

#09

GS SCORE

An Institute for Civil Services

IAS MAINS 2022

MAINS SAMPOORNA

**CONTEMPORARY
ISSUES of
INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS**



iascore.in

Contents

■ India's Act East Policy and North East India Opportunities and Impediment	01
■ India's Maritime Security & stakeholders involved	02
■ Regulation of large multinational tech companies' activities (EU approval to Digital Services Act)	04
■ Neighbourhood "FAST" Policy	04
■ The global idea of "WHO's first-ever pandemic treaty"	06
■ India US 2+2 (past, present & future)	07
■ India's Arctic Ambitions	08
■ War crimes and the rules of war (Ukraine crisis)	09
■ Iran-Russia Relations under Raisi: The Eurasian Dimension	10
■ Role of UNHCR- A Critical Analysis	11
■ India-Japan diplomatic relations (70th anniversary)	12
■ India Australia economic partnership trade agreement	13
■ Refugee Crisis - Indian context	14
■ India-UAE Free Trade Agreement and its significance	15
■ India and Nepal: moving beyond the hurdles of Past	16
■ Blue Opportunities for Green Development of Pacific Island Countries	18
■ Harnessing New Opportunities in a World of Declining Multilateralism	19

■ Global Security Initiative	20
■ Bill to ban funding of ‘weapons of mass destruction’	21
■ US makes lynching a hate crime.....	22
■ A closer look into Feminist Foreign Policy in India	23
■ Revisiting RCEP, world’s largest trade pact	24
■ Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Agreement: Roadmap to	26
India’s Strategic Access in the Arctic	
■ World powers vow to prevent spread of nuclear weapons	27
■ Third India-Central Asia Dialogue	28
■ Intersecting Geo-economics and Geopolitics: Nord Stream 2	29
and Europe	
■ ‘China backs Iran nuclear deal’	31
■ China’s land borders law and its implications for Nepal and Bhutan	32
■ India, Russia and the new era of global politics	33
■ EU’s role in Indo-Pacific	34
■ AUKUS Security Alliance	36
■ 60 years of Antarctic Treaty	37
■ Israel—Palestine Conflict	38
■ What New Quad means for India	41
■ Significance of Raisina Dialogue.....	42
■ Relevance of OPEC for India’s Energy Security	43
■ Importance of Abraham Accords for stability in Middle-east	44
■ Vaccine diplomacy of India during Covid	45
■ SRI LANKA’s Economic Crises	46
■ 5 th BIMSTEC Summit and its significance.....	47
■ SCO Summit Nov 2021, its role and relevance in Sino-India relations	48
■ Davos Agenda 2022.....	49

India's Act East Policy and North East India Opportunities and Impediments

Context:

Recently, the Prime Minister reiterated Vietnam's importance as an important pillar of India's Act East Policy.

Background:

- India announced 'Look East policy' in 1991 which was aimed at a shift in foreign policy towards ASEAN and other East Asian countries.
- Taking this forward, India announced 'Act East policy' in 2014 which is a step forward in this direction.



Opportunities for North east India from India's Act East policy-

■ Economic & Connectivity

- ▶ The region will directly benefit from the economic projects with ASEAN like **Kaladan multi modal project** and **Free trade agreement** with ASEAN.
- ▶ Infrastructure connectivity projects like **Urja Ganga project** will connect **North east Grid with National Grid** and better connectivity with south east Asia through North east India
- ▶ The ASEAN region and Japan can act as a **ready market for industries** in the North east region. In 2019, 47.8 percent of India's exports by value were delivered to fellow Asian countries; 19.3 percent were sold to European importers and 18.8 percent worth of goods were shipped to North America. These investments take this even further.

■ Cultural

- ▶ India is actively participating in the conservation and restoration of heritage sites such as Cham Temple Complex in Vietnam, Ta Prohm temple located in the Angkor World Heritage Site in Cambodia, VAT PHOU Temple in LAOS and Ananda Temple in Myanmar
- ▶ Further, India has historical connectivity with Eastern region through spread of **Buddhist values** in South East Asia, Japan and China.

■ Strategic

- ▶ The eastern region is significant in the changing geopolitical scenario in which significance of Indo-Pacific is growing. North east is the key to connect with the region in the changing scenario.
- ▶ India has been able to do surgical strikes in Myanmar against **anti India groups** due to smooth cooperation between the two.

■ Impediments for North East in harnessing opportunities-

- ▶ China views India as a rival in the Indo pacific region and it pushing infrastructure connectivity in border areas at a faster pace. Secondly, deep pockets of China make it easy to connect the region through its projects like **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**.
- ▶ **Naga peace talks** have not been successful and people protest against AFSPA regularly.
- ▶ China has gained round among ethnic Chinese across the region. It is also assumed that certain anti- India groups has linkages with groups in Myanmar and China.

■ Suggestive measures

- ▶ Moving along the policy of **Non-aligned movement**, India can chalk out its own way in connecting with the region that can boost industrial growth in the region.
- ▶ Highlighting the cultural ties along the Buddhism and Hinduism, and the current connection through Indian diaspora, India can have better people to people contacts than China in the region.
- ▶ Student exchanges with partner countries mainly from the North east, can promote better cooperation and remittances in the region.

Conclusion:

North east region with its ethnic, cultural and border connections can act as a gateway to the eastern region and make 'Act East policy' a success.

India's Maritime Security & stakeholders involved

Context:

- Post-Mumbai attacks in 2008, an overhaul of the maritime security apparatus was witnessed.
- Now, the imminent appointment of a **national maritime coordinator**, as announced in April 2021, will be a substantial step toward building greater multi-agency operational and collaborative capabilities to provide for maritime security.

Why maritime security matters?

- **Rich maritime geography:** India has a 7,517-km-long coast line, where lie nine coastal states that are home to a number of ports that handle some 1,400 million tonnes of cargo ever year.

- **National wellbeing:** With more than 90 percent of its trade transiting over the sea and more than 80 percent of its hydrocarbon requirements being seaborne, the security of India's **Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC)** from its east, west, and south is critical to its national wellbeing.
- **Dependence:** As the country is set to grow to a \$5 trillion economy by 2025-26 and a \$10 trillion economy by 2032, the volume and value of its trade is going to increase exponentially. India's dependence on imported sources of energy is also likely to increase to 90 percent, maritime region can play a vital role here.
- **Emerging source of power:** By the turn of the decade, the Indian Ocean is also going to be the scene of the emerging great power competition, with China throwing down the gauntlet to the United States.
- **Important strategic points (trade): Strait of Malacca** in the east and **Suez canal & Cape of Good Hope** in the west as an entry & exit point of this ocean commands more than 70% of the world's seaborne trade in oil transits.

Coastal Security Governance

Currently, coastal security of India is governed by a three-tiered structure.

- **Indian Navy** patrols the **International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL)**
- **Indian Coast Guard** is mandated to do patrolling and surveillance up to 200 nautical miles (i.e., EEZ).
- **The State Coastal/Marine Police (SC/MP)** performs boat patrolling in shallow coastal areas.
- **Jurisdiction:** The SCP have jurisdiction up to 12 nautical miles from the coast; and the ICG and the IN have jurisdiction over the entire maritime zone (up to 200 nautical miles), including the territorial waters (with the SMP).
- The **Border Security Force (BSF)** is deployed in the creek areas of Gujarat and Sundarbans in West Bengal.

Major Security Threats faced by India:

- **Piracy:** There is a persistent threat of pirate attacks on ships, especially around the Somali coast. This jeopardizes trade and commerce.
- **Terrorism:** International waters are used by terrorists to execute their operations. For instance, the 2008 Mumbai Attacks occurred due to a maritime security lapse.
- **Illegal Migration:** International Oceans are a better way to enter into another country's territory than taking the land/air route. Thus, a higher degree of illegal migration happens through maritime waters.
- **Transnational organized crimes:** The waters are also used for transnational organized crimes that inflict significant harm on the global economy and jeopardize the security of the state.
- This includes illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, trafficking in persons, illicit trafficking in firearms, etc.
- **India's leadership role in shaping the regional maritime contours**
- SAGAR (security and growth for all in the region) doctrine
- Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)

Conclusion:

There is now a political recognition of the importance of the maritime domain to India's national interests, much needs to be done to establish essential structures with appropriate mandates, capable of shaping the national maritime security discourse.

Regulation of large multinational tech companies' activities (EU approval to Digital Services Act)

Context:

- In a major development that could alter the entire social media landscape, the **European Union** has finally reached consensus on the **Digital Services Act (DSA)** to increase the regulation on social intermediaries.

What is the new law?

- The **Digital Services Act (DSA)**, which was approved by the European Parliament, follows the **Digital Markets Act (DMA)**.
- Digital Services Act along with Digital Markets Act will replace the decade old legislation **E-Commerce directives of 2002**
- Digital Services Act (DSA), a landmark legislation to force big companies to act against disinformation.
- DSA ensures regulation over way intermediary.

What are the provisions?

- **Applicability:** DSA will apply to a "large category of online services, from simple websites to Internet infrastructure services and online platforms."
- **Faster removal:** Online platforms and intermediaries will have to add "new procedures for faster removal" of content deemed illegal or harmful.
- **Risk reduction analysis:** This law has mandated the companies to have a risk reduction analysis to reduce the incitements in the society.
- **Dark Pattern Ban:** New legislation has proposed to ban the Dark Pattern and misleading interface specially pop ups which creates discrepancies to the consumers and targeted advertising

Conclusion:

The new law focuses on minors and gender based violence in the society, to improve the social harmony and reduce the social violence new legislation has increased the liability of the way intermediary regarding removal of any unlawful content.

Neighbourhood "FAST" Policy

Context:

- New Delhi has already been stepping up its engagement with its neighbours as a part of '**Neighbourhood first policy**', now by shifting towards the '**Neighbourhood Fast Policy**' declared at the South Asian economic conference. It move an step even further for the cooperation.

What is Neighbourhood First Policy?

- **Neighbourhood First Policy** of India is a core component of India's foreign policy.
- It focuses on peaceful relations and collaborative synergetic co-development with its South Asian neighbours of the Indian subcontinent encompassing a diverse range of topics
- This policy creates new avenues as well as leverages existing regional cooperation initiatives, such as **SAARC, SASEC, BBIN, and BIMSTEC**.
- It compliments **India's Look East policy** focused on Southeast Asia and Look West Policy focused on Middle East.

Why India puts its neighbourhood 'first'?

- **Geostrategic importance:** The country's geopolitical and geostrategic location has prompted New Delhi to pursue unique relations with neighbours.
- **Disturbed history:** Important turning points in the history of relations have been India's nuclear tests of 1998, the Kargil War of 1999 and the 2001 terrorist attacks in the US and on the Indian parliament.
- **Gujral Doctrine:** With the background of Gujarat's development model and inspiration from the 'Gujral Doctrine', Prime Minister has embarked on a pragmatic and proactive policy of putting the "neighbourhood first".

Challenges for India:

- **Relation with Pakistan:** Relation with Pakistan, remains India's biggest diplomatic and security challenge. India's challenge is to manage relationships with a state which, openly, uses terror as an instrument of state policy and has fractured, multiple power centres.
- **Unstable Afghanistan:** Afghanistan remains a challenge too, more so with the arrival of the extremist Taliban regime. Fragile within and facing state-sponsored external threat from Pakistan, **jihadist terrorism** in all directions, from which India is unlikely to remain immune. Indian diplomacy is active in international efforts to stabilise the country.
- **China:** China is another big challenge that is increasing its presence around India. The relationship is marked with suspicion over China's policy towards Pakistan, including the construction of **the Gwadar port**. Also, China-Pakistan **economic corridor running through POK**.
- **Anti-Indian sentiments:** Anti-Indian sentiments are getting rooted in the minds of people of region due to perceived notion of India's big brother attitude and its economic dependence to India.

Required measures:

- **Transportation:** As the largest country, India should be leading to establish cross-border transport and communication links.
- **Developing Markets:** India should work with its neighbour in strengthening their markets and its own infrastructure to its neighbours.
- **Dialogue:** India must ensure its neighbour of continuous support for their development. Efforts must be made to strengthen Indian exports in the region.
- **Soft power:** India's soft power and common culture provide an opportunity for India to strengthen its cultural roots further in the region.

Conclusion:

India's foreign policy in the region is based on the principles of respect, dialogue, cooperation, peace and prosperity. Trust deficit at the borders must be restored to fulfil the India's vision. The need of the hour is to speed up the connectivity for strong ties and for resolving issues between the neighbours.

The global idea of “WHO’s first-ever pandemic treaty”

Context:

Members of the World Health Organisation (WHO) holding the first round of negotiations towards creating the ‘**first-ever pandemic treaty**’.

Background

- World Health Assembly had in December 2021 agreed to start a global process to draft the pandemic treaty.
- For this at a special session, the Health Assembly adopted “**The World Together**” as title to its initiative of drafting a global pandemic treaty.

Need of international collaboration

- The pandemic has highlighted **dangerous fissures in the global health system**.
- The **IHR adopted in 2005** in the aftermath of the 2002-03 SARS outbreak, **do provide a legal framework on how to proceed in such events**.
- The Panel for a **Global Public Health Convention (GPHC)**— an independent coalition of global leaders working towards preventing infectious disease outbreaks from becoming pandemics — **has stressed on the need for accountability** in a report released recently.
- The report noted, “While we appreciate the complexity of negotiating a Convention, we also urge haste. With current systems, we are little better prepared now to face a new pandemic threat than we were two years ago”.

International Health Regulations (IHR):

- The IHR are an instrument of international law that is legally-binding on 196 countries, including the 194 WHO Member States.
- They create rights and obligations for countries, including the requirement to report public health events. The Regulations also outline the criteria to determine whether or not a particular event constitutes a “public health emergency of international concern”.
- Since IHR falls under **Article 21** of the **WHO’s Constitution**, countries have to explicitly opt out if they wish to do so.
- The IHR, in its ambit, covers all kinds of public health emergencies of international concern which includes a pandemic.
- Finally, the IHR introduce important safeguards to protect the rights of travellers and other persons in relation to the treatment of personal data, informed consent and non-discrimination in the application of health measures under the Regulations.

Way ahead for the treaty

It is important to note that a progress report is expected to be delivered to the 76th World Health Assembly in 2023, and its outcome will be submitted to the 77th World Health Assembly in 2024 for consideration. An intermittent public hearings are also planned.

India US 2+2 (past, present & future)

Context:

The fourth '2+2' dialogue between India and the United States took place in Washington DC.

What is 2+2 dialogue?

- The 2+2 dialogue is a format of meeting of the foreign and defence ministers of India and its allies on strategic and security issues.
- A **2+2 ministerial dialogue** enables the partners to better understand and appreciate each other's strategic concerns and sensitivities taking into account political factors on both sides, in order to build a stronger, more integrated strategic relationship in a rapidly changing global environment.

Importance of the meeting:

- The dialogue's importance lies in the light of the divergence that has emerged between the two countries over the **Russia-Ukraine war**. This would reduce the expectations gap that seems to exist between the two countries, particularly on India's relations with Russia.

India and US:

- Agreements Signed between the two are of great importance for cooperation in various dimensions:
 - ▶ Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Association (LEMOA)
 - ▶ Fuel Exchange Agreement
 - ▶ Technical Agreement (TA) on information sharing on White (merchant) Shipping
 - ▶ The Information Exchange Annex (IEA) Aircraft Carrier Technologies

■ Defence Acquisitions

- ▶ Aggregate worth of defence acquisition from U.S. Defence has crossed over US\$ 13 billion.
- ▶ India and the United States have launched a Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI)
- The strengthening of the mechanisms of cooperation between the two militaries are of significance in the context of an increasingly **aggressive China**.
- The **Indian Navy and the US Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT)** are set to deepen their maritime cooperation in the Western Indian Ocean.
- The two sides are also increasingly engaged in multi-lateral exercises such as the MALABAR, RED FLAG and RIMPAC, covering the broad expanse of the Indo-Pacific.

Conclusion:

India-US relations have become increasingly multi-faceted, covering cooperation in areas such as trade, defense and security, education, science and technology, civil nuclear energy, space technology and applications, environment, and health. Grassroot-level interactions between the people of the two nations provide further vitality and strength to this bilateral relationship.

India's Arctic Ambitions

Context:

- As per the contents of **India's Arctic Policy**, unveiled recently, India aspires to have a permanent presence, more research stations and establish satellite ground stations in the Arctic region.

Background

- ▶ The policy documents the history of India's relationship with the region, which can be traced back to February 1920, when it signed the **Svalbard treaty** in Paris.
- ▶ In 2007, India launched its **first scientific expedition** to the Arctic.
- ▶ Since 2013, India has been an **Observer nation** in the **Arctic Council**, where it has consistently participated in meetings of Senior Arctic Officials and contributed to its six Working Groups, the policy states.

What is the Arctic Policy?

Title: 'India and the Arctic: building a partnership for sustainable development'.

The policy is built on six central pillars —

- ▶ Science and research
- ▶ Climate and environmental protection
- ▶ Economic and human development
- ▶ Transportation and connectivity
- ▶ Governance and international cooperation
- ▶ National capacity building

What is the status of India's presence in Arctic as of now?

- ▶ India has had a **research base in the Arctic since 2008** and also has **two observatories** in the region.
- ▶ The country presently has a single station, **Himadri, in Ny-Alesund, Svalbard, a Norwegian** archipelago, where research personnel are usually present for 180 days.
- ▶ It is in the **process of procuring an ice-breaker research vessel** that can navigate the region.
- ▶ India has **"Observer" status in Arctic Council**.
- ▶ About **25 universities and institutes** in India are involved in Arctic research in India

Why does India want enhance its research role in Arctic?

- ▶ Weather of **Arctic influences Indian monsoon**.
- ▶ Studying the **impact of climate change on ice caps** in Arctic
- ▶ The region **holds immense geopolitical importance as the Arctic is projected to be ice-free by 2050** and world powers making a beeline to exploit the region rich in natural resources.
- ▶ Way forward
- ▶ India must officially appoint an **'Arctic ambassador/representative' who will represent and voice India's perspectives on Arctic affairs**.
- ▶ Constituting a dedicated expert committee to plan, monitor, steer, implement and review India's Arctic policy **may help streamline the country's approach in a better manner**.

War crimes and the rules of war (Ukraine crisis)

Context:

- ▶ During the **2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine**, Russian authorities and armed forces were accused of committing **war crimes** by carrying out both deliberate attacks against civilian targets and indiscriminate attacks in densely populated areas.

Background (Genesis of War Crimes and the rules of war):

- ▶ As per United Nations, the concept of war crimes developed particularly at the end of the **19th century** and the beginning of the **20th century**.
- ▶ During that time, the **international humanitarian law**, which is also known as the law of armed conflict, was codified.
- ▶ **Then Hague Conventions** was adopted in 1899 and 1907.
- ▶ **The Hague Conventions** prohibited the warring parties of using certain means and methods of warfare.

■ What are war crimes?

- ▶ As per the **Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court**, when it comes to war crimes, the court has jurisdiction when the crime is committed as part of a plan or policy or as part of a large-scale commission of such crimes.
- ▶ For the purpose of this statute, 'war crimes' means grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949.

■ What about 'grey areas' in the definition?

- ▶ As per the **UN Office on Genocide Prevention** and the Responsibility to Protect war crimes are separated from **genocide** and **crimes against humanity**.
- ▶ Genocide and crimes against humanity can happen in peacetime. It can happen during the unilateral aggression of a military toward a group of unarmed people.
- ▶ On the other hand, war crimes are defined as occurring in a domestic conflict or a war between two states.

Did Russia commit war crimes?

Russia has been accused of using cluster munitions in the bombardment of residential areas in the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv. Human rights groups say the weapons are indiscriminate and the Russians' use of cluster munitions in a populated area could be considered a war crime.

Wrapping Up

War crimes investigations and trials often take years to come together, and sometimes fail to secure a conviction. In the case of Ukraine, events have moved at an unprecedented pace. After dozens of governments formally requested action, the ICC launched a war crimes investigation just weeks into the conflict. Still, legal experts said proving in court that a military unit has intentionally targeted civilians, or recklessly bombarded them, is a difficult task

Iran–Russia Relations under Raisi: The Eurasian Dimension

Context:

Iran's President *Ebrahim Raisi* recently visited Moscow. It was President Raisi's first bilateral and third foreign visit after coming to power since August 2021. Both Iran and Russia have continuously shown growing convergence in their relationship with each other.

Background:

- ▶ Iran and Russia are strategic allies and form an axis in the Caucasus alongside **Armenia**.
- ▶ Iran and Russia are also military allies in the conflicts in Syria and Iraq and partners in Afghanistan and post-Soviet Central Asia.
- ▶ In the past, **Hassan Rouhani** (president of Iran 2013-21) has been slammed for Trusting the west, but the new president **Ebrahim Raisi** is trying to reinforce relations with non-western countries, including China and Russia.

Contours of Iran-Russia Relations:

- ▶ **Strengthening Bilateral Trade:** The record figure of Iran-Russia bilateral trade exceeded **\$3.5bn in 2021**.
- ▶ But it still falls far short compared with the levels reached between Russia and several other regional actors.
- ▶ Bilateral cooperation in infrastructure, energy, banking and trade are the area of common interest.
- ▶ **Raisi has asserted that Iran–Russia ties are on the path to becoming strategic relations.**

Geo-economic Opportunities and Challenges:

- ▶ **Countering Economic sanction levied by the USA:** Strengthening of economic ties with Russia has acquired a new significance in countering Washington's economic pressure and policy of isolating Iran. The **bilateral trade between Iran and Russia doubled** in the last two years. **Iran's exports to Russia have passed US\$ 1 billion for the first time.**
- ▶ **EAEU-Iran preferential trade agreement (PTA):** The impressive growth comes after Iran and the **Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)** implemented in October 2019, a **three-year preferential trade agreement (PTA)** which stipulated that during this period, the two parties must accept the conditions for achieving a full free trade plan for tariff-free essential commodities.

Limitations:

- ▶ **Low shipping capacities of Iranian ports in the Caspian Sea:** Measures need to be taken to increase the volume of trade between Iran and the EAEU.
- ▶ **Underdeveloped Rail Communication:** Another limitation is underdeveloped rail communication **between Iran and Russia in the Caucasus region**. Unfortunately, due to the non-membership of Turkmenistan and the Republic of Azerbaijan in the EAEU, Iran does not have a direct land connection with the Union.

Conclusion:

Raisi's administration is firm on the "**strategy of balancing foreign relations**". Increasing cooperation and interaction with neighbours is Iran's basic priority to increase its bargaining power, especially at a time when its economy is fragile and its international position uncertain.

Role of UNHCR- A Critical Analysis

Context:

Millions of people are fleeing conflict in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Myanmar and recently in Ukraine, as well as persecution in areas of Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, creating the highest level of displacement since World War II.

About UNHCR:

The **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)** was created in 1950 to **address the refugee crisis that resulted from World War II**. It is a **UN agency** mandated to aid and protect refugees, forcibly displaced communities, and stateless people.

Key Challenges to UNHCR:

- ▶ Growing Disregard for International Law
- ▶ Mandate to address statelessness
- ▶ Disdain for Multilateral Cooperation
- ▶ Stretched Humanitarian System (due to major emergencies and COVID-19 pandemic)
- ▶ Increase in irregular and mixed migration movements

Area of Improvements:

■ Improving the security of refugees and humanitarian workers:

- ▶ Threats to the **physical security of refugees** and others of concern have grown in recent years. They emanate from **armed criminals, state and non-state armed actors**, local populations and even elements within the refugee community itself.
- ▶ At the same time, the “humanitarian space” for aid workers has also been shrinking, and staff of humanitarian agencies have increasingly become the target of violent attacks.

■ Internal reform:

Its administrative structures, systems, processes and staffing arrangements are being reviewed to make sure that they are fully aligned with the challenges.

Promoting the use of Resettlement:

Resettlement is a vital instrument of international solidarity and responsibility-sharing, and UNHCR is mandated to continue to promote it. Resettlement on some occasions has been hampered by a very restrictive implementation of anti-terrorist legislation.

Conclusion:

Reform processes within the United Nations, particularly with regard to responses to **humanitarian concerns** and notably to situations of internal displacement, require UNHCR to **adopt new methods of work and new approaches** in order to become more flexible, efficient, reliable and integrated partner within the broader UN system.

India-Japan diplomatic relations (70th anniversary)

Context:

Visit of Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida to India on 19-20 March

Background:

Year 2022 marks the **70th anniversary** of India-Japan diplomatic relations. Prime Minister of both the countries concluded the **14th India-Japan Annual Summit** during this visit.

History of Japan's relations with India:

■ During ancient times:

- ▶ The friendship between India and Japan has a long history rooted in spiritual affinity and strong cultural and civilizational ties.
- ▶ Exchange between Japan and India is said to have begun in the 6th century when Buddhism was introduced to Japan.
- ▶ In 752 A.D. consecration or eye-opening of the towering statue of Lord Buddha in Todaji Temple (Nara) was performed by an Indian monk, Bodhisena.

■ During Colonial times:

- ▶ The **Japan-India Association was set up in 1903**, and is today the oldest international friendship body in Japan.
- ▶ **Japanese soil was used by Indian revolutionary Rash Bihari Bose** to spread the idea of fighting against the British rule for liberating India.
- ▶ It must also be remembered that Azad Hind Fauz was organised with the help of Japanese Army and both fought together against the British forces to free India during the Second World War.

■ After India gained Independence:

- ▶ In 1949, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru donated an Indian elephant to the Ueno Zoo in Tokyo.
- ▶ Japan and India signed a peace treaty and established diplomatic relations on 28th April, 1952. This treaty was one of the first peace treaties Japan signed after World War II.
- ▶ India was the first country to receive Japanese Official Development Assistance in 1958

■ In the Post-Cold War Era:

- ▶ **India's East Asia Policy** and its need to fill the void, left by the termination of Soviet Union, cemented the bond of between India and Japan even more.
- ▶ The relationship between the two countries was soon revived as the then Prime Minister of Japan Yoshiro Mori visited India in the year 2000 and "**Global Partnership for India and Japan for 21st Century**" was signed.
- ▶ Further upgrade of this relation took place when in **2006**, the association between the two countries was elevated and termed as "**Global and Strategic Partnership**".
- ▶ In **2014**, the relation was ameliorated further to "**Special Strategic and Global Partnership**".

■ Strategic Relations:

- ▶ India and Japan are both members of Quad.
- ▶ India and Japan are also camping for a seat in UNSC as permanent members.
- ▶ India and Japan's recently concluded trilateral partnership with Italy to counter China and maintain peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific also showcases common ground in strategic sphere between the two countries.

Economic ties between India and Japan:

- ▶ India and Japan have signed a **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement** in 2011.
- ▶ The **Technical Intern Training Program (TITP)** between India and Japan also has potential to deepen economic relations between the two.
- ▶ Recently India, Australia and Japan formally launched the **Supply Chain Resilience Initiative**. The initiative was launched to counter the dominance of China in the **Global Supply Chain**.

Way ahead

- India and Japan need to enhance their **people to people contact** even more.
- **Japan's ageing economy** can be sustained **by India's human resource**.
- Both countries can together help **keep China in check**.
- Japan can be a source of further capital investment in India, especially has less investment opportunities now are visible for the former in China due to deteriorating relations between the two.

India Australia economic partnership trade agreement

Context:

India and Australia have signed a new trade deal. It is a historic deal and the two countries are looking at each other to make the most of this agreement.

Background:

- The India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (Ind-Aus ECTA), was signed on April 2, 2022.
- This is the third **free trade agreement** for India, who has previously signed similar trade agreements with Japan and Korea.

Quick summary of the Agreement:

- **Aim:** The aim is to enhance the bilateral trade to \$45 billion in the next five years (currently at \$27.5billion), with a clear focus on job creation and exports.
- **Zero-duty access:** Australia is offering zero duty access to India for about 96.4 per cent of exports (by value) from day one. This covers many products which currently attract 4-5 per cent customs duty in Australia.
- **Cheaper raw material:** Since Australian exports are more concentrated in raw materials and intermediates, many industries in India will get cheaper raw materials which will make them competitive, in particular sectors like steel, aluminium and fabric/ garments.

- **Pharma sector:** For the pharma segment, the pact would provide fast-track approvals and fast-track quality assessment/inspections of manufacturing facilities.
- **Tariff reduction:** The **comprehensive IndAus ECTA** provides for competitive tariff elimination or tariff reduction on a wide range of goods and opens new services markets for suppliers across both markets.
- **Service sector:** In the services space, some of the key offers from Australia include: quota for chefs and yoga teachers; post study work visa of 2-4 years for Indian students on a reciprocal basis;
- **Labour-intensive sectors:** Labour-intensive sectors which would gain immensely include textiles and apparel, few agricultural and fish products, leather, footwear, furniture, sports goods, jewellery, machinery, electrical goods and railway wagons.

Excluded Items:

To safeguard sensitive sectors, India has several goods in the exclusion category in which no duty concessions will be accorded to Australian imports.

- ▶ Such goods will include milk and other dairy products, toys, sunflowers, seed oil, walnuts, pistachio nuts, platinum, wheat, rice, bajra, apple, sugar, oil cake, gold, silver, chickpeas, jewellery, iron ore and most medical devices.

Impact of the Agreement:

- ▶ Now, with a trade deal in place, bilateral trade is expected to touch \$45 billion in the next five years.
- ▶ The agreement will see both governments secure alternative supply chains with each other and counter China by slashing duties on more than 85% of export goods. It is expected to be implemented in the coming four months.

Refugee Crisis – Indian context

Context:

The issue assumes significance in the wake of 'Ukraine Crisis' and the flood of refugees.

What are the challenges faced by refugees?

- Limited access to quality education
- Compromised mental health and the threat of 'lost' childhoods
- Separation from families and greater vulnerability
- Shifting family dynamics and responsibilities
- Isolation in host community
- Concern's work with refugee children

What are the Legal Framework present in India?

- India is neither a signatory to the **1951 UN Refugee Convention** relating to refugee status nor of its **1967 Protocol**.

- India is not a signatory to the **1951 United Nations Convention** and **1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees**, and it does not currently have a national law on refugees.
- The refugees and asylum seekers were entitled to the rights in **Articles 14, 20 and 21 of the Constitution**.

- **Foreigners Act, 1946:** The **Foreigners Act, 1946**, gives the central government the right to deport a foreign national.
- **Passport Act, 1920:** According to the Passport Act, 1920, it is mandatory for anyone entering India through water, land or air to possess their passport and also prohibits the entry of the person not possessing the document.
- As the **Citizenship Act 1955**, an illegal immigrant can be: Foreign national who enters India on valid travel documents and stays beyond their validity, or Foreign national who enters without valid travel documents.
- While law and order is a **State subject** under the **Indian Constitution**, international relations and international borders are under the exclusive purview of the Union government.
- In 2011, the Union government circulated to all states and Union Territories a Standard Operating Procedure to deal with foreign nationals who claimed to be refugees.

India also needs to strengthen the border areas as the borders are porous and the neighbourhood countries are facing political vulnerabilities constantly. India can improve border surveillance, exploring the options of border fencing and smart walls, etc.

India-UAE Free Trade Agreement and its significance

Context:

India and the United Arab Emirates have signed the **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)**.

Background:

- ▶ India and UAE have entered into a **Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** by signing the CEPA in February, 2022.
- ▶ The above deal was signed in a virtual summit headed by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

What is a Free Trade Agreement?

- ▶ It is an agreement between two or more nations to eliminate tariffs and non-tariff barriers on a significant amount of imports from partner countries.
- ▶ Services, investment, and economic cooperation may all be covered by the agreement.
- ▶ **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement** is one of the types of Free Trade Agreement.
- ▶ It is **India's First Free Trade Agreement in the last 10 years**. The last major FTA India signed was with Japan in 2011.
- ▶ India-UAE qualifies as an **"early harvest agreement"**. Under an early harvest agreement, **two trading partners significantly reduce or eliminate customs duties on a limited number of goods** and relax norms for promoting trade in services.

Importance for the agreement:

- ▶ The CEPA is also the first of its kind in India's stable of FTAs given that it comes with **an in-built safeguard mechanism**.
- ▶ It is important to note that the government has criticised the lack of safeguards in previously negotiated FTAs that left domestic industry vulnerable to import surges.
- ▶ The CEPA with the UAE incorporates a **permanent safeguard mechanism** that can be **resorted to** by either nations, **in case of a sudden surge in imports**.

To protect domestic industry, **India has decided to keep a range of agri-products outside the deal. This includes dairy, tea, coffee, rubber, spices, sugar and tobacco products.**

Manufactured items such as pharmaceuticals, certain chemicals including azo dyes, aluminium and copper scrap, certain categories of steel, helicopters and aeroplanes have also been kept out.

- ▶ UAE is the third largest trading partner of India after China and USA.
- ▶ The UAE has established itself as a major economic hub not just in the Middle East/West Asia region, but also globally.
- ▶ As a part of Gulf Cooperation Council, UAE can help in finalising the FTA between Indian and the GCC.
- ▶ India-UAE relations have become a focal point of India's Extended Neighbourhood and Look West policies in the region. This deal will further boost the relation between the two countries.

India's Extended Neighbourhood: In 2004 the Indian government affirmed that "the concept" of an "extended neighbourhood for India" included the region from the Suez Canal to the South China Sea and includes within it West Asia, the Gulf, Central Asia, South East Asia, East Asia, the Asia Pacific and the Indian Ocean Region.

India and Nepal: moving beyond the hurdles of Past

Context:

The latest statement made by the Indian Embassy in Nepal on the issue of border dispute between the two countries. It says "India's position on its boundary with Nepal is well known, consistent and unambiguous"

Background:

- India and Nepal share the history of cordial relations since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.
- The warmth between the two seems to have been lost in last few years and one of the main reason of the same is the border disputes, with respect to territories of **Limpiadhura, Lipulek and Kalapani**, between the two countries.



Map in Nepal's Textbooks

- The Indian Embassy on 16th January, 2022 reiterated the view of the Indian Government stating that all the above-mentioned territories are part of India.

The current state of relationship:

- The bilateral relations between India and Nepal have hit the rock-bottom though the two are far to be termed as adversaries of each other.
- Drop in cordiality between the two can be attributed to factors such as-
 - ▶ blockage of 2015
 - ▶ territorial disputes
 - ▶ condition of Nepali immigrants in India
 - ▶ growing influence of China in Nepal

What measures are required?

- **Mutual understanding:** India and Nepal both need to understand the requirement of using bilateral mechanisms, that have been set to resolve the disputes between the two countries, to their fullest potential.
- **Focus on resolving issues:** The border dispute between the two countries look minor, but allowing it to fester is likely to sow the seeds of immense competition and intense rivalry in the sensitive Himalayan frontier with far-reaching geopolitical implications. Both the countries therefore have to focus their energies towards resolving these amicably.
- **Government-to-Government bonding:** It is true that Nepal-India relations are largely governed by people-to-people relations, but the importance of government-to-government relations can no longer be underestimated.

Blue Opportunities for Green Development of Pacific Island Countries

Context:

Lack of economic opportunities due to the impact of COVID-19 have forced countries all over the world including the small island countries of Pacific to explore new ways in which growth can be brought back on track. One of this is to explore the Blue Opportunities that will pave the way for sustainable development of these countries.

What are Blue Opportunities?

Blue Opportunities are considered to be the way forward for sustainable development of the Pacific Island countries. These opportunities tend to adhere to adopting those practices that help in preservation of ocean ecosystem and build "Blue Economy".

- According to the World Bank, the blue economy is the "sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and jobs while preserving the health of ocean ecosystem."

What are the environmental challenges faced by the Pacific island countries?

- Rising sea level
- Ocean acidification
- Salt water intrusion

How Blue Opportunities can be adopted by Pacific Ocean countries?

- Coastal conservation now is being done by the indigenous communities on these islands through constructing sea walls and dykes.
- Conservation of coastal areas is also been taken up by planting mangroves on the shores which would not only help the community against storm surges but will also help in carbon sequestration and promote bio-diversity.
 - ▶ Designating marine protected areas or taboo areas where fishing activities are not permitted have been found to be effective in getting the ecosystem to bounce back and flourish. This will lead to ample opportunities in near and far future for the fishing industry.
 - ▶ Climate loss and damage, compensation has been another tool that could potentially assist the Pacific island countries in achieving their developmental goals.
 - ▶ Key focus of Pacific island countries should also be on decarbonising the maritime shipping sector by using green energy powered vehicles for transportation. This strategy will also insulate these countries from volatile prices of fossil fuels.

What role can be played by other countries for protection of global environment and hence the Pacific Island countries?

It is important to remember that the Pacific Island countries are very small and thus do not in a big way contribute to deterioration of the global environment. The onus therefore falls on major economies and emitter of the world. The major contribution from these countries can come in the form of them adhering to the Nationally Determined Contributions accepted under the Paris Peace Agreement.

Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) or Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) is a non-binding national plan highlighting climate change mitigation, including climate related targets for **Greenhouse Gas emission reductions**, policies and measures governments aim to implement in response to climate change and as a contribution to achieve the global targets set out in the Paris Agreement.

Harnessing New Opportunities in a World of Declining Multilateralism

Context:

Today, the world is somehow witnessing the crisis of multilateralism, however, it is often forgotten that this crisis (declining multilateralism) could offer new opportunities for the countries to harness, particularly India.

Background

- The **post-World War II** multilateral order may have been shaped largely by the western allies, but this did not deter India from taking on an active role across different negotiations for the setting up of new international organisations.
 - ▶ For instance, even before the country won independence in 1947, its negotiators worked systematically to ensure that any international trade organisation that emerged would take into account its interests (and the concerns of several other developing countries).
 - ▶ India was a founding member of the **United Nations (UN)**, and an original signatory to the **General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)**.
 - ▶ Even when the rules of the game did not turn out to its advantage—it was neither a permanent member of the **UN Security Council**, nor was it a member of the informal decision-making “**Quad**” group in the **GATT**—its enthusiasm for multilateralism seldom waned.

What is ‘multilateralism’?

- Multilateralism is the process of organizing relations between groups of three or more states.
- Beyond that basic quantitative aspect, multilateralism is generally considered to comprise certain qualitative elements or principles that shape the character of the arrangement or institution.
- Those principles are:
 - ▶ An indivisibility of interests among participants
 - ▶ A system of dispute settlement intended to enforce a particular mode of behavior etc.

The rise of multilateral system

- Over the next 70 years, sometimes in coalitions and sometimes alone, the world’s largest democracy sought to reform the multilateral system from the inside.
- This earned it a reputation of being a “difficult” negotiator, especially when dealing with western counterparts.
- Its persistent activism, however, contributed to at least some updating of the system (e.g.,
- **Organisation**, from the mid-2000s onwards, began to include Brazil and India in the Quad).

How has the multilateral system helped India?

India's dramatic rise since the turn of the millennium has been facilitated by many **growth and development opportunities** afforded to it by **free markets** and the absence of major wars because of multilateralism along with other factors also multilateralism proved to be a good measure for India's **domestic economic and social reforms**.

How is it an opportunity for India?

- **First**, while India itself had, for decades, pushed for reforms in the multilateral order (e.g., for greater inclusiveness in international organisations), the crisis of the system seems to have finally created a more widespread recognition for the necessity of reform.
- **Second**, key players in the west—especially in Europe—have begun to recognise that they need new allies and friends. This is especially so given that the US seems to be turning away from the very system that it had led in creating, and then served as a guarantor for.
- **Third**, a significant cause for the malaise of multilateralism lies in the disillusionment of the many—within both the global north and the global south—who believe that they have missed out on the gains of globalisation. This disillusionment, in turn, is a product not only of inequalities that have indeed increased across many societies, but also of the absence of a convincing narrative about globalisation and the multilateral rules that facilitate it. In some key policy circles in developed countries, this has prompted considerable soul-searching, as exemplified by Munich Security Conference 2020 and its focus on “westlessness”.
- **And fourth**, a recognition seems to be finally growing that sometimes helter-skelter globalisation—in a world where production chains can be weaponised—is no longer acceptable. Alternative and more sustainable forms of globalisation need to be developed, which meet goals of both prosperity and security. The moment is ripe for sharing new ideas. And while India has always had much to offer the world, the world may now be ready to appreciate it.

Global Security Initiative

Context:

Recently China announced to launch a new initiative, ‘the Global Security Initiative’ to counter the QUAD in the Indo-Pacific region.

Background:

- Indo-Pacific region remained a major focus not only in the contemporary times but from the historical times.
- Even during the **Colonial era**, the British followed the expansionary policy by colonizing various countries like India, Myanmar and Sri Lanka to have a strategic presence in the region.
- The Indian Ocean region and the Pacific Ocean region account for 60% of world trade.

What is Global Security Initiative?

An action plan is taken by China to counter the bloc and group politics in the Indo-Pacific region, e.g., QUAD and AUKUS.

What are the main objectives of the Initiative?

- Comprehensive, Cooperation and sustainable security in Indo-Pacific Region.
- Oppose unilateralism and say no to group Politics and blocs confrontation in the region.
- Build an Asian Security model of Mutual Respect, openness and integration.

How this could impact India?

- **Territorial integrity:** Among the other nations of QUAD India is the only country which shares a land boundary with China. Territorial conflict between two nations remained at a central position in diplomatic relations between the countries.
- **Strategic Presence:** India is also trying to increase its strategic presence in the Indo-Pacific region to promote peace, security and free navigation in the international waters. A new security initiative can pose a threat to the strategic presence of India in this region.
- **Trade:** Despite territorial conflict and power aspirations in the region, China has always remained one of the largest trade partners for India. Countering the QUAD initiative will have a direct impact on India's trade balance with China.
- **Pharmaceuticals:** Apart from trade in other products India is also relying on China for its API components for pharmaceutical companies.
- **What steps India should take?**
- **Neighbourhood First Policy:** India should focus on the neighbourhood first policy to have a close relationship with the nations in the region.
- **SAGAR Doctrine:** Under SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) Doctrine India should collaborate with nations sharing the Indian Ocean.
- **Act East Policy:** India should enhance its cooperation with the eastern nations like ASEAN countries to maintain the status quo in the region.
- **South-south Diplomacy:** Most of the emerging economies share the Indo-Pacific region. India should focus on South-South diplomacy to collaborate with these emerging economies.
- **International and multilateral forums:** India should collaborate with other nations for securing a proper rule-based world order in the international waters.
- **Aatmanirbhar Bharat:** India should promote its domestic industries and exports, to reduce the dependence on other nations for essential imports.

Conclusion:

India is the only country in the QUAD grouping which shares a land boundary with China, and the territorial disputes played an important role in deciding diplomatic relations between the two nations. India should be actively involved in world affairs and world trade and keep the idea of national interest and nation first policy to maintain a balance with every nation. To counter Chinese hegemony in the region India should actively engage in the QUAD grouping in various dimensions such as vaccine policy, energy security and soft diplomacy. Soft diplomacy and cultural linkages with other nations sharing the Indo-Pacific region could enhance India's strategic presence in the region.

Bill to ban funding of 'weapons of mass destruction'

Context:

Foreign Minister S Jaishankar introduced a Bill in Lok Sabha that seeks to prohibit the financing of **weapons of mass destruction (WMD)**.

About Weapons of Mass Destruction and their Delivery Systems (Prohibition of Unlawful Activities) Amendment Bill, 2022:

- It seeks to ban funding of **weapons of mass destruction (WMD)** and empowers the Centre to freeze and seize financial assets of people involved in such activities.
- It also fulfils India's international obligations pertaining to weapons of mass destruction.
- The Bill seeks to insert a new **Section 12A** in the existing law which states that "no person shall finance any activity which is prohibited under this Act, or under the United Nations (Security Council) Act, 1947 or any other relevant Act for the time being in force, or by an order issued under any such Act, in relation to weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems".
- It proposes to "**prohibit any person from making funds, financial assets or economic resources or related services available for the benefit of persons related to any activity which is prohibited under this Act.**"

Need:

- The earlier law of 2005 regarding WMDs and their **Delivery Systems (Prohibition of Unlawful Activities)** only banned their manufacture.
- The existing Act (Weapons of Mass Destruction and their Delivery Systems (Prohibition of Unlawful Activities) Act, 2005) does not cover the financial aspect of WMD delivery systems and inclusion of new provisions was essential to meet India's international obligations.

US makes lynching a hate crime

Context:

United States President Joe Biden has signed into law the first federal legislation that makes lynching a federal hate crime in the country after civil rights groups pushed for such a measure for more than a century.

Background

- Assent to Emmett Till Anti-Lynching Bill was given by President of US Joe Biden.
- This law makes lynching a federal hate crime.
- The passing of this Act is significant as the US continues to be rocked by 'black rights matter' movement following the killing of George Floyd by a police officer.

What is the Emmett Till Anti-Lynching Bill?

- It makes lynching a federal crime punishable by imprisonment of up to 30 years. The legislation is named after 14-year-old Emmett Till, who was brutally murdered in a racist attack in Mississippi in 1955.
- This law expressly terms lynching to be a hate crime.
- The abovementioned law was unambitiously passed by the US lawmakers with only 3 Republican legislators opposing it.
- Under this law, an action can be prosecuted as a lynching when a person conspires to commit a hate crime that results in death or serious injury.
- It has to be noted that in the legislative history of United States, the passing of an Anti-Lynching Bill was attempted about 200 times.

Lynching in India:

- In recent years India has also faced the problem of mob lynching. Most common reason for lynching in India have arisen due to cow vigilantism.
- People getting lynched in most cases are accused of smuggling cattle for slaughtering them.
- Rumors regarding crimes or wrong committed by a person may also become the reason for him being lynched by the mob.
- It has been found that in most cases of lynching, the incident was caused due to spread of rumors through social media.
- People belonging to minority community have mostly been the victims of lynching in India.

Lynching laws in India

There is no national law made on mob lynching. Mob lynching is not defined in IPC, CrPC, and nor defined in the constitution.

Though there are certain provisions in the IPC, for example-

- **Section 223 (a)** of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), 1973 states that persons or a mob involved in the same offence in the same act can be tried together.
- **Sections 302** (murder)
- **Section 304** (culpable homicide not amounting to murder)
- **Section 307** (attempt to murder)

Which states have anti-lynching laws?

- **Jharkhand:** In Jharkhand, the Prevention of Mob Violence and Mob Lynching Bill, 2021 envisages imprisonment for those pronounced guilty of mob violence and lynching for periods ranging from three years to life term, besides fine and attachment of property.
- **Rajasthan:** In August 2019, the Rajasthan government passed the 'The Rajasthan Protection from Lynching Bill, 2019' providing for life imprisonment and a fine from Rs 1 lakh to Rs 5 lakh to those convicted in cases of mob lynching leading to victim's death.
- **West Bengal:** In August 2019, the West Bengal Assembly passed 'The West Bengal (Prevention of Lynching) Bill, 2019', proposing a maximum punishment of life imprisonment and fines ranging from Rs 1 lakh to Rs 5 lakh for offences.

A closer look into Feminist Foreign Policy in India

Context:

India's commitments to international agreements towards gender equality show its tremendous potential to make crucial advances in feminist foreign policy. But there are remaining gaps that India needs to fix in order to realise its full potential.

Background:

We have seen that during the last couple of years several countries around the globe have gained traction in terms of the merits and efficacy of the **Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP)**. Analysing a little deeper reveals a very interesting aspect of it, which is how it gets influenced by the context in which it is discussed.

Development of Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) Framework:

- It took shape with **Sweden's adoption of a Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) in 2014**. After that several countries have announced **gender mainstreaming** in their foreign policy.
- Feminist approaches to international affairs can be traced back to the 1980s, though largely rooted in traditional thinking and activism.
- The scenario started changing in the 1990s with the realisation that it is not only necessary to include women in peacebuilding and peacekeeping but also in the wider gamut of diplomacy and foreign and security policy.

Dimensions of Feminist Foreign Policy in Indian Context:

- **Deconstruction of power structures:**
 - ▶ Ending gender essentialist standards
- **Involvement of women and focus towards ensuring equality:**
 - ▶ Equal representation of women
 - ▶ Ending the idea of foreign policy being a male-dominated field
 - ▶ Roles open to women remain highly gendered
- **Human security school of thought:**
 - ▶ Securing peace
 - ▶ Enhanced accessibility to basic human rights
 - ▶ Specific allocation of resources to realise the outcomes

Gender in India's foreign policy: On paper, India's commitments towards gender equality seem highly impressive. Ironically, in the recently released World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Report 2021, India had slipped 28 spots to rank 140 out of the 156 countries covered. Still, some examples need to be appreciated.

- Ratification of the **Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)** in 1993
- India's reiteration towards implementing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (UN SDG) 5 on gender equality
- Providing financial aid and assistance to multilateral programmes focusing on women's empowerment;
- India's membership in the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in 2020.

Conclusion:

The gaps that exist between progressive policy intent and actual impact has much to do with a socio-cultural context held back by strong cultures of patriarchy. Adopting a feminist foreign policy means a commitment to have gender equality and women's rights present in both foreign and national policies including health, climate, education, nuclear, security, economic issues & others. Both Genders mainstreaming in foreign policy and an overarching feminist foreign policy are equally important.

Revisiting RCEP, world's largest trade pact

Context:

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) officially came into effect on the first day of the New Year. Even without India, which virtually at the last moment developed cold feet and refused to join the 15-nation trade pact, it is the world's largest free trade agreement.

Background:

- The RCEP was first proposed at the 19th ASEAN meet in November 2011 with an aim to create a consolidated market for the 10 member countries and their trade partners.
- Negotiations to chart out this deal had been on since 2013, and India was expected to be a signatory until its decision last November.
- On November 4, 2019, India decided to exit discussions over “significant outstanding issues”.

What is RCEP?

Described as the “largest” regional trading agreement to this day, RCEP was originally being negotiated between 16 countries — ASEAN members and countries with which they have free trade agreements (FTAs), namely **Australia, China, Korea, Japan, New Zealand and India**.

Why did India opt out of the deal?

- Since the beginning, RCEP presented a platform to India to further its strategic and economic status in the Asia-Pacific region. Since it brought the biggest economies of the region into a trading arrangement for the first time, India felt it would be a singular opportunity to enhance its exports to the region.
- India also did not secure the kind of benefits it had hoped for in the services sector.
- **China factor:** Escalating tensions with China are a major reason for India’s decision. While China’s participation in the deal had already been proving difficult for India due to various economic threats, the clash at **Galwan Valley** has soured relations between the two countries.

How beneficial is the organization?

- **Increase in income:** By 2030, RCEP will increase the income of member economies by 0.6% while adding \$245 billion and 2.8 million jobs to the regional economy.
- **Greater cooperation:** It also stands to promote greater regional cooperation in trade and investment, addressing regulatory issues to ease cross-border movements.
- **Increase in regional investment:** Regional investment may increase further as RCEP prohibits performance requirements—such as a specified percentage of domestic content or requirement of technology transfer—being placed on investors as conditions for market access, and locks in future easing of measures thus lowering risk of backtracking.
- **Digital economy:** RCEP takes a pragmatic approach to the digital economy, a sector that rose in importance during the course of the pandemic.

Way forward:

The ramifications of India’s decision to opt out of RCEP will be tested. When India chose to stay out of the Belt and Road Initiative in 2017, there was much commentary that New Delhi might be isolating itself. Three years later, India’s position has been recognised by like-minded democracies, and many have said that India’s decision was prescient.

Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Agreement: Roadmap to India's Strategic Access in the Arctic

Context:

Several issues of mutual interest were discussed during the **India-Russia annual summit** but the agreement on an important Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Agreement (**RELOS**) could not be reached. RELOS remains to be a crucial agreement between India and Russia as both the countries plan to increase their bilateral investments in the **Arctic region and Russian Far East**.

What is RELOS?

The **Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Agreement (RELOS)** is a long-awaited administrative agreement that would enable the militaries of both the countries (India and Russia) to access logistics and support facilities at each other's bases and ports. It would facilitate the replenishment of fuel, rations, spare parts and berthing for troops, warships and aircrafts while operating away from home ports and bases during the war and peacetime missions.

Significance for India:

■ Economic and Geo-Strategic significance:

- ▶ India's interests in the Arctic region are increasing and it is keen to make investments particularly in the exploration of Russian oil, gas and other rare earth minerals in the near future.
- ▶ At present, India does not maintain any port facility or naval base in this region as a whole. An agreement such as RELOS would enable Indian Navy to have greater operational reach in the Arctic.

■ Emerging Shipping Connectivity:

- ▶ The signing of RELOS between India and Russia, would open India's access to Russian Arctic naval ports and military bases from Vladivostok to Murmansk and beyond.
- ▶ India, does not have its own full-fledged base or naval docking or refuelling facility in the Arctic, but through RELOS it would have access to all such facilities in the near future.

India's Interests in Arctic Region:

■ Environmental Interest:

- ▶ India's extensive coastline makes it vulnerable to the impact of Arctic warming on ocean currents, weather patterns, fisheries and most importantly, the monsoon.
- ▶ Arctic research will help India's scientific community to study melting rates of the Himalayan glaciers, which are endowed with the largest freshwater reserves in the world outside the geographic poles.

■ Scientific Interest:

- ▶ Research Stations: India launched its first scientific expedition to the Arctic in 2007 and set up a research station 'Himadri' in the international Arctic research base at Ny-Ålesund in Spitsbergen, Svalbard, Norway.
- ▶ India has two other observatories in Kongsfjorden and Gruevbadet in Norway.

■ **Strategic Interest:**

- ▶ **Countering Chinese Influence:** The strategic implications of an active China in the Arctic and its growing economic and strategic relationship with Russia are self-evident and need close monitoring.
- ▶ **Arctic Council Membership:** Since 2013, India has had observer status in the Arctic Council, which is the predominant inter-governmental forum for cooperation on the environmental and development aspects of the Arctic.

Partnering with Russia via an agreement such as RELOS would offer tremendous support and opportunities to India in the Arctic. India's primary engagements in the Arctic are focused on understanding scientific interconnections between Arctic sea ice melting and changes in Indian monsoon systems. India still cannot afford to lose the sight of geopolitical and geo-economic transitions emerging in the region, where states like China are pursuing dominant economic and strategic posturing in the region.

World powers vow to prevent spread of nuclear weapons

Context:

In a joint statement, permanent members of the UN Security Council (UNSC) pledge to ensure a nuclear war is never fought, amid rising world tensions.

Background:

Nuclear weapons have only been used twice in warfare—in the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945—about 13,400 reportedly remain in our world today and there have been over 2,000 nuclear tests conducted to date. The dangers from such weapons arise from their very existence. Thus, disarmament is the best protection against such dangers. However, achieving this goal has been a tremendously difficult challenge.

Important Treaties to prevent nuclear proliferation

- The United Nations has sought to eliminate such weapons ever since its establishment. The first resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly in **1946** established a Commission to deal with problems related to the discovery of atomic energy among others. A number of multilateral treaties have been established since then. These include the:-
- Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT):
- Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests In The Atmosphere, In Outer Space And Under Water, also known as the Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT). Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), which was signed in 1996 but has yet to enter into force
- **Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) :**
- Other initiatives include:
 - ▶ the Nuclear Suppliers Group
 - ▶ the Missile Technology Control Regime
 - ▶ the Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation
 - ▶ the Wassenaar Arrangement

Key-highlights of the Statements

- The statement said that the United States, United Kingdom, Russia, China and France – who are the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council – consider it their primary responsibility to avoid war between the nuclear states and to reduce strategic risks, while aiming to work with all countries to create an atmosphere of security.
- The five pledged to adhere to the 1970 Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) which obligates them “to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament.”
- A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.

Significance of the pledge

- **Confidence enhancement:** The agreement will “help build confidence and form the foundations of future control over offensive and defensive arms”.
- **Building trust and reducing conflicts:** The pledge will “increase mutual trust” and reduce the risk of nuclear conflict.

Third India-Central Asia Dialogue

Context:

India and five central Asian countries asserted the need for Afghanistan to have a “truly representative and inclusive” government and the need for immediate humanitarian aid for Afghan people.

- This consensus was announced in the joint statement of the third India-Central Asia dialogue.
- It was attended by the foreign ministers of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan.

Background

- PM Modi’s visit to the five Central Asian countries in 2015 and India’s permanent membership to the **Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)** in 2017 have paved the way for elevated strategic cooperation between India and Central Asian Republics after the launch of Connect Central Asia Policy in 2012.
- In addition to this, the **India-Central Asia dialogue** mechanism has honed India’s outreach to this region.

Key-highlights of the Summit:

- India and the Central Asian countries had similar concerns and objectives in Afghanistan. (Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan — share borders with Afghanistan)
- The countries flagged the goals of “a truly inclusive and representative government, the fight against terrorism and drug trafficking, ensuring unhindered humanitarian assistance, and preserving the rights of women, children, and the minorities”.
- All of them “unequivocally” stated their support for UNSC Resolution 2593 (2021), which demands that Afghan territory not be used for sheltering, training, planning or financing terrorist acts and calls for concerted action against all terrorist groups.

Why Central Asia assumes significance for India?

- **Geo-strategic location:** Its geographical proximity, strategic location, and historical linkages make it an important partner for New Delhi.
- **Energy hub:** Central Asia has an abundance of oil and gas deposits. The region contains vast hydrocarbon fields both on-shore and off-shore in the **Caspian Sea** which homes around 4 percent of the world's natural gas reserves and approximately 3 percent of oil reserves.
 - ▶ Gas (Turkmenistan)
 - ▶ Oil, gas and uranium (Kazakhstan)
 - ▶ Uranium and gas (Uzbekistan)
 - ▶ Hydropower (Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan)
- **Global power hub:** Strategically, Central Asia is emerging as the next high-stakes competition ground for global powers, hence, it would behoove India to pay closer attention.
- **Leading role:** Central Asia provides India with the right platform to leverage its political, economic, and cultural connections to play a leading role in Eurasia.
- **Significant transportation hub:** The region is a major transportation hub for gas and oil pipelines and multi-modal corridors connecting China, Russia, Europe, and the IOR.

How India is increasing engagement with the region?

Connect Central Asia Policy: India's 'Connect Central Asia Policy' covers an entire gamut of a multi-model approach to strengthen politico-economic, security, and cultural ties between the two.

- India is also involved in three connectivity initiatives that involve Central Asia. These initiatives are the:
 - ▶ International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC)
 - ▶ the Ashgabat Agreement
 - ▶ the development of Chabahar Port in Iran

Way forward:

- India has invited all the heads of Central Asian states, as a special and smart gesture, to participate as Chief Guests at the Republic Day next year as India celebrates her 75 Azadi ka Amrit Maahotsav. New Delhi is also expected to organize an India-Central Asia leaders summit in January 2022.
- These developments are likely to advance India's outreach to its extended neighbourhood and be a game changer as the region wades through the great power competition.

Intersecting Geo-economics and Geopolitics: Nord Stream 2 and Europe

Context:

Recently, the natural gas prices soared in Europe after the Nord stream-2 project faced a setback due to the sanctions by the US administration under 'Protecting Europe's Energy Security Act' of 2019.

Background

- The project aims to transport natural gas from Russia to Germany through the sea route bypassing land route covering many countries including Ukraine.
- It has been opposed by East European countries as well as USA administration due to many reasons, primarily to undermine the influence of Russia in Europe.
- In this background, the recent sanctions by the USA government on the project cause new irritants in the USA-Russia relations.

What is Nord Stream 2 project?

- This is an extension of Nord Stream project that aims at transporting natural gas from Russia to Germany through a system of offshore gas pipelines running under the Baltic Sea.
- In Nord 2 project, additional pipelines are installed for transporting gas from Russia to Germany.

Importance of the project-

■ For Germany:

- ▶ Economic- It will be able to get natural gas at a cheaper cost due to elimination of transit fees that were to be provided to the transit countries.
- ▶ Energy security- It will lead to energy security in the light of reduced domestic production in Europe. For instance, recent sanction on the project has increased gas prices by 17% in Europe.

■ For Russia:

- ▶ Political- Friendly relations with the Germany and thus, Europe can reduce USA's hegemony in the region fueling Russia's geopolitical ambitions.
- ▶ Economic- In the light of pandemic induced recession, Nord Stream project can lead to greater economic returns for the Russia.

Recent concerns about the project-

- Germany has highlighted that the operator is not organized in a legal form under German law.
- The main assets and human resources had not been transferred from the Swiss-based Nord Stream 2 parent company to its German subsidiary.
- USA feels that the project can lead to long term concerns on energy security for Europe.

Way forward:

It is necessary in the present context that fears among the European countries be addressed in a positive manner. In this direction, Russia can take following measures-

- Transferring the main assets and human resources from the Nord Stream 2 parent company to its German subsidiary.
- Discussions and dialogue in a wider manner to ensure that economic project will not be used for political reasons.
- An agreement with the transit countries by which Russia and Germany can provide some minimal transit fees to these countries.

'China backs Iran nuclear deal'

Context:

China has called for a 'new forum' to defuse tensions in the West Asia. China has reaffirmed its commitment to Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, an implicit rebuke of the U.S. for abandoning the accord.

About

■ What is Iran's nuclear deal?

- ▶ In 2015, Iran agreed a long-term deal on its nuclear programme with a group of world powers known as the P5+1 - the US, UK, France, China, Russia and Germany.
- ▶ It came after years of tension over Iran's alleged efforts to develop a nuclear weapon. Iran insisted that its nuclear programme was entirely peaceful, but the international community did not believe that.
- ▶ Under the accord, Iran agreed to limit its sensitive nuclear activities and allow in international inspectors in return for the lifting of crippling economic sanctions.

■ The US's withdrawal

- ▶ President Donald J. Trump withdrew the United States from the agreement in May 2018, saying it failed to address Iran's ballistic missile program and its role in regional wars.
- ▶ The United States re-imposed sanctions and moved to wipe out Iran's oil exports, prompting Iran to resume some of its nuclear activities.
- ▶ Following the U.S. killing of Iranian military commander Qasem Soleimani in January 2020, Iran announced plans to halt most of its commitments to the deal.

■ What's the need of forum?

- ▶ Iran has been locked in an acrimonious relationship with Saudi Arabia, the other major West Asian power, over the war in Yemen, Iranian influence in Iraq and Saudi support for Washington's sanctions on Tehran.
- ▶ The proposed forum would "enhance mutual understanding through dialogue and explore political and diplomatic solutions to security issues in the West Asia".
- ▶ The support for the Iranian nuclear deal, negotiated by the Obama administration but ultimately abandoned by Donald Trump, would be a precondition of entry to the forum.

Iran Nuclear Deal Impact on India

- Restoration of JCPOA may ease many restrictions over the Iranian regime, which may directly or indirectly help India. This can be reflected in the following examples:
- Boost to Regional Connectivity: Removing sanctions may revive India's interest in the Chabahar port, Bandar Abbas port, and other plans for regional connectivity.
- This would further help India to neutralize the Chinese presence in Gwadar port, Pakistan.
- Apart from Chabahar, India's interest in the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), which runs through Iran, which will improve connectivity with five Central Asian republics, may also get a boost.

China's land borders law and its implications for Nepal and Bhutan

Context:

China's new land border law strengthens land border protection, and also firming up the military-civilian role in defending the country's borders. The law has serious implications on its neighbors especially Nepal and Bhutan. This brief attempts to analyze implication of China's law on the two Himalayan countries.

Background:

- In October 2021, China passed a new "Land Borders Law". The law intends to defend China's territorial sovereignty and land borders with increased civil-military interactions and coordination. Although China has clarified that this law wouldn't affect the existing border treaties and cooperation, it incorporates several provisions that could further intimidate small and less powerful neighboring states like Nepal and Bhutan.

How Chinese border law is a threat to Nepal?

- The Chinese border law in this context poses a new challenge to Nepal.
- As Nepal attempts to pursue this delicate balance between the Asian giants, it will hesitate to question and scrutinize China, much to the latter's advantage.
- China will, thus, use this opportunity to increase connectivity, settlements, village constructions, and salami-slicing tactics across its borders with Nepal.
- And much of the issue gets even more complicated to resolve, once these Chinese villages and settlements are militarized and better connected.

Challenges persistent in Bhutan

- Severe infrastructure and material limitations to confront the Chinese intrusions, villages and settlements.
- Socio-economic problems
- China will exploit the law to make additional territorial gains through border villages and then supplement them with more militarization and connection.

India's view on the law

India has described China's "unilateral" enactment of a land boundary legislation as a matter of "concern" and hoped that Beijing would not undertake any action at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) under the "pretext of this law".

India-China border dispute

The India-China border dispute covers the **3,488-km-long Line of Actual Control (LAC)** of which 1,126 km is located in Arunachal Pradesh. China claims Arunachal Pradesh as South Tibet, which India has firmly rejected. The India-China border is divided into three sectors

- **Western:** The boundary dispute in the Western Sector pertains to the Johnson Line proposed by the British in the 1860s that extended up to the Kunlun Mountains and put Aksai Chin in the then princely state of Jammu and Kashmir.

- **Middle:** In the Middle Sector, the dispute is a minor one. It is the only one where India and China have exchanged maps on which they broadly agree.
- **Eastern:** The disputed boundary in the Eastern Sector of the India-China border is over the **MacMahon Line**.

India, Russia and the new era of global politics

Context:

For a 'stable and fair international relations system', strong relations between Russia and India are important in maintaining a balance in the changing world order. Thus, in the light of the recent 21st annual India-Russia Summit held in India, this brief delves into what is working for the relationship between the two nations, and what needs to be worked on.

Background:

- The visit by Russian President Vladimir Putin is in continuation of the tradition of Annual Summits alternately held in India and Russia
- The year 2021 marks
 - ▶ Completion of 5 decades of the 1971 Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation
 - ▶ 2 decades of Declaration on Strategic Partnership

Significance of ties with Russia to India-

■ Defence

- ▶ Russian remains a key player for Indian defence imports, despite plans for diversification. It accounts for about 60 per cent of the inventory of the Indian armed forces. It is also involved with the 'Make in India' initiative in defence equipment.

■ Economy

- ▶ The trade target between India Russia is set as USD 30 billion by 2025

■ Energy

- ▶ It includes hydrocarbons (oil and gas), as well as nuclear. India aims to increase import of oil from Russia, from currently 1 per cent of all imports, to 4 or 5 per cent in the next five years.
- ▶ Bharat Energy Center in Moscow was opened by India that will deepen bilateral cooperation and strengthen the 'Roadmap for Cooperation in Hydrocarbons for 2019-24'
- ▶ Petrochemicals- Russian investment in the Paradip cracker plant and an Indian investment in Arctic LNG-2 are being explored.
- ▶ Green energy- With India announcing its net zero target date, the need to transition to greener energy sources has become imperative. A new Gas Task Force will bring in Russia as a major partner, including in the field of hydrogen.

Why India is significant for Russia?

■ Economy-

- ▶ Trade in pharmaceuticals continues to be one of the main items of India's exports to Russia. Indian companies' have huge participation in Russia's localization programme under Pharma 2020 and Pharma 2030 schemes.
- ▶ Cooperation in the Russian Far-East
- ▶ Under India's 'Act Far-East Policy' India could be a reliable partner in the development of the Russian Far-East. India has earlier committed US\$ 1 billion Line of Credit for projects for development of the Russian Far East
- ▶ Energy, transport and logistics, maritime connectivity, diamond processing, forestry, pharmaceuticals & healthcare, tourism and humanitarian fields are key areas of cooperation in the Russian Far-East
- ▶ **Balancing China in Asia**-Rise of regional powers will lead to balance of Chinese hegemony in the region and beyond.

Challenges in India- Russia relationship-

■ Geopolitical ideology-

- ▶ **Afghanistan**- While both country want stability in Afghanistan and curbs on export of terrorism and drugs, Moscow favors Taliban role and India is against it.
- ▶ **Pakistan**- Russia's tilt towards Pakistan reflects change in Russia's stance towards India
- ▶ **Indo-Pacific**- Russia considers India as USA's partner in the region, and India feels Russia is on the same page as China.
- ▶ **Strategic balancing** can also lead to isolation from both partners i.e USA and Russia

■ India-US relations-

- ▶ India's defence purchases from Russia could face threat from USA through sanctions under the **Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)**.

■ Economy-

- ▶ USA and China has greatly surpassed Russia in terms of economic strength, thus its's potential to support India is limited.
- ▶ Russia has still not joined India promoted International Solar Alliance (ISA) and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI)

Conclusion:

Indo-Russia relation is a symbol of the long standing and time-tested partnership characterized by mutual trust, respect for each other's core national interests and similarity of positions on various international and regional issues.

EU's role in Indo-Pacific

Context:

The European Union (EU) released the '**EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific**,' a document outlining a cooperation plan with the Indo-Pacific. The strategy defines the region as extending from the east coast of Africa to the Pacific Island States.

Background

- The economic, demographic, and political weight of the Indo-Pacific region is expanding, from the east coast of Africa to the Pacific island states.
- The world's centre of gravity is moving towards the Indo-Pacific, both in geo-economic and geo-political terms.
- The futures of the EU and the Indo-Pacific are interlinked.
- The EU and the Indo-Pacific are highly interconnected, with many shared interests and solid ties, from trade and investments to research and innovation, as well as sustainable development, climate change, biodiversity protection, and security.

Why is the need for EU Strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific?

- The Indo-Pacific region is increasingly becoming strategically important for the EU.
- The region's growing economic, demographic, and political weight makes it a key player in shaping the international order and in addressing global challenges.
- The EU is already the top investor, the leading development cooperation partner, and one of the biggest trading partners in the Indo-Pacific region.
- Together, the Indo-Pacific and Europe hold over 70% of the global trade in goods and services, as well as over 60% of foreign direct investment flows.

What are the main elements of the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy?

The basic message is that the EU will deepen its engagement with partners in the Indo-Pacific to respond to emerging dynamics that are affecting regional stability. There are **seven priority areas** for EU action:

- Sustainable and inclusive prosperity
- Green transition
- Ocean governance
- Digital governance and partnerships
- Connectivity
- Security and defense
- Human security

Way forward for EU

- **Support France:** The EU's security and defense capabilities are quite limited, as compared to the U.S. and China. To obviate an imbalance in favor of economic links, the EU will need to give adequate space and support to France which has sizeable assets and linkages with the Indo-Pacific.
- **Coordination with the UK:** EU also must forge strategic coordination with the U.K. as the latter prepares to expand its role in Asia as part of its 'Global Britain' strategy.
- **Leverage economic power:** As a major economic power, the EU has an excellent chance of success in its trade negotiations with Australia, Indonesia, and New Zealand and economic partnership agreement with the East African Community; and in forging fisheries agreements and green alliances.
- **Enhanced relations with partners:** To achieve all this and more, the EU must increase its readiness to share its financial resources and new technologies with partners.

Way forward for India:

- **Close partnership:** India's pivotal position in the region necessitates a closer India-EU partnership.

- **Trade agreements:** Early conclusion of an ambitious and comprehensive trade agreement and a standalone investment protection agreement will be major steps.
- **Effective cooperation:** Cooperation in Industry 4.0 technologies is desirable.
- **Upgrading ties:** Consolidating and upgrading defense ties with France, Germany, and the U.K. should also remain a significant priority.

Conclusion:

The European Union can create a vantage position for itself in the Indo-Pacific by being more candid with itself, more assertive with China, and more cooperative with India.

AUKUS Security Alliance

Context:

The U.S. the U.K. and Australia announced a new trilateral security partnership, AUKUS.

About the AUKUS Pact

- The historic grouping will advance strategic interests, uphold the international rules-based order, along with generating hundreds of high-skilled jobs.
- Under the first major initiative of AUKUS, Australia would build a fleet of nuclear-powered submarines with the help of the US and the UK, a capability aimed at promoting stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

Highlights of AUKUS Alliance :

- Indo-Pacific Focus: The AUKUS security team will focus on developing strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific region.
- Although the US has openly denied that the collection is targeted at China, its Indo-pacific status makes it an ally against China's independent actions in the South China Sea.
- The three countries alongside Canada and New Zealand already share a deep understanding of the Five Eyes partnership.
- Australia now has to join the top six-nation group - India, US, UK, France, Russia and China - using nuclear-powered submarines. It would also be the end of the world to have such submarines without having a nuclear power plant.
- Multilateral Partnerships: AUKUS will also include new building and integration meetings between the three countries, as well as partnerships in emerging technologies (using AI, quantum technology and underwater capabilities).

What does the AUKUS Security Alliance mean in India?

- According to Indian Observers, the partnership is very beneficial to India. As India has been at the forefront of uniting the unity of the Indo-Pacific countries. Benefits include,
- Develop Indian partners in the region: QUAD means nothing but the skills development required by all its members, especially Australia and Japan. This will give Indian partners more confidence and confidence in their defensive skills.
- AUKUS and the future US military base on Australian soil will support India's efforts to protect the Indo-Pacific.

- Provide much needed time in India to build naval capabilities: In addition, AUKUS will buy some valuable time for India to strengthen its rural military capabilities.
- Develop India's ambitions for international relations: Partnerships will allow India to demand more of its foreign policy and defence strategy.

Why did China express its concern about the AUKUS Security Alliance?

- First, AUKUS aims to protect the strategic interests of the partner in the region across the two seas and 38 countries.
- Second, it is a message to China that the US will one day do the same to other countries in the region. Sharing military and critical skills such as cyber, artificial intelligence, and computum computing. It is a cause for concern in China, as these are the key areas in which China currently governs.
- Third, AUKUS is a security group, unlike QUAD, which is a communication group.
- Fourth, the Declaration marks a new decline in Australia-China relations. China is Australia's largest trading partner, with about US \$ 200 billion trading in two ways. But the relationship has been strained over the past few years.

Conclusion:

India now has very little to worry about before maritime and AUKUS in the game. This new alliance could allow the three countries to strengthen their focus on the more difficult part of the world. The triangular side of AUKUS will be a major message to China, and it will come close to balancing China in the Indo-Pacific region.

60 years of Antarctic Treaty

Context:

The 1959 Antarctic Treaty celebrates its 60th anniversary.

Background:

- Various international conflicts motivated the creation of an agreement for the Antarctic.
- After the Second World War, the U.S. considered establishing a claim in Antarctica. From August 26, 1946, and until the beginning of 1947, **Operation Highjump** was carried out, the largest military expeditionary force that the United States has sent to Antarctica to the present.
- In 1949, Argentina, Chile, and the United Kingdom signed a Tripartite Naval Declaration committing not to send warships south of the 60th South parallel, which was renewed annually until 1961 when it was deemed unnecessary when the treaty entered into force.
- This tripartite declaration was signed after the tension generated when Argentina sent a fleet of 8 warships to Antarctica.

What is Antarctic Treaty?

- The Antarctic Treaty was signed in Washington on 1 December 1959 by the twelve countries whose scientists had been active in and around Antarctica during the International Geophysical Year (IGY) of 1957-58.

- It entered into force in 1961 and has since been acceded to by many other nations.
- The total number of Parties to the Treaty is now 54.
- The treaty is remarkably short and contains only 14 articles.
- It remains the only example of a single treaty that governs a whole continent.
- Principal provisions include promoting the freedom of scientific research, the use of the continent only for peaceful purposes, and the prohibition of military activities, nuclear tests and the disposal of radioactive waste.

Significance of Treaty

- **Peace purpose:** The most important provision of the treaty is Article IV, which effectively seeks to neutralise territorial sovereignty in Antarctica.
- No formal recognition was given to any of the seven territorial claims on the continent, by Argentina, Australia, Chile, France, New Zealand, Norway and the United Kingdom.
- Russia, the United States and China — signatories with significant Antarctic interests who have not formally made territorial claims — are also bound by the limitations of Article IV.
- And one sector of Antarctica is not subject to the claim of any country, which effectively makes it the last unclaimed land on earth.
- The treaty also put a freeze on any disputes between claimants over their territories on the continent. Claimants agreed to abide by the rules and obligations of the treaty, which meant countries that don't recognise claims (such as China and Russia) are free to go about scientific research and peaceful activities.
- **Environment protection:** Protection of the Antarctic environment has been a central theme in the cooperation among Antarctic Treaty Parties. In 1964, the ATCM adopted Agreed Measures for the Conservation of Antarctic Fauna and Flora.
- **Scientific research:** It has been the main activity on the Antarctic continent, and both the Antarctic Treaty and the Environment Protocol emphasize the importance of science and scientific cooperation in the Antarctic Treaty System.
- **Tourism guidelines:** The main ATCM regulations and guidelines for tourists and expedition organizers are contained in the Environment Protocol and Tourism Guidelines. The ATCM also issues specific guidelines for the sites most visited by tourists.

Conclusion

Antarctic watchers say though that the strength – and the weakness – is that it operates on consensus. One solution to the lack of inspections is to set up an independent group of inspectors – this is something that was provisioned for in the Antarctic Treaty but never established.

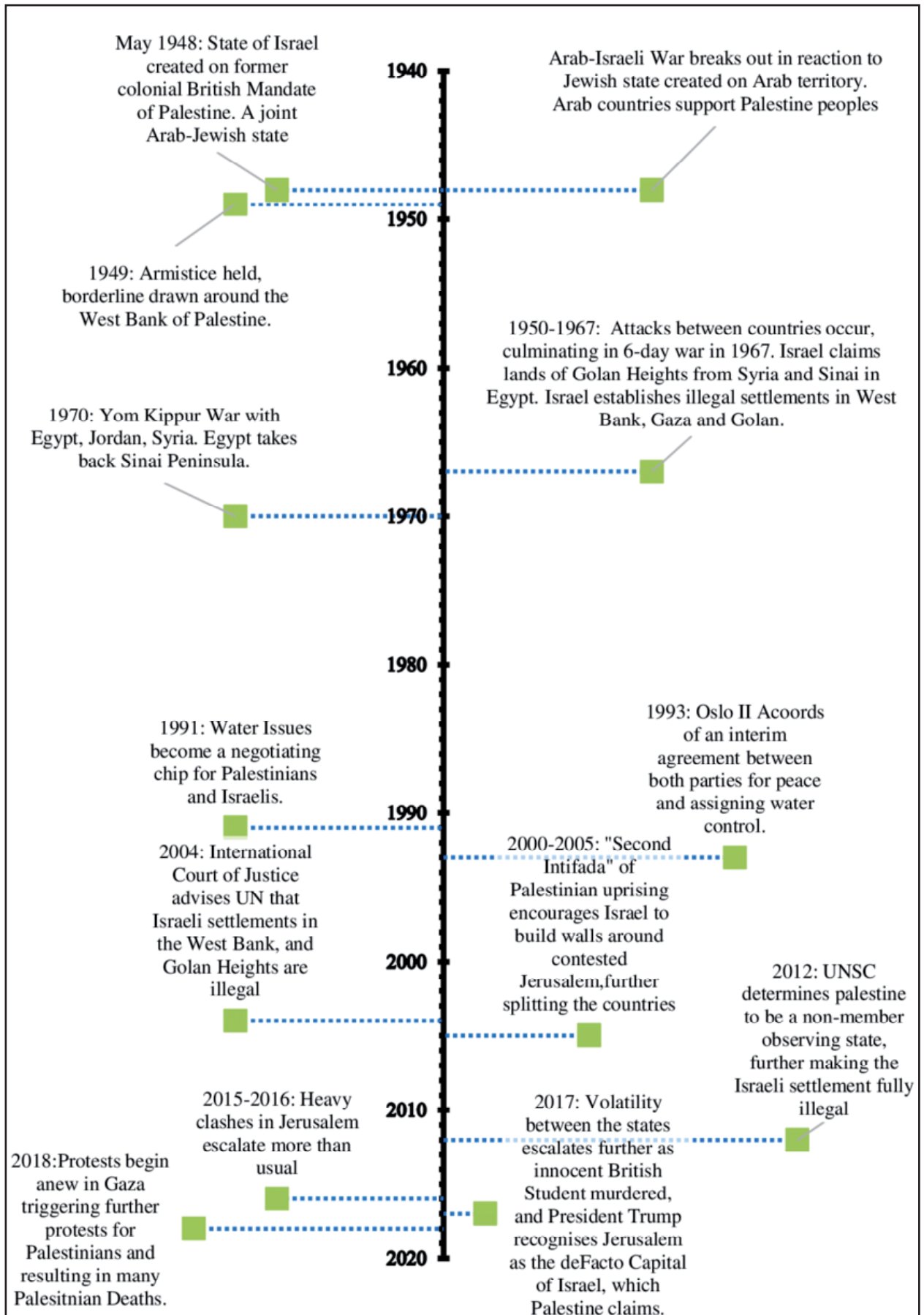
Israel—Palestine Conflict

CONTEXT:

Egypt, France, Germany, Jordan warn Israel that annexing settlements in the occupied West Bank could have 'consequences' for relations.

Background:

- The Israeli-Palestinian conflict dates back to the end of the nineteenth century.



- In 1947, the United Nations adopted Resolution 181, known as the Partition Plan, which sought to divide the British Mandate of Palestine into Arab and Jewish states.
- On May 14, 1948, the State of Israel was created, sparking the first Arab-Israeli War.
- The war ended in 1949 with Israel's victory, but 750,000 Palestinians were displaced and the territory was divided into 3 parts:
 - ▶ the State of Israel
 - ▶ the West Bank (of the Jordan River)
 - ▶ the Gaza Strip

Stand of Palestine:

- They want Israeli to withdraw from pre-1967 borders and establish an independent Palestine state in West Bank and Gaza.
- Israel should stop all expansion of settlements before coming to peace talks.
- Palestine wants Palestine refugees who lost their homes in 1948 to be able to come back.
- Palestine wants **East Jerusalem** as the capital of the Independent Palestine state.

Stand of Israel:

- Sovereignty over **Jerusalem**.
- Recognition of Israel as a Jewish State. Note: Israel is the only country in the world created for a religious community.
- The right of return of Palestine refugees only to Palestine and not to Israel.

Recent issue of AL-Aqsa:

■ Why is Al-Aqsa sacred for Jews?

In Judaism, the Temple Complex is the holiest location. The Dome of the Rock to the northern side and the Al-Aqsa Mosque towards the south are located on the Temple Mount, which is a walled complex within Jerusalem's Old City. Its Western Wall, a relic of the Second Temple and the sacred site in Judaism, is located southwest of the Temple Complex.

■ Why is it sacred for Muslims?

Al-Aqsa has two different meanings in Arabic: "the farthest," which relates to its location in relation to Mecca as described in the Quran, and "the ultimate," which pertains to its prestige among Muslims. Following Mecca's Masjid-al-Haram and Medina's Masjid-a-Nabawi, the mosque is Islam's third holiest location.

■ What is India's stand?

- ▶ At the initial stages of the Israel-Palestine conflict, India opposed partition and supported the Palestinian interests and one-state solution.
- ▶ Since 1992, India's policy shifted to focus on maintaining close ties with both Israel and Palestine.
- ▶ However, India retained its staunch support for the Palestinians.
- ▶ Since 2014, Indian foreign policy focused more on balancing its ties with both sides. It had shifted from supporting Palestine to abstention at the UN forums.
- ▶ India is currently backing the two-state solution to resolve this crisis, a major shift from the earlier support for Palestine and opposition to separate states.

- ▶ This takes into consideration the importance of smooth diplomatic ties with Arab nations – India’s major energy suppliers.

Conclusion:

The international community must do its part to not further kindle the brewing tensions and work towards supporting the welfare of all communities in the war-ridden region.

What New Quad means for India

Context:

India, Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States began a new quadrilateral economic forum, focused on trade, climate change, energy, and maritime security

Background:

- India’s new quad deal comes in the background of the Israel-US-UAE ‘Abraham accords’ which normalised Israel-UAE ties. Moreover, India’s talks with China over de-escalation at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) have reached an impasse as the 13th round of talks were not fruitful after Chinese side did not agree to any of India’s forward-looking proposals.

How it can be different from Quad:

- Similar to the original Quadrilateral Security Dialogue of India-US-Australia-Japan, this new quad engages India and US’ cooperation against instability. While the original quad reortedly counters China, this quad targets the instability in the Middle East (West Asia). However, the new ‘quad’ aims to counter China’s monopoly in the 5G race, semiconductors, technology, space and also limit its expansionist ideas - opening up new ports, naval base, surveillance and military incursions in South China sea and on land.

Significance for India:

■ Creating a minilateral in the Middle-East:

- ▶ Such events mark an important turning point in Delhi’s engagement with the Middle East.
- ▶ It suggests India is now ready to move from bilateral relations conducted in separate silos towards an integrated regional policy.
- ▶ As in the Indo-Pacific, so in the Middle East, regional coalitions are bound to widen Delhi’s reach and deepen its impact.

■ India bridging the Arab-Israeli rift:

- ▶ Often the Arab nations and Israel are divided over Palestine.
- ▶ The simultaneous expansion of Delhi’s cooperation with Israel and the Arab world was considered impossible.
- ▶ However, India’s new foreign policy broke from that assessment and demonstrated the feasibility of a non-ideological engagement with the Middle East.
- ▶ This diplomatic pragmatism allows Delhi to reimagine its policies towards the Middle East.

■ Extension of cooperation with the US:

- ▶ Thinking of the US as a partner in the Middle East is part of the reimagination.
- ▶ For long, India defined the US, and more broadly the West, as part of the problem in the Middle East.
- ▶ As a result, Delhi kept a reasonable political distance from the US in the region.

■ Miscellaneous:

- ▶ India's scale with Israeli innovation and Emirati capital could produce immense benefits to all three countries.
- ▶ Add American strategic support and you would see a powerful dynamic unfolding in the region.

Conclusion

- This engagement has thus opened up a new opportunity for India to go for deeper engagement with Israel without risking its relations with the other Arab states of the Persian Gulf.
- In the evolving scenario, there seems much scope for a profitable trilateral synergy, but India cannot take its preponderance as a given.
- There is much to be done in realizing the full potential of the "Indo-Abrahamic Accords".

Significance of Raisina Dialogue

Context:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the seventh edition of the Raisina Dialogue in New Delhi recently.

About

■ Raisina Dialogue:

- ▶ The Raisina Dialogue is an annual **conference on geopolitics and geoeconomics** addressing issues facing the **global community**.
- ▶ It takes its name from the Raisina Hill, the seat of the Indian government.
- ▶ It is organized by the **Ministry of External Affairs** in collaboration with the **Observer Research Foundation (ORF)**.
- ▶ Since its inception, the Raisina Dialogue has emerged as a leading global conference on international affairs featuring the participation of heads of state, ministers, journalists, academics and researchers.

Significance of Raisina Dialogue 2022:

- India is the second-largest country in the world in terms of population, and the significance of demographics can never be underestimating.
- No matter where there is conflict, India worries about evacuating its people. Therefore, India has to be the one country invested in global peace that will seek to avoid conflict
- The Raisina Dialogue 2022 will help in finding ways to move toward a global order that is inclusive and rules-based.

- The need for constructive conversations and encouraging diverse opinions along multiple tracks has never been more.
- In this discourse, we aim to map the evolving geopolitical and geoeconomic trend-lines, question prevalent dogmas about the international system, and encourage future-oriented thinking.
- The dialogue is a platform that brings together India's friends and partners seeking common ground.

CONCLUSION:

- To the emerging economies, raisina talks provide a platform to raise their voice and put it in front of the world.
- Good research is for public good and to achieve what must be done together and to find its way raisina talks is a good platform.

Relevance of OPEC for India's Energy Security

Context:

OPEC's share of Indian oil imports falls to lowest in at least 15 years

About OPEC:

- OPEC, is an inter-governmental organization of 14 major oil producing countries which together produces about 40 percent of the world's crude oil. OPEC oil exports represent about 60 percent of the total petroleum traded internationally. India is the world's 3rd largest importer of crude oil behind only the United States and China. Our imports from OPEC countries constitute 85 percent of our total crude imports and 94 percent of the gas imports.

- The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) was founded in Baghdad, Iraq, with the signing of an agreement in September 1960 by five countries namely Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela. They were to become the Founder Members of the Organization.
- These countries were later joined by Qatar (1961), Indonesia (1962), Libya (1962), the United Arab Emirates (1967), Algeria (1969), Nigeria (1971), Ecuador (1973), Gabon (1975), Angola (2007), Equatorial Guinea (2017) and Congo (2018).

How is OPEC important for India

- India as of now **imports roughly 70 percent** of its crude from the OPEC members.
- On a decadal comparison, the **imports have reduced drastically from 87 percent of India's total crude import to 70 percent** in 2021-22.
- This reduction is on account of India **expanding its import basket** to rope in non-OPEC members so as to have a **stable and consistent supply of crude**.
- The **United States is the largest non-OPEC crude importer** to India.

Why OPEC plus came into existence?

- When Russia concluded the Vienna Agreement in 2016, the Russian leadership believed that it would help prepare the country for the Russian presidential elections in March 2018.

- Higher oil prices ensured the Kremlin's financial capacity to lead a successful electoral campaign.
- This changed the regime's priorities – from satisfying the needs of the general population to ensuring the sustainability of the Kremlin's alliance with powerful tycoons, including that controlling oil production.
- For Saudi Arabia, turning what had been an ad hoc coalition into a formal group provides a hedge (protection) against future oil-market turbulence.
- For Russia, the formalization of the group helps expand Putin's influence in the Middle East
- However, both reportedly aimed at causing a drop in oil prices in order to hit US shale producers, who have continued to benefit from OPEC production cuts by expanding their market share.

Conclusion

The IOCs, independent oil companies and others have reduced their investments by more than 50% during two consecutive years. However, NOCs have not only weathered the storm from the downturn but have also bravely continued investing across the supply chain. In this way, OPEC will continue to be a dependable and reliable supplier of first choice to rapidly growing countries like India.

Importance of Abraham Accords for stability in Middle-east

Context:

The Abraham Accords was signed by the UAE, Bahrain and Israel, under U.S. President Donald Trump's mediation.

What are Abraham Accords'?

The Abraham Accords are a joint statement made between Israel, the United States and the United Arab Emirates on August 13, 2020. It also refers to the agreement reached between Israel, Bahrain and the UAE to normalise relations between the three.

Need for the Agreement

■ Strategic:

- ▶ Israel, the UAE and Bahrain share the **common threat perception** of Iran.

■ Economic:

- ▶ UAE and Bahrain are more **modern societies** which share the overarching and immediate priority of **post-pandemic economic resuscitation**.

■ Political:

- ▶ Donald Trump can sell this as a victory for his **Middle East policy** in the upcoming presidential elections.
- ▶ UAE **generates goodwill** in the U.S which was eroded due to the Yemen War.
- ▶ The **sense of isolation** that Israelis feel in their own neighbourhood may also be partially lifted.
- ▶ **What is the significance of the agreement?**

- This accord clearly marks a new beginning in the relations between the Sunni-ruled Gulf kingdoms and the Jewish state.
- It is the first between Israel and Arab countries since the 1994 Jordan-Israel peace treaty.
- Under the agreement, the UAE and Bahrain would normalise ties with Israel.
- This will herald better economic, political and security engagement.

India and The Abraham Accords

- India had welcomed the Accords, highlighting its support for mechanisms that offer peace and stability in the region.
- India now has stronger, multifaceted and growing socioeconomic engagements with Israel and the Gulf countries than before.
- With over eight million Indian diaspora in the Gulf remitting annually nearly \$50 billion, annual merchandise trade of over \$150 billion and sourcing of nearly two-thirds of India's hydrocarbon imports and major investments
- India is the preferred source of manpower, food products, pharmaceuticals, gems, jewellery and light engineering items.
- Indians are also the biggest stakeholders in Dubai's real estate, tourism and Free Economic Zones.

Way Forward:

- The **confrontational approach** in the Middle East seems to have delivered less. The Palestinians themselves in Gaza and Ramallah remain divided with differing political allegiances confronted by Israeli intransigence. Moreover, the **changing geopolitical dynamic** and US role in the region have yielded a fresh **collaborative approach** in the hope that it may also help in resolving the Palestinian issue.
- In the evolving scenario, there may be scope for a **profitable trilateral synergy** for India, but India cannot take its preponderance as a given. It needs to keep its powder as dry as the shifting sands of the Empty Quarter.

Vaccine diplomacy of India during Covid

Context:

India is regarded as the vaccine manufacturing hub of the world, contributing 60% to the global vaccine supply.

What is Vaccine diplomacy?

- Vaccine diplomacy, a form of medical diplomacy, is the use of vaccines to improve a country's diplomatic relationship and influence of other countries. Meanwhile, vaccine diplomacy also "means a set of diplomatic measures taken to ensure access to the best practices in the development of potential vaccines, to enhance bilateral and/or multilateral cooperation between countries in conducting joint R&D, and, in the case of the announcement of production, to ensure the signing of a contract for the purchase of the vaccine at the shortest term.

Importance of India's Vaccine Diplomacy

- The foreign-policy benefits in strategic areas could be great. For instance, India is keen on mending its ties with Bangladesh. New Delhi's controversial citizenship law enacted and the news of \$40 billion in investments from China to Bangladesh had strained ties between the two nations. The COVID-19 vaccine can let a little slack back in.
- Similarly, vaccine diplomacy provides an opportunity for India to resolve outstanding issues with Nepal. Relations between the two countries recently hit a new low when they entered into a heated exchange over the Kalapani territorial dispute -- an area situated at the strategic China-Nepal-India trijunction.
- In Indian Ocean countries like the Maldives and Mauritius, India's vaccine diplomacy can help foster stronger ties in the region, and offset China's growing influence attributable to its financial investments and social-development projects.
- Advantage over Chinese: China recently offered its vaccines to Nepal, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh as it held a multilateral dialogue with the four countries and Pakistan on anti-epidemic prevention.
- ECONOMIC BENEFITS
- **Make India global supply centre:** Beyond India's immediate neighbours, South Korea, Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Morocco and South Africa have all shown inclinations to purchase vaccines from India which is estimated to be 60% of the global supply of inoculants.
- **Boost Pharma Manufacturing in India:** India can become the pharmacy of the world. If Indian vaccines help developing countries to meet their urgent needs, they can become the future long term destination for market expansion of Indian pharmas.

Conclusion:

- Vaccines are the single most powerful health interventions developed by modern medicine. Universal, equitable, and affordable supply of vaccines for low- and middle-income countries are needed more than ever. In past epidemics, such as the H1N1 influenza, many developing countries were on the outside looking in when it came to access. India is now on the inside, and it can play a crucial role health and safety in an increasingly interdependent world.

SRI LANKA's Economic Crises

Context:

The Sri Lankan economy has been facing a crisis owing to a serious Balance of Payments (BoP) problem. Its foreign exchange reserves are depleting rapidly and it is becoming increasingly difficult for the country to import essential consumption goods.

What does Balance of Payment crises mean?

BOP is the difference between all the money that has entered the country during a particular period of time and all the money that has left the country during that same period. It has to be understood that money which enters and moves out of a country is in foreign currency (mostly US Dollars). Hence, more money moving out of the country than coming in implies depletion of country's foreign currency reserves. These reserves are important for a country because payment for imported goods can only be done through foreign currency.

What are the reasons for Balance of Payments crises surfacing in Sri Lanka?

- Sri Lanka's economy and its foreign currency revenue to large extent depends on tourism, which has received a severe beating in the recent times.
- The 2019 serial blast in Sri Lanka had caused decline in the arrival of foreign tourist in the country.
- Global pandemic of Corona has further decimated the tourism industry.
- The pandemic also did not allow Sri Lankan labourer to travel outside the country where they are employed (mostly gulf countries), thus impacting the foreign currency earned by Sri Lanka through the way of remittances.

What has the Government of Sri Lanka done to overcome the crises?

- Sri Lankan government has approached China and the latter has promised loan of \$ 1 billion and a credit line of \$ 1.5 billion.
- The Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka G. L. Peiris was on a visit to India recently where he has succeeded in receiving line of credit worth \$ 1 billion from the Indian Government.
- The Central Bank of Sri Lanka was not intending to receive aid from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as its assistance would have come with conditionalities.
- But the gravity of the situation has caused the Central Bank and the Sri Lanka government to approach the IMF for immediate assistance.
- **What is the way forward?**
- In the short term, Sri Lankan government has to seek aid of foreign currency from whatever sources it can to tide over the crises and provide immediate relief to its people.
- In the long term, the government of Sri Lanka is required to diversify its sources of foreign exchange earnings.
- The South Asian country also needs to produce, to a greater extent, items of daily consumption and public importance which can be produced/manufactured in Sri Lanka itself.
- Depreciation of Sri Lankan currency vis-à-vis US Dollar is necessary to make the exports from the country more competitive in international markets.
- Promotion of tourism must be focused on as Sri Lanka has been seeing fall in Covid cases.

5th BIMSTEC Summit and its significance

Context:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently participated in the 5th BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) Summit hosted in virtual mode by Sri Lanka, the current chair of BIMSTEC.

About 5th BIMSTEC Summit:

- The Summit's theme "**Towards a Resilient Region, Prosperous Economies, Healthy People**" captures the main current priorities of member states.
- The main outcome of the Summit was the **adoption and signing of the BIMSTEC Charter**, which formalizes the grouping into an organization made up of members' states that are littoral to, and dependent upon, the Bay of Bengal.

- The Summit also saw considerable progress being achieved in the BIMSTEC connectivity agenda with the **adoption of the 'Master Plan for Transport Connectivity'** by Leaders which lays out a guidance framework for connectivity related activities in the region in the future.
- **Three BIMSTEC agreements** were signed which represent progress being achieved in ongoing cooperation activities:
 - ▶ BIMSTEC Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters;
 - ▶ BIMSTEC Memorandum of Understanding on Mutual Cooperation in the field of Diplomatic Training and
 - ▶ Memorandum of Association on Establishment of BIMSTEC Technology Transfer Facility.

How significant is BIMSTEC for India?

- BIMSTEC provides a new platform for India to engage with its neighbours with the **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)** becoming dysfunctional because of differences between India and Pakistan:--
 - ▶ **BIMSTEC** allows India to pursue three core policies-
 - ▶ **Neighbourhood First**– primacy to the country's immediate periphery;
 - ▶ **Act East** – connect India with Southeast Asia; and
 - ▶ **Economic development of India's north-eastern states** – by linking them to the Bay of Bengal region via Bangladesh and Myanmar.
- Allows India to counter China's creeping influence in countries around the **Bay of Bengal** due to the spread of its **One Belt and One Road Initiative**.
- It is of utmost significance to India as it is a major support in implementing its **Act East Policy** and the development of its ambitious '**Sagar Mala**' project.

SCO Summit Nov 2021, its role and relevance in Sino-India relations

Context:

- The 21st Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit at Dushanbe, Tajikistan held recently via video Conferencing. Discussions took place on two critical issues:
 - ▶ Membership of Iran to this organisation
 - ▶ the unfolding security situation in Afghanistan

What is Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)?

- The SCO is a permanent international intergovernmental organization.
- It was founded at a summit in Shanghai in 2001 by the Presidents of Russia, China, the Kyrgyz Republic, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.
- The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Charter was signed during the St. Petersburg SCO Heads of State meeting in June 2002, and entered into force on 19 September 2003.

India & SCO

- India was made an Observer at the SCO in 2005.

- The historical meeting of the Heads of State Council of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation was held in 2017 in Astana.
- At the meeting the status of a full member of the Organization was granted to the Republic of India and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

Key- highlights of the summit

- The summit is important as it is taking place at a time when Taliban has taken over Afghanistan and has declared formation of an Interim government, after the US led forces left that country after two decades.
 - ▶ This has led to the fear that there will be an increase in drug trafficking, terror groups operating from Afghanistan.
- The main focus of this summit was primarily on the ground situation in Afghanistan and its global repercussions.
- The SCO Summit was followed by an Outreach session on Afghanistan between SCO and the **Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO)**.
 - ▶ Afghanistan has had an observer status in the SCO.
- Members of the China and Russia-led Shanghai Cooperation Organisation endorsed Iran's future membership of the bloc that already includes South Asian rivals India and Pakistan.

India's stand in the 21st SCO's summit

The Indian delegation, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, urged the eight-member panel to come up with a joint approach and frame a code of conduct to stop terror financing and cross-border terrorism.

- PM Modi flagged concerns over the serious humanitarian crisis unfolding in Afghanistan, noting that the economic woes of the Afghan people are increasing due to the blockage in financial and trade flows.
- PM Modi said the recent developments in Afghanistan will have the greatest impact on neighbouring countries like India and added that there was a need for regional focus and cooperation on the situation in the country.
- He pointed out that the developments in the country could lead to an uncontrolled flow of drugs, illegal weapons and human trafficking.
- Modi warned that continued instability and fundamentalism in Afghanistan would encourage terrorist and extremist ideologies all over the world.
- India is committed to increasing its connectivity with Central Asia. Asserting that there should be respect for the territorial integrity of all countries.

Davos Agenda 2022

Context:

The World Economic Forum (WEF) held its Annual Meeting of 2022 in Davos as the first global in-person leadership event since the start of the pandemic.

Focus Area of 2022 meeting:

Topics on the agenda included the following:

- Pandemic recovery
- Tackling climate change
- Building a better future for work
- Accelerating stakeholder capitalism
- Harnessing the technologies of the Fourth Industrial Revolution

Significance of meeting:

- The meeting provides a unique environment in which to reconnect, exchange insights, gain fresh perspectives and advance solutions.
- The sessions addressed issues like global cooperation; economic rebalancing; society, equity and global health; nature, food and climate; industry transformation; and innovation, governance and cybersecurity.
- The focus was on setting strategies for impact, building new frontiers, creating viable future scenarios and providing ambitious solutions to the world's biggest issues.

Outcome of the Davos Agenda 2022: Indian Perspective

- India as a leader in transition towards green energy:
 - ▶ As part of the World Economic Forum's Climate Action Platform, the "Indian CEO Alliance" will continue efforts to achieve the vision to achieve India's low-carbon transition by 2070.
 - ▶ It will bring together the government, businesses, and other key stakeholders to achieve the Indian Prime Minister's ambitious, five-part "**Panchamrit**" pledge, which includes the country's **net-zero by 2070 target**.
 - ▶ **India's efforts at 20% ethanol blending have paid well as the target have been pushed ahead from 2030 to 2025.**
- **Fighting Climate Change:** As a major global economy, India's role in mitigating climate change is critical, and India Inc. must add its full weight to the country's efforts, as well to the global endeavour, against global warming.

■ Fight against Plastic Pollution

- ▶ Maharashtra has joined the World Economic Forum's Global Plastic Action Partnership (GPAP).
- ▶ The economic powerhouse joins a growing list of global economies that will leverage the GPAP platform to drive localized solutions for the circular economy.
- ▶ Covid-19 has been a challenge in achieving a ban on single use plastic, the partnership will help in achieving the goalpost.
