperatures.
- The agreement came into force on November 4, 2016 and 189 countries have adopted it.
- The Paris accord requires countries to set their own voluntary targets for reducing greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide, and to steadily increase those goals every few years.
- The only binding requirement is that nations have to accurately report on their efforts.
- Crucially, under the Paris agreement countries for the first time had declared national action plans known as '**Intended Nationally Determined Contributions**' (INDC) outlining targets to cut greenhouse gas emissions.
 - Though these are not legally binding, they are based on the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR), recognising that the obligations of developing countries have to be viewed in the context of their economic and social limitations.
- Under the agreement, developed countries had also made key commitments to provide finances for the **Green Climate Fund**, established under the **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)**.
 - This body approves funding for projects in countries that are vulnerable to the impacts

of climate change in the form of storms, heat waves and extreme rainfall.

What is the concern?

- The U.S. is currently the second-highest greenhouse gas emitter in the world.
- It's responsible for spewing more than 5 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide a year since 1990, to say nothing of other potent planet-warming gases, such as methane or hydrofluorocarbons.
- The country is number one in overall "historical" emissions, however: the source of 25 percent of all human-produced greenhouse gases that have collected in the atmosphere since the Industrial Revolution.
- The U.S. is now the only major country in the world not committed to the accord, which aims to keep global temperatures from rising more than 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit (2 degrees Celsius) above pre-industrial temperatures.



Which countries are taking the lead on climate-change mitigation?

- China and the European Union have picked up the pieces.
- China to become carbon neutral (by 2060):** In September, China, the world's top emitter of greenhouse gases, announced a bold plan to make its economy **carbon neutral by 2060**, using a combination of renewable energy, nuclear power and carbon capture.
- EU's Green Deal:** Likewise, the **EU's Green Deal**, first announced in December 2019, sets out a

CLIMATE COMMITMENTS

Climate Action Tracker (CAT), a consortium of scientists and policy specialists, has rated countries on the basis of their policies and emissions pledges, and has estimated the amount of warming that is compatible with those actions. The CAT rates a nation's commitments against what it judges to be a fair-share plan to reduce emissions.

Pledges are:

- ◆ Critically insufficient; >4°C
- ◆ Highly insufficient; 3–4°C
- ◆ Insufficient; 2–3°C
- ◆ Compatible with 2°C
- ◆ Compatible with 1.5°C



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road map for making the bloc carbon neutral by 2050. Compared with 1990 levels, the EU has already reduced its greenhouse-gas emissions by 24%. Legislation intended to achieve full carbon neutrality by the middle of the century is under discussion.

- Other major economies, such as Japan and South Korea, pledged last month to become **carbon neutral by 2050**, but haven't spelt out in detail how they will achieve it.
- In all, more than 60 countries worldwide — including all EU member states except Poland — have committed to achieving net-zero emissions by mid-century.

What will the withdrawal mean in practice?

- While the US now represents around 15% of global greenhouse gas emissions, it remains the world's biggest and most powerful economy.
- So when it becomes the only country to withdraw from a global solution to a global problem it raises questions of trust.
- Although this has been a long time coming, there is still a palpable sense of disappointment for many Americans who believe that climate change is the biggest global challenge and the US should be leading the fight against it.

- The formal withdrawal has also re-opened old wounds for climate diplomats.
- What does this mean for India and its efforts to fight climate change?
- In 2015, India played a crucial role in shaping the agreement through the **BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa)** and **LMDC (Like-Minded Developing Countries)** country groups.
- In October 2015, ahead of the annual Conference of Parties in Paris, India had announced its ambitious INDCs.
- It pledged a reduction in its emissions intensity of its Gross Domestic Product by 33 to 35 per cent by 2030, below 2005 levels.
- Crucially, it announced that by 2030, it would increase the share of non-fossil fuels in the installed energy capacity to 40 per cent.

- Further, it set a target of creating an additional carbon sink to absorb 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide by increasing its forest and tree cover by 2030.
- India's climate action goals will continue as per plan even as they termed the US exit as a move that would lead to problems in cutting emissions globally.

How will it impact the climate?

- The world has already warmed 1.2 degrees Celsius (2.2 degrees Fahrenheit) since pre-industrial time, so the efforts are really about preventing another 0.3 to 0.7 degrees Celsius (0.5 to 1.3 degrees Fahrenheit) warming from now.
- "Having the U.S. pull out of Paris is likely to reduce efforts to mitigate, and therefore increase the number of people who are put into a life-or-death situation because of the impacts of climate change: this is clear from the science,

What's next now?

- Parties to the Paris accord have agreed to update their targets for 2030 in line with the latest evidence on the world's remaining carbon budget.

- A special report from the **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)** on keeping warming to 1.5 °C, completed in 2018, made clear that the climate targets that countries think they can meet are not sufficient to halt global warming.
- All remaining parties to the agreement must submit their new 2030 targets before the next major United Nations climate meeting, set to take place in **Glasgow, UK, in November 2021**.

- The US withdrawal, if it is sustained by the next administration, will inevitably cause some countries to reduce their level of effort on implementing existing commitments.

◎ **CONCLUSION**

Climate change is a very important issue and world action is needed. The world leaders need to come forward and be compliant with the Paris Agreement.

GSSCORE

RIGHT TO PROTEST AND ETHICS

CONTEXT

The judgment of the Supreme Court of India to a petition asking for the Shaheen Bagh protests against CAA, to be cleared, on the grounds that the protests inconvenienced several commuters by shutting off an arterial road, assumes crucial significance.

◎ BACKGROUND

- In a short judgment regarding the petitions against the **Shaheen Bagh protests**, the Supreme Court (SC) qualified the right to protest, and said that while dissent and democracy go hand-in-hand, protests in public places for an indefinite period of time are unacceptable.
- The SC was, in effect, dealing with the tension between the right to protest of a set of citizens and the right to mobility and convenience of other citizens and has come up with a formulation which respects protests, but within limits.
- The apex court observed it is the duty of the administration to remove such road blockades. Unfortunately no action by administration and hence court's intervention in the matter.
- A bench comprising Justices SK Kaul, Krishna Murari and Hrishikesh Roy said:
- "Public places cannot be occupied indefinitely. Dissent and democracy go hand in hand but protests must be carried out in designated area... Such kind of occupation of public place for protests is not acceptable."

Shaheen Bagh sit-in protest

- On March 23, the Shaheen Bagh sit-in protest against the citizenship law was cleared by Delhi police after curbs were imposed on assembly and movement of people in wake of the coronavirus pandemic.
- The protest had been on for more than 100 days. It began on December 15 in Southeast Delhi, with at least 300 women at the forefront of it.
- It sparked many similar demonstrations across the country.
- The protest saw several elderly women, some in their 80s, participate daily.

speech and expression, which is a fundamental right under **Article 19(1)(a)**.

Important Provisions

- Article 19(1)(a) guarantees the freedom of speech and expression.
- Article 19(1)(b) states about the right to assemble peaceably and without arms.
- Article 19(2) imposes reasonable restrictions on the right to assemble peaceably and without arms and to freedom of speech and expression and none of these rights are absolute in nature.
- These reasonable restrictions are imposed in the interests of the sovereignty & integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence.
- However, there is more to it. Protesting against injustice is also a moral duty.

Reasonable Restrictions

- **Article 19(1)(3) says this right is subject to "reasonable restrictions" in the interest of public order.**
 - If the security of the state is in jeopardy
 - If the friendly relationship we share with a neighbouring country is at stake
 - If public order is disturbed
 - If there is contempt of court
 - If the sovereignty and integrity of India are threatened

How State handles protest?

- Article 246 of the Constitution places 'public order' and 'police' under the jurisdiction of the state.
- This gives each state government full legislative and administrative powers over the police. Each state's police force has two components:
 - the civil police
 - the armed police

◎ ANALYSIS

What is the right to protest? Is it a 'right' OR 'moral' duty too?

- The right to peaceful protest is granted to citizens of India by our Constitution. It is part of the freedom of

- While the civil police control crime, the armed police are specialised police units that deal with extraordinary law and order situations.
- They are organised in the form of battalions which are used as striking reserves to deal with emergency situations arising in the state.
- Although matters of the police are a state subject, the Constitution empowers the central government to intervene in certain police matters in order to protect the state in times of emergency.

Important SC's Judgement on protest

- In 1973, a Constitution bench of the apex court had held, in its judgment in the case of *Himat Lal K Shah vs Commissioner of Police, Ahmedabad* (AIR 1973 SC 87), that the State's power to regulate public meetings on streets doesn't extend to closing all the streets or open areas for public meetings, thereby denying the fundamental right which flows from Article 19(1)(a) and (b).
- In the case of **Ramlila Maidan Incident v. Home Secretary, Union Of India & Ors.**, the Supreme Court had stated, "Citizens have a fundamental right to assembly and peaceful protest which cannot be taken away by an arbitrary executive or legislative action."
- It was in **Maneka Gandhi vs. Union of India** that Justice Bhagwati had said, "If democracy means government of the people by the people, it is obvious that every citizen must be entitled to participate in the democratic process and in order to enable him to intelligently exercise his rights of making a choice, free & general discussion of public matters is absolutely essential."

The Position in International Law

- This all-encompassing ban on protests in public spaces except designated areas doesn't just go against the court's own judgments from the past, it also runs contrary to international law.
- A UN Special Rapporteurs' report on the **right to freedom of peaceful assembly** notes that while restrictions to the right of peaceful assembly can be made in the interest of national security or public order, these must be lawful, necessary and proportionate to the aim pursued.
- It also notes that these restrictions are to be the exception, not the norm, and, very importantly, that they "must not impair the essence of the right."
- "To this end, blanket bans, including bans on the exercise of the right entirely or on any exercise of the right in specific places or at particular times, are intrinsically disproportionate, because they preclude consideration of the specific circumstances of each proposed assembly."

International law on 'right to protest'

- The right of peaceful protest is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations in December 1948.
- In terms of international law, the rights to freedom of association, peaceful assembly and expression are recognised in various treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
- Together, these rights constitute the right to protest.

Why SC's views assume significance?

- The judgment deals a further blow to the right to civil protests in India. Even though the petition itself had been rendered infructuous over the past seven months because of the protestors having voluntarily cleared the protest site due to the Covid pandemic.
- The judgement holds that the occupation of public ways indefinitely anywhere "for protests is not acceptable and the administration ought to take action to keep the areas clear of encroachments or obstructions".
- It further rules that "demonstrations expressing dissent have to be in designated places alone". To drive home the point, it expressly posits that "future... protests are subject to the legal position... enunciated above".

A new era of global protest

- Mass protests increased annually by an average of 11.5 percent from 2009 to 2019 across all regions of the world, with the largest concentration of activity in the Middle East and North Africa and the fastest rate of growth in sub-Saharan Africa.
- Analysis of the underlying drivers of this growth suggests the trend will continue, meaning the number and intensity of global protests is likely to increase.
- Protests have resulted in a broad range of outcomes, ranging from regime change and political accommodation to protracted political violence with many casualties.
- Factors that could increase the rate of protest include-
 - slowing global economic growth
 - worsening effects of climate change
 - foreign meddling in internal politics via disinformation and other tactics

- Russia, China, and Iran are notably active in suppressing protest movements within their own borders.
- Three potential catalyzing factors, which could intensify the trend or make it more manageable, warrant particular attention:
 - the use of technology by protestors and governments alike
 - the tension between shifting democratic and authoritarian government types
 - the need for improved understanding and responsiveness between governments and their citizens.
- The outbreak of the novel coronavirus in early 2020 appears to have temporarily interrupted the surge of protests from 2019 in Hong Kong and Iran, though protest movements from Canada to India continue.

When does protest cross an ethical line?

- Non-violent protests, also known as civil disobedience, have been utilized by some of our greatest historical leaders. Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela all lead their followers in peaceful protests including marches and sit-ins.
- However, over the past few years, there have been several instances of protests for legitimate causes, which have turned into violent protests or riots.

• Why do some protests turn violent?

- The citizens' right to protest is a pillar of Indian democracy. While citizens are allowed to peacefully assemble, however, protests and demonstrations sometimes take a violent turn.
- People who are prepared to use violent confrontation can be psychologically different from those who are not.
- People who are prepared to adopt violence are more likely to report feelings of contempt for political adversaries whom they hold responsible for wrongdoing.
- Debates in India are veering towards the dangerous trend of an exercise in hypocrisy, diversion and counter accusations.

Political inclination

- Political opportunities indirectly facilitate protest mobilization and enhance their chance of success.
- The basic idea is that demonstrations influence the political agenda if they take place under favorable political circumstances.

• Impact on day-to-day functioning

- The right of citizens to protest and gather peacefully without arms is a fundamental aspect of India's democracy.
- While it is also the right of the government to protect civilians from violent protests, certain essential principles need to be kept in mind.
- It must be questioned how much of it is in democratic character and what good one is serving the country, if the protests keeps the work days from going smoothly and disrupts everyday life.
- Sometimes, protests are also a public nuisance to those who do not share the same opinion or just want to go ahead with their everyday routine.
- This situation needs a nuanced response.

Why protest is so important for democracy?

- **Contributing to all spheres of life:** Protests play an important part in the civil, political, economic, social and cultural life of all societies.
- **Positive social change:** Historically, protests have often inspired positive social change and the advancement of human rights, and they continue to help define and protect civic space in all parts of the world.
- **Advancement of human rights:** Protests encourage the development of an engaged and informed citizenry.
- **Strengthening democracy:** They strengthen representative democracy by enabling direct participation in public affairs.
- **Making authorities accountable:** They enable individuals and groups to express dissent and grievances, to share views and opinions, to expose flaws in governance and to publicly demand that the authorities and other powerful entities rectify problems and are accountable for their actions.
- **Essential for marginalised section:** This is especially important for those whose interests are otherwise poorly represented or marginalised.

Powerful protests that shook India

- **Nirbhaya Movement- 2012:** After, 2012 Delhi Gang Rape thousands of people came out on streets to protest in several parts of the country. Finally, new laws were formed. The government also announced the Nirbhaya Fund for the safety of the girls.

- **Chipko Movement – 1973:** The Chipko Movement was based on **Gandhian principles of non-violence**. People, especially women, protested against deforestation by hugging trees. Thousands of people across India came out in support of the green movement.
- **Save Silent Valley Movement – 1973:** A social movement aimed at the protection of Silent Valley, an evergreen tropical forest in the Palakkad district of Kerala, started in 1973 brought many activists and people together. The controversy surrounding the valley still exists and people are still waiting for the final result.
- **Narmada Bachao Andolan – 1985:** This Andolan changed the way people looked at the development projects. This protest was to express the views against a large number of dams being constructed near the Narmada river. It brought a large number of Adivasis, farmers, environmentalists, and human rights activists together. The court ordered an immediate stoppage of work at the dam.
- **Jan Lokpal Bill, 2011:** When anti-corruption activist Anna Hazare began a hunger strike at Jantar Mantar, the whole nation came together and stood by him. This initiative was a one-of-its-kind event in decades.

- **The Assam Protests, 1979-1985:** This was a movement against undocumented immigrants in Assam. The movement was led by All Assam Students Union and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad. They were fighting for the right of indigenous people of the state to protect their rights, their homeland against the illegal migrants. The Assam accord was signed and modified many times.

The role of technology

- Digital technologies offer new opportunities and challenges to protests and they are used both as a crucial medium for enabling protests to take place and a platform for protest.
- Technological advancements have also significantly enhanced the ability of governments to infringe and potentially violate human rights in protests.

◎ CONCLUSION

In a democracy, the fundamental right of each citizen is 'sacrosanct'. However, the collective cannot undermine the same. During protest, citizens should always be cognisant that in the name of protest, "the life of a civilised society cannot be allowed to be paralysed".

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THE MIYAS OF ASSAM, AND THEIR CHAR-CHAPORI CULTURE

◎ **CONTEXT:** Months ahead of the Assembly elections, a proposed “Miya museum” reflecting the “culture and heritage of the people living in char-chaporis” has stirred up a controversy in Assam.

◎ **ABOUT :** **Who are the Miyas?**

- The ‘Miya’ community comprises descendants of Muslim migrants from East Bengal (now Bangladesh) to Assam.
- They came to be referred to as ‘Miyas’, often in a derogatory manner.
- The community migrated in several waves — starting with the British annexation of Assam in 1826, and continuing into Partition and the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War — and have resulted in changes in demographic composition of the region.
- Years of discontent among the indigenous people led to the **six-year-long (1979-85) anti-foreigner Assam Agitation** to weed out the “illegal immigrant”, who was perceived as trying to take over jobs, language and culture of the indigenous population.

The Controversy

- The proposed museum reflecting the culture of ‘Char-Chapori’ people in the Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra premises in Guwahati has led to the controversy.
- The Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra - where the ‘Char-Chapori’ museum is proposed - is a cultural institution named after the saint scholar, social-religious reformer Srimanta Sankaradeva - a Vaishnavite, adding a religious clash to the controversy.
- Moreover, the complex was set up under Clause 6 of the Assam Accord, signed in 1985, to ‘preserve and promote the cultural heritage of the people of Assam’, after the bloody anti-foreigners agitation in Assam.

What are char-chaporis?

- ‘Char’ in Assamese means sandbar while ‘chapori’ is flood-prone riverbank. These areas are associated with migrant Muslims of Bengali origin who are viewed as ‘Bangladeshis’.
- The Char-Chapori area denotes the riverine area of lower and central Assam which mainly comprises of Bengali Muslims.
- They are used interchangeably or with a hyphen. They keep changing shapes — a char can become a chapori, or vice versa, depending on the push and pull of the Brahmaputra.
- Prone to floods and erosion, these areas are marked by low development indices. 80% of the Char population lives below poverty line.
- A **UNDP Assam Human Development report** (2014) describes the char areas as suffering from “**communication deficits, lack of adequate schooling facilities beyond primary, girl child marriage, poverty and illiteracy**”.
- While Bengali-origin Muslims primarily occupy these islands, other communities such as Misings, Deoris, Kocharis, Nepalis also live here.
- In popular imagination, however, chars have become synonymous to the Bengali-speaking Muslims of dubious nationality.

HOW THE US COUNTS ITS VOTES IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

◎ **CONTEXT:** Let's take a look at how the world's oldest democracy counts their votes.

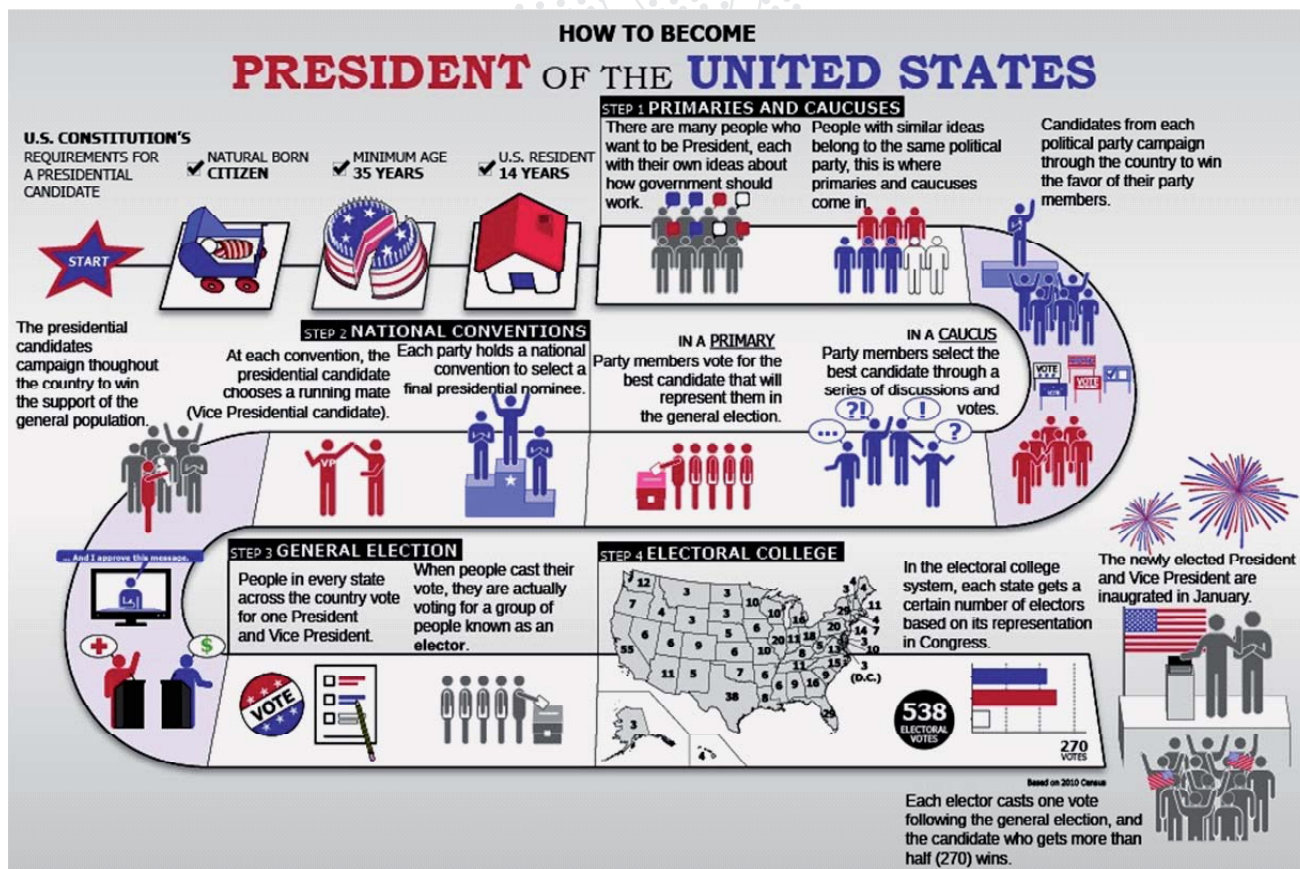
◎ **ABOUT:** **How is the American President elected?**

There are five main steps to electing a President:

- Primaries and Caucuses
 - National Conventions
 - Election Campaigning
 - General Election
 - Electoral College
- Forty-eight states, plus the District of Columbia, have a winner-takes-all approach to their Electoral College votes.
 - This means that on election day whoever wins the **popular vote** by even a single vote, wins all of the state's electoral votes.
 - It therefore does not matter by how many votes the candidates win in each state, as long as they win more than the next person.

Who actually elected the President?

- US voters have **no constitutional right** to vote for the president or his running mate.
- In the US Election process, voters merely indicate a preference, but the task of actually electing the president falls to these 538 individual electors to the **US Electoral College**.



- It is possible for candidates to be the most popular candidate among voters and still fail to win enough states to gain majority electoral votes.
- In practice, electors almost always vote for the candidate who wins the popular vote.

For example

- If an elector votes against their state's presidential pick, they become "faithless".
- This happened in the 2016 race when seven electoral college votes were cast this way, but the results weren't affected by the faithless electors.
- In 2016, Donald Trump had almost three million fewer votes than Hillary Clinton, but won the presidency because the electoral college gave him a majority.

How are elections supervised in the US?

- In the US, all elections — federal, state, and local — are directly organised by the ruling governments of individual states.
- The US Constitution and laws grant the states wide latitude in how they administer elections, resulting in varying rules across the country.
- In many US states, the responsibility of conducting elections falls on the state's secretary of state — a politician who in some states is directly elected and in others appointed by the state governor.

How is the election process different from India?

- In India, the Constitution under Article 324 provides for a separate rule-making **Election Commission** that is independent of the executive in government.
- Set up in 1950, it is charged with the responsibility of conducting polls to the offices of the President and Vice President of India, to Parliament, and to the state Assemblies and Legislative Councils.
- In India, the ECI has been devised as an apolitical body — a key priority of the country's founding leaders.
- So, US states vary widely when it comes to key electoral practices such as vote counting, postal voting and drawing constituencies.
- Often, individual states are accused of providing an unfair advantage to one political party through practices such as gerrymandering.
- During the Jim Crow era (late 19th century-early 20th century), states in the American South actively disenfranchised Black people— a practice that was largely curbed by the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

AFTER PUNJAB, NOW RAJASTHAN INTRODUCES BILLS TO NEGATE IMPACT OF CENTRE'S FARM LAWS

◎ CONTEXT:

- The Rajasthan Assembly passed three Bills to stop the applicability of the Centre's new agriculture sector laws in the State. The move comes after the Punjab Assembly adopted a resolution against the farm laws and unanimously passed four bills to counter the Centre's contentious legislations.

- This development raises a very serious question “Can States challenge the validity of central laws?”

◎ ABOUT:

The debate on federalism

- Agriculture being a state subject under the Constitution, any central legislation seeking to remove barriers to trade and creating a unified national market for farm produce could trigger a fresh debate on federalism.
- The main subjects of the three acts are ‘agriculture’ and ‘market’ that are essentially **state subjects as per the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution.**
- The **Seventh Schedule (Article 246)** places “agriculture” in entry 14 and “market and fairs” in entry 28 of the State List.

What are the bills?

- The three bills passed by the House are
 - ▶ The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services (Rajasthan Amendment) Bill, 2020
 - It seeks to restore agricultural safeguards in the state through the regulatory framework of the Rajasthan Agricultural Produce Markets Act, 1961, to secure the livelihood of farmers and those engaged in agriculture activities.
 - The bill has a provision for punishment for those who force a farmer to sell his produce below the minimum support price, but this is limited only to contract farming.
 - The Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) (Rajasthan Amendment) Bill, 2020
 - ▶ The Bill mentions that harassment of farmers will be punishable by imprisonment or fine.
 - ▶ But it does not make it clear whether purchase below MSP will be deemed as harassment.
 - The Essential Commodities (Special Provisions and Rajasthan Amendment) Bill 2020
 - It empowers the government to control production, supply and distribution of essential commodities.

The bills, however, need the assent of the governor before they become laws. The governor could withhold assent and refer them to the president.

Can the states refuse to implement the central laws?

- A dispute between the Centre and the states on any issue is clearly envisaged by the **Constitution.**
- Therefore, the states can well ask the Supreme Court to decide whether they can refuse to implement the law during the pendency of the case in the Supreme Court.
- State assemblies can pass resolutions on any subject, to express the collective opinion of their members.
- But they will be bound by what the Supreme Court eventually decides on the matter.
- The resolutions are perfectly valid, but they will have no effect if the Supreme Court favours the Centre, after hearing the petitions filed by the states on the subject.
- Needless to say, the Supreme Court’s decision will be binding on the states as well as the Centre.

Is it legal?

- Usually, when a state wants to amend a Central law made under one of the items in the concurrent list, it needs the clearance of the Centre.
- When a state law contradicts a Central law on the same subject, the law passed by Parliament prevails.
- This is an arrangement envisaged as most Parliament laws apply to the whole of India and states amending the Central laws indiscriminately could lead to inconsistencies in different regions on the application of the same law.

Judicial challenge

- The other option available with the states is to take the Centre to the Supreme Court over the validity of these laws.
- Article 131 confers exclusive jurisdiction on the Supreme Court in disputes involving States, or the Centre on the one hand and one or more States on the other.
- This means no other court can entertain such a dispute.
- It is well-known that both High Courts and the Supreme Court have the power to adjudicate cases against the State and Central governments.
- In particular, the validity of any executive or legislative action is normally challenged by way of writ petitions — under Article 226 of the Constitution in respect of High Courts, and, in respect to fundamental rights violations, under Article 32 in the Supreme Court.

ON PEOPLE'S ALLIANCE FOR GUPKAR DECLARATION

◎ CONTEXT:

More than a year after the abrogation of the special constitutional status of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and its reorganisation, a number of mainstream political parties of Kashmir have come up with a joint response in the form of the People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD).

◎ ABOUT:

- The formation of the alliance follows the spirit of the Gupkar Declaration that was adopted on 4 August 2019, a day before the changes in the structure of the state were announced in Parliament.
- Amidst the rumours that the Government of India was going to take some unprecedented steps in relation to J&K, the representatives of six mainstream parties of Kashmir had resolved that modification, abrogation of Article 35A and Article 370, or unconstitutional delimitation, or trifurcation of the state would be an aggression against the people of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. It was therefore resolved that all parties be united to protect and defend identity, autonomy and the special status of J&K.

Why was the declaration signed?

- On August 4, 2019, the first Gupkar declaration was signed after an all-party meeting at the Gupkar Road residence of NC supremo Farooq Abdullah.
 - The signatories were reportedly members of the NC, PDP, CPI(M), Congress, J&K Peoples Conference and Awami National Conference.
- The resolution had parties unanimously agreeing to unify in their efforts to protect and defend the identity, autonomy and special status of Jammu and Kashmir.
- Just a day after this, on **5 August 2019** however, the central government revoked the special status under Article 370 and split Jammu and Kashmir into two Union Territories.

- The Article 35A, which guaranteed specific rights to permanent residents of the former state was also repealed.
- What followed was a complete lockdown in J&K, with communications within the then state blocked out.
- Senior political leaders from most parties were placed under house arrest.
- With most political leaders now released from detention, efforts are on to renew the movement by signing the Gupkar Declaration 2.0.

What is the Gupkar Declaration II?

- On 22 August 2020, leaders from the six political parties once again held a meeting and signed the Gupkar II Declaration to renew their resolve to adhere to the 2019 declaration that was signed.
- The coming together of six mainline parties is unprecedented in Kashmir politics. Key Kashmir watchers describe the stand taken by the Kashmir-based parties as "political resistance", but hesitate to call it the "people's alliance".

THREE-JUDGE PANEL OF MADRAS HC QUESTIONS VALIDITY OF SPECIAL COURTS TO TRY MPS, MLAS

◎ CONTEXT:

A three-judge committee of the Madras High Court has questioned the constitutional validity of setting up Special Courts to exclusively try MPs and MLAs for various crimes, pursuant to the apex court's orders for fast-tracking cases against lawmakers.

◎ ABOUT:

What are Special Courts?

- The Supreme Court had in 2017 asked all states to set up special courts to expedite cases against legislators after noting that a huge number of sitting MP/MLAs had multiple criminal cases against them.
- A Special Court shall consist of a single Judge who shall be appointed by the State Government with the concurrence of the High Court.

The numbers

- On December 14, 2017, the Central Government constituted 12 special courts.
- Accordingly, high courts were directed to transfer cases against MPs and MLAs to such special courts.
- The States/UTs where 65 or more such cases are pending were to get a special court, as per the policy introduced by the Centre
- As a result, Special Courts were set up in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Delhi and three special courts at magisterial level in Maharashtra, Kerala and Delhi.

Key-points made by the Judges

- The three-judge **criminal rules committee** of the High Court made the following points:
- The Special Courts should be "offence-centric" and not "offender-centric."
- Special Courts can be constituted only by statute and not by '**judicial or executive fiats**'.

- An MP/MLA, who commits an offense under the **POCSO Act** [or other Special Acts like Prevention of Corruption Act, Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act] can only be tried by a **Special Court** created under the **POCSO Act** [PC Act, NDPS Act].
- There cannot be another Special Court exclusively for the trial of an MP/MLA, who commits POCSO offense.

- ◎ **BACKGROUND:**
- The HC Committee report, dated October 13 is a part of the status report filed by **amicus curiae** Vijay Hansaria and advocate Sneha Kalita in the Supreme Court.
 - This comes in the face of a 2017 Supreme Court order authorizing the Centre to set up 12 Special Courts to exclusively try criminal politicians across the country.
 - What about other States?
 - The issue of statutory special courts has also been flagged by several other states. Bihar, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Punjab and Haryana, Telangana, Meghalaya and Kerala are among the states where the "special offences" such as sexual offences against children under POCSO Act, SC/ST Act have not been transferred to the "MP/MLAs courts" and remain before the statutory special courts.

A SECURE FUTURE FOR PLATFORM WORKERS

- ◎ **CONTEXT:** The Code on Social Security Bill, 2020, for the first time in Indian law, attempted to define 'platform work' outside of the traditional employment category.

- ◎ **ABOUT:** What is platform work?

- Platform work means a work arrangement outside of a traditional employer-employee relationship in which organisations or individuals use an online platform to access other organisations or individuals to solve specific problems or to provide specific services or any such other activities which may be notified by the Central Government, in exchange for payment.

Types of workers

- **Gig worker:** Section 2(35) defines a gig worker as a person who participates in a work arrangement and earns from such activities outside of a traditional employer-employee relationship
- **Platform worker:** Section 2(61) defines a platform worker as someone engaged in or undertaking platform work
- **Unorganised worker:** Section 2(86) defines an unorganised worker as a home-based, self-employed or wage worker in the unorganised sector. This includes a worker in the organised sector who is not covered by the **Industrial Disputes Act, 1947**, or Chapters III to VII of this Code.

The role of platform workers

- The role of platform workers amidst the pandemic has presented a strong case to attribute a more robust responsibility to platform aggregator companies and the State.
- They were responsible for delivery of essential services during the pandemic at great personal risk to themselves.
- They have also been responsible for keeping platform companies afloat despite the pandemic-induced financial crisis.
- This has cemented their role as **public infrastructures** who also sustain demand-driven aggregators.

- The dependence of companies on platform workers merits a jointly assumed responsibility by public and private institutions to deliver welfare measures.

MORE THAN 100 BEACHED WHALES SAVED OFF SRI LANKA

◎ **CONTEXT:** More than 100 whales stranded on a Sri Lankan beach have been guided to the sea in an overnight rescue operation.

- ◎ **ABOUT:**
- **Cetacean stranding**, more commonly referred to as **beaching**, refers to the phenomenon of dolphins and whales stranding themselves on beaches.
 - Whales are known to strand themselves on beaches across the world and they do so singularly or in groups.
 - While individual strandings are mostly attributed to injury or sickness, it is not clear why exactly whales beach themselves in groups.

Why Whales strand?

Strandings are complex events and there are many reasons why dolphins and whales may strand. In most cases the exact cause is unknown but any one of the following factors, or a combination of them, can be the cause.

- **Old or sick:** Old whales may find it difficult to keep up with their pod or resist heavy swells or inshore currents. Because of failing strength these animals may strand.
- **Injured:** Whales that escape net entanglements or are hit by vessels may sustain serious injuries, such as broken teeth and jaws, deep lacerations, flipper dislocations or fractures, spinal or muscle damage or severed fins or flukes.

Pilot whale

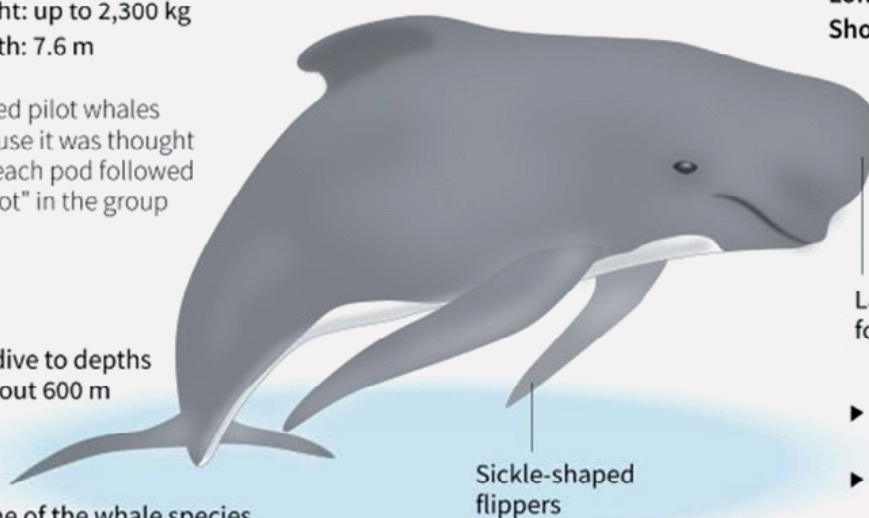
One of the largest members of the dolphin family

Weight: up to 2,300 kg
Length: 7.6 m

Named pilot whales because it was thought that each pod followed a "pilot" in the group

Can dive to depths of about 600 m

- One of the whale species most often involved in mass strandings



Two types:

Long finned: *Globicephala melas*
Short finned: *Globicephala macrorhynchus*

Differ slightly in

- size
- tooth count
- flipper length
- skull formation

Large bulbous forehead

- Commonly seen in tight, sociable pods
- Each pod has between 20-100 whales

Source: CSM/NOAA Fisheries/IUCN/NZ Department of Conservation

© AFP

- Navigational errors: When chasing prey, whales may accidentally beach themselves. They can be picked up by a wave and thrown onto a beach or be left high and dry by the receding tide
- Social bonding: The strong social bonding of some species of whales can cause mass strandings. Whales that strand in groups are usually deep water species with highly evolved social structures.
- Pilot whales -- which can grow up to six metres (20 feet) long and weigh a tonne -- are highly social.
 - There are two species of pilot whales – long finned and short finned.

Which human influences exacerbate the situation?

- In addition to natural factors, man-made underwater noise from ships, icebreakers, drilling platforms or military sonar equipment can also massively impair the orientation and communication of marine mammals.
- They flee the strong sound waves in a state of confusion.
- And since the density of water is much higher than that of air, sound propagates underwater about five times faster than in the air.
- Military sonar operations employing very loud sounds have particularly drastic effects.
 - The sonars, which are louder than 200 decibels, triggered the formation of gas bubbles in the blood vessels and organs of marine mammals (as happens with diving sickness), obstructing the blood supply and leading to their death.

THE COMMISSION FOR AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT (CAQM)

- ◎ **CONTEXT:** Dissolving the 22-year-old Environmental Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority (EPCA), the Centre has constituted a “permanent” body—the Commission for Air Quality Management in National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas.
- ◎ **ABOUT:**
- The Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) will have the power:
 - to formulate rules, set emission standards
 - to impose fines up to Rs. 1 crore or send violators to prison for up to five years.
 - The permanent body is to be headed by a **former secretary** to the Government of India or **chief secretary** to a state government.
 - The ex-officio members comprise chief secretaries or secretaries dealing with the subject of environment in the states of Delhi, Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh and non-governmental organisations.
 - Of the total members, only three members representing NGOs have been included.
 - Tasks and power of the Commission
 - The Commission will, among a long list of tasks, provide the mechanism and the means to implement in the NCR and around, the National Clean Air Programme, the National Air Quality Monitoring Programme, the National Ambient Air Quality Standards.
 - It is tasked with laying down parameters of air quality in various aspects, parameters for emission or discharge of environmental pollutants from various sources.
 - The Commission has the right to prohibit activities that are likely to cause or increase air pollution in the NCR.

- The Commission can take up matters suo-motu or on the basis of complaints from individuals and organisations
- It will submit to the Centre an annual report which will be laid before both houses of the Parliament. Every regulation and order of the Commission too will be placed before Parliament.
- The Commission would specifically monitor measures taken by the states to prevent factors causing air pollution like stubble burning, industrial emissions, road dust, vehicular pollution, construction activities, biomass burning and other major sources of air pollution.

WWF IDENTIFIES 100 CITIES, INCLUDING 30 IN INDIA, FACING 'SEVERE WATER RISK' BY 2050

◎ CONTEXT:

A hundred cities worldwide, including 30 in India, face the risk of 'severe water scarcity' by 2050, according to a recent report by World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).

Key-highlights of the Report

- The cities would face a 'grave water risk' by 2050 due to a dramatic increase in their population percentage to 51 per cent by 2050, from 17 per cent in 2020, according to a press statement by WWF-India.
- The cities include global hubs such as Beijing, Jakarta, Johannesburg, Istanbul, Hong Kong, Mecca and Rio de Janeiro.
- Thirty Indian cities are also included in the list.
- More than half of the identified cities are from China and India.

30 Indian cities that will face a 'grave water risk' by 2050 according to WWF

1. Jaipur	11. Kolkata	21. Jalandhar
2. Indore	12. Ahmedabad	22. Pune
3. Thane	13. Jabalpur	23. Dhanbad
4. Vadodara	14. Mumbai	24. Bhopal
5. Srinagar	15. Lucknow	25. Gwalior
6. Rajkot	16. Hubli-Dharwad	26. Surat
7. Kota	17. Nagpur	27. Delhi
8. Nashik	18. Chandigarh	28. Aligarh
9. Visakhapatnam	19. Amritsar	29. Kozhikode
10. Bengaluru	20. Ludhiana	30. Kannur

What's behind the situation?

- **Rapid urbanization:** Rapid urbanisation and lack of basic infrastructure have already made cities in India water-stressed.
- In June last year, one of India's most populous cities, Chennai faced an acute water shortage when the cities four major reservoirs dried up after a delay in the onset of monsoons.

- **Environmental problems:** The analysis also cited issues like deforestation, soil erosion, overgrazing, air pollution and water pollution that contributed to the country's environmental problems.
- What measures are required to be taken?
- **More investment in nature-based solutions:** Cities needed to invest more in nature-based solutions and enhance the health of river basins, watersheds and wetlands to build resilience to water risks.
- Nature-based solutions include restoring degraded watersheds, reconnecting rivers to their floodplains, and creating urban wetlands be implemented whilst improving infrastructure and reducing water consumption.
- **Public funding pool:** To manage these initiatives, a public funding pool needed to be created in collaboration with the private sector to invest, reduce risk and generate returns and fuel sustainable economic growth.
- **Collaborative global efforts:** Cities also needed to support greater global efforts to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions to avoid reaching these scenarios.

WWF emphasises on India's Smart Cities plan

- The WWF analysis stressed on the importance of **India's Smart Cities initiative** — about which the Government of India says while there is a lack of a universally accepted definition of what a Smart City entails, it is a "wish list of infrastructure and services that describes" a city dweller's "level of aspirations".
- Noting how the Smart Cities initiative provides a framework for water management, the WWF report noted how "urban watersheds and wetlands are critical for maintaining the water balance of a city, flood cushioning, micro-climate regulation and protecting its biodiversity".

FAST RADIO BURSTS DETECTED IN THE MILKY WAY FOR THE FIRST TIME

◎ **CONTEXT:** Intense pulses of radio waves known as fast radio bursts (FRB) that have been frequently detected in other galaxies, have now been found in the Milky Way, new studies have shown.

◎ **ABOUT:** Fast radio bursts (FRB)

- FRBs were first discovered in 2007 and there are still many gaps in information regarding them. A number of theories have been suggested about the causes of FRBs including alien starships and colliding black holes.
- Many theories have also suggested that FRBs are caused by neutron stars, that are the corpses of stars which died in explosions called supernovas.
- The latest studies have now confirmed that FRBs are in fact generated by a rare type of neutron star known as a '**magnetar**'.
 - Magnetars are the most powerful magnets in the cosmos.
 - Their magnetic fields are 5,000 trillion times more powerful than that of the Earth.

Source of FRB

- The source of the FRB was traced to a magnetar known as **SGR 1935+2154**, located about 30,000 light-years from the earth.
 - It lies in the centre of the Milky Way, in the constellation **Vulpecula**.
- The FRB generated by this magnetar was so powerful that it emitted as much energy in

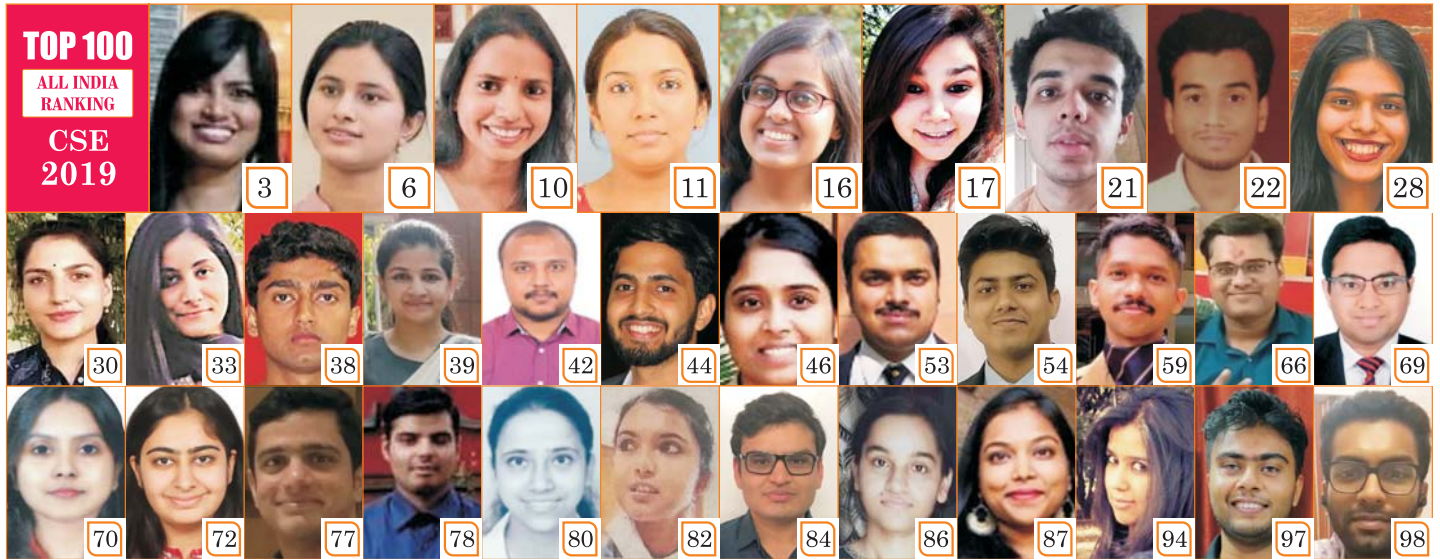
one millisecond as the sun does in 30 seconds, according to the scientists.

- The FRB was not only the closest such signal ever recorded near the Earth. It was also 3,000 times brighter than any other magnetar radio signal detected till now.
- The scientists also concluded that most FRBs in other galaxies also were generated by magnetars.

Significance of the Study

- This discovery makes it plausible that most fast radio bursts come from magnetars.
- Until now, astronomers have been struggling to explain why some FRBs aren't one-off events like supernova explosions but seem to repeat themselves instead. Magnetars could provide the answer, since they spin slowly and flare periodically, like a lighthouse beacon.

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