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INDIA & NEIGHBOURS

India-Pakistan, India-China, India-Nepal, Myanmar

1 Chinese dam on Yarlung Tsangpo/Brahmaputra

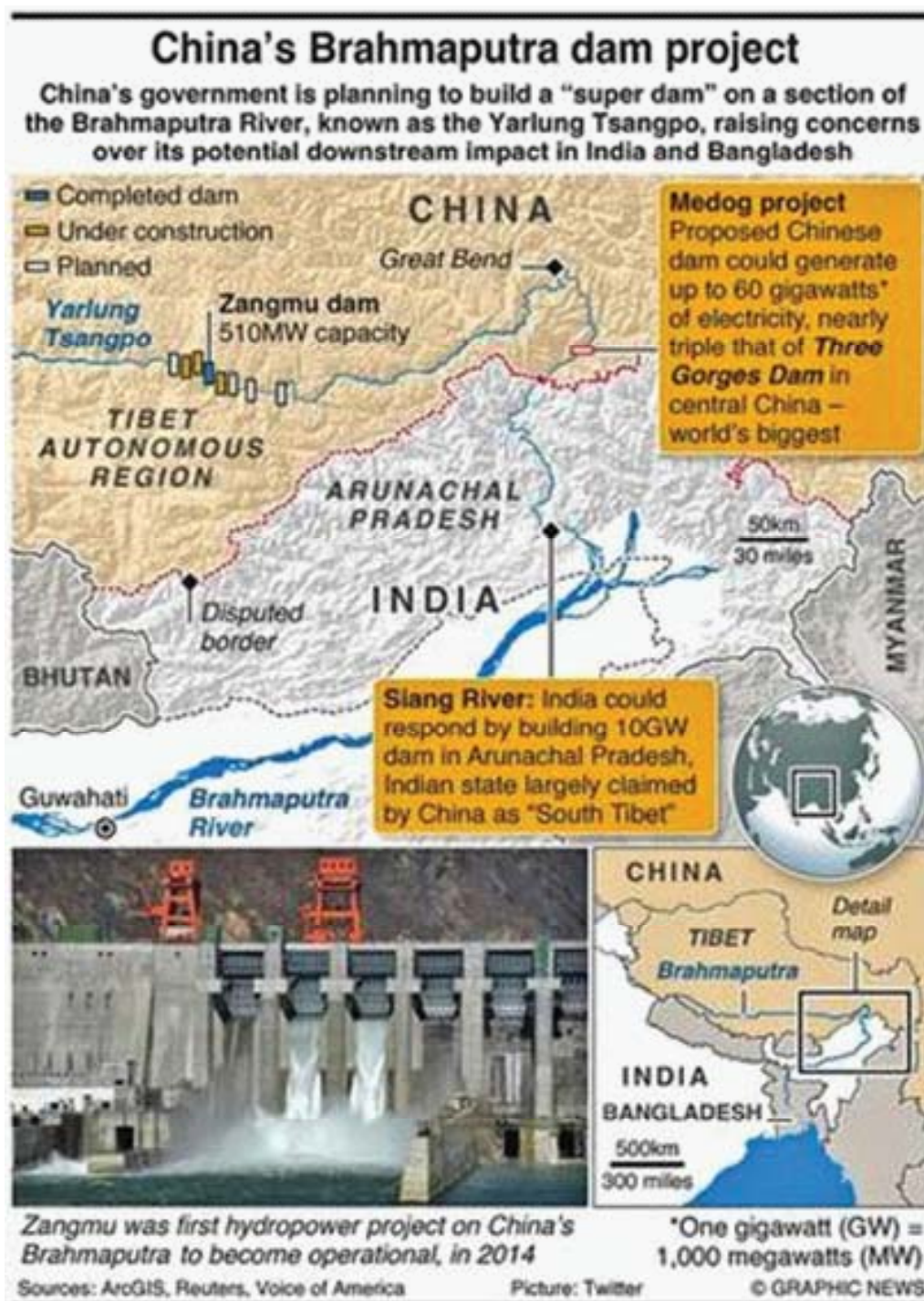
Context: China is planning to build a huge dam on the river Brahmaputra, which has raised concern in downstream countries – India and Bangladesh.

Yarlung Zangbo

- The Brahmaputra (called Yarlung Tsangpo in China) is one of the longest rivers in the world.
- The trans-border Yarlung Zangbo originates from the Majieyangzom glacier in the southwest of the Tibetan Plateau and flows into Arunachal Pradesh where it is called the Siang and then to Assam as the Brahmaputra before flowing into Bangladesh.
- Of the total 2,880 kilometres (kms) length of the Yarlung Tsangpo/ Brahmaputra,
 - **Tibet (2,880 km):** 1,625 km flows through the Tibetan plateau with the name Yarlung Tsangpo
 - **India (918 km):** It assumes the names of Siang, Dihang, and Brahmaputra in its 918 kilometres in India
 - **Bangladesh (337 km):** the rest of the 337 kilometers in Bangladesh is named the Jamuna till its confluence with the Ganges near Goalando.

China's plans

- The dam is to be built on the river in Medog county, where it drops by 2,000 metres, making it an ideal place to harness hydropower.
- This region is located in the Tibet Autonomous Region, governed by China.
- In 2010, China began construction of small dams along the mainstream of the Yarlung Tsangpo, two of them have already been completed and at least three are under construction.
- The proposed one is the largest of them all.



2 Kohala Hydropower Project

Context:

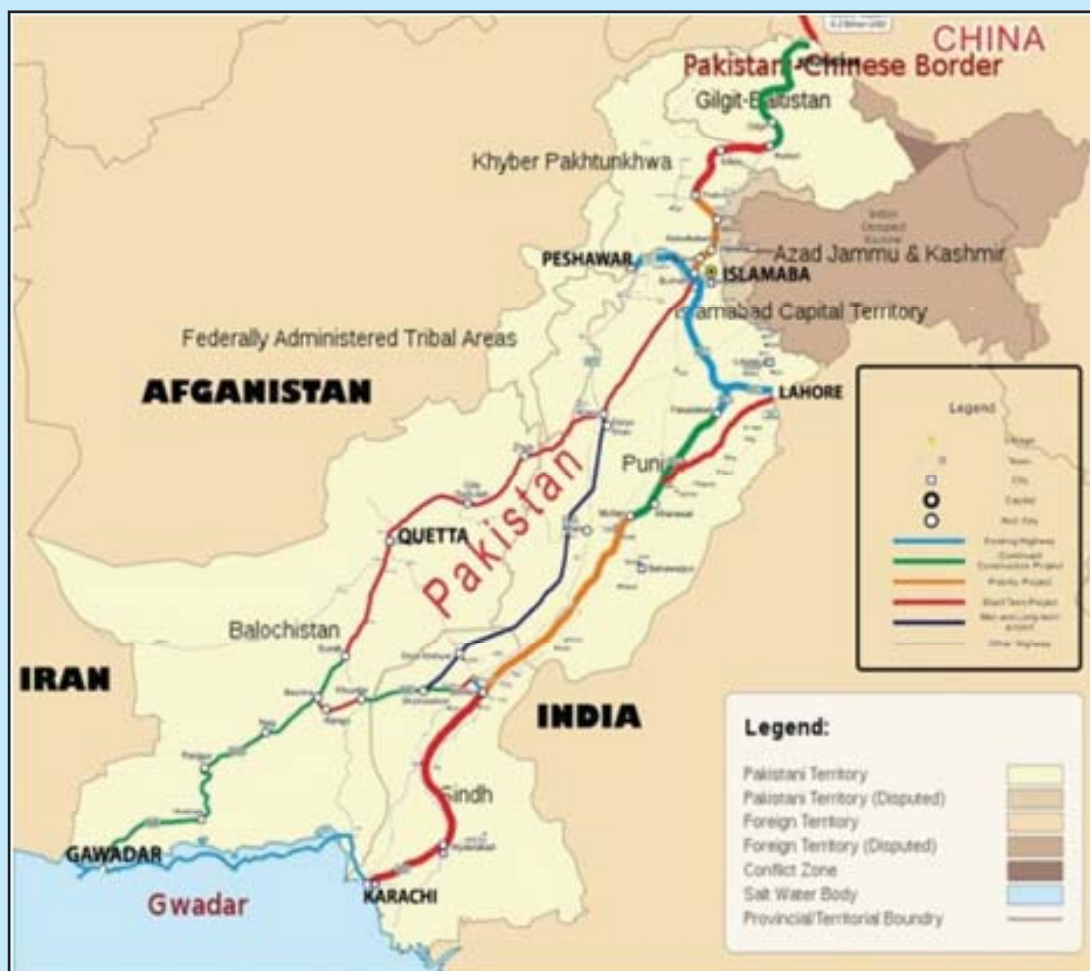
- China under the multi-billion-dollar CPEC will set up 'Kohala hydropower project', a 1,124-megawatt power project in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir despite India's objection to it.

About the Project:

- The project will be built on the Jhelum River and aims at annually providing more than five billion units of clean and low-cost electricity for consumers in Pakistan.

Jhelum River

- Jhelum River originates from Verinag spring in Anantnag and after passing through Srinagar it flows into Wular lake and then passing through Baramula and Uri, it enters into Pakistan.
- The Jhelum River is the only major Himalayan river which flows through the Kashmir valley.
- The Indus, Tawi, Ravi and Chenab are the other major rivers flowing through the state.



What is CEPC?

- The 3,000-km-long CEPC is aimed at connecting China and Pakistan with rail, road, pipelines, and optical cable fiber networks.
- It connects China's Xinjiang province with Pakistan Gwadar port, providing access to China to the Arabian Sea.
- The CPEC passes through PoK, over which India has conveyed its protests to China.

India's view on the development

- India's stance against CPEC is Pakistan's illegal Occupation of Kashmir (PoK). China and Pakistan are jointly accelerating Construction under the Belt & Road Initiative.
- The project passes through Gilgit-Baltistan in PoK, which New Delhi considers its territory.

3 India and China activate border mechanism talks

Context: India and China have activated the “working mechanism” at the diplomatic level, alongside the military-to-military conversation taking place at the field level to “dis-engage” and “de-escalate” the situation.

Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs

- The Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC) was set up through an India-China agreement in January 2012 for improved institutionalized information exchange on border-related issues.
- The mechanism was first suggested by Wen Jiabao in 2010.
- It was finalised at the 15th round of special representative talks in January 2012.
- Since then multiple rounds have occurred for resolution.

Important Pacts:

- There are five major pacts that both sides agreed upon on the issue of maintaining “peace and tranquillity” along the borders. The pacts are-
 - the 1993 Agreement on Maintenance of Peace and Tranquility along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China Border Areas
 - the 1996 Agreement on Confidence Building Measures in the Military Field along the LAC
 - the 2005 Protocol on Modalities for the Implementation of the Confidence Building Measures in the Military Field along the LAC
 - the 2012 Agreement on the Establishment of a Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs
- 2013 Border Defence Cooperation Agreement

Line of Actual Control

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

4 Assessing the ‘critical’ importance of Chushul sector in India-China standoff

Context: The Chushul sub-sector has come into focus in the standoff between the Indian and PLA troops.

What is the Chushul sub-sector?

- The Chushul sub-sector lies south of Pangong Tso in eastern Ladakh.

- It comprises high, broken mountains and heights of Thatung
 - Black Top
 - Helmet Top
 - Gurung Hill
 - Magger Hill besides passes such as-
 - Rezag La and Rechin La
 - the Spanggur Gap
 - the Chushul valley
- Situated at a height of over 13,000 feet close to the LAC, the Chushul Valley has a vital airstrip that played an important role even during the 1962 War with China.
- Due to its location, Chushul is one among the five Border Personnel Meeting points between the Indian Army and the People's Liberation Army of China.



Disputed and sensitive areas

- There are about 23 “disputed and sensitive areas” on the Line of Actual Control, stretching from Arunachal Pradesh to Ladakh region.
- The other sensitive areas in Ladakh include Trig Heights, Dumchele, Chumar, Spanggur Gap and Pangong Tso.
- Outside of Ladakh, sensitive areas include Namkha Chu, Sumdorong Chu, Asaphila, Dichu, Yangtse, Fish Tail-I & II in Dibang Valley in Arunachal Pradesh and Barahoti, Kaurik&Shipki La in the middle sector.

Strategic importance to India

- **Strategic location:** Chushul enjoys tremendous strategic and tactical importance because of its location and terrain, which make it a centre for logistics deployment.
- **Easy connectivity:** This sector has plains that are a couple of kilometres wide, where mechanised forces, including tanks, can be deployed. Its airstrip and connectivity by road to Leh add to its operational advantages.
- **Capability to dominate:** Indian troops have now secured the ridgeline in this sub-sector that allows them to dominate the Chushul bowl on the Indian side, and Moldo sector on the Chinese side.
- **Clear sight:** They also have a clear sight of the almost 2-km-wide Spanggur gap, which the Chinese used in the past to launch attacks on this sector in the 1962 War.

5 India-China five point action plan

Context: India and China have agreed on a five-point course of action to disengage and reduce tensions along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), where their troops have been engaged in a four and a half month long stand-off.

About the Five Point Action Plan

- It aims to ease tensions between India and China. Both the sides agreed to strengthen communication ties, avoid actions that would escalate tensions between the two countries and refrain from sending more troops to the border.

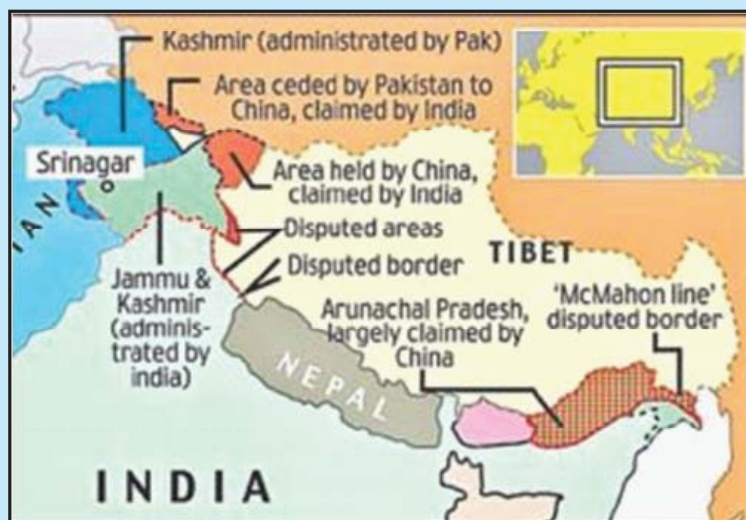
- The five-point plan is to-
 - not allow differences to become disputes
 - disengaging quickly to ease tensions
 - abiding by the existing India-China border protocols and avoiding escalatory action
 - continuing the dialogue between Special Representatives National Security Advisers as well as the other mechanisms
 - working towards new confidence-building measures (CBMs)

How significant is the development?

- It reiterates the process of dialogue, disengagement, and easing of the situation. All this was comprehensively dealt with in the previous five agreements given below:
 - The 1993 'Maintenance of Peace and Tranquility Agreement' forms the basis of all follow up agreements.
 - 1996 'Confidence Building Measures' denounced the use of force
 - 2005 'Standard Operating Procedures' and patrolling modalities.
 - 2012 'Process of Consultation and Cooperation'
 - 2013 'Border Cooperation Agreement', signed as a sequel to Depsang intrusion by PLA

Boundary disputes with China

- **Aksai Chin:** Located in the northwestern part of the Tibetan Plateau, it is approximately 35,241 sq km in size, administered by China and part of the Xinjiang Autonomous Region. India considers it a part of its union territory of Ladakh.
- **Depsang Plains:** The Depsang Plains are located on the border of the union territory of Ladakh and disputed zone of Aksai Chin. The Chinese Army controlled most of the plains during its 1962 war with India, while India controls the western portion of the plains.
- **Demchok, Chumar:** Both in the Leh district of Ladakh, controlled by India.
- **Kaurik, Shipki La:** In the Kinnour district of Himachal Pradesh.
- **Nelang, PulamSumda, Sang, Jadhag and Lapthal:** In the Uttarkashi district of Uttarakhand.
- **Barahoti:** In the Chamoli district of Uttarakhand whose grazing fields are disputed by China, which is also in the state of Uttarakhand and is controlled by India.
- **Trans-Karakoram Tract:** An area of nearly 5,800 square kilometers (2,239 sq mi) along both sides of the Shaksam River, is entirely administered by China as a part of Kargilik County in the Kashgar Prefecture of the Xinjiang Autonomous Region.



- **Arunachal Pradesh:** Arunachal Pradesh is a state of India created on Jan. 20, 1972, and located in the far northeast. The majority of the territory is claimed by China as part of South Tibet.

6 China constructs a strategically significant highway in Tibet

Context: China has completed the construction of a strategic highway through the **Brahmaputra Canyon**, stated to be the world's deepest, close to the **Arunachal Pradesh** border ahead of its plan to build a mega-dam over the gorge.

About the project and canyon

- Construction of a highway costing USD 310 million passing through the Yarlung Zangbo Grand Canyon, known as the world's deepest gorge with a maximum depth of 6,009 meters has been completed.
- The **Yarlung Tsangpo Canyon** is located at the great bend of the river before entering the **Indian State of Arunachal Pradesh**.
- As the canyon passes between the peaks of the **Namcha Barwa (Namjagarwa)** and **Gyala Peri mountains**, it reaches an average depth of about 5,000 m (16,000 feet) around Namcha Barwa.

- **Submarine canyons** can also develop when powerful **ocean currents** sweep away sediments.
- Just as rivers erode land, these currents carve deep canyons in the ocean floor.
- Rivers have a natural tendency to cut through underlying surfaces, eventually wearing away rock layers as sediments are removed downstream.
- A river bed will gradually reach a baseline elevation, which is the same elevation as the body of water into which the river drains.
- The processes of weathering and erosion will form canyons when the rivers headwaters and estuary are at significantly different elevations, particularly through regions where softer rock layers are intermingled with harder layers more resistant to weathering.

India-Pakistan

7 Pakistan's new political map

Context: Pakistan released a new political map in August 2020, that claimed all of Jammu and Kashmir as Pakistan territories, on the eve of the first anniversary of revocation of Article 370. It also includes Ladakh, Sir Creek and Junagadh.

The new political map

- On paper, the map links Pakistan with Chinese-administered territory via the Shaksgam Valley, a part of the Gilgit-Baltistan region ceded to China by Pakistan under their 1963 border settlement.
- To the east is the Aksai Chin region – the limit of China's claims in Kashmir which it has controlled since a 1962 war with India.
- Between the two lies the Siachen Glacier, an undefined area at the northern extreme of the de facto border between Pakistani- and Indian-administered Kashmir known as the Line of Control.

Changes in map



- The new map showed Pakistan frontier clearly marked with India with the entire Kashmir as its territory.
- However, the part of Kashmir and Ladakh border with China was not marked and described as Frontier Undecided.
- Similarly, the Line of Control had been extended to the Karakoram Pass, clearing showing Siachen as part of Pakistan. The LoC had been marked by a red dotted line.
- The J&K had been described as Disputed Territory Final status to be decided in line with relevant UNSC resolutions.
- Another change in the map showed that the international border lines lies along the eastern bank of Sir Creek, which was previously along the western bank.
- The other inclusion is that of Junagadh, also in coastal Gujarat.

Sir Creek

- Sir Creek is a 96-km strip of water disputed between India and Pakistan in the Rann of Kutch marshlands.

- Originally named Ban Ganga, Sir Creek is named after a British representative.
- The Creek opens up in the Arabian Sea and roughly divides the Kutch region of Gujarat from the Sindh Province of Pakistan.
- Apart from strategic location, Sir Creek's core importance is fishing resources. Sir Creek is considered to be among the largest fishing grounds in Asia.

Junagarh

- Junagarh is situated in the western state of Gujarat at the foothills of the Girnar Hills.
- The city of Junagarh takes its name from the fort that encloses the old city.
- Junagarh was an important trade center as testified by the Ashokan edicts dating from 250 BC.
- At the time of partition, the Nawab of Junagarh opted to take his tiny state into Pakistan.
- However, the predominantly Hindu population forced the Nawab to leave the country instead.

8 60 years of the Indus Water Treaty

Context: September 19, 2020 marked the 60th anniversary of the Indus Water Treaty (IWT) between India and Pakistan, a treaty that is often cited as an example of the possibilities of peaceful coexistence that exist despite the troubled relationship.

The Indus Water Treaty

- The Indus Water Treaty is a World Bank-brokered settlement signed in Karachi on September 19, 1960, between Pakistan and India to use the water available in the six rivers of the Indus system.
- The sharing formula devised after prolonged negotiations sliced the Indus system into two halves.
- Under this treaty, India got control over three 'eastern rivers':
 - Beas
 - Ravi
 - Sutlej



- While Pakistan got control over three 'western rivers':
 - Indus
 - Chenab
 - Jhelum
- India is allowed to use 20% water of the western rivers for irrigation, power generation and transport purposes.
- IWT granted 3.6 million acre-feet (MAF) of "permissible storage capacity" to India on the western rivers but due to poor water development projects, 2-3 MAF of water easily flows into Pakistan.

Dispute over Indus Water Treaty

- Pakistan recently sought international arbitration if India sought to build hydropower projects on the Jhelum and Chenab rivers.
- Though the agreement has been seen as one of the most successful water-sharing pacts, the current tension between the two South Asian neighbours might well lead to a flashpoint.

Can India 'revoke' the Treaty?

- A unilateral abrogation of the treaty could attract global criticism and New Delhi would only use the rivers as pressure tactics and threaten Pakistan.

9

The India-Nepal Dispute: What, and Why?

Context: The Indo-Nepal territorial dispute around the Kalpani-Limpahua-Lipulekh trijunction region stems from the ambiguity around the original border. The current tension is the result of a combination of factors: India's strategic concerns; declined India- Nepal relations; Beijing's stable stance in Nepal; and worsening India-China relations.

A brief overview of Indo-Nepal border issues

- The Indo-Nepal border was originally delineated by the 1816 Sugauli Treaty, which established the Kali River (Sharda, Mahakali) as a border, with the area east of the river going to Nepal.
- Kalapani, Limpiyhura, Lipulekh Triangle Territorial Dispute Centre at the origin of Kalipani River.
- Nepal's stance is that the river originates from a stream northwest of Lipulekh, which brings Kalapani, linpiyaxle, and lipulekh to its territory.
- India's stance is that the river originates in springs beneath Lipulekh, and hence this area falls within Pithoragarh district in the state of Uttarakhand, India.
- Both sides have maps of the British period to claim their position.

Recent Dispute

- India recently inaugurated the Darchula-Lipulekh pass link road, cutting across the disputed Kalapani area, which is used by Indian pilgrims traveling to Kailash Mansarovar.
- The Nepalese government protested this move, pointing out that the construction of the road amounted to territorial encroachment.
- Nepal granted constitutional validity to its stance through the introduction of a constitutional amendment and began tightening border security measures.

10 Myanmar's Protest and what led to Military Coup in Myanmar

Context: Weeks of demonstrations and a deadly crackdown have roiled Myanmar since a February coup brought back full military rule following years of **quasi-democracy**.

Background:

Myanmar, also known as Burma, has suffered decades of repressive military rule, poverty due to years of isolationist economic policies, and civil war with ethnic minority groups.

- **1948:** Myanmar has been ruled by a military junta for many of the years since it gained independence from British colonial rule in 1948.
- The Union of Burma began as a parliamentary democracy, like most of its newly independent neighbors on the Indian subcontinent.
- **1962:** But representative democracy only lasted until 1962, when General U Ne Win led a military coup and held power for the next twenty-six years.
 - ▶ Ne Win instituted a new constitution in 1974 based on an isolationist policy and a socialist economic program that nationalized Burma's major enterprises.
- **1988:** By 1988, widespread corruption, rapid shifts in economic policy related to Myanmar's currency, and food shortages led to massive student-led protests.
 - ▶ In August 1988, the army cracked down on protesters, killing at least three thousand and displacing thousands more.
 - ▶ In the aftermath of the 1988 crackdown, Ne Win resigned as chairman of his party, although he remained active behind the scenes as another military junta took power.
- **1989:** In 1989, the new military regime changed the country's name from the Union of Burma to the Union of Myanmar, and the capital, Rangoon, was renamed Yangon.
- **2005:** In 2005, the military government moved the administrative capital to Nay Pyi Taw, a city it built in central Myanmar.
- **2007:** In 2007, the so-called **Saffron Revolution**, widespread anti-government protests that were sparked by fuel price hikes and named after the saffron-colored robes worn by participating Buddhist monks—and international pressure prompted shifts in Myanmar.
- **2008:** The junta pushed forward a new constitution in 2008, which is still in place today, that gave the military widespread powers even under civilian rule.
- The military junta unexpectedly officially dissolved in 2011 and established a civilian parliament for a transitional period, during which former army bureaucrat and Prime Minister Thein Sein was appointed president.
- **2015:** Myanmar held its first nationwide, multiparty elections—considered to be the freest and fairest elections in decades—since the country's transition away from military rule.
 - ▶ **Suu Kyi** became Myanmar's de facto leader in 2015.
- **2021 February:** Government overthrown in military coup.

The country profile

- Myanmar, also known as Burma, is in South East Asia. It neighbours Thailand, Laos, Bangladesh, China and India.
- The country gained independence from Britain in 1948.
- It was ruled by the armed forces from 1962 until 2011, when a new government began ushering in a return to civilian rule.
- The ruling military changed the country's name from Burma to Myanmar in 1989.



What is happening now?

- In 2020, Myanmar held its second national elections under civilian rule, which the Ms Suu Kyi's NLD party overwhelmingly won.
 - ▶ The military suffered a major blow in the elections: the USDP won just 33 of 476 available seats, while the NLD won 396.
- Military leaders alleged voter fraud, and after the country's election commission rejected the military's claims, it staged a coup in February 2021.
- The military is now back in charge and has declared a **year-long state of emergency**.
- It seized control on 1 February following a general election which Ms Suu Kyi's NLD party won by a landslide.
- The coup took place as a new session of parliament was set to open.

Who is Aung San Suu Kyi?

- Aung San Suu Kyi, 75, is the daughter of Myanmar's independence hero, Gen Aung San who was assassinated just before the country gained independence from British colonial rule in 1948.
- She remained popular with the public despite spending years under house arrest.
- She was released in 2010, and in November 2015 she led the NLD to a landslide victory in Myanmar's first openly contested election for 25 years and became de facto leader.

11 China-Bhutan Boundary Talks

Context: In the latest development, China and Bhutan have agreed to continue to maintain peace and stability in the border areas before the final settlement of their boundary issues.

The Dispute

- Bhutan shares over a 400-km-long border with China and the two countries have held 24 rounds of boundary talks in a bid to resolve the dispute.
- The Boundary Talks between Bhutan and China began in 1984 and both countries have signed-

- the Guiding Principles on the Settlement of the Boundary Issues in 1988
- the Agreement on Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity along with the border areas in 1998
- These two agreements form the basis of the boundary negotiation between Bhutan and China.

India's stake in the region

- India maintains close ties with the tiny Himalayan neighbor.
- **Doklam**, an area close to the India-Bhutan-China tri-junction, had witnessed a standoff between Indian and Chinese armies.
- The area is of strategic importance to all three nations.

India-China border dispute

- The India-China border dispute covers the 3,488km-long Line of Actual Control (LAC).
- The two sides have held 22 rounds of Special Representatives-level talks so far to resolve the boundary dispute.
- The meeting took place in the backdrop of the military standoff between China and India in eastern Ladakh since May last year.

1 India-US Defence Deals

Context: At 2+2 meeting, India & US have signed the intelligence-sharing pact BECA. With key deals LEMOA and COMCASA already signed, what does it mean for defence, particularly in light of LAC standoff?

What is BECA?

- The Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement largely pertain to geospatial intelligence, and sharing information on maps and satellite images for defence.
- Anyone who sails a ship, flies an aircraft, fights wars, locates targets, responds to natural disasters, or even navigates with a cell phone relies on geospatial intelligence.
- Signing BECA will allow India to use the US's advanced geospatial intelligence and enhance the accuracy of automated systems and weapons like missiles and armed drones.

The Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA)

- The Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement was signed between India and the US in 2016.
- It allows the military of each country to replenish from the other's bases: access supplies, spare parts and services from the other country's land facilities, air bases, and ports, which can then be reimbursed.

The Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA)

- The Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement was signed in 2018.
- It allows the US to provide India with its encrypted communications equipment and systems so that Indian and US military commanders, aircraft and ships can communicate through secure networks in peace and war.

Key-deals (in-short)

- LEMOA means one partner trusts the other enough to expose its valuable assets.
- COMCASA means one is confident that it can rely on encrypted systems to connect the two militaries.
- BECA means it can share highly classified information in real time without fear of being compromised.

2+2 meeting

- It is the highest-level institutional ministerial meeting between the two countries.
- It is a format of dialogue the counterparts from another country.
- India holds 2+2 meeting with Australia, Japan and the USA.

2 US asks India to join the Blue Dot Network

Context: In a letter, the United States asked India to join the Blue Dot Network.

What is the Blue Dot network?

- It is a U.S.-led collaboration with Australia and Japan that supports private-sector led infrastructure financing opportunities in response to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
- The Blue Dot network was jointly launched in November 2019 on the sidelines of the 35th ASEAN Summit in Thailand by the-
 - ▶ United States (International Development Finance Corporation (DFC))
 - ▶ Japan (Japanese Bank for International Cooperation)
 - ▶ Australia (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade)
- It is meant to be a multi-stakeholder initiative that aims to bring governments, the private sector and civil society together to promote "high quality, trusted standards for global infrastructure development".
- Under it, infrastructure projects within the Indian Ocean Region will be certified in keeping with globally-recognized standards that uphold principles of transparency and financial viability.

Does it counter China's Belt and Road Initiative?

- The Blue Dot network is part of the US's Indo-Pacific strategy, which is aimed at countering Chinese President Xi Jinping's ambitious BRI.
- From the US's point of view, the Indo-Pacific region is the most economically dynamic and populous part of the world.
- Further, the US sees China's infrastructure investments and trade strategies as reinforcing its geopolitical aspirations, including efforts to build and militarise outposts in the South China Sea, which as per the US, restricts the free movement of trade and undermines regional stability.

China's Belt and Road Initiative

- The project is often described as a 21st century silk road, made up of a "belt" of overland corridors and a maritime "road" of shipping lanes.
- The Belt and Road Initiative combines two initiatives
- The (land based) Silk Road Economic Belt, comprising six development corridors, namely:
 - ▶ New Eurasian Land Bridge Economic Corridor (NELBEC)
 - ▶ China – Mongolia – Russia Economic Corridor (CMREC)
 - ▶ China – Central Asia – West Asia Economic Corridor (CCWAEC)

- ▶ China – Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor (CICPEC)
- ▶ Bangladesh – China – India – Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIMEC)
- ▶ China – Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)
- The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road
 - ▶ The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road connects China to Southeast Asia, Indonesia, India, the Arabian peninsula, Somalia, Egypt and Europe, encompassing the South China Sea, Strait of Malacca, Indian Ocean, Gulf of Bengal, Arabian Sea, Persian Gulf and the Red Sea.

3 India and RCEP

Context:

- In the latest development, 15 countries solidified their participation in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).
- Even as India opted to stay out after walking out of discussions last year, the new trading bloc has made it clear that the door will remain open for India to return to the negotiating table.

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.
- India pulled out of the agreement last year over concerns about cheap Chinese goods entering the country. It can join at a later date if it chooses.

What is RCEP?

- It is 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.

4 India, Japan to develop port project in Sri Lanka

Context: India and Japan will develop the West Container Terminal (WCT) at the Colombo Port. The High Commission of India had “approved” Adani Ports for the project.

About the project

- Under the project, India and Japan will develop the strategic Colombo Port’s Western Container Terminal (WCT) under a joint venture.
- **Time period:** 35 year
- **Investors:**
 - ▶ **India:** Adani Ports, which had earlier been nominated to develop the ECT, has secured the Indian nomination for developing the WCT.
 - ▶ **Japan:** Japan is yet to nominate its investor.
- **Stake:** Unlike in the case of the ECT, where India and Japan were to jointly own 49 per cent of the stake, the two will have 85 per cent stake in the WCT.

Some other projects of India with Sri Lanka

Economic Cooperation

- Sri Lanka is one of India's largest trading partners among the SAARC countries. India in turn is Sri Lanka's largest trade partner globally.
- The main framework for bilateral trade has been provided by the India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement (ISFTA) that was signed in 1998 and entered into force in March 2000.
- India is also investing in Sri Lanka's infrastructure development in the Northern and Eastern provinces.
- India also invested in building Trincomalee Port to counterweight the Chinese developments at Hambantota Port.

Regional Strategic cooperation

- Sri Lanka is a member of regional groupings like BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) and SAARC in which India plays a leading role.
- India and Sri Lanka conduct joint Military ('Mitra Shakti') and Naval exercise (SLINEX).
- The government of India formally launched the e-Tourist Visa (eTV) scheme for Sri Lankan tourists in 2015 to increase the people-to-people contact.

5 Mission Sagar

Context: India launched Mission Sagar as part of the government's outreach initiative towards five Island nations in the Indian Ocean Region amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

What is SAGAR?

- In 2015, India unveiled its a strategic vision for the Indian Ocean i.e. Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR).
- It is an increasing recognition of the increasing importance of maritime security, maritime commons, and cooperation.
- The initiative is in line with the principles of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). The mission aims to
 - to seek a climate of trust and transparency
 - respect for international maritime rules and norms by all countries
 - sensitivity to(towards) each other's interests
 - peaceful resolution of maritime issues
 - increase in maritime cooperation

6 India's ties with Central Asia

Context: As India cements its position as one of the fastest-growing major economies of the world, its increased engagement with the Central Asian region can lead to mutually beneficial gains — both in economic and strategic terms.

Background:

- India-Central Asia relations stagnated in the 20th century, due to the Anglo-Russian rivalry in the "Great Game".
- The Great Game, also known as 'BolshayaIgra', which started in 1830 was an intense rivalry between British and Russian empires over Central Asia and the trade routes.

Central Asian Nations

- Central Asia is a landlocked region, which is located in the heart of Asia.
- Central Asia is composed of the 5 post-soviet countries (also known as 5 'Stans'): Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.

Why Central Asia assumes significance for India?

- **Geostrategic location:** Its geographical proximity, strategic location, and historical linkages make it an important partner for New Delhi.
- **Energy:** Central Asia is significant for India as it 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 in Turkmenistan
 - Oil, gas, and uranium in Kazakhstan
 - Uranium and gas in Uzbekistan
 - Hydropower in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan

- **Global power hub:** Strategically, Central Asia is emerging as the next high-stakes competition ground for global powers.
- Significant transportation hub: Central Asia is a major transportation hub for gas and oil pipelines and multi-modal corridors connecting China, Russia, Europe, and the IOR.

Some multilateral platforms which India is a party along with CARs countries

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)

- SCO is a permanent intergovernmental international organisation, created in 2001 in Shanghai (China) by Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.
- The SCO currently comprises eight Member States (China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan), four Observer States interested in acceding to full membership (Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran, and Mongolia) and six "Dialogue Partners" (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Turkey).

Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA)

- CICA is an inter-governmental forum for enhancing cooperation towards promoting peace, security and stability in Asia.
- CICA members consist of: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, China, India, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Egypt, Mongolia, Pakistan, Palestine, South Korea, Russia, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan and Vietnam.

7

India, Australia ink landmark Defence Pact to access Each Other's Bases

Context: India and Australia inked a landmark agreement for reciprocal access to military bases for logistics support besides firming up six more pacts to further broaden ties.

Highlights of the Summit

- India and Australia forged a major defence alliance by signing an 'Arrangement concerning Mutual Logistics Support (MLSA)'.
- The countries upgraded their relations to a 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership'.
- The other important agreements signed during the summit include-
 - ▶ a framework arrangement on cyber and cyber-enabled critical technology cooperation
 - ▶ a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on cooperation in mining and processing of critical and strategic minerals
 - ▶ an implementing arrangement on cooperation in defence science and technology to the existing MoU on defence cooperation.
 - ▶ Vocational education
 - ▶ Water resources management
- The two countries also released a declaration on "Shared Vision for Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific" that advocated for a "rules-based maritime order that is based on respect for sovereignty and international law, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Law".

What is Mutual Logistics Support Agreement?

- The Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA) will allow militaries of the two countries to use each other's bases for repair and replenishment of supplies besides facilitating scaling up of overall defence cooperation.

India-Australia's other strategic partnerships

- Both the countries conduct naval exercise 'AUSINDEX', which was first started in 2015.
- The two armies had also launched exercises, the AUSTRAHIND, in 2016.
- In its White Paper on Foreign Policy in 2017, Australia recognized India as the "pre-eminent maritime power among Indian Ocean countries" and a "front-rank partner of Australia".
 - ▶ There are also regular staff-to-staff talks between the three wings of the armed forces on both sides.

8

First QUAD Summit

Context: In a signal development, the first QUAD (Quadrilateral Cooperation) summit held virtually between India, US, Japan and Australia.

What is Quad?

- The Quad, or Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, comprises the United States, India, Japan and Australia.

- It is an informal group of the four nations that hold semi-regular meetings, joint military drills, and discussions about regional, economic and development assistance.
- The framework was established in 2007, but it took on a new level of importance in 2019 with a discussion among foreign ministers amid China's increasing influence.

Key-highlights of the virtual Summit

- **The Spirit of the Quad:** A joint statement, titled 'The Spirit of the Quad' was presented after the summit
 - ▶ The cooperation decided to pool their financial resources, manufacturing capabilities and logistics to ramp up manufacturing and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines in the Indo-Pacific region
- **Expanding vaccine diplomacy:** The leaders finalised a landmark initiative under which huge investments will be made in India to create additional production capacities to roll out a billion coronavirus vaccine doses by 2022 for exports to the Indo-Pacific region.
- **Free Indo-Pacific:** The Quad leaders vowed to strive for an Indo-Pacific region that is free, open, inclusive, healthy, anchored by democratic values, and unconstrained by coercion, sending an apparent message to China.
- **Working groups:** Three working groups in areas of vaccine, climate crisis and critical and emerging technology would also be created.

India's initiatives in Indo-Pacific

- **SAGAR:** To promote its strategic interests in the Indian Ocean, India launched the SAGAR vision in 2015.
- **Indian Pacific Ocean Initiative:** On 4 November 2019, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the IPOI at the East Asia Summit in Bangkok.
 - ▶ The main objective of the IPOI is to ensure the safety, security, and stability of the maritime domain, and to do that, seven pillars have been laid out.
 - ▶ IPOI is being built on the pillars of India's 'Act East' policy (focusing on the Eastern Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific) and 'Act West' (focusing on the Western Indian Ocean).
- **India's theatre command:** The Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC), India's first and only tri-service theater command of the Indian Armed Forces is located in IPR which aids immensely in protecting India's strategic interest in the region.

3

INTERNATIONAL EVENTS

1 Chinese energy project in Sri Lanka

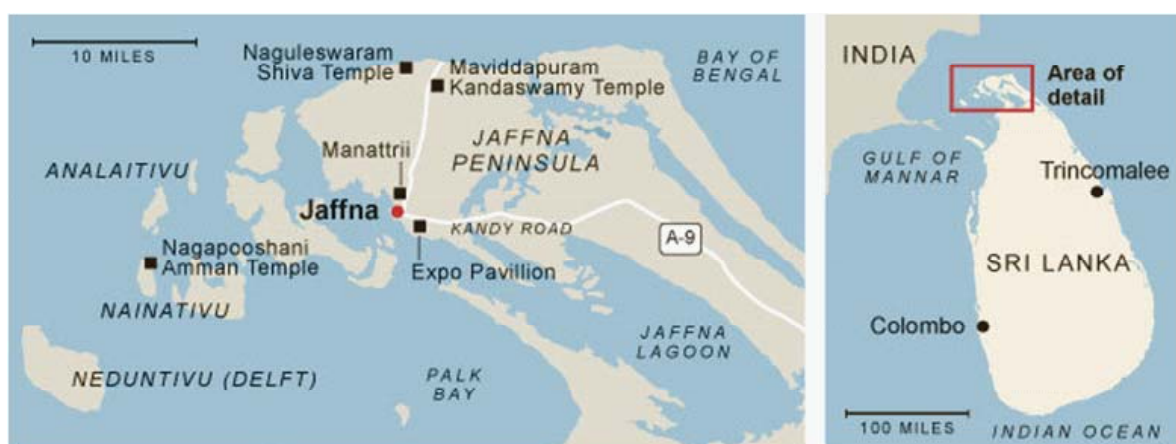
Context: In the latest development, Sri Lanka cleared the Chinese energy project in three islands off Jaffna peninsula that are barely 50 km from the Tamil Nadu coast.

About the Project

- Under the project, China will set up hybrid wind and solar energy projects on three Sri Lankan islands off the northern Jaffna peninsula 45 km from Rameswaram in Tamil Nadu.
- Project's local partner:** The energy project's local partner, the Ceylon Electricity Board.
- Funding:** The funds for the project are to come from the Asian Development Bank.

The concerned islands

- The islands concerned are Delft Island, Analativu, and Nainativu.
 - Delft island, the largest of the three islands, is the closest to Rameswaram, which lies to the island's southwest.
- Between, Rameswaram and Delft Island, lies the Kachchativu, the tiny island that India ceded to Sri Lanka in 1974.
- The waters around these islands are an area of contest and rivalry between Tamil Nadu and Jaffna fishers. The matter has been on the bilateral agenda for decades.



Why the development of these projects is concerning for India?

- Pulling out of Sri Lanka from some significant deals:** Sri Lanka recently pulled out of the East Container Terminal (ECT) deal (2019) with India and Japan at the Colombo port.

- **A part of the Chinese ring-fence policy:** These developmental proposals in Sri Lanka are viewed as the extension of other Chinese projects in nations such as the Maldives, African Nations, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and other nations in the Indian Ocean.

2 Special UK BNO Visa Scheme for millions of Hong Kong residents

Context: A visa scheme to allow Hong Kong residents to come to the UK opened recently, with some 300,000 people expected to apply. The visa, which is open to holders of a British National (Overseas) passport and their immediate dependents, will offer a fast track to UK citizenship.

Background:

- The move comes as China and Hong Kong have said they will no longer recognize the British National Overseas (BNO) passport as a valid travel document from January 31.
 - BNO is a special status created under British law in 1987 that specifically relates to Hong Kong.
- The scheme is also in a response to Beijing's decision last year to impose a sweeping national security law on Hong Kong, a former British colony, to snuff out huge and sometimes violent pro-democracy protests.



One Country, two systems Agreement

- A former port city of the British Empire, Hong Kong was handed back to China under the 1984 Sino-British joint declaration ("1984 Joint Declaration").
- The legally binding treaty sought to retain Hong Kong's way of life, common law legal system and capitalist economy, and guarantee its politico-economic status for 50 years from 1997.
- It was agreed that Hong Kong's capitalist system, which was different to China's communist model, would continue. It also meant Hong Kong has its own legal system and borders, and rights such as freedom of assembly, free speech and freedom of the press are protected.
- But the UK says this agreement - known as the Joint Declaration - is under threat because the territory has passed a new law that gives China sweeping new controls over the people of Hong Kong.

What is BNO Citizenship?

- British National Overseas (BNO) citizenship is a type of British nationality created in 1985 that people in Hong Kong could apply for before the 1997 handover to China to retain a link with the UK.
- The lifelong status, which cannot be passed down to family members, did not give holders any special rights.

What is in the new law?

- Under the special visa scheme, the visas will be issued to those in Hong Kong who hold a British National (Overseas) passport and their immediate dependents and will offer a fast track to UK citizenship.
- Applicants who get the visa can live and work in the UK for 5 years, after which they apply for settlement.
- Citizenship: Twelve months after this, they can apply for citizenship.

3 US, Russia agree to extend 'New START' nuclear arms treaty

Context: The Russian lower house of Parliament, the Duma, ratified for the extension of new START nuclear treaty with the US, which is now expected to last until 2026.

What is New START treaty?

- The New START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty), was signed in 2010 by former US President Barack Obama and his Russian counterpart at the time, Dmitry Medvedev.
- The treaty was to replace the 1991 START treaty.
- The treaty limits each party to 700 deployed intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) or deployed submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), 1,550 nuclear warheads on deployed ICBMs and SLBMs, and 800 deployed and non-deployed ICBM launchers.
- It also envisions a rigorous inspection regime to verify compliance.

Overview

- Signed: 8 April 2010
- Entered into Force: 5 February 2011
- Duration: Ten-year duration with option to extend for no more than five years
- Parties: United States, Russian Federation

Some Other Russia- U.S arms treaties

• SALT I

Begun in November 1969, by May 1972, the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) had produced both the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, which limited strategic missile defenses to 200 interceptors each, and the Interim Agreement, an executive agreement that capped U.S. and Soviet intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM) and submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) forces.

• SALT II

SALT II, signed in June 1979, limited U.S. and Soviet ICBM, SLBM, and strategic bomber-based nuclear forces to 2,250 delivery vehicles (defined as an ICBM silo, a SLBM launch tube, or a heavy bomber) and placed a variety of other restrictions on deployed strategic nuclear forces.

• START I, II and III

The Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I), required the United States and the Soviet Union to reduce their deployed strategic arsenals.

- **SORT (Moscow Treaty)**

On May 24, 2002, Presidents George W. Bush and Vladimir Putin signed the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT or Moscow Treaty) under which the United States and Russia reduced their strategic arsenals to 1,700-2,200 warheads each.

4 Russia withdraws from the Open Skies Treaty

Context

- In a latest development, Russia announced that it was leaving the Open Skies Treaty (OST).

About

- **The Open Skies Treaty**

- ▶ The landmark treaty was signed in 1992.
- ▶ It had 35 signatories, including key players US and Russia, along with one non-ratifying member (Kyrgyzstan).
- ▶ The Open Skies Treaty, which entered into force in 2002, permits countries to fly unarmed aircraft with cameras and other sensors over the territory of the treaty's other member states.
- ▶ Each party to the treaty has two annual quotas:
 - the number of flights it may conduct over other treaty-parties (active quota)
 - the number of over-flights that it must accept (passive quota)
- ▶ Under the treaty, a member state can "spy" on any part of the host nation, with the latter's consent.

India's Open Sky agreement

- India has Air Service Agreements (ASA) with 109 countries covering aspects relating to the number of flights, seats, landing points and code-share.
- In this regard, the Policy will be as follows:
 - ▶ The government plans to liberalize the regime of bilateral rights leading to greater ease of doing business and wider choice to passengers.
 - ▶ The government will enter into an 'Open sky' ASA on a reciprocal basis with SAARC countries and countries with territory located entirely beyond a 5000 km radius from New Delhi.
 - ▶ For countries partly or fully within 5000 km radius, where the designated carriers of India have not fully utilised 80% of their capacity entitlements, but foreign carriers /countries have utilised their bilateral rights and are pressing for increase in capacity, a method will be recommended by a Committee headed by the Cabinet Secretary for the allotment of the additional capacity entitlements.
 - ▶ Whenever designated carriers of India have utilised 80% of their capacity entitlements and seek additional capacity entitlements.
 - ▶ Indian cargo airlines with 74% FDI cannot normally be designated carriers and are not able to undertake scheduled international operations at present due to the 'Substantial Ownership and Effective Control (SOEC)' clause in the ASA.
- The ASA will be suitably amended in consultation with the country concerned based on the concept of "principal place of business" and "effective regulatory control" of the host country.

5 UK invites India to attend G7

Context: The United Kingdom has invited India to attend G7 Summit to be held in Cornwall in June 2021.

What is the G7?

- The G7 (or Group of Seven) is an organisation made up of the world's seven largest so-called advanced economies: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States.
- It was for a while, known as the G8 as it also included Russia, but after their 2014 annexation of Crimea, they were booted out of the summit, reducing it to the G7.

Background

- The concept of a yearly forum for the world's major industrialised countries emerged before 1973.
- However, its progress accelerated after the 1973 oil crisis, where the US convened an informal gathering of finance ministers from West Germany, France and the United Kingdom ahead of a proper gathering.
 - ▶ **G5:** It later expanded to involve Japan to become the G5.
 - ▶ **G6:** Two years later in 1975, it included Italy, becoming the G6
 - ▶ **G7:** Canada joined in 1976 to create the G7.
 - ▶ **G8:** In 1998, years after the end of the Cold War, Russia was invited for the first time, marking a major turning point in world relations.
- This ended in 2014 after Russia annexed Crimea with the group returning to its previous G7 lineup.

Expansion of G7 to G11

- **Expected Countries:** Demands are arising to expand G7 to include India, Russia, South Korea and Australia.
- Reason:
 - ▶ Having India and others in the G7 is considered a way of countering the rising influence of China on the world stage.
 - ▶ It will give US more leverage to influence the other nations.

6 Tibet returns as fulcrum point between US and China

Context: Needling China, the US Congress passed The Tibetan Policy and Support Act (TPSA) to step up US support to Tibetans.

What is the Tibetan Policy and Support Act, 2020?

- The Tibetan Policy and Support Act of 2020 is part of a massive USD 2.3 trillion package for the year-end bill to provide long-delayed coronavirus relief and fund the federal government, modifies and re-authorises various programmes and provisions related to Tibet.
- Built on the landmark Tibetan Policy Act of 2002, the TPSA addresses Tibetan-

- human rights
- environmental rights
- religious freedoms
- the democratic Tibetan government in exile

The Dalai Lama Factor

- The Act reaffirms the right of Tibetans to choose a successor to their spiritual leader.
- Any interference by Chinese government officials will be met with serious sanctions and deemed inadmissible into the United States.

14th Dalai Lama

- The incumbent and the 14th Dalai Lama has been living in exile in India ever since his 1959 escape from Tibet, which had been occupied by the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) in 1950-51.
- He has been leading the movement for "genuine autonomy" for Tibet and Tibetans.

7

India, Sri Lanka, Maldives up maritime security

Context: India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives revived their trilateral maritime security cooperation dialogue, for the first meeting of the group since 2014.

What are the key-advances made in the meeting?

- This is the fourth edition of the trilateral meeting, and the last one was held in 2014.
- Seychelles, Mauritius and Bangladesh will be present as observers at Sri Lanka's invitation.
- Intending to encourage meaningful maritime cooperation in the Indian Ocean region, India, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives discussed several areas for possible collaboration such as:
 - Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)
 - Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR)
 - Joint military exercises, capacity building, maritime security threats, marine pollution, and maritime underwater heritage

The previous developments

- **DOSTI (India-Maldives):** Following the first trilateral meeting, the India-Maldives 'DOSTI' joint Coast Guard exercise in 2012 added Sri Lanka and was held as a trilateral exercise.
 - India-Maldives DOSTI exercises have been going on since 1991.
 - These are aimed at strengthening capabilities of the three partners in the area of search and rescue operations, combating piracy and armed robbery, damage control, and casualty evacuation at sea.
- **SLINEX (India-Sri Lanka):** India and Sri Lanka also have held bilateral naval exercises called SLINEX since 2005.
 - The latest iteration, the eighth, was held off Trincomalee in Sri Lanka in October 2020.

8 China to join UN arms trade treaty

Context: China's top legislative body has voted in favour of the country's bid to join the UN-sponsored ATT, which seeks to regulate international trade in conventional military equipment.

About Arms Trade Treaty

- The ATT was established in December 2014. Key principles of membership include-
 - self-defense rights
 - the intent to settle disputes through peaceful means
 - to refrain from issuing threats or use of force against the territorial integrity of any country
 - to respect human rights
- The treaty has a global membership of 106 countries, with Namibia the most recent to join in April.
- Major military exporters including France, Germany, Israel, Spain, and the United Kingdom are members of the treaty.

China's participation in conventional arms control

- China actively implements the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (PoA) and participates in the work of the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA) for successive sessions.
- China serves as the contracting party of the United Nations Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) and its annexed Protocols and actively fulfills its obligations under the convention, submitting reports of the PoA, the UNROCA and the CCW in time.

India's participation in conventional arms control

- Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material (CPPNM)
- CPPNM - 2005
- Chemical Weapons Convention- 1993
- Biological Weapons Convention
- International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism
- Australia Group
- Missile Technology Control Regime
- Nuclear Suppliers Group: India is not a member, but vowed to "harmonize" its export controls with those advocated by the voluntary 45-member group. India is prohibited from importing key nuclear materials and technologies from group members because New Delhi does not subject its entire nuclear enterprise to safeguards administered by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).
- Wassenaar Arrangement
- International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Additional Protocol: IAEA approved India's additional protocol on March 3, 2009. India ratified it in June 2014.
- Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism
- Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation

9 Japan to rename areas of islands disputed with China

Context: Japan's Ishigaki city Assembly passed a bill to rename an administrative area covering a group of islands in the East China Sea, immediately triggering backlash from China and Taiwan, both of which also claim the uninhabited islets as their own.

About:

- The disputed islands are known as the Senkaku in Japan and the Diaoyu in China.
- Ties between China and Japan have been strained by a territorial row over a group of islands, known as the Senkaku islands in Japan and the Diaoyu islands in China.
- There are total eight uninhabited islands and rocks in the East China Sea.
- They have a total area of about 7 sq km and lie north-east of Taiwan, east of the Chinese mainland and south-west of Japan's southern-most prefecture, Okinawa. The islands are controlled by Japan.

The changed names

- The assembly changed the name of the southern Japan area containing the Senkaku Islands from "Tonoshiro" to "TonoshiroSenkaku," which both Beijing and Taipei see as an attempt to cement Tokyo's claim by inserting the Japanese name "Senkaku."
- The renaming took effect on October 1, 2020 and it is aimed at resolving administrative confusion between a locale in downtown Ishigaki, which shares the name "Tonoshiro" with the isles.



What is Japan's claim?

- Japan says it surveyed the islands for 10 years in the 19th Century and determined that they were uninhabited.
- On 14 January, 1895 Japan erected a sovereignty marker and formally incorporated the islands into Japanese territory.

- After World War Two, Japan renounced claims to a number of territories and islands including Taiwan in the 1951 Treaty of San Francisco.
- These islands, however, came under US trusteeship and were returned to Japan in 1971 under the Okinawa reversion deal.

Claims made by China

- China says that the islands have been part of its territory since ancient times, serving as important fishing grounds administered by the province of Taiwan.

Taiwan's claim

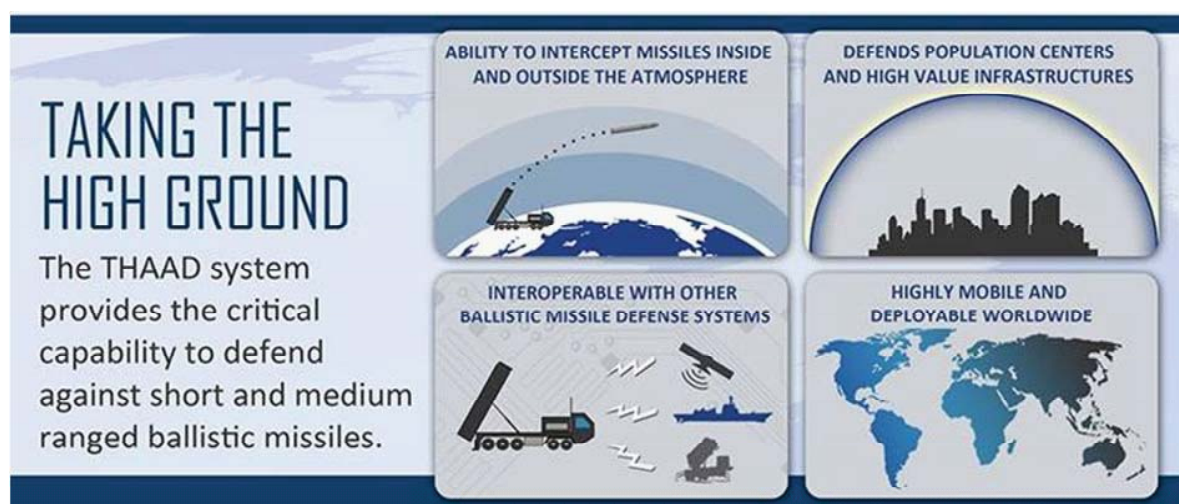
- Separately, Taiwan also claims the islands.

10 China opposing THAAD defence systems in South Korea

Context: China issued a statement reiterating its long-standing objections to the presence of the US THAAD missile defence system in South Korea.

What is THAAD?

- THAAD is an acronym for Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, a transportable, ground-based missile defense system.
- THAAD is coupled with space-based and ground-based surveillance stations, which transfer data about the incoming missile and informs the THAAD interceptor missile of the threat type classification.
- THAAD is alarmed about incoming missiles by space-based satellites with infrared sensors.
- Key-features of the missile system-
 - ▶ Shoots down short- and medium-range ballistic missiles in the terminal phase of their flight
 - ▶ Uses hit-to-kill technology - where kinetic energy destroys the incoming warhead
 - ▶ Has a range of 200km and can reach an altitude of 150km
 - ▶ US has previously deployed it in Guam and Hawaii as a measure against potential attacks from North Korea
- This anti-ballistic missile defense system has been designed and manufactured by the US company Lockheed Martin.
- South Korea is not the only country with the THAAD missile defense system. It has been previously deployed in the UAE, Guam, Israel and Romania.



11**Both Koreas violated the armistice agreement: UNC**

Context: Both North and South Korea recently violated the armistice agreement that governs their shared border, according to a probe by the United Nations Command (UNC).

What is armistice agreement?

- This armistice signed on July 27, 1953, formally ended the war in Korea. North and South Korea remain separate and occupy almost the same territory they had when the war began.
- The Korean War, which began on June 25, 1950, when the North Koreans invaded South Korea, officially ended on July 27, 1953.
- The Korean Armistice Agreement is somewhat exceptional in that it is purely a military document—no nation is a signatory to the agreement.
- Specifically the Armistice Agreement:
 - suspended open hostilities
 - withdrew all military forces and equipment from a 4,000-meter-wide zone, establishing the Demilitarized Zone as a buffer between the forces
 - prevented both sides from entering the air, ground, or sea areas under control of the other
 - arranged release and repatriation of prisoners of war and displaced persons
 - established the Military Armistice Commission (MAC) and other agencies to discuss any violations and to ensure adherence to the truce terms

Demilitarized Zone (DMZ):

- Stretching 150 miles along the 38th parallel, the 2.5-mile-wide Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) was established in 1953 as a buffer zone between the warring communist north and capitalist south.

About UNC:

- The UNC is commanded by an American general.
- It oversees affairs in the heavily fortified Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) between the two Koreas, which remain technically at war.

12**Power sharing deal in Afghanistan**

Context: Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani and his rival Abdullah Abdullah have signed a power-sharing deal, ending months of political uncertainty.

The power sharing deal:

- Mr Ghani and Dr Abdullah - the old rivals who both held positions in the previous government - signed the agreement.
- Ghani will remain president, but Abdullah's party will appoint half of the cabinet ministers.
- Abdullah will lead peace negotiations with the Taliban under the title of chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation, according to a copy of the agreement.
- Also as part of the deal, Abdurrahshid Dostum will be promoted to marshal and will gain a seat on the Afghan National Security Council.

Background:

- Afghanistan has been in political disarray since the country's Election Commission in December 2019 announced Mr. Ghani had won the September election with more than 50% of the vote.
- Mr. Ghani and Mr. Abdullah both declared themselves president in parallel inauguration ceremonies in March.

US's role

- A peace agreement between the U.S. and the Taliban signed February 29 calls for U.S. and NATO troops to leave Afghanistan.
- It was seen at the time as Afghanistan's best chance at peace in decades of war.

13 West Bank

Context: As Israel was set to launch its new unity government, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed to push on with controversial plans to annex large parts of the occupied West Bank.

About:

- The West Bank is a chunk of land east of Israel.
- It is home to nearly three million Palestinians, and would make up the heart of any Palestinian state.
- It is a landlocked territory near the Mediterranean coast of Western Asia, bordered by Jordan to the east and by the Green Line separating it and Israel on the south, west and north.
- The West Bank also contains a significant section of the western Dead Sea shore.



The bone of contention

- The territory is still a point of contention due to a large number of Palestinians who live there and hope to see the land become a part of their future state.
- The West Bank is currently home to about 2.8 million Palestinian Arabs and 400,000 Jewish residents in 127 communities commonly referred to as settlements.
- When Israel took control of the land in 1967 it allowed Jewish people to move in, but Palestinians consider the West Bank illegally occupied Palestinian land.

Oslo Accords

- Oslo Accord was signed in between both the countries to bring peace.
- The Oslo Accords are a pair of agreements between the Government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO):

- ▶ the Oslo I Accord, signed in Washington, D.C., in 1993
- ▶ the Oslo II Accord, signed in Taba, Egypt, in 1995
- The Oslo Accords marked the start of the Oslo process, a peace process aimed at achieving a peace treaty based on United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.
- The Oslo Accords created a Palestinian Authority tasked with limited self-governance of parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip; and acknowledged the PLO as Israel's partner in permanent-status negotiations about remaining questions.

United Nations stance

- The United Nations considers all settlement activity by Israel in the West Bank to be illegal, but Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced his intention to annex the settlements in the region.

14 Saudi Arabia launches an oil war

Context: Saudi Arabia has started an incredible price war with Russia by slashing its selling prices and pledging to unleash its pent-up supply onto a market reeling from falling demand because of the coronavirus outbreak.

Reasons behind Saudi Arabia's move

- The turmoil comes after the implosion of the oil alliance between OPEC and Russia.
- Russia refused to go along with OPEC's efforts to rescue the corona virus-battered oil market by cutting production.
- Russia's refusal to cut production was aimed at piling up more losses on US shale oil producers, many of which need higher oil prices to survive.
- The failure of the Vienna meeting left the oil industry shell-shocked, sparking a 10% plunge in oil prices even before the Saudi declaration of war.

When can this damage the US shale industry?

- The shale revolution was made possible by the combination of horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing (fracking).
- In the early 2000s fracking technology began to be broadly applied to reservoirs that had been viewed as being uneconomic for the previous 100 years or so.
- Along with this shifting of export and import polarity, came the sentiment that the U.S. was now the swing producer of crude oil and would quickly fill any gaps left by other producers.

OPEC

Background:

- ▶ The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) was founded in 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.

Members

- ▶ 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).
- ▶ Currently, the Organization has a total of 13 Member Countries.
- ▶ The Statute stipulates that "any country with a substantial net export of crude petroleum, which has fundamentally similar interests to those of Member Countries, may become a Full Member of the Organization, if accepted by a majority of three-fourths of Full Members, including the concurring votes of all Founder Members."

15 Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan

Context: The United States has signed an agreement with Taliban insurgents that could pave the way for ending the 18-year-war in Afghanistan in Doha (Qatar).

Highlights of the Agreement

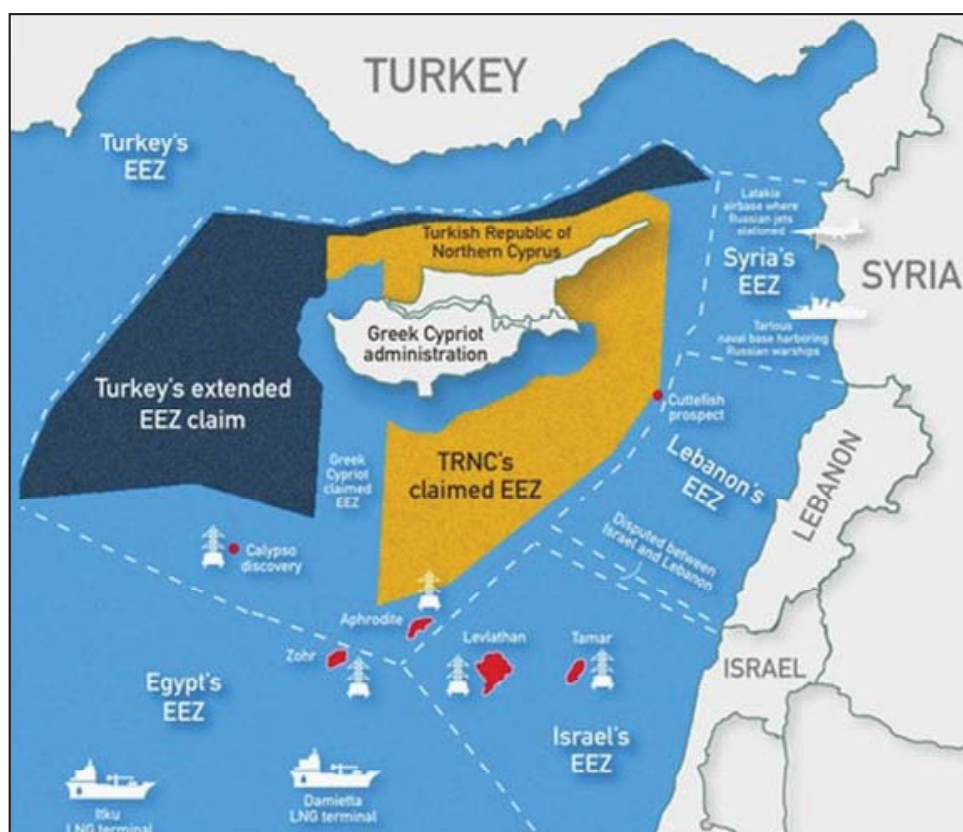
- **Military troops withdrawal:** It lays out a 14-month timetable for the withdrawal of "all military forces of the United States, its allies, and Coalition partners, including all non-diplomatic civilian personnel, private security contractors, trainers, advisors, and supporting services personnel."
- **Release of prisoners:** The agreement also calls for the release of 5,000 Taliban prisoners and 1,000 "prisoners of the other side" on the first day of intra-Afghan negotiations. The relevant sides have the goal of releasing all the remaining prisoners over the course of the subsequent three months.
- Comprehensive Ceasefire between the Afghan Government and Taliban.
- The prevention of the use of Afghanistan by any group or individual against the security of the United States and its allies.
- **Facilitation of an intra-Afghan dialogue:** The participants of intra-Afghan negotiations will discuss the date and modalities of a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire, including agreement over the future political roadmap of Afghanistan.

India's Stand

- India has been always supportive of the inclusive peace process, specifically Afghan-owned, Afghan-led and Afghan-controlled.
- The participation of the Afghan government's delegation during the Doha agreement as well as the upcoming intra-Afghan peace negotiations would be following the path desired by India.
- The deal has reiterated India's commitment to Afghanistan's pursuit of "sustainable peace and reconciliation".
- Thus, India has accepted the Doha Agreement (2020).

16 A row between Turkey and Greece raising tension in the eastern Mediterranean

Context: NATO allies Turkey and Greece have locked horns over who gets to explore hydrocarbons in the Eastern Mediterranean. This latest spat over gas reserves and maritime rights has prompted fears that tensions could escalate further.



What about international laws?

- The territorial claims of Greece and Cyprus are backed by international law under the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.
- But Turkey is not a signatory to the convention so even if Turkey's latest actions were found illegal by an international maritime tribunal, Turkey likely would ignore rulings against it.
- Cyprus and Greece have not brought a case against Turkey before the tribunal overseeing the Law of the Sea.

17 Israel and Bahrain establish formal diplomatic relations

Context: Israel and Bahrain have formally established diplomatic relations. The deal - brokered by the US - was signed in the Bahrain capital, Manama.

Recognition of Israel

- For decades, most Arab states have boycotted Israel, insisting they would only establish ties after the Palestinian dispute was settled.
- Bahrain is now the fourth Arab country in the Middle East - after the UAE, Egypt, and Jordan - to recognize Israel since its founding in 1948.
 - ▶ The Arab World consists of 22 countries in the Middle East and North Africa: Algeria, Bahrain, the Comoros Islands, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.
 - Iran and Turkey are not Arab countries and their primary languages are Farsi and Turkish respectively.

18 China Passes Export Law to Protect National Security, Technology

Context: China has passed a new law restricting sensitive exports to protect national security, a move that adds to policy tools it could wield against the US as tensions -- especially in technology -- continue to rise.

What does the Law state?

- The law comes into effect on December 1.
- It allows Beijing to “take reciprocal measures” against countries that abuse export controls and pose a threat to national security.
- **Applicability:** Export controls under the law will apply to civilian, military, and nuclear products, as well as goods, technologies, and services related to national security.
 - ▶ Chinese authorities will formulate and adjust an export control list of items to be published in a “timely manner”.

Implications for India

- India has an extradition treaty with Hong Kong in the form of the 1997 Surrender of Fugitives Offenders treaty.
 - ▶ Hong Kong is home to a large Indian community, as well as many Indian professionals who work in the service industry, banking and finance, and shipping.

19 The Withering of Arab League

Context: The Palestinians have stepped down from a key Arab League role in protest at the regional bloc’s failure to take a stand against Israeli-Arab deals.

About the Arab League

- The League of Arab States, or Arab League, is a voluntary association of countries whose peoples are mainly Arabic speaking or where Arabic is an official language.
- Its stated aims are to strengthen ties among member states, coordinate their policies and direct them towards a common good.
- It has 22 members including Palestine, which the League regards as an independent state.
 - ▶ The Arab World consists of 22 countries in the Middle East and North Africa: Algeria, Bahrain, the Comoros Islands, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

Reason behind Palestine’s decision

- The Palestinians had been hoping the League would condemn deals signed last week in Washington, where the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain agreed to normalize ties with Israel.
- The Palestinians called it a betrayal and said normalization should be offered only in return for Israel’s withdrawal from Palestinian territories

What’s the latest normalization ‘Deal’?

- The United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain are the latest countries in the Arab region to formally establish diplomatic ties with Israel in deals brokered by the United States.
- The only two Arab countries Israel has signed peace treaties with are Egypt and Jordan, in 1979 and 1994 respectively.
 - ▶ Egypt and Jordan share borders with Israel and have both fought wars with Israel in the past.

20 Armenia and Azerbaijan fight over disputed Nagorno-Karabakh

Context: One of the world's oldest conflicts, a territorial dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan, has re-erupted with the heaviest clashes in years. In the latest development, Russia brokered a new peace deal between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the two countries that have been in a military conflict for over six weeks over the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh in the South Caucasus.

What is the deal?

- The deal, which is meant to end the conflict between the two nations, was signed by
 - Russia (President Vladimir Putin)
 - Azerbaijan (President Ilham Aliyev)
 - Armenia (PM Nikol Pashinyan)
- As per the new peace deal-
 - Both sides will now maintain positions in the areas that they currently hold, which will mean a significant gain for Azerbaijan as it has reclaimed over 15-20 per cent of its lost territory during the recent conflict.
 - All military operations are suspended, Russian peacekeepers will be deployed along the line of contact in Nagorno-Karabakh and along the Lachin corridor that connects the region to Armenia.
 - These Russian peacekeepers with a force of roughly 2,000 will be deployed in the area for five years.
 - Refugees and internally displaced persons will return to the region and the adjacent territories and the two sides will also exchange prisoners of wars and bodies.
 - Significantly, a new corridor will be opened from Nakhchivan to Azerbaijan, which will be under Russian control.

What is Nagorno-Karabakh region?

- Nagorno-Karabakh is the subject of an unresolved dispute between Azerbaijan, in which it lies, and its ethnic Armenian majority, backed by neighboring Armenia.
- Traditionally inhabited by Christian Armenians and Muslim Turks.
- In Soviet times, it became an autonomous region within the Republic of Azerbaijan
- Internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan, but the majority of population is ethnic Armenian



The Conflict

- Since 1991, Armenia and Azerbaijan have been at odds over Nagorno-Karabakh.
- The land is an ethnic Armenian enclave within Azerbaijan and it lies approximately 50 kilometres from the Armenian border.
- The region has been out of control of Azerbaijan since the end of the war in 1994.

21

Pakistan to elevate Gilgit-Baltistan to full-fledged province with all constitutional rights

Context: Pakistan has decided to elevate Gilgit-Baltistan's status to that of a full-fledged province.

About:

- The region was part of the erstwhile princely state of Jammu and Kashmir and is claimed by India.
- Gilgit-Baltistan is located between the Karakoram and the Himalayas world's highest mountains. It's home to K-2, the second tallest mountain in the world.
- During the first Indo-Pak war of October 1947, Pakistan occupied 78,114 sq km of the land of Jammu and Kashmir, including the 'Northern Areas'.
 - The Northern Areas is the other name of Gilgit-Baltistan that Pakistan has used for administrative reasons because it was a disputed territory.



Governance of the Region

- The political nature of Gilgit-Baltistan has been directionless from the beginning.
- Pakistan initially governed the region directly from the central authority after it was separated from 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir' on April 28, 1949.
- In 1963, Pakistan gave away 5,180 sq km of the region to China, despite local protests.
- Pakistan passed the Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self Governance Order in 2009, which granted "self-rule" to the 'Northern Areas'.
- Pakistan signed an agreement with China for mega infrastructure and hydel power projects in September 2009.
- In 2019, a seven-judge bench of the Supreme Court of Pakistan took up the constitutional status of Gilgit-Baltistan.

- Over the years, the region has acquired a government and a council, which gave it a de facto status of a province of Pakistan, but the constitutional status of the region remained vague without explicit statehood.

22 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.

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.
- Negotiations between the P5+1 and Iran yielded the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in July 2015, a comprehensive 25-year nuclear agreement limiting Iran's nuclear capacity in exchange for sanctions relief.
- 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.
- 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 Iran says?

- Iran said that it would "automatically" fulfil the nuclear commitments if US rejoins the Nuclear Accord of 2015 and lifts sanctions.

Criticism of Iran

- The International Atomic Energy Association raised its serious concern over Iran's Nuclear sites and country's failure to cooperate with agency probe into undeclared nuclear material in the country.
 - Iran has been enriching uranium hexafluoride gas to 4.5% of the fissile isotope uranium-235 (U-235) over the past year.
 - By 20 May, it had stockpiled 1572 kilograms of enriched uranium, ostensibly for use in civilian reactors.

23 FATF's keeps Pakistan on 'Enhanced Follow-up List

Context: Noting that Pakistan's measures against money laundering and terror financing "is not yet sufficient to justify a re-rating", a regional affiliate of the Financial Action Task Force retained the country on its "Enhanced Follow-up" list.

What is Enhanced follow-up list?

- "Enhanced follow-up" is an intensive process of correction that deals with members with significant deficiencies (for technical compliance or effectiveness) in their AML/CFT systems.

- While Pakistan was found to be “partially compliant” on 25 of 40 recommendations, it was found to be “non-compliant” on four, “largely compliant” on nine parameters and “fully compliant” on one.

About FATF

- The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) was established in July 1989 by a Group of Seven (G-7) Summit in Paris, initially to examine and develop measures to combat money laundering.
 - In 2001, the FATF expanded its mandate to incorporate efforts to combat terrorist financing, in addition to money laundering.
 - In 2012, it added efforts to counter the financing of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.
 - Three decades after its creation, in April 2019, FATF Ministers adopted a new, open-ended mandate for the FATF.
- FATF has two types of lists:**
 - Black List:** Countries that are supporting terror funding and money laundering activities are placed in the Blacklist.
 - Gray List:** Those countries which are not considered as the safe heaven for supporting terror funding and money laundering; included in this list. The inclusion in this list is not as severe as blacklisted.

24 How the US counts its votes in the presidential election?

Context: Let’s take a look at how the world’s oldest democracy counts their votes.

How is the American President elected?

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

Who actually elects the President?

- US voters have no constitutional right to vote for the president or his running mate.
- In the US Election process, voters merely indicate a preference, but the task of actually electing the president falls to these 538 individual electors to the US Electoral College.
- Candidates can be the most popular candidate among voters and still fail to win enough states to gain majority electoral votes.
- In practice, electors almost always vote for the candidate who wins the popular vote.

HOW TO BECOME PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

**U.S. CONSTITUTION'S
REQUIREMENTS FOR
A PRESIDENTIAL
CANDIDATE**

✓ **NATURAL BORN
CITIZEN**

✓ **MINIMUM AGE
35 YEARS**

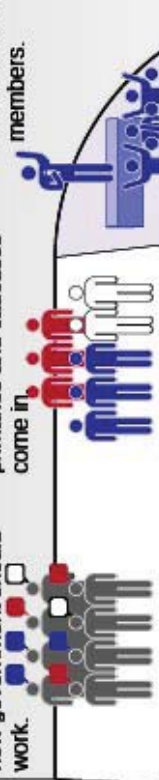
✓ **U.S. RESIDENT
14 YEARS**



STEP 1 PRIMARIES AND CAUCUSES

There are many people who want to be President, each with their own ideas about how government should work.

Candidates from each political party campaign through the country to win the favor of their party members.



STEP 2 NATIONAL CONVENTIONS

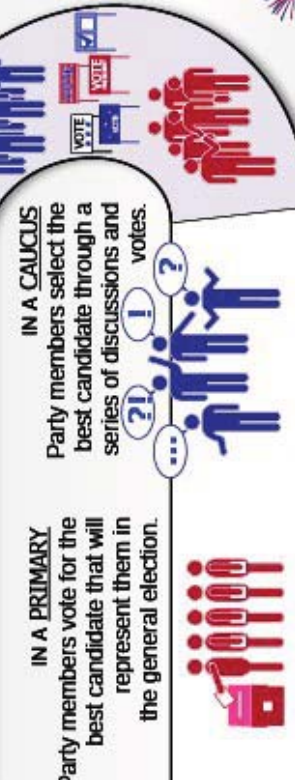
At each convention, the presidential candidate chooses a running mate (Vice Presidential candidate).

IN A PRIMARY

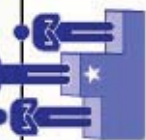
Party members vote for the best candidate that will represent them in the general election.

IN A CAUCUS

Party members select the best candidate through a series of discussions and votes.



The presidential candidates campaign throughout the country to win the support of the general population.



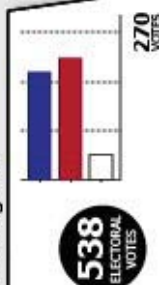
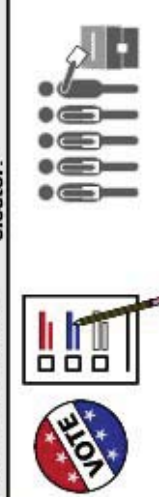
...And I approve this message.

STEP 3 GENERAL ELECTION

People in every state across the country vote for one President and Vice President.

STEP 4 ELECTORAL COLLEGE

In the electoral college system, each state gets a certain number of electors based on its representation in Congress.

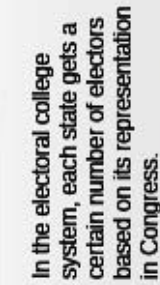


Based on 2010 Census

Each elector casts one vote following the general election, and the candidate who gets more than half (270) wins.



The newly elected President and Vice President are inaugurated in January.



How are elections supervised in the US?

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

How is the election process different from India?

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

25 Ethiopia on the Brink of Civil War

Context: Ethiopia is on the brink of civil war, threatening the stability of one of the world's most strategic regions, the Horn of Africa, and the fracturing of one of the continent's most powerful and populous countries.

About

- Ethiopia is Africa's oldest independent country and its second-largest in terms of population.
- Apart from a five-year occupation by Mussolini's Italy, it has never been colonized.
- It has a unique cultural heritage, being the home of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church - one of the oldest Christian denominations - and a monarchy that ended only in the coup of 1974.

Some key dates in Ethiopia's history:

- **4th century** - Christianity becomes the state religion.
- **1855-1868** - Reign of Emperor Tewodros II, who lays the foundation for the modern Ethiopian state.
- **1896** - Invading Italian forces are defeated by Ethiopians at Adwa.
- **1935-1941** - Italy deposes Emperor Haile Selassie and annexes Ethiopia, before being driven out by British, Commonwealth, and Ethiopian forces.

- **1962** - Haile Selassie annexes Eritrea, which becomes an Ethiopian province.
- **1974** - Haile Selassie was overthrown in a military coup after government fails to deal with famine.
- **1977-79** - Thousands are killed in "Red Terror" orchestrated by Marxist dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam.
- **1984-85** - Another serious famine devastates much of the country.
- **1991** - Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front deposes Mengistu. Meles Zenawi establishes stability and achieves considerable economic progress in his 19-year authoritarian rule.
- **1993** - Eritrea becomes independent.
- **1999-2000** - Ethiopian-Eritrean border war.
- **2018** - Abiy Ahmed becomes prime minister and launches reform program at home. Ends state of war with Eritrea.

How has the conflict started in Tigray?

- The leaders of Tigray dominated Ethiopia for many years until Mr. Abiy came to power in 2018 on the back of anti-government protests and curbed their influence.
- The conflict escalated in September when Tigray held local elections in insubordination of the Ethiopian federal government.
- These elections were considered "illegal" by the federal government, further leading to conflict with Tigray authorities.
- The structure of Ethiopia's federal system allows the country's ten regions significant autonomy.

What consequences for the rest of Africa?

- Few regions are more vulnerable than the Horn of Africa.
- Ethiopia's neighbors include Somalia- Ethiopian forces have reportedly begun withdrawing from that country to return home and Sudan, facing its huge political transition.
- Neighbouring Eritrea has shown little sign of opening up after making peace with Ethiopia in 2018, and its government and the Tigray one don't get along.
- A conflict could suck in these countries and others not far from the most strategic military outpost in Africa, tiny Djibouti, where several global powers including the US and China have their only military bases on the continent.
- The Horn of Africa is also short water crossing away from Yemen and the rest of the Arabian Peninsula.
- Ethiopia already was drawing concern over a dispute with Egypt over a huge dam Ethiopia is completing on the Blue Nile.



26 Bhutan's Tax Inspectors Without Border (TIWB)

Context: Tax Inspectors Without Borders (TIWB), a joint initiative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), launched its programme in Bhutan.

About the programme

- Through this program, India in collaboration with the UNDP and the TIWB Secretariat aims to aid Bhutan in strengthening its tax administration by transferring technical know-how and skills to its tax auditors, and through sharing of best audit practices.
- **Duration:** This programme is expected to be of about 24 months' duration.
- **Focus:** In the area of International Taxation and Transfer Pricing.
- **South-South cooperation:** This programme is another milestone in the continued cooperation between India and Bhutan and India's continued and active support for South-South cooperation.

27 60 years of Antarctic Treaty

Context: The 1959 Antarctic Treaty celebrates its 60th anniversary.

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
 - the prohibition of military activities, nuclear tests and the disposal of radioactive waste

Some important provisions of the Treaty:

- Antarctica shall be used for peaceful purposes only
- Freedom of scientific investigation in Antarctica and cooperation toward that end... shall continue
- Scientific observations and results from Antarctica shall be exchanged and made freely available
- No new claim, or enlargement of an existing claim to territorial sovereignty in Antarctica shall be asserted while the present Treaty is in force.
- To promote the objectives and ensure the observance of the provisions of the Treaty, "All areas of Antarctica, including all stations, installations and equipment within those areas ...shall be open at all times to inspection" (Article VII).

28 Brazil became 130th country to ratify the Nagoya Protocol

Context: Brazil ratified the Nagoya Protocol on Access to **Genetic** Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their **Utilization** to the **Convention on Biological Diversity** ("Nagoya Protocol").

The ratification comes 10 years after Brazil signed the Protocol on February 2, 2011.

What is Nagoya Protocol?

- The Nagoya Protocol is an international agreement created by the United Nations (UN).
- It equitably shares the benefits of genetically modified organisms.
- It is one of two protocols that allow ambitious biodiversity goals to be efficiently achieved.

Convention on Biological Diversity

- The Nagoya Protocol is headed up by the Convention on Biological Diversity.
- It is an international legal instrument, facing penalties from the UN if the rules of compliance are broken.
- The agreement expects to cover "all possible domains that are directly or indirectly related to biodiversity and its role in development."

Utilization of genetic resource

- '**Genetic Resource**' is defined as 'any material of plant, animal, microbial or other origin containing functional units of heredity of actual or potential value'.
- '**Utilising**' is defined as 'to conduct research and development on the genetic and/or biochemical composition of genetic resources including through the application of biotechnology'.

Human genetic resources fall outside the Nagoya Protocol and the Nagoya Protocol applies only to genetic resources accessed after October 2015.

4

INTERNATIONAL/ REGIONAL GROUPINGS

1 The UK 'finally' struck a post-Brexit trade deal with EU

Context: Britain clinched a historic deal with the European Union as both sides managed to thrash out a post-Brexit free trade agreement just days before the December 31 deadline.

What are the EU and Brexit?

- The European Union is made up of 27 European countries.
- EU citizens are free to live and work in other EU countries, and firms in those countries can buy and sell each other's goods without checks or extra taxes at borders.
- The UK first applied to join what was then the European Economic Community in 1961 and finally became a member in 1973.
- The UK was the first country to leave the EU and this was known as Brexit - British exit.
- Brexit happened because a public vote - or referendum - was held in June 2016, to decide whether the UK should be in the EU.

What is the deal all about?

- The deal contains new rules for how the UK and EU will live, work, and trade together.
- The two sides reached a "zero tariff-zero quota deal" which will help smooth the trade of goods across the channel.

2 SCO Summit

Context: For the first time, India hosted the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) heads of government meeting after it joined the eight-member grouping in 2017.

What is SCO?

- The SCO is an economic and security bloc in which India and Pakistan were admitted as full members in 2017.
- Its founding members included China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.
- Its driving philosophy is known as the "Shanghai Spirit" which emphasizes harmony, working by consensus, respect for each other's culture, non-interference in the internal affairs of others, and non-alignment.

Historical Background

- After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the then security and economic architecture in the Eurasian region dissolved and new structures had to come up.
- The original Shanghai Five were China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan.
- The SCO was formed in 2001, with Uzbekistan included.
- It expanded in 2017 to include India and Pakistan.

3

India to deploy naval liaisons at Madagascar, Abu Dhabi for information exchange

Context: After joining the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) as 'Observer', India is looking to post Navy Liaison Officers at the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre (RMIFC) in Madagascar and also at the European maritime surveillance initiative in the Strait of Hormuz for improved Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA).

About:

- The Indian Ocean Commission is a regional forum in the southwest Indian Ocean.
- The IOC is particularly unique and is the only African regional organization composed entirely of islands: Comoros, France/Reunion, Madagascar, Mauritius, and Seychelles.
- China and the European Union (EU) have been Observers in the IOC since 2016 and 2017, respectively.
- India became an Observer in March 2020 along with Japan and the United Nations.

Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre (RMIFC)

- The RMIFC functions under the aegis of the IOC.
- It is based in Madagascar. It is designed to deepen maritime domain awareness by monitoring maritime activities and promoting information sharing and exchange.

European maritime surveillance initiative in the Strait of Hormuz

- The EMASOH headquarters is composed of Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, and French officers and is based at the French naval base in Abu Dhabi.
- The aim is "to monitor maritime activity and guarantee freedom of navigation in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz."
- EMASOH deploys air and naval units in the Strait of Hormuz and adjacent areas for peaceful surveillance of naval activity.

4

ASEAN Special Summit

Context: The online ASEAN Special Summit and ASEAN+3 Special Summit on Covid-19 response took place in Hanoi, Vietnam, chaired by Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc, chairman of ASEAN and ASEAN+3.

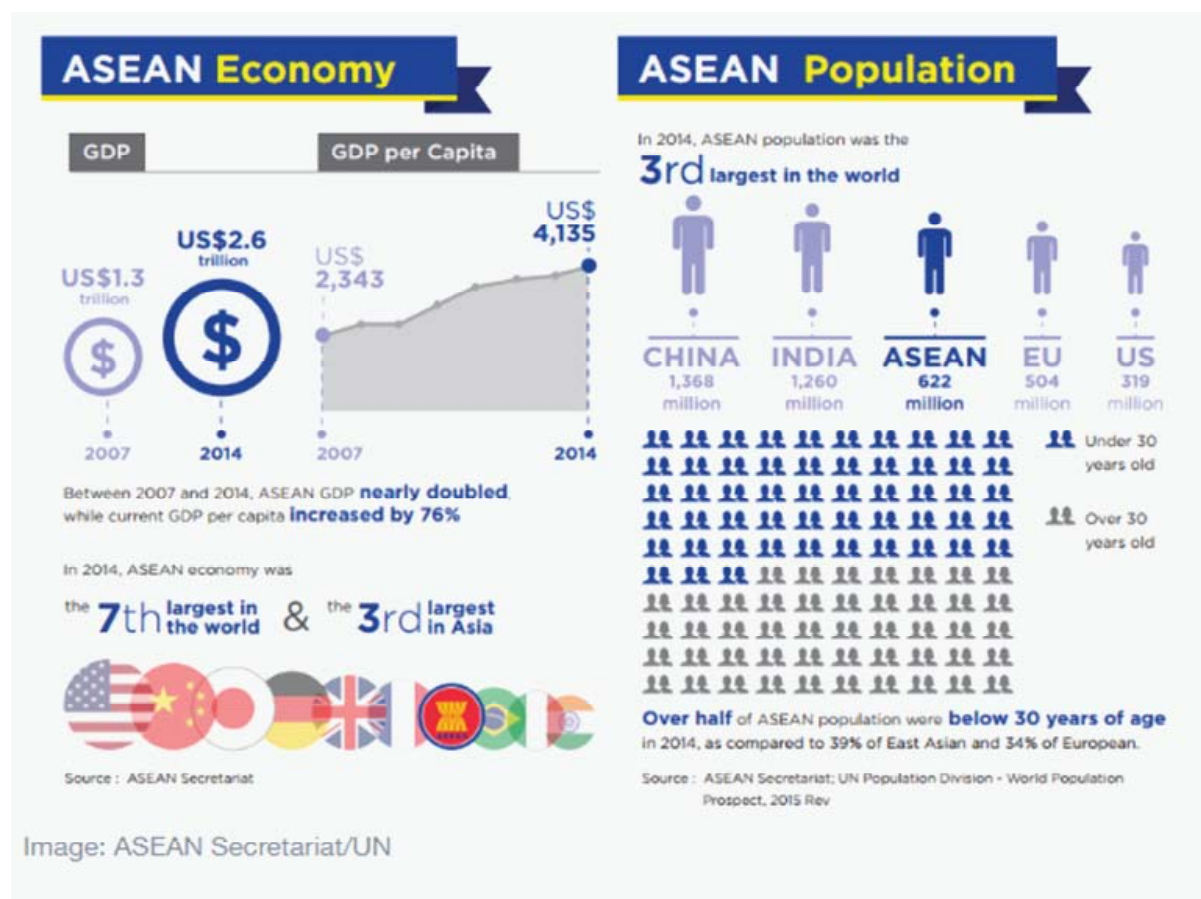
About:

- The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (more commonly known as ASEAN) is an intergovernmental organization aimed primarily at promoting economic growth and regional stability among its members.
- There are currently 10 member states: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Vietnam.
- Chairmanship of ASEAN rotates annually, based on the alphabetical order of the English names of Member States.
- ASEAN was founded half a century ago in 1967 by the five Southeast Asian nations of Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand.



Economic importance of ASEAN:

- If ASEAN were a country, it would be the seventh-largest economy in the world, with a combined GDP of \$2.6 trillion in 2014.
- It is projected that by 2050, ASEAN will rank as the fourth-largest economy in the world.
- It also has the third-largest labor force in the world, behind China and India.



5 G20 Virtual meeting

Context: Leaders across the globe, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, participated in a virtual G20 Leaders' Summit to discuss strategies to combat the coronavirus pandemic.

About:

- The Group of Twenty, or the G20, is the premier forum for international economic cooperation. The G20 brings together the leaders of both developed and developing countries from every continent.
- Collectively, G20 members represent around 80% of the world's economic output, two-thirds of the global population, and three-quarters of international trade.
- Throughout the year, representatives from G20 countries gather to discuss financial and socio-economic issues.

Historical background:

- Originated in 1999 at the level of Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors, the G20 gathered for high-level discussions on macro-financial issues.
- In the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis, the G20 was elevated to include the leaders of member countries.
- The first G20 Leaders' Summit took place in Washington D.C. in November 2008. Consequently, the G20 agenda expanded beyond macro-financial issues, to include socio-economic and development issues.

G20 Summit 2020

- This event marked the first time that Saudi Arabia holds the Presidency of the G20.
- The Saudi Arabian Presidency has selected the theme, 'Realizing Opportunities of the 21st Century For All'.
- The Group of Twenty (G20) Leaders' Summit 2021 will convene in October 2021 in Rome Italy.

6 APEC agree on free trade

Context: Leaders from the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, including the US, have pledged to work toward free, open, and non-discriminatory trade and investment to revive their coronavirus-battered economies.

What is APEC?

- The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) is a regional economic forum established in 1989 to leverage the growing interdependence of the Asia-Pacific.
- APEC is a 21 members body.
- APEC ensures that goods, services, investments, and people move easily across borders.

Key-highlights of the meeting

- APEC leaders adopted the Putrajaya Vision 2040, a new 20-year growth vision to replace the Bogor Goals.
 - ▶ The Bogor Goals, One of APEC's flagship initiatives, were released in 1994 for members to move towards the long-term goal of free and open trade and investment in the Asia-Pacific region no later than the year 2020.
- They pledged to build an "open, dynamic, resilient and peaceful region" by 2040 and tasked officers to draw up implementation plans by next year.

7 16th meeting of Secretaries of Security Councils of SCO

Context: Agreeing to cooperate in the fight against "international terrorism", "extremism", "separatism", and "religious radicalism", National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval and his Pakistan counterpart joined NSAs of the **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)** member countries in **Dushanbe, Tajikistan**.

About SCO

- The SCO is an economic and security bloc in which India and Pakistan were admitted as full members in 2017.
- **Founding members:** China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.
- **Current Members:** India, Kazakhstan, the People's China, Kyrgyzstan Republic, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.
- Its driving philosophy is known as the "**Shanghai Spirit**"
 - ▶ It emphasises harmony, working by consensus, respect for each other's culture, non-interference in the internal affairs of others and non-alignment.

Organizational structure

- The SCO Summit is the grouping's main body that sets the agenda for the coming year.
- The organisation has two permanent bodies —
 - ▶ the **SCO Secretariat** based in **Beijing**
 - ▶ the **Executive Committee** of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) based in **Tashkent**

8 17th meeting of foreign ministers of BIMSTEC member countries

Context: Recently the **17th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting** of the Foreign ministers of the **Bay of Bengal Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)** group finalized an aspiring air, land-linkages.

Origin BIMSTEC

- It came into existence in 1997 through the "**Bangkok Declaration**".
- Initially, it had four Member States with the acronym '**BIST-EC**' (**B**angladesh, **I**ndia, **S**ri-Lanka, and **T**hailand - **E**conomic Cooperation).
- At present, BIMSTEC constitutes **seven** Member States:
- **South Asia (5 countries):** Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka

- **Southeast Asia (2 countries):** Myanmar and Thailand
- It was renamed as 'BIMST-EC' in **BIMSTEC Transport Infrastructure and Logistic Study (BTILS)** project in 2007.

Mandate of the Organization

- **BIMSTEC** connects the **littoral countries of the Bay of Bengal and the Himalayan ecologies**.
- It has emerged as a major instrument for regional cooperation with its primary focus on **economic and technical cooperation** among the countries of **South Asia and south-east Asia**.
- Its stability lies in that it includes **two influential powers India and Thailand** which lays-off fear the dominance by one big power.
- The grouping promotes increased connectivity with ASEAN countries and supports smaller countries like Bangladesh Bhutan and Nepal to develop connectivity with ASEAN nations.
- **Transport and Communication** is one of the **14 priority sectors** of cooperation of BIMSTEC, since 1997. **This sector is led by India.**

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

1 Enrica Lexie Case

Context: The Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague has upheld the conduct of the Indian authorities in the EnricaLexie case and which two Italian marines were accused of killing two Indian fishermen in 2012, and said India is entitled to get compensation in the case but can't prosecute the marines due to official immunity enjoyed by them.

About the case:

- In February 2012, India accused two Italian marines, onboard the MV EnricaLexie --an Italian flagged oil tanker-- of killing two Indian fishermen who were on a fishing vessel off Kerala coast in India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).
- India had detained the two marines after the shooting incident but later allowed them to return to Italy on specific conditions following separate orders by the Supreme Court.
- The issue of jurisdiction over the case became a big argument between the two countries.

What the International Tribunal has ruled?

- The international tribunal decided that India is entitled to payment of compensation in connection with "loss of life, physical harm, material damage to property and moral harm suffered by the captain and other crew members of St. Antony".
- The Tribunal upheld the conduct of the Indian authorities concerning the incident under the provisions of the UNCLOS.
- It held that the actions of the Italian military officers and, consequently, Italy breached India's freedom of navigation under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) Article 87(1)(a) and 90.
- India is therefore precluded from exercising its jurisdiction over the Marines.
- The Arbitral Tribunal has therefore agreed on the Italian position that the Marines, being members of the Italian armed forces in the official exercise of their duties, cannot be tried by Indian courts.

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

- United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) or the Law of the Sea Convention or the Law of the Sea treaty came into operation and became effective from 16th November 1982.
- It lays down a comprehensive regime of law and order in the world's oceans and seas establishing rules governing all uses of the oceans and their resources.

- The Convention also provides the framework for further development of specific areas of the law of the sea.
- The Law of the Sea Convention says that military vessels have the “right to innocent passage” to traverse the territorial sea of a coastal state without entering internal waters so long as they are not prejudicial to the peace, good order, and security of the coastal state.
- India signed the Convention on December 12, 1982, and ratified it on June 29, 1995.

2 International Day of UN Peacekeepers

Context: International Day of UN Peacekeepers is observed on May 29. On this day, tributes are paid to those people who have immensely contributed to the work done by the United Nations.

About:

- The International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers is celebrated annually on May 29.
- This is the date when in 1948 the first UN peacekeeping mission named the “United Nations Truce Supervision Organization”, or UNTSO began operations in Palestine.
- Moreover, the day is also celebrated to honor more than 3,900 peacekeepers who have lost their lives serving under the U.N. flag since the year 1948.

India & UN Peacekeeping Operation:

- Indian Army has been taking part in UN peacekeeping operations since 1950.
- Units and troops of the Indian Army have been part of 49 UN Missions with over 1,95,000 troops having served in various parts of the world.
- Presently, India is ranked as the third-largest troop contributor to UN peacekeeping missions.

The Theme:

- The theme of International Day of UN Peacekeepers 2020 is “Women in Peacekeeping: A Key to Peace”.
- This theme has been chosen as it is the 20th anniversary of the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security.

3 Inclusion of Taiwan in WHO

Context: The leaders of United States (US)’s congressional foreign affairs committees have written to over 60 nations (Germany, Thailand, Canada, Britain, Saudi Arabia, and Australia) to garner their support towards the inclusion of Taiwan in the World Health Organisation (WHO).

About:

- The country is commonly known by the name “Taiwan” but officially it is called the Republic of China.
- The island of Taiwan floats in the South China Sea, just over one hundred miles from the coast of mainland China.

- Taiwan is not a member of the WHO, because most governments do not recognize it as an independent state.
- India is among the 179 of the 193 member states of the UN that do not maintain diplomatic ties with Taiwan.

World Health Organization

- The World Health Organization is a specialized agency of the United Nations.
- It was inaugurated following the second world war on 7 April 1948 – a date now celebrated as World Health Day.
- Based in Geneva, Switzerland, the WHO has 194 member states.

4 Pakistan, China re-elected to UNHRC

Context: Pakistan and Nepal have been re-elected to the UN Human Rights Council, while China won a seat by the smallest margin showing a drastic drop in standing.

What is UNHRC?

- UNHRC is an inter-governmental body within the United Nations system responsible for-
 - strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe
 - addressing situations of human rights violations and make recommendations on them.
- The UNHRC has “the ability to discuss all thematic human rights issues and situations that require its attention throughout the year”.
- The Human Rights Council replaced the former United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR).
- The Human Rights Council holds no fewer than three regular sessions a year, for a total of at least 10 weeks.
 - The sessions are held at the UN Office in Geneva, Switzerland.

Membership

- The Council is made up of 47 UN Member States, which are elected by the UNGA through a direct and secret ballot.
- Members of the Council serve for three years and are not eligible for immediate re-election after serving two consecutive terms.

Distribution of Seats

- African States: 13 seats
- Asia-Pacific States: 13 seats
- Latin American and Caribbean States: 8 seats
- Western European and other States: 7 seats
- Eastern European States: 6 seats

5 India's UN journey, from outlier to the high table

Context: The 75th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations (UN) is an opportunity to look at the major trends, patterns, and future challenges as far as India is concerned in terms of safeguarding its interests and promoting the common good.

The Organization

- The United Nations is an international organization, committed to-
 - ▶ maintaining international peace and security
 - ▶ developing friendly relations among nations
 - ▶ promoting social progress, better living standards, and human rights
- **Membership:** It is currently made up of 193 Member States.
 - ▶ Each of the 193 Member States of the United Nations is a member of the General Assembly. States are admitted to membership in the UN by a decision of the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council.
- **Main Organs:** The main organs of the UN are the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Trusteeship Council, the International Court of Justice, and the UN Secretariat. All were established in 1945 when the UN was founded.

What is the current status of India in the UN?

- India is a founding member of the United Nations, signing the UN Charter, along with 50 other countries, on 26 June 1945.
- Currently, India is a non-permanent member of the UN.
 - ▶ In the past, India has gained a non-permanent seat in the Security Council in 1950- 1951, 1967-1968, 1972-1973, 1977-1978, 1984-1985, 1991-1992, and most recently in 2011-2012.

How do United Nations work in India?

- In India, the UN's work is guided by the United Nations Sustainable Development Framework (UNSDF), a framework of cooperation, results, and strategies between the Government of India and the United Nations system in India to contribute to the achievement of national priorities and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- The focus areas include poverty and urbanization; health, water, and sanitation; education; nutrition and food security; climate change, clean energy, and disaster resilience; skilling, entrepreneurship, and job creation; and gender equality and youth development.
- The UNSDF is underpinned by the overarching principle of the SDGs to leave no one behind, echoing the Government of India's message of SabkaSaathSabkaVikas (development for all).
- The UNSDF also includes a set of UN flagship programs that are aligned with major government schemes.
- The flagship programs will be scalable, innovative, and multi-sectoral solutions to some of the most pressing development challenge that India faces, while also serving as catalysts for increased investment in development finance.

6 UN commission reclassifies cannabis, no longer considered risky narcotic

Context: The UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) took several decisions, leading to changes in the way cannabis is internationally regulated, including its reclassification out of the most dangerous category of drugs.

What is Cannabis?

- Cannabis (often called marijuana) refers to a group of three plants with psychoactive properties, known as Cannabis sativa, Cannabis indica, and Cannabis ruderalis.
- Cannabis comes from the cannabis plant.
- It contains the active ingredient delta-9 TetraHydroCannabinol (THC), which affects brain function.
- The flowers and leaves of the cannabis plant are dried, then smoked, or eaten for the psychoactive effects of THC, which can alter perception and mood. The dried flowers (heads) of the cannabis plant have a high THC concentration.
- Cannabis is a depressant drug that reduces brain activity.

The UN Convention on Narcotic Drugs

- India is one of 53 members of the UN Commission on Narcotics Drugs.
- Twenty-seven of these countries, including the US and many European nations, voted to remove cannabis from Schedule IV of the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, where it is listed alongside opioids like heroin, while 25 countries (including Pakistan and China) voted to retain it, and one member abstained.

What does it mean for India?

- According to the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotics, marijuana was controlled.
- The NDPS (Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances) Act, 1985, was passed by the Rajiv Gandhi government with penal provisions in case cannabis was found in one's possession, sold, or if one grew the plant.
- Removing cannabis from the list of dangerous drugs will require an amendment to the Drug and Cosmetics Act.

7 India's CAG appointed as 'external auditor' of the OPCW

Context: The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), selected India's Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) as the 'External Auditor' of the OPCW for the three-year term starting in 2021.

Role of India's CAG in International Bodies

- In the past also, CAG has held the position of External Auditor of OPCW during the period from 1997 to 2003.
- The Comptroller and Auditor General of India is currently the External Auditor of
 - World Health Organization (2020-2023)
 - Food and Agriculture Organization (2020-2025)
 - Inter Parliamentary Union (2020-2022)
- CAG is the Chair of the United Nations (UN) Panel of External Auditors.

About OPCW

- The **Chemical Weapons Convention** entered into force on **29 April 1997**.
- The event marked the birth of an international chemical weapons disarmament regime headed by the **Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)**.
- **Member States:** 193

- **Implementing body:** OPCW is the implementing body for the Chemical Weapons Convention.
- The OPCW oversees the global endeavour to permanently and verifiably eliminate chemical weapons

The Convention:

- The Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction (the CWC), is comprised of a Preamble, 24 Articles, and 3 Annexes —
 - ▶ the Annex on Chemicals
 - ▶ the Verification Annex
 - ▶ the Confidentiality Annex
- **Objective:** To eliminate an entire category of weapons of mass destruction by prohibiting the development, production, acquisition, stockpiling, retention, transfer or use of chemical weapons by **States Parties**.
 - ▶ States Parties, in turn, must take the steps necessary to enforce that prohibition in respect of persons (natural or legal) within their jurisdiction.

- Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant (NPP): Russia began construction of Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) Unit 5 in India.

SUMMITS/ CONFERENCES

1 Singapore Convention on Mediation Enters into Force

Context: Singapore Convention on Mediation, an international convention that aims to help businesses resolve cross-border disputes and further facilitate international trade took effect.

Analysis:

• Singapore Convention on Mediation

- The United Nations Convention on International Settlement Agreements Resulting from Mediation ("Singapore Convention (on Mediation)") came into force on 12 September 2020.
- It creates a harmonized framework for cost-effective and prompt enforcement of international mediated settlement agreements, aiming to render mediation more efficient and attractive to commercial parties globally, as an alternative to international arbitration and litigation.
- As of September 2020, the Convention has 53 signatories, including India, China, and the U.S.
- Also known as the United Nations Convention on International Settlement Agreements Resulting from Mediation, this is also the first UN treaty to be named after Singapore.

Applicability of the Convention

- The Singapore Convention can be resorted to only in case of an international commercial dispute, and specifically excludes disputes arising from personal, family, inheritance, or employment matters.
- The convention also does not apply to settlement agreements that have been approved by a court or concluded in the course of court proceedings, and which are otherwise enforceable as a judgment.
- Besides, it does not include settlement agreements that have been recorded and are enforceable as an arbitral award.

India and mediation

India has had a long history of mediation.

- The Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, has long recognized the concept of mediation as an effective alternative dispute resolution.
- Mediation centers have been established in many districts and High Courts in India.
- The Mediation and Conciliation Project Committee—consisting of Supreme Court and High Court judges, and senior advocates—has taken the lead in evolving policy matters relating to the mediation.

- The recently introduced Commercial Courts (Pre-Institution Mediation and Settlement) Rules, 2018, prescribe the mechanism for convening a mediation before the institution of a commercial dispute.
- The Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996, provides a conciliation mechanism whereby the resultant settlement agreement has the status or effect of an award.

India's obligations under the Convention

- Pursuant to Article 253 of the Constitution of India, the Parliament is required to promulgate legislation to give effect to any international Convention.
- In furtherance of the same, the Government has approved the establishment of the New Delhi International Arbitration Centre (NDIAC) as a statutory body. NDIAC was proposed through the New Delhi International Arbitration Centre Act, 2019.

2 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)

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

What is TPNW?

- The TPNW contains provisions that prohibit states from participating in any nuclear weapons-related activities including development, testing, possession, stockpile, use, or threat of use of nuclear weapons.
- Signatories are required "to prevent and suppress any activity prohibited under the TPNW undertaken by persons or on territory under its jurisdiction or control."
- In 2016, the U.N. General Assembly decided to hold a conference for the negotiation of the treaty.
- The conference took place in March 2017.
- The treaty was subsequently adopted at the United Nations on July 7, 2017, and was opened for signature by the U.N. Secretary-General on September 20, 2017.
- When Honduras ratified the treaty in late October, it reached the requisite 50 ratifications and is set to enter into force on January 22, 2021.

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

- The NPT has 191 state parties, making it one of the most widely subscribed to international agreements.
 - ▶ Five state parties (China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, United States) are acknowledged to possess nuclear weapons pending their elimination pursuant to Article VI of the treaty.
 - ▶ All other NPT members are obligated, subject to safeguards monitored by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), not to acquire nuclear weapons.
- Similarly, members of the TPNW are obligated not to acquire nuclear arms subject to IAEA safeguards, and the importance of the NPT to international peace and security is recognized in the preamble to the TPNW.
- But the TPNW goes further than the NPT: Any member of the TPNW is barred from "inducing" a state to use or threaten nuclear weapons on its behalf.

What is India's stand on the treaty?

India had rejected the treaty for two main reasons.

- **Not negotiated in the right forum:** First, because it was not negotiated in the right forum or the right manner.
- **Lack of attention to important areas:** India's second criticism has been on lack of attention to issues of verification and compliance.
- With such fundamental questions left unanswered, India found the treaty insufficient to promote real disarmament.

3 India-UK Virtual Summit

Context: Prime Minister of India and The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom held a Virtual Summit recently

Key-highlights of the Summit

- **Roadmap 2030:** An ambitious 'Roadmap 2030' was adopted at the Summit to elevate bilateral ties to a 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership'.
 - The Roadmap will pave the way for a deeper and stronger engagement over the next ten years in the key areas of people to people contacts, trade and economy, defence and security, climate action and health.
- **Global Innovation Partnership:** A new India-UK 'Global Innovation Partnership' was announced that aims to support the transfer of inclusive Indian innovations to select developing countries, starting with Africa.
- **Migration and mobility:** A comprehensive partnership on migration and mobility is also launched that will facilitate greater opportunities for the mobility of students and professionals between the two countries.

The **UK** is India's second largest partner in research and innovation collaborations.

1 USTR probe for taxing digital service companies

Context: The office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) is initiating investigations into taxes adopted or under consideration by 10 nations, including India, on revenues of American digital service companies like Netflix, Airbnb, Uber, LinkedIn, and Spotify.

About Section 301 Report

- The Special 301 Report is prepared annually by the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR).
- The USTR inquiry is under the US Trade Act of 1974 and Section 301 of this law, hence referred to as '301 investigations'.
- The US law mandates consultations with trading partners as and when a Section 301 investigation is initiated.
- The Section 301 provision gives the USTR "broad authority" to investigate and respond to a foreign country's action which may be "unfair" or "discriminatory" as well as negatively affect US commerce.
- Adopted in 1974, it allows the US President to impose tariffs or other curbs on foreign nations.
- India will also be accorded an opportunity to negotiate with the US and prevent the imposition of tariffs by reaching a comprehensive outcome, one the line of similar negotiations that are currently underway with France.

What is United States Trade Representative (USTR)?

- Founded in 1962, the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) has lead responsibility for developing and coordinating U.S. international trade, commodity, and direct investment policy.

2 World Telecommunication and Information Society Day 2020

Context: World Telecommunication and Information Society Day 2020 was observed on 17 May to raise awareness about the use of technology and the importance it plays in the current scenario.

About:

- The anniversary of the signing of the first International Telegraph Convention and the creation of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) is celebrated on May 17 as the World Telecommunication and Information Society Day, since 2006.
- It's the day to celebrate the power of telecommunication and its importance in building relationships across cultures around the world.
- The day was coined by the United Nations General Assembly.

International Telegraph Convention

- The first international telegraph convention was signed in Paris on May 17, 1865.
- The event was officially commenced in 1973 in Malaga-Torremolinos, Spain, at the ITU plenipotentiary conference.

The theme

- UNESCO celebrates the day with a special theme every year.
- The theme this year is: Connect 2030: ICTs for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

3 World Happiness Report

Context: The United Nations (UN) released its 'World Happiness Report' and India was at a dismal 144 rank of a total 156 nations surveyed, while Pakistan stood at 66 rank.

About:

- It is an annual survey by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network for the United Nations. It was originally launched in 2012.
- It ranks countries using the Gallup World Poll and six factors:
 - levels of GDP
 - life expectancy
 - generosity
 - social support
 - freedom
 - corruption income

Key-highlights of the findings:

- India has been scored at 3.573 points nestled between Lesotho and Malawi nations. Pakistan, on the other hand, has been ranked 66 with a score of 5.693, international media reported.
- On top of the charts is Finland rated as high as 7.809 points for the third consecutive year with Denmark (7.646) and Switzerland (7.560) at the no 2 and 3 spots, respectively.
- Followed by Iceland (7.504) and Norway (7.488), completing the top five positions in the ranking.

S.No.	World's 10 Happiest Countries	World Happiness Report	World's Unhappiest Cities
1.	Finland	Helsinki, Finland	Afghanistan
2.	Denmark	Aarhus, Denmark	South Sudan
3.	Switzerland	Wellington, New Zealand	Zimbabwe
4.	Iceland	Zurich, Switzerland	Rwanda
5.	Norway	Copenhagen, Denmark	Central African Republic
6.	Netherlands	Bergen, Norway	Tanzania
7.	Sweden	Oslo, Norway	Botswana
8.	New Zealand	Tel Aviv, Israel	Yemen
9.	Austria	Stockholm, Sweden	Malawi
10.	Luxembourg	Brisbane, Australia	India

5

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) 2021 report

Context: India stands seventh among the nine countries armed with nuclear weapons in terms of inventory of warheads, according to the **SIPRI Year Book 2020**.

Key-highlights of the Report

- **India's neighbours:** Both nuclear neighbours of India-China and Pakistan-have more warheads than its inventory.
 - ▶ **Pakistan:** Pakistan ranks sixth, with 160 nuclear warheads, just above India among the nuclear weapon countries.
 - ▶ **China:** China's nuclear warhead count stands at 320 - that is, more than double the number that India has.
- **Russia:** Russia leads the world with 6,375 warheads, followed by the US with 5,800, and the UK with 215 warheads.
- **Israel:** The country is believed to possess between 80 and 90 nuclear warheads.

Nine nuclear-armed States

- The nine nuclear-armed states includes the **United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, China, India, Pakistan, Israel and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea)**.
- They together possessed an estimated 13,400 nuclear weapons at the start of 2020.

What are nuclear bombs?

- Nuclear bombs are weapons of mass destruction.

- They harness the forces that hold the nucleus of an atom together by using the energy released when the particles of the nucleus (neutrons and protons) are either split or merged.
- Nuclear weapons are made using fissile material which can be either **highly enriched uranium (HEU)** or separated plutonium.
- There are two ways that nuclear energy can be released from an atom:
 - **Nuclear fission**– the nucleus of an atom is split into two smaller fragments by a neutron. This method usually involves isotopes of uranium (uranium-235, uranium-233) or plutonium (plutonium-239).
 - **Nuclear fusion**– two smaller atoms are brought together, usually hydrogen or hydrogen isotopes (deuterium, tritium), to form a larger one (helium isotopes); this is how the sun produces energy.

The situation in India

- India has moved slowly to build its **nuclear-triad**.
- After developing land and air “vectors” (carriers of nuclear warheads - **Agni series of missiles** for the Army and **Mirage-2000** and **Jaguar fighters** of the Air Force), India is boosting naval nuclear prowess.
- **INS Arihant** became **n-capable** in 2018. **INS Arighat** is on the course.
- India has become the third largest spender on military for the first time. But it still spends only a little over one-fourth of China’s military spending.
- The country is second biggest importer of arms in the world.

About SIPRI

- **Established in:** 1966
- **Based in:** Stockholm
- SIPRI is an independent international institute dedicated to research into conflict, armaments, arms control and disarmament.
- It provides data, analysis and recommendations, based on open sources, to policymakers, researchers, media and the interested public.

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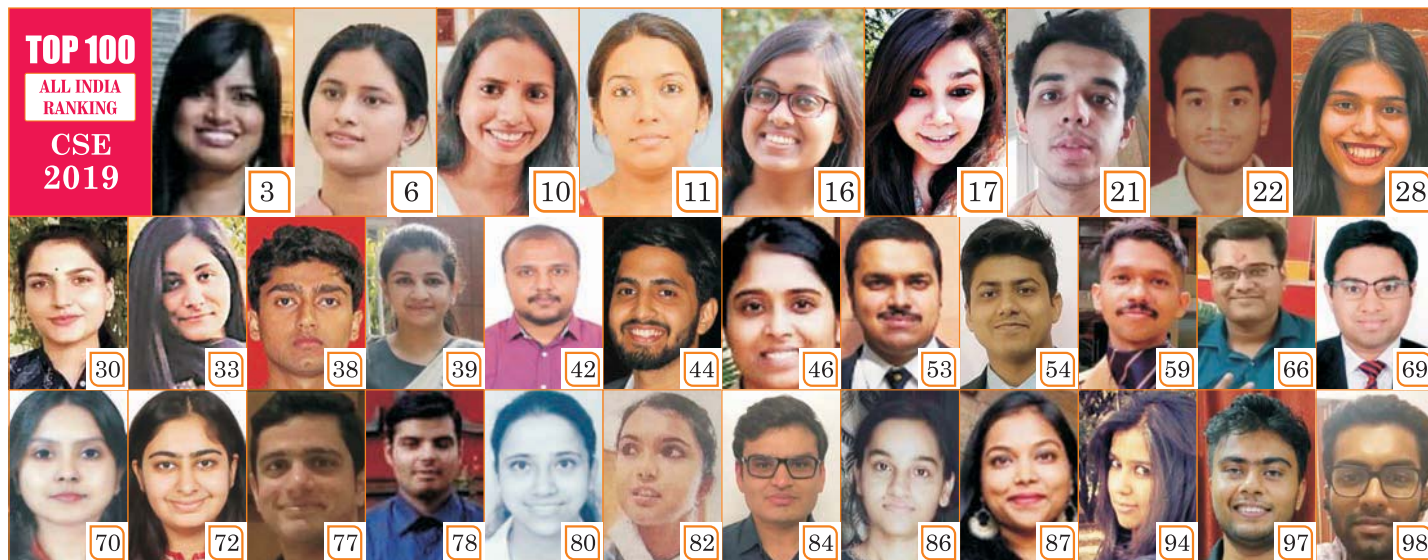
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