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SEP 2023

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Apr 2023 / May 2023 / June 2023

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1. India and Tanzania Bilateral Relations

Why in news?

The President of the United Republic of Tanzania undertook a State Visit to the Republic of India.

Political Relations

- Both sides noted with satisfaction, an increasing level of bilateral political engagement and strategic dialogue on regional and global issues including the vision for the Indo-Pacific and implementation of the Indian Ocean Rim Association's Outlook on the Indo-Pacific. It was noted that India and Tanzania are maritime neighbours with a long history of trade and people to people linkages therefore Tanzania has an important place in India's vision of SAGAR (Security and Growth for all in the Region). Both sides encouraged cooperation on the Indo-Pacific noting that the AU vision for peace and security in Africa with focus on development of Blue/ocean economy for accelerated economic growth coincides with SAGAR vision. They also welcomed Tanzania's participation in the annual Humanitarian Assistance Disaster Relief (HADR) exercises in India for sharing of experiences to undertake rescue and relief operations during major natural calamities.
- Both sides agreed to continue with high-level political dialogue through the Joint Commission mechanism at the Foreign Ministers' level and bilateral meetings between Leaders. Both sides agreed to initiate a Policy Planning Dialogue between their Foreign Ministries.

Defence Cooperation

- The two leaders expressed satisfaction over the successful 2nd Joint Defence Cooperation Committee meeting held in Arusha on 28th and 29th June 2023 resulting in a five-year Roadmap for Defence Cooperation between the two countries.
- Both sides recalled the successful visits of Defence Ministers of Tanzania to India in August 2022 and February 2023, during which both sides agreed to expand scope of defence cooperation. The Tanzanian side appreciated the deployment of the Indian Military Training Team (IMTT) at the Command and Staff College in Duluti.



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- Considering the successful hosting of the Defence Expos twice in Dar es Salaam on 31st May 2022 and 2nd October 2023 which saw participation of several Indian defence companies; both sides expressed interests in expanding cooperation in the area of Defence industry. The two leaders also expressed pleasure at the progress of cooperation between the two sides towards the capacity building of the Tanzanian forces as well as industry.

Maritime security

- Acknowledging that India and Tanzania are maritime neighbours who face common maritime security challenges, the two sides agreed to enhance cooperation in maritime security in the Indian Ocean region. They expressed satisfaction over the first ever India-Tanzania Joint Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) surveillance exercise conducted in July 2023 when the Indian Naval Ship Trishul visited Zanzibar and Dar es Salaam. They also noted that India and Tanzania held bilateral maritime exercise in October 2022 during the visit of the Indian Naval Ship Tarkash.
- The Tanzanian side appreciated the hydrographic surveys of Tanzanian major ports done by India in recent years. Thus, the two sides agreed to continue cooperation in this area.
- Both leaders looked forward to increased interoperability between their Armed Forces. They noted the regular port calls by the Indian ships to Tanzanian ports and appreciated the conduct of the maiden trilateral maritime exercise involving India, Tanzania and Mozambique in the Mozambique Channel during the visit of the Indian Naval Ship Tarkash in October 2022.
- The two leaders commended the signing of the Technical Agreement on sharing White Shipping Information between India and Tanzania.

Blue Economy

The Tanzanian side expressed interest to cooperate with the Government of India in the field of Blue economy including tourism, maritime trade, services and infrastructure, marine scientific research, capacity in seabed mining, ocean conservation and maritime safety and security. India and Tanzania agreed to cooperate under the framework of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) to ensure a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable Indian Ocean Region.

Trade and Investment

- The two sides expressed commitment to increase bilateral trade volumes and towards this end, directed the respective Officials to explore new areas of trade. It was further agreed that both sides should harmonise trade volume data and take initiatives to



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further enhance bilateral trade volumes by organizing visits of business delegations, business exhibitions and interaction with business communities.

- The Tanzanian side acknowledged that India is amongst the top five investment sources for Tanzania whereby 630 investment projects worth USD 3.74 billion have been registered and thus creating 60,000 new jobs. Both sides welcomed recent trends of renewed interest among Indian businesspersons for investment in Tanzania. Both sides agreed to explore the possibility of setting up of an Investment Park in Tanzania, Tanzanian side assured full support in this regard.
- The two leaders expressed desire to expand bilateral trade using Local currencies. They noted that Reserve Bank of India (Indian Central Bank) has cleared the way for trade using local currencies i.e. Indian Rupee (INR) & Tanzanian Shilling by allowing the authorized banks in India to open Special Rupee Vostro Accounts (SRVA) of correspondent banks of Tanzania and that transactions using this mechanism have already materialised. The two sides agreed to continue with the consultations in order to address any concerns so as to ensure sustainability of this arrangement.
- Both sides recognised that agriculture sector cooperation remains a strong pillar in the relations whereby 98% of product lines from Tanzania are imported tariff-free using India's Duty Free Tariff Preference (DFTP) scheme. India remains a major destination for Tanzanian cashew nuts, pigeon peas, spices, avocado and other agricultural commodities. Both sides agreed to further revitalise cooperation in this sector.

Development Partnership

- Tanzania appreciated India's development partnership assistance in the areas of Water, Health, Education, Capacity Building, Scholarships and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) among others.
- The two sides also expressed satisfaction on Lines of Credits (LoCs) extended by India to Tanzania that amount to over USD 1.1 billion covering fields of drinking water infrastructure, agriculture and defence. It was specifically noted that Water Projects in 24 towns of Tanzania worth USD 500 Million through a Line of Credit scheme are presently being implemented. Once completed, it would provide easy access to safe drinking water to about 6 million residents of these regions.
- The Tanzanian side appreciated that the Indian scholarship and capacity building program has tremendously contributed to its Human Resource development. India offers 450 Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) scholarships for capacity building and 70 Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) scholarships for long term programmes in 2023-24. The Indian side announced the decision to increase the number of Long term scholarships (ICCR) from 70 to 85 for the year 2023-24. As part of



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its commitment to the Global South, India also announced 1000 additional ITEC slots for Tanzania to be used over a 5-year period in new and emergent fields like Smart Ports, Space, Biotechnology, Artificial Intelligence, Aviation Management, etc.

Education, Skill Development and Development of ICT

- The Indian side offered collaboration in areas of space technologies and digital public infrastructure under India Stack including Unified Payments Interface (UPI) and Digital Unique Identity (Aadhar).
- The Tanzanian side welcomed Indian support for establishing a Vocational Training Centre (VTC) in Pemba, Zanzibar and designing courses based on the demands of the local market. The Indian side offered to set up vocational training institutions on the lines of Vocational Skilling Centres of India to provide training and skill enhancement to the Tanzanian youth.
- Tanzania commended the decision by India to set up two ICT Centres at Dar es Salaam Institute of Technology and at Nelson Mandela African Institute for Science & Technology (NMAIST) in Arusha. Tanzanian side also expresses its appreciation to India for upgrading the ICT centre in NM-AIST.

Space Cooperation

Tanzanian side congratulated the Indian side on the successful landing of Chandrayaan-3 lander on the surface of the moon on 23 August, 2023.

The Indian side offered collaboration in area of space technologies to Tanzania, which was welcomed by the Tanzanian side.

Health

- Both sides reaffirmed the excellent cooperation in the health sector, noting the recent visit of Hon. Ummu Mwalimu (MP), Minister for Health of Tanzania to India in July 2023 and the visit of a joint delegation from India and UAE that visited Tanzania in August 2022 to scout for opportunities. Both sides agreed to work for further collaboration in the health sector.
- Tanzanian side appreciated the donation of 10 ambulances by the Government of India aimed at assisting in the provision of prompt medical care to patients and support to hospital infrastructure.
- Both sides also highlighted the excellent track record of bilateral cooperation in the implementation of grant projects including donation of radiation therapy machine,



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“Bhabhatron II”, essential medicines, an artificial limbs fitment camp organized in 2019 which benefited 520 Tanzanian patients among others.

Regional Issues

The Indian side congratulated Tanzania for successfully hosting two major Summits, namely, the African Human Capital Heads of State summit and the Africa Food Systems Summit in July and September 2023, respectively.

International Issues

- Indian side thanked Tanzania for their support in increasing interaction with the East African Community (EAC).
- Both leaders underscored that there are convergences between the two countries in international forums. It was noted that both sides have active participation in UN Peacekeeping Operations and have contributed towards regional security initiatives. Both sides noted the contributions made by Tanzania in the peacekeeping operations deployed under the auspices of the Southern African Development Community (SADC).
- India and Tanzania agreed on the need for reform of the United Nations Security Council through expansion in both categories of membership. Indian side conveyed appreciation to Tanzania for its support during India’s term as a non-Permanent member of the UNSC for the period 2021-22 and also for Tanzania’s support for the Indian candidature for a non-Permanent membership of UNSC in 2028-29.

About tanzania

- It was formed as a sovereign state in 1964 through the federation of the separate states of Tanganyika and Zanzibar.
- Dodoma is the official capital and Dar es Salaam is the center of most government administrations as well as the country’s largest city and port.
- It is located just south of the equator in East Africa. It is bounded on the north by Uganda, Lake Victoria and Kenya, on the east by the Indian Ocean, on the south and southwest by Mozambique, Lake Nyasa, Malawi and Zambia, and on the west by Lake Tanganyika, Burundi and Rwanda.
- Africa’s highest mountain, Kilimanjaro (5,895 m) and the world’s second deepest lake, Lake Tanganyika (1,436 m deep) are located in Tanzania.



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2. Conflict Between Israel and Palestine

Why in news?

Recently, the Palestinian militant group Hamas launched a devastating attack on Israel known as Operation 'Al-Aqsa Storm.

Israel – Palestine Conflict

- The Israeli-Palestinian conflict dates back to the end of the nineteenth century.
- In 1947, the United Nations adopted Resolution 181, known as the Partition Plan, which sought to divide the British Mandate of Palestine into Arab and Jewish states.
- Palestine was a part of Ottoman empire, later became part of British empire.
- On May 14, 1948, the State of Israel was created, sparking the first Arab-Israeli War.
- The war ended in 1949 with Israel's victory, but many Palestinians were displaced and the territory was divided into 3 parts: the State of Israel, the West Bank (of the Jordan River), and the Gaza Strip.

Arab's fight against the Israel (1948-49)

- Arabs saw the creation of Israel as a part of a conspiracy to move them out of their land. Consequently, in 1948, the Arab states of Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, and Syria declared war on Israel.
- Note: It's interesting to note here that India opposed the UN resolution and Gandhi called it as a crime against humanity. But India recognized Israel in 1950.
- At the end of the war between Israel and Arab countries, Israel emerged victoriously. Moreover, it could increase its territory to a larger extent and it marked the beginning of the expansionist policy of Israel.

UN Charter and return of the Sinai Peninsula

- Under the UN Charter, there can lawfully be no territorial gains from war, even by a state acting in self-defense.
- Therefore, in response to the Six-Day War, the UN Security Council adopted a resolution for 'Land for peace' and it mandated that Israel should return the captured areas back to the defeated nations.
- In light of Israel's reluctance to return the captured territories, another Arab-Israeli war erupted in 1973 (Yom Kippur War) in which Israel suffered some setbacks.



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What are the Global Ramifications of the Conflict?

- Disrupt the geopolitical realignment Process in Middle East- Middle East in recent times has been witnessing geopolitical realignments from the Israel-Arab reconciliation to the Iran-Saudi détente. However the recent conflict will disrupt this peace and normalisation process being pursued by middle eastern countries.
- Make the Middle East as theatre of War- Middle East had been a theatre of War with Wars like Gulf War, Iraq war, 6 day war. The recent conflict has potential to become a full blown war with involvement of foreign powers like US, EU. This would make the region a theatre for proxy wars like US and Iran.
- Disrupt the global connectivity projects and global transport routes- The envisaged projects like India Middle East Economic Corridor (IMEC) will be disrupted by this prolonged conflict. The escalation of the conflict would endanger the strategic supply routes like the Strait of Hormuz and the red sea.

What will be the impact of the Israel-Palestine Conflict on India?

- India through its support for Israel has chosen sides in the recent conflict. However any prolonged conflict will not augur well for India.
- Impacts our De-hyphenation and West Asia Policy- India had been successfully implementing its de-hyphenation policy in the region. India's relation with both the Arab World and Israel has improved. However the current conflict puts India in a diplomatic tightspot to choose one side. India cannot afford to loose either.
- Increase in Inflation- Any prolonged conflict in the Middle East will impact the oil and gas production. Inflation in the country will further increase as India is heavily dependent upon imported oil and gas.
- Depreciation of the Indian Rupee- The conflict will impact the inflow of FPI and FDI in the Indian financial market. Increase in oil prices will further increase India's Current Account Deficit(CAD). All these will lead to depreciation of the Indian rupee.

Recent Developments:

Al-Aqsa Mosque & Sheikh Jarrah:

- In May 2021, Israeli armed forces attacked Al-Aqsa Mosque in the Haram esh-Sharif in Jerusalem, ahead of a march by Zionist nationalists commemorating Israel's capture of the eastern half of the city in 1967.



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- The threatened eviction of dozens of Palestinian families in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah escalated the crisis further.

West Bank Settlement:

- Israel's Supreme Court has rejected a petition against the eviction of more than 1,000 Palestinian inhabitants of a rural part of the occupied West Bank in an area which Israel has designated for military exercises.
- The judgment paved the way for the demolition of eight small villages in a rocky, arid area near Hebron known to Palestinians as Masafer Yatta and to Israelis as the South Hebron Hills.

3. AUKUS

Why in news ?

As part of the AUKUS initiative with Australia and the US, the UK has given three UK businesses a 4 billion pound (\$4.9 billion) contract to design and build an attack submarine powered by nuclear energy.

What is AUKUS?

AUKUS is a recently formed strategic defence alliance involving Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. This marks the first time the United States has shared nuclear propulsion technology with an ally, excluding its partnership with the United Kingdom. The AUKUS alliance was established after the Australian Navy sought the UK's assistance in acquiring nuclear-powered submarines. Discussions regarding this collaboration occurred during the G7 meetings in June 2021, attended by Joe Biden, Scott Morrison, and Boris Johnson. It is important to note that the AUKUS partnership is neither a newly created entity nor a collective defence pact.

Background of AUKUS Alliance

- In recent years, the perceived extent of the Chinese threat in the Indo-Pacific area has expanded substantially.
- Nuclear-powered submarines have a greater range, are faster and are more difficult to detect in this setting.
- Meanwhile, America may deploy attack submarines from HMAS Stirling, an Australian navy facility in Perth.



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Purpose of AUKUS

The purpose of AUKUS is to “deepen cooperation on security and defense”. This is particularly in the Indo-Pacific region. The agreement includes the sharing of intelligence, technology, and capabilities. It is seen as a way to deter China from aggression.

Features of AUKUS Alliance

- The AUKUS alliance has several notable features:
- Strategic Defense Cooperation: AUKUS establishes a framework for enhanced strategic defence cooperation between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.
- Nuclear Propulsion Technology Sharing: The alliance includes sharing nuclear propulsion technology, marking the first time the United States has shared such technology with an ally other than the United Kingdom.
- Focus on Submarines: AUKUS primarily focuses on developing and acquiring nuclear-powered submarines for the Australian Navy.
- Technological Advancements: The alliance emphasizes the utilization of advanced technology and innovation in defence and security measures.
- Intelligence Sharing: AUKUS facilitates intelligence sharing and collaboration among the member countries to enhance their collective defence capabilities.

4. India's Policy Towards Afghanistan

Why in news?

Recently, The Afghanistan Embassy to India informed that it was being forced to close down, given the lack of resources with the Taliban regime.

Situation in Afghanistan

- Afghanistan has historically been a theatre of great-power politics, from the British colonial period to when the United States (US) launched its ‘War on Terror’ in the early 2000s.
- The Taliban’s return to power in Afghanistan in August 2021 changed the strategic dynamics in the region.
- Afghanistan found itself sinking further into destitution due to international isolation and the economic turmoil.



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- The U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported a staggering increase in poverty, with 97% of Afghans living below the poverty line, a stark rise from 47% in 2020, according to Amnesty International
- The absence of social safety nets forced desperate families into distressing measures such as child marriages and organ trafficking.

India's Interest

- India and Afghanistan have a strong relationship based on historical and cultural links.
- India, owing to its strategic location straddling Pakistan and Iran and other Central Asian Republics (CARs), has had a keen perception of the threat of terrorism emanating from the region.
- As a contiguous neighbour and long-standing partner of Afghanistan, and given strong historical and civilisational linkages to the Afghan people, India has direct stakes in ensuring the return of peace and stability to the country.
- When Kabul fell to the Taliban in August 2021, India was compelled to rethink its policy towards its western neighbor.

Present Approach

- India's collective approach to Afghanistan has been articulated in Security Council Resolution 2593, which was adopted on August 30, 2021, following the fall of Kabul and the subsequent Taliban takeover.
- India made a statement that Afghanistan's land should not be utilized for the purposes of harboring, instructing, organizing, or financing terrorist operations.
- India's permanent representative to the United Nations has reiterated the country's steadfast dedication to peace, stability and humanitarian support for Afghanistan.

Future Prospects

- India has played a significant role in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Afghanistan.
- Peace and stability in Afghanistan are critical imperatives that need to collectively strive for.
- India will continue to play its constructive role in the pursuit of this objective.
- The interests of the Afghan people will always continue to be at the core of all efforts.

Economic Relations between India and Afghanistan

- India seeks to expand its economic presence in Afghanistan as the international coalition fighting the Taliban have begun their withdrawal process. Especially, it wants to improve transport connectivity and economic collaboration with countries in Central



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and South Asia. India has already invested \$10.8 billion in Afghanistan as of 2012. More such projects are likely to come once NATO withdraws completely from Afghanistan.

- This includes setting up Iron ore mines, a 6 MTPA steel plant (by SAIL—Steel Authority of India Limited), an 800 MW power plant, Hydro-electric power projects, transmission lines and roads. India helped in the reconstruction of Salma Dam in the Herat province. Besides producing 42 MW power, this Indo-Afghan friendship dam provides irrigation for 75,000 hectares of farmland in the Chisti Sharif district.

5. Exercise Yudh Abhyas 2023

Why in news ?

Recently the 19th edition of “Exercise Yudh Abhyas” is set to begin in the United States of America.

Main body

- The previous edition of the Exercise was conducted in Auli, Uttarakhand, India in November 2022.
- Indian Army contingent comprising of 350 personnel will participate in this edition of the Exercise. The lead battalion from Indian side is affiliated to MARATHA Light Infantry Regiment. 1-24 Infantry Battalion of 1st Brigade Combat Team will participate from the US side. Both sides will practice a series of tactical drills to enhance interoperability in conducting UN peacekeeping operations. Personnel from both sides will also hold detailed discussions to share their experiences and best practices. The theme of the Exercise is ‘Employment of an Integrated Battle Group in Mountain/ Extreme Climatic Conditions’ under Chapter VII of United Nations mandate.
- A Command Post Exercise and Expert Academic Discussions on selected topics will also form part of the schedule. The scope of the Field Training Exercise includes validation of Integrated Battle Groups against hostile forces at the Brigade level, Integrated Surveillance Grid at the Brigade/ Battalion level, employment of Heliborne/ Airborne elements and Force Multipliers, validation of logistics and casualty management during operations, evacuation and combat medical aid and other aspects as applicable to High Altitude Areas and Extreme Climatic Conditions.
- The Exercise will also involve exchange of views and best practices in drills on a wide spectrum of combat skills including combat engineering, obstruction clearance, mine



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and Improvised Explosive Devices warfare. “EX YUDH ABHYAS-23” will facilitate both Armies to mutually learn from each other and further strengthen the bonds between the two armies.

Other Exercises between India and USA

Army: Vajra Prahar

Navy: MALABAR (Multilateral)

Air Force: Cope India, Red Flag (Multilateral)

6. Dispute in South China Sea

Why in news

The Philippine coast guard has removed a floating barrier placed by China’s coast guard in the South China Sea.

About

- Location: South China Sea is an arm of western Pacific Ocean in Southeast Asia. It is south of China, east & south of Vietnam, west of the Philippines and north of the island of Borneo.
- It is connected by Taiwan Strait with the East China Sea and by Luzon Strait with the Philippine Sea.
- Bordering states & territories (clockwise from north): the People’s Republic of China, the Republic of China (Taiwan), the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, Singapore and Vietnam.
- Strategic Importance: This sea holds tremendous strategic importance for its location as it is the connecting link between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean (Strait of Malacca).

What is the South China Sea dispute?

The South China Sea is situated just south of the Chinese mainland and is bordered by the countries of Brunei, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam. The countries have bickered over territorial control in the sea for centuries, but in recent years tensions have soared to new heights.



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The reason?

- China's rise as a global power. The South China Sea is one of the most strategically critical maritime areas (more on this later) and China eyes its control to assert more power over the region.
- In 1947, the country, under the rule of the nationalist Kuomintang party, issued a map with the so-called "nine-dash line" (for a detailed explanation, scroll down). The line essentially encircles Beijing's claimed waters and islands of the South China Sea — as much as 90% of the sea has been claimed by China. The line continued to appear in the official maps even after the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) came to power.
- In the past few years, the country has also tried to stop other nations from conducting any military or economic operation without its consent, saying the sea falls under its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).
- China's sweeping claims, however, have been widely contested by other countries. In response, China has physically increased the size of islands or created new islands altogether in the sea, according to the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR).
- In addition to piling sand onto existing reefs, China has constructed ports, military installations, and airstrips—particularly in the Paracel and Spratly Islands, where it has twenty and seven outposts, respectively. China has militarised Woody Island by deploying fighter jets, cruise missiles, and a radar system," it added.
- To challenge China's assertive territorial claims and protect its own political and economic interests, the US has intervened in the matters. It has not only increased its military activity and naval presence in South Asia but also provided weapons and aid to China's opponents.

Significance of the South China Sea

- It is a major shipping route. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development estimates that over 21% of global trade transited through these waters in 2016.
- It is also home to rich fishing grounds that provide for the livelihoods of millions of people across the region. More than half of the world's fishing vessels operate in this area.
- Although largely uninhabited, the Paracels and the Spratlys may have reserves of natural resources around them.
- Control of the sea lane would allow China to potentially disrupt, or threaten to disrupt, cargo shipments travelling to and from all countries in East and Southeast Asia.
- China could also deny foreign military forces, particularly the United States', access to the maritime region.



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What is the 'nine-dash line'?

- the nine-dash line demarcates China's territorial claims in the sea on Chinese maps. It was initially the "eleven-dash line" but in 1953, the CCP-led government removed "the portion encompassing the Gulf of Tonkin, simplifying the border to nine dashes," CFR said.
- The line runs as far as 2,000 km from the Chinese mainland to within a few hundred kilometres of the Philippines, Malaysia and Vietnam.
- But on what parameters the line has been drawn? China's claim on the waters and islands within the boundary is based on its "historical maritime rights". However, the country has never clearly stated the line coordinates and the line runs many miles beyond what is allowed under the United Nations treaty on maritime territorial issues, which China has signed.

India's Stand:

- India has maintained that it is not a party to the SCS dispute and its presence in the SCS is not to contain China but to secure its own economic interests, especially that of its energy security needs.
- However, China's increasing ability to decide and expand its role in the South China Sea has compelled India to reevaluate its approach on the issue.
- As a key element of the Act East Policy, India has started internationalizing disputes in the Indo-Pacific region to oppose China's threatening tactics in SCS.
- Further, India is using its Buddhist legacy to make a strong bond with the Southeast Asian region.
- India has also deployed its navy with Vietnam in the South China Sea for protection of sea lanes of communication (SLOC), denying China any space for assertion.

Why in news



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The Indian Coast Guard conducted a coastal security drill named 'Operation Sajag' along the west coast.

About Operation Sajag:

- During the drill, extensive checking and verification of documents and crew passes of all fishing boats, barges and craft at sea was undertaken.
- A total of 118 ships including those from Customs, Marine Police, Ports & Indian Navy participated in the drill.
- In order to strengthen the coastal security construct, a slew of measures have been incorporated ranging from Issuance of Biometric cards for the fishermen, colour coding of fishing boats as per each state, manning of fish landing centres and access control at entry/exit check points, coastal mapping, designating specific marine band frequency for security agencies, training of marine police personnel by Indian Coast Guard amongst others.
- Biometric card readers have also been issued to security agencies.
- The drill facilitates revalidation of the coastal security mechanism and bring awareness among the fishermen at sea.

Indian Coast Guard

- The Indian Coast Guard is a maritime law enforcement and search and rescue agency of India with jurisdiction over its territorial waters including its contiguous zone and exclusive economic zone.
- It was established in 1977 by the Coast Guard Act, 1978 of the Parliament of India.
- Parent Agency: Ministry of Defence
- Headquarters: New Delhi
- Head: Director General Indian Coast Guard (DGICG)

Missions of Indian Coast Guard

- Safety and protection of artificial islands, offshore terminals and other installations.
- Protection and assistance to fishermen and mariners at sea.
- Preservation and protection of marine ecology and environment including pollution control.
- Assistance to the Department of Customs and other authorities in anti-smuggling operations.

8. India suspends Visa Services for Canadians



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Why in News:

- Amid the growing controversy over the recent killing of a Sikh separatist in Canada, India has stopped issuing visas to Canadian citizens.

Background:

- The current crisis began after Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau alleged a possible link between the killing of Khalistani separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada in June and agents of the Indian government.
- Canada expelled a senior Indian diplomat, and India responded by expelling a senior Canadian diplomat.

Background of Khalistan Movement:

- This movement originated due to the independence of India and subsequent partition on religious lines.
- Due to this partition, Lahore, the capital of the Sikh Empire of King Ranjit Singh, came under the control of Pakistan. Apart from this, many holy Sikh sites including Nankana Sahib, the birthplace of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, also came under the jurisdiction of Pakistan.
- The Khalistan movement is a separate fight for a sovereign Sikh state in present-day Punjab (both India and Pakistan).

India and Canada relations (in terms of trade and agriculture):

- India's total trade with Canada in the last financial year (2022-23) was \$8 billion. This is 0.7% (\$1.1 trillion) of India's total trade with the world.
- In 2022-23, imports and exports between India and Canada were almost equal (\$4 billion imports vs \$4 billion exports), although India achieved a trade surplus of \$58 million, which was very small.
- Among all the goods that India imports from Canada, three categories of goods are prominent: Mineral fuels, mineral oils and their related products; bituminous substances; Mineral wax etc., 2. Wood or other fibrous cellulosic material; Waste and scrap of paper or paperboard, 3. Edible vegetables and related materials.

Effect of suspension visa:

- Canadian citizens who wish to visit India but do not yet have an Indian visa will be affected.
- This affected group will primarily include Canadian tourists, business travelers and students.



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- Tour operators in India were expecting a large number of tourist arrivals from Canada this winter season, as in 2021, Canada has the fourth highest number of tourist arrivals in India in the world.

Regarding OCI Card:

- Canadians of Indian origin who hold a valid Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) card, or a valid long-term visa for India, will not be affected by the suspension of visa services.
- OCI card allows holders to enter India for life and stay and work in the country indefinitely.
- Canadian citizens with valid Indian visas will not be affected by the latest decision of the Government of India.

Some important facts related to Canada:

- Canada became independent from Great Britain in
- Canada is the second largest country in the world in area after Russia.
- Its passport comes among the 10 most powerful passports in the world.
- Like India, Canada also has no state religion, that is, it is secular.

9. India-Brazil Joint Statement

Recently, India-Brazil have issued their joint statement on the occasion of G-20 summit.

The year 2023 also marks the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Brazil and India as well as the 20th anniversary of the IBSA (India-Brazil-South Africa – IBSA) forum.

A look at the key points of the joint statement:

- Both countries have decided to work together on the framework of G-4 and L.69. G-4 includes Brazil, India, Japan and Germany. Both these groups are demanding reforms in the 'United Nations Security Council (UNSC)'.
- On this occasion, Brazil has supported India's candidature for the non-permanent seat of the UNSC for the term 2028-2029. Both countries are founding members of the 'Global Biofuel Alliance (GBA). The GBA will facilitate the development and adoption of biofuels.
- India has welcomed Brazil's chairmanship of the BASIC Group. It should be noted that the basic group includes Brazil, South Africa, India and China. Additionally, India has also



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supported Brazil's presidency of the 30th Conference of the Parties (COP30) to the UNFCCC in 2025.

- Both countries have expressed their intention to harness the full potential of their economic partnership. For this, both the countries have agreed to work together for the expansion of the India-Mercosur Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) during Brazil's presidency of the Mercosur grouping. Mercosur is an economic and political organization. This includes Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay.
- It has been decided to establish India-Brazil Business Forum for mutual cooperation in the private sector. Both countries have also agreed to expand joint projects in partnership with International Solar Alliance (ISA) and Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) in other countries of the world.

10. India-Saudi Arabia Strategic Partnership Council Meeting

- Recently, the first meeting of the India-Saudi Arabia Strategic Partnership Council (SPC) has been organized.
- Prime Minister Modi and Crown Prince Bin Salman co-chaired the first meeting of the India-Saudi Strategic Partnership Council (SPC) during the G-20 meeting.
- It was established as a high-level council to strengthen India-Saudi Arabia relations. It may be noted that 'SPC' was established in 2019. ,
- In the meeting, Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud and Prime Minister Narendra Modi held wide-ranging discussions focusing on expanding trade and security ties.
- India becomes the fourth country after Britain, France and China with which Riyadh has entered into such a strategic partnership.

Key points of SPC meeting:

- A task force will be formed to expedite the completion of the \$50 billion West Coast Refinery project.
- It aims to set up Asia's largest refinery with a capacity of 60 million tonnes per annum in Ratnagiri, Maharashtra.
- It is a trilateral project between ARAMCO (Saudi Arabia), Abu Dhabi National Oil Company /ADNOC (United Arab Emirates) and Indian companies.
- Both countries will cooperate on establishing power and grid interconnection. Also, it has been decided to expand the existing partnership in the hydrocarbon sector into a comprehensive energy partnership.



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- Both countries have discussed new and renewable energy; Digitalization and Electronic Manufacturing; MoUs have been signed in areas like increasing bilateral investment, desalination of sea water.

Importance of India-Saudi Arabia relations

- **Geo-strategic:** Saudi Arabia's strategic location in West Asia makes it an important country within India's foreign policy priorities in the region.
- **Economic Cooperation:** Bilateral trade between India and Saudi Arabia has increased unprecedentedly to \$52.75 billion in the financial year 2022-23. India's exports to Saudi Arabia reached \$10.7 billion, showing a significant growth from \$8.8 billion recorded in 2021-22. India is the second largest trading partner of Saudi Arabia, while Saudi Arabia is the fourth largest trading partner of India.
- **Energy Security:** Saudi Arabia has been India's third largest supplier of crude oil and petroleum products during the financial year 2022-23. India imported 39.5 million metric tonnes (MMT) of crude oil from Saudi Arabia in FY 2022-23, which is 16.7% of its total crude oil imports. Furthermore, India's liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) imports from Saudi Arabia reached 7.85 MMT, accounting for 11.2% of total petroleum gas imports in FY23.
- **Cultural:** The Indian community in Saudi Arabia, numbering approximately 2.2 million, represents the largest expatriate group in Saudi Arabia. Indian expatriates constitute 7% of Saudi Arabia's population, playing a vital role in the country's economic development. Apart from this, the holy cities like Mecca and Medina are also located here, which are famous for the annual Hajj and Umrah pilgrimage.

11. Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment

Recently, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and US President Shri Joe Biden chaired the 'Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII)' on the sidelines of the G-20 Summit in New Delhi.

PGII is a development initiative that aims to help address infrastructure deficiencies in developing countries as well as accelerate progress on the Sustainable Development Goals globally. It is a collaborative effort of the G7 countries to fund infrastructure projects in developing countries.



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It aims to advance public and private investment in sustainable, inclusive, resilience and quality infrastructure. Through this partnership, the G7 aims to mobilize up to US\$600 billion by 2027 to address the infrastructure investment gap in partner countries.

PGII was announced during the G-7 summit held in the United Kingdom in 2021. Another project announced under PGII is the Trans-African Corridor. It will connect Angola's Lobito port to Congo's Katanga province and the Copper Belt in Zambia.

The rail and shipping corridor of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEI-EC) is part of the Partnership for Global Infrastructure Investment (PGII). PGII is being seen as a response to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI):

- China launched the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013 under the leadership of President Xi Jinping.
- Its aim is to revive ancient trade routes from China to East Asia via Rome in Europe.
- Many countries participating in BRI have become trapped in China's debt trap diplomacy. Italy, for example, is now planning to exit the initiative.
- **Territorial disputes:** The BRI includes the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor, which connects China's Kashgar to Pakistan's Gwadar port through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.
- It is noteworthy that the G7's PGII initiative aims to provide a more transparent and sustainable option to the BRI.

12. India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEE-EC)

On the sidelines of the G20 Summit in New Delhi, in the pursuit of deeper multi-modal connectivity, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed among the governments of India, the US, Saudi Arabia, the European Union, the UAE, France, Germany, and Italy to establish the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor.

IMEE-EC:

- The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEI-EC) is an infrastructure development project that aims to create connectivity through rail and shipping networks, energy cables and data links.



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- This network will aid economic growth through geographic integration between Asia, the Arabian Gulf and Europe.
- The IMEE-EC aims to promote trade, clean energy and economic growth while providing an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Components:

- **Railway Lines:** This will increase the speed of trade between India and Europe by 40 percent.
- **Power cables and a clean hydrogen pipeline:** Power cables and a clean hydrogen pipeline to promote clean energy trade.
- **High-Speed Data Cable:** High-speed data cables to connect the world's innovative digital ecosystems and create business opportunities.
- The Eastern Corridor connects India to the Arabian Gulf, the Northern Corridor connects the Arabian Gulf to Europe.

Benefits to India:

- Food security, regional supply chains, trade access, environmental considerations, economic cohesion, enhancing job creation and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
- Reliable cross-border ship-to-rail transit network connecting India, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel and Europe.
- This gives India a significant role in global commerce, digital communications and energy networks, comparable to China's BRI.
- **Geographical advantage:** It places India firmly on the trade route extending from South East Asia to the Gulf, West Asia and Europe.

13. Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA)

Recently Assam has requested the Central Government to withdraw the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), 1958 and the Disturbed Areas Act.

AFSPA provides special powers to the armed forces to maintain law and order in disturbed areas.



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The armed forces can even open fire on anyone violating the law in such disturbed areas. They can arrest a person and search any premises without a warrant.

Key aspects of the Act:

Disturbed Area: The Governor of a State and the Central Government are empowered to declare any part or full of any state as a disturbed area if according to their opinion that it has become necessary to disrupt the terrorist activity or any such activity that might impinge on the sovereignty of India or cause insult to the national flag, anthem or India's Constitution.

Immunity to armed forces personnel: Legal proceedings cannot be taken against them without the prior approval of the Central Government. In 2016, the Supreme Court had said in one of its decisions that the armed forces cannot be exempted from investigation of excesses committed during the discharge of their duties even in disturbed areas.

Dealing with the arrested person: The military officer is bound to hand over the arrested person without any delay to the officer in charge of the nearest police station.

Applicability to: Assam, Manipur, Nagaland and parts of Arunachal Pradesh.

Concerns: Abuse of powers, violation of human rights etc.

Under the Assam Disturbed Area Act, the state government can notify any particular area of a city or town as a disturbed area.

14. African Union (AU) becomes permanent member of G20

Recently African Union (AU) has become a permanent member of G20. This announcement was made at the 18th G20 Heads of State and Government Summit in New Delhi. With the addition of this latest member, the G20 has now become the G21.

The idea of including the African Union into the G-20 originated from the 'Voice of the Global South' summit in January 2023.

In June 2023 the Prime Minister wrote to G20 leaders proposing that the African Union be granted full membership at the upcoming Delhi summit of the G20.



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The move is a reflection of the deepening of India's engagement with Africa, which was boosted by the arrival of more than 40 heads of state and government for the 3rd India-Africa Forum Summit in October 2015. Until now, only one country from the African Union, South Africa, was part of the G20.

Under the Africa Outreach Initiative, India has sent ministerial level delegations to all African countries. Prime Minister Modi himself has visited at least 10 countries in Africa in the last nine years.

This is also in line with India's aspiration for permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council. India is keen to get the support of the African Union, which has 55 votes.

African Union (AU):

- It is an intergovernmental organization of 55 member countries located on the African continent. This organization was formed on 9 July 2002.
- Earlier the name of this organization was Organization of African Unity (OAU), which was formed in 1963 after the independence of Africa, when it included 32 member countries.
- Its headquarters is located in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- With approximately 1.4 billion people the group has a gross domestic product (GDP) of \$3 trillion.

Objectives of the African Union (AU)

- Its objective is to accelerate the process of political and socio-economic integration of the continent.
- Furthermore, the AU addresses the multifaceted social, economic and political problems facing African countries.
- Its major objectives also include the promotion of peace, stability and security in the entire region.
- Protection and promotion of human rights is also part of the agenda.

India-Africa relations:

- **Social Infrastructure:** India-Africa cooperation includes education, health and skill enhancement at various levels. India-Africa Partnership (Achievements, Challenges and Roadmap 2030)



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- **Common geopolitical interests:** India and Africa have common interests in UN reform, counter-terrorism, peacekeeping and cyber security.
- **Economic Cooperation:** Trade stood at US\$63.3 billion in 2018-19, contributing to economic ties. Asia–Africa Growth Corridor – an economic cooperation agreement between India, Japan and several African countries.

Result of AU joining G20:

- Fadhel Kaboub, associate professor of economics, said the AU now has an opportunity to use the G20's permanent seat for global trade, finance and investment.
- Kenyan President William Ruto said the group's inclusion would give African interests and perspectives voice and visibility in the G20.

15. Launch of the Global Biofuel Alliance (GBA)

Recently, India has launched the 'Global Biofuel Alliance (GBA)' on the sidelines of the G20 summit.

The 'Global Biofuels Alliance' has been jointly launched by the leaders of the countries involved in it, Singapore, Bangladesh, Italy, USA, Brazil, Argentina, Mauritius and UAE.

The initiative aims to accelerate the use of sustainable biofuels and reduce the world's dependence on traditional fossil fuels.

Global Biofuels Alliance:

- 'GBA' is an initiative of India. GBA members include 19 countries and 12 international organizations.
- Also supporting the GBA are G20 member countries Argentina, Brazil, Canada, India, Italy, South Africa and the US.
- All these countries facilitate the adoption of biofuels, thereby increasing bioenergy access in emerging economies.
- International organizations include the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, World Economic Forum, World LPG Organization, International Energy Agency, International Energy Forum, International Renewable Energy Agency and the World Biogas Association.



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- GBA members are major producers and consumers of biofuels. The United States (52%), Brazil (30%) and India (3%), and contribute about 85% of ethanol production and about 81% of consumption.

Importance of Global Biofuels Alliance:

- The Global Biofuels Alliance focuses on promoting sustainable biofuels, particularly in the transportation sector. It aims to expand markets, support global biofuels trade, share policy insights, and provide technical assistance to national biofuels programs around the world.
- It will also facilitate the development, adoption and implementation of internationally recognized standards, codes, sustainable principles and regulations to encourage biofuels adoption and trade.
- Furthermore, the alliance will focus on cooperation and provide additional opportunities to Indian industries in the form of technology exports and equipment exports.
- The initiative is in line with India's goal of transitioning to alternative fuels and reducing its carbon emissions, with the goal of achieving net-zero emissions by 2070.

Biofuel:

- Biofuels are renewable energy sources derived from biomass, such as crop stubble, plant waste and municipal solid waste.
- India, a major oil importer, imports more than 85 percent of its crude oil needs.
- The country aims to increase ethanol blending in petrol to 20% by 2025 and is setting up compressed biogas (CBG) plants.

16. 20th ASEAN-India Summit

Recently the Indian Prime Minister has participated in the 20th ASEAN-India Summit and the 18th East Asia Summit (EAS) in Jakarta, Indonesia.

Key Points:

- The Prime Minister reaffirmed the central role of ASEAN in the perspective of the Indo-Pacific region and highlighted the synergy between India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) and ASEAN's Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP).
- He discussed with ASEAN partners how to further strengthen the ASEAN-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and chart its future path.



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- He also stressed the need to complete the review of the ASEAN-India Goods Trade Agreement (AITIGA) in a timely manner.

Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative:

- The 'Indo-Pacific Ocean Initiative' was proposed by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the 14th East Asia Summit (EAS) in Bangkok, Thailand on November 4, 2019.
- PM Modi had suggested this initiative for a safe and stable maritime zone.

ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific: It provides a vision to guide cooperation in the region and enhance ASEAN's community building process and further strengthen existing ASEAN-led mechanisms such as the East Asia Summit.

Key findings of the summit:

India has presented a 12-point program to strengthen 'India-ASEAN' cooperation in this conference.

These include the following:

- To establish an economic corridor with multi-modal connectivity that will connect South-East Asia-India-West Asia-Europe.
- Sharing India's digital public infrastructure stack with ASEAN partners.
- Proposal to establish an ASEAN-India Fund for a Digital Future, which will focus on cooperation in digital transformation and financial connectivity.
- Invitation to ASEAN countries to join the World Health Organization – Global Center for Traditional Medicine (WHO-GCTM) established in India.
- Invitation to ASEAN countries to join the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI).
- To support the "Economic and Research Institute of ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) to act as a knowledge partner.
- Call for enhanced cooperation on maritime safety, security and domain awareness. A call to collectively raise issues facing the Global South in multilateral fora.



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- A call to work together on mission life. Offering to share India's experience in providing affordable and quality medicines to the people through Jan Aushadhi Kendras.

ASEAN:

- The Association of Southeast Asian Nations or ASEAN was established on 8 August 1967 with the signing of the Bangkok Declaration.
- ASEAN is at the center of India's Act East policy. This policy focuses on India's extended neighbors in the Asia-Pacific region.
- India became a summit-level partner of ASEAN in 2002.

East Asia Summit (EAS):

- The East Asia Summit is a meeting of the Heads of State/Government of the countries participating in the EAS which is held annually.
- EAS is a forum of 18 countries in the Asia-Pacific region. It has been formed to pursue the objectives of regional peace, security and prosperity.
- The East Asia Summit (EAS) process was initiated in 2005 with the holding of the first East Asia Summit in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
- At its inception, the East Asia Summit consisted of 16 participating countries. This group includes the ten member countries of ASEAN and Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, Russia and the United States.
- The United States and the Russian Federation attended the sixth East Asia Summit in Bali, Indonesia on 19 November 2011.

17. India and Greece agree for strategic partnership

Recently, for the first time in four decades, an Indian Prime Minister paid a state visit to Greece.

During this, both sides have agreed to raise bilateral relations to a strategic level and increase India's reach in the Mediterranean region.

What is strategic partnership?

A strategic partnership is a long-term interaction between two countries based on political, economic, social and historical factors. For example, India has strategic partnerships with the United States, Russia, China, Japan, Britain, France and others.



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Importance of the Mediterranean region for India's geopolitical interests:

- There will be increased engagement and connectivity with a region that spans three continents (Asia, Africa and Europe).
- This region is also important for India's Indo-Pacific policy. This is because India can be an important partner for the Mediterranean countries to connect with the Indo-Pacific region.

Highlights of PM's visit:

- Both countries have also set a target of doubling bilateral trade by 2030. Bilateral trade was to increase to \$1.94 billion in the year 2022-23.
- It has been agreed to expeditiously finalize the 'Mobility and Migration Partnership Agreement' to facilitate the movement of skilled migrants.
- An MoU was signed on cooperation in the agriculture sector. It also included the formation of a Hellenic-Indian Joint Sub-Committee on Agriculture. This sub-committee will help in sectoral cooperation for mutual benefit.
- Both sides said they stand united on the issue of maintaining maritime security and abide by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).
- India welcomed Greece to the International Solar Alliance. Also, India said it looked forward to Greece joining the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI).
- Both countries have agreed to promote joint efforts in the conservation and protection of ancient sites, and to strengthen cooperation within UNESCO
- The Prime Minister of India was awarded the Grand Cross of the Order of Honor, the second highest civilian honor of Greece.

18. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi honored with 'Grand Cross of the Order of Honour'

Recently, the President of Greece, Ms. Katerina Sakellariopoulou has honored Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi with the Grand Cross of the Order of Honor.

The Grand Cross of the Order of Honour

- The Order of Honor was established in 1975. On the face of the star is the face of the goddess Athena. The words "Only the rich should be honoured" are engraved on it.
- The Head of State of Greece awards the Grand Cross of the Order of Honor to prime ministers and public figures who, while holding distinguished positions, have contributed to the advancement of Greece's status.



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- The citation reads – “In the service of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, this honor is given to the friendly people of India.”
- It is also said in this,
- ” On the occasion of this visit, the Greek State Honours the Prime Minister of India, a statesman who has tirelessly promoted the global reach of his country and who works systematically for India’s economic progress and prosperity, bringing about bold reforms. A statesman who has brought environmental protection and climate change among the top priorities of international activity,” the citation added.

19. India-Russia talks to develop Northern Sea Shipping Route

Recently Russia is in talks with India to develop the Northern Sea Route (NSR).

Key Cause:

Port of Murmansk, the starting point of the Northern Sea Route, has seen an increase in Indian cargo traffic. India accounts for 35 percent of the cargo handled by this port.

Northern Sea Route (NSR):

- It is the shortest shipping route connecting Europe and the Asia-Pacific region. Spread over 5,600 km, it passes through the four seas of the Arctic Ocean.
- The route begins at the boundary between the Barents and Kara Seas (Kara Strait) and ends at the Bering Strait (Provideniya Bay).
- The NSR offers potential distance savings of up to 50% compared to existing shipping lanes via Suez or Panama.

Significance of Northern Sea Route:

- Using the NSR will save about 30-40 per cent of energy and time compared to the Suez Canal route commonly used by ships.
- The length of the NSR is approximately one-third less than the length of the conventional waterway via the Suez Canal. The risk of piracy on this route is negligible.
- The operation of this route will make exploration, exploitation and transportation of natural resources present in the Arctic region easier.

Challenges:



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- Russia continues to claim sovereignty over the NSR. Violating the principle of freedom of navigation in this route can lead to geo-strategic conflicts.
- Due to the fog in the Arctic region, the shipping operation period will be reduced.
- The increased movement of ships on the NSR will harm the environment of the Arctic. In addition, the ship operating cost is also likely to increase.

20. 6 new countries to join BRICS, including Iran and Saudi Arabia

Recently the members of 'BRICS' have announced the expansion of the BRICS group by welcoming 6 (six) new countries.

The first phase of expansion includes Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United Arab Emirates, which will officially become full members of BRICS from 1 January 2024.

15th BRICS Summit:

- The 15th BRICS summit was held in Johannesburg (South Africa) from 22 to 24 August. The addition of these six new members has been announced at the end of this 15th BRICS summit.
- It is to be noted that for the first time since 2019, the leaders of BRICS countries Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa appeared on one stage in this event.
- The summit is the first BRICS summit to be held in person after the emergence of the coronavirus pandemic and subsequent global sanctions.
- The Prime Minister of India also participated in the 'BRICS-Africa Outreach and BRICS Plus Dialogue' in Johannesburg on August 24, 2023.

Importance of joining BRICS as a member:

- The joining of new members will strengthen the organization, and it will help in maintaining and strengthening the multilateralism system.
- Let us tell you that this group was earlier expanded in 2010, when South Africa was included. Then it became BRIC to BRIC.
- The expansion of BRICS is part of a plan to build dominance and reshape global governance into a "multipolar" world order that places the voice of the Global South at the center of the world agenda.



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- The inclusion of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Iran and Egypt marks the first representation of MENA (Middle East and North Africa) in the group, and the inclusion of Argentina was supported by its member Brazil.
- The inclusion of Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates assumes special significance as all three will represent both sides of the oil-rich Gulf in BRICS.
- Originally composed of Brazil, Russia, India and China, BRICS was conceived as a global organization of major economies playing an increasingly important role in the post-Cold War world order.

Challenges:

- There is a lack of trust among the present 5 member countries of BRICS. Also, there is no consensus among them on the standards, norms and procedures related to membership expansion. The India-China border dispute is an example of this.
- Differences are seen among its member countries on global issues.
- Authoritarian regimes exist in BRICS member countries like China and Russia.
- Sometimes BRICS is considered as an anti-Western group. This perception may challenge its integration with the world order.
- There are different economic and political restrictions on the existing members of BRICS and those who are proposed to become members. This can cause financial hindrance.

BRICS:

- BRICS is the name of an organization of five major emerging economies of the world. This organization includes Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. The BRICS Summit is chaired every year on behalf of its member states.
- The conference is hosted by five countries every year. South Africa is hosting the 2023 BRICS summit.

21. India-Sri Lanka conflict over Katchatheevu Island

Recently the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, said that reclaiming the Katchatheevu island from Sri Lanka could be a permanent solution to the fishermen's problems in Tamil Nadu.

It may be noted that this has been a long-standing issue of dispute between India and Sri Lanka regarding the right and sovereignty of fisheries on this uninhabited island.



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Katchatheevu island dispute

- Kachchatheevu Island is a small green island of about 285 acres in the middle of the Palk Strait, which connects the Bay of Bengal to the Arabian Sea.
- Katchatheevu Island was formed due to a volcanic eruption in the 14th century.
- In the year 1974, Prime Minister of India Indira Gandhi and Sirima RD Bandaranaike of Sri Lanka signed an agreement. Under this agreement, the island of Katchatheevu was handed over to Sri Lanka.
- The agreement allowed Indian fishermen to fish around the island, drying their nets there, and allowing Indian pilgrims to visit the Catholic shrine on the island.

Fishing rights and livelihood:

- Fishermen from both India and Sri Lanka have historically used Kachchatheevu for fishing.
- Although this facility was accepted in the 1974 agreement, the supplementary agreement was signed in the year 1976.
- The purpose of the 1976 agreement was to define maritime boundaries and exclusive economic zones for both countries. Along with this, there was a ban on fishing vessels and fishermen of both countries, to ban fishing in each other's territorial waters without the explicit permission of either of the two countries.

Stand of Government of India and State Government:

- The Government of India clarified in 2013 that the question of recovery did not arise, as no Indian territory had been transferred.
- The issue was raised as a dispute between British India and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), which was resolved through agreements in 1974 and 1976.
- The central government claimed that Katchatheevu was located on the Sri Lankan side of the India-Sri Lanka International Maritime Boundary Line.
- The central government had announced in Kanyakumari in 2014 that the 'BJP' would reclaim the Kachchatheevu island, but till date it has not been done.
- Tamil Nadu leaders have raised the demand for the restoration of the island from time to time.
- The Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu said that he hoped that the central government would now take up the issue with Sri Lanka and take steps to reclaim Katchatheevu.
- If this does not happen, the DMK will bring in a new government at the Center after May 2024 (after the Lok Sabha elections), he claimed, which will lead Bharat (Indian National



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Development Inclusive Alliance).

22. Malabar naval exercise concludes in Sydney

Recently the 27th edition of Malabar exercise has concluded near Sydney off the east coast of Australia.

Australia is hosting this exercise involving India, Australia, Japan and the US for the first time.

Key Points:

- The exercise saw the participation of ships, submarines and aircraft from the Indian Navy, Royal Australian Navy, Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force and the US Navy.
- The 'MALABAR 2023' exercise was conducted in two phases, comprising the harbor phase from 11-15 August 2023 and the sea phase from 16-21 August 2023.
- The Indian Navy was represented by indigenously built destroyer INS Kolkata, frigate INS Sahyadri and P8I maritime patrol aircraft.
- The sea phase of Exercise Malabar saw complex and high intensity exercises, weapon firings and cross deck helicopter operations in the air, surface and undersea areas.

Objectives of Malabar Exercise:

- Exercise Malabar showcased the strong cooperation, shared values and collective capability of the four participating nations to ensure a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific and promote peace and security for all.
- Joint exercises at sea to strengthen war-fighting skills.
- To enhance interoperability to undertake advanced maritime operations among the navies of the four countries.

23. Trinidad And Tobago Inks Pact For Sharing Indian Technology Stack

Recently India has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to share India Stack with Trinidad and Tobago.

India Stack Open is a collection of 'Application Programming Interface (API)' and digital public goods, which aims to facilitate identity, data and payment services on a large scale.



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An API is a set of defined rules that enable different applications to communicate with each other.

Earlier India has signed MoUs for sharing India Stack with countries like Armenia, Sierra Leone, Suriname and Antigua and Barbuda.

A similar MoU was also signed with Papua New Guinea in July 2023, which shows the growing interest and acceptance of the initiative globally.

UPI, which is also a part of the India stack, has been accepted in France, UAE, Singapore and Sri Lanka. Different agencies own and maintain the individual components of India Stack.

For example-

- “Aadhaar” related products are owned and managed by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI);
- ‘DigiLocker’ is under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (Meity);
- Unified Payments Interface (UPI) is controlled by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI).
- The regulation of the account aggregator framework rests with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

Significance of India Stack:

- It enables governments, businesses, start-ups etc. to move towards presence-less, paperless and cashless service delivery.
- It helps in establishing synergy in all forms of digital economy. Also, it expands the access of digital services to all citizens.
- It promotes innovation and entrepreneurship by providing equal access to data, especially in emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning.

Layers of India Stack:

- Identity based layer: Each resident is given a unique ID, and they are enabled to prove that “I am who I claim to be”.
- Payment based layer: It allows any person to make payment to any other person. It is inter-operable, fast and affordable. It is not just limited to smartphones.
- Data Empowerment: Helps in sharing data in a secure manner.



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24. India-Australia 'Mutual Recognition Arrangement' (MRA)

Recently the Union Cabinet has approved the 'Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA)' of Authorized Economic Operators (AEO) between India and Australia.

The objective of Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA) of Authorized Economic Operators is to provide mutual benefit to the exporters of both the countries in clearance of goods by the Customs authorities.

Key facts:

- The objective of this arrangement is to provide mutual benefit to recognized and credible exporters of both the signatory countries in clearance of goods by the customs authorities of the importing country.
- The arrangement is a key component of the World Customs Organization's SAFE Framework of Standards, which aims to make global trade safe and convenient by strengthening last-mile security of supply chains while providing high facilitation for trade globally.
- This arrangement will benefit Indian exporters exporting to Australia and thus boost trade relations between the two countries.
- The mutual recognition of the Australian Trusted Business Operator Program in Australia and the Authorized Economic Operator Program in India will come into effect from the date of signature by the authorized representatives of both countries.
- The text of the proposed Mutual Recognition Arrangement has been finalized with the consent of the Customs Administrations of the two countries.
- Indian Customs has signed two MRAs with the Customs Administration of South Korea and Hong Kong. Additionally, MRAs with the United States and Taiwan are in the final stages of being concluded.

WCO's SAFE Framework

It was adopted by the WCO Council in 2005. It aims to strengthen the security of international supply chains and facilitate the movement of legitimate goods.

Significance:





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- It has ushered in a new approach to end-to-end management of goods moving across borders.
- This underlines the importance of a close partnership between customs and trade.

World Customs Organization (WCO)

- It is an independent intergovernmental body. It was established in 1952 as the Customs Co-operation Council (CCC). Its headquarter is located in Brussels, Belgium.
- Its objective is to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of customs administration. Presently 185 countries are its members.

25. Malabar drill to be held off Australia for the first time (Malabar exercise 2023)

From August 11 to 21, 2023, 'Malabar exercise 2023' is being organized in Sydney.

It is being hosted by the Royal Australian Navy (RAN).

Indian Navy's frontline indigenous warships INS Sahyadri and INS Kolkata, ships from the US Navy (USN), Japan Maritime Self Defense Force (JMSDF) and Royal Australian Navy (RAN) are participating in the exercise.

Malabar Exercise

- The Malabar series of maritime exercises began in 1992 as a bilateral exercise between the Indian Navy and the US Navy.
- It is an exercise to bring together the four major navies of the world in the Indo-Pacific region.
- In 2020 only the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) participated.

INS Sahyadri: INS Sahyadri is the third ship of the indigenously designed and built Project-17 class multi-role stealth frigate.

INS Kolkata: INS Kolkata is the first ship of the indigenously designed and built Project – 15A class destroyers



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26. 'Maya' operating system (MAYA OP) will replace Windows: Ministry of Defense

Recently, the Ministry of Defense of India has decided to install an operating system called "Maya" instead of the Microsoft operating system in all computers connected to the Internet.

The decision has been taken in the wake of increasing cyber and malware attacks on defense as well as critical infrastructure across the country.

In the past, there has been an increase in the number of malware and ransomware attacks in the country including critical infrastructure. There have been several attempts earlier in the Ministry of Defense to replace the Windows OS with an indigenously developed OS.

Maya Operating System:

- 'Maya OS' is a new operating system developed by the Ministry of Defense of India to protect its systems from cyber attacks.
- It is based on the open-source Ubuntu platform, which means it uses free and publicly available software.
- 'Maya OS' aims to provide a robust protection against cyber threats by providing an interface and functionality similar to 'Windows OS', allowing users to easily adapt to the new system.
- Maya OS is equipped with a feature called Chakravyuh, which is an end point anti-malware and antivirus software. It creates a virtual security wall between users and the Internet, preventing hackers from accessing sensitive data.
- Currently, Maya OS is being installed only in the systems of the Ministry of Defense and not on the computers connected to the network of the three services.

27. Report on 'India's Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy: Prospects & Limitations'

Recently, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs has submitted its report on the work done by the government regarding 'India's soft power and cultural diplomacy'.



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‘Soft power’ is the ability of a country, through which it can persuade other countries to fulfill its wish without the use of force or pressure.

A country’s soft power lies in its attractiveness, and this attractiveness stems from three sources: its culture, its political values, and its foreign policies.

India channels the following resources under its soft power policy. These resources include Indian art and literature, Indian cuisine, yoga and traditional medicine, Indian cinema and sports, Indian democracy and its constitution, etc.

Challenges:

- There is ambiguity in the assignments given to the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR). Sufficient budget is not allotted to the council and related institutions on time.
- There is a lack of coordination among many institutions, and their roles also conflict.
- There is a lack of skilled and dedicated workforce to work in the field of ‘soft power’.

Committee Recommendations:

- ICCR should make proper budget allocation. A coordination mechanism should be established between the Ministry of External Affairs and the ICCR and other relevant ministries.
- The report asked the government to prepare a policy document on India’s uses of soft power.
- According to the report, a formal study of existing international best practices in the use of soft power should be taken up on a priority basis.
- A multi-pronged approach should be adopted for religious and medical tourism through infrastructure and skilled expertise.
- A study group should be set up to evaluate the working of ICCR vis-à-vis foreign counterparts like British Council, American Center etc.

Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)

- ICCR was established in the year 1950 with the objective of promoting Indian culture and its values abroad, and to strengthen cultural exchanges between India and other countries.



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- The Indian Council for Cultural Relations is an autonomous organization of the Government of India under the Ministry of External Affairs.

Functions of ICCR:

- ICCR organizes cultural festivals, performances, exhibitions and lectures in India and abroad.
- Acts as a medium of cooperation with international organizations, cultural institutions and foreign governments to promote cultural exchange.

28. India's Neighbourhood First Policy

Recently the Parliamentary Committee on External Affairs has released its report on 'Neighbourhood First Policy'.

It may be noted that the concept of Neighborhood First Policy was conceptualized around the year 2008. It is a dynamic policy, which aims to adopt a consultative, non-reciprocal (selfless) and result-oriented approach to strengthen relations with neighboring countries.

The countries of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Maldives, Myanmar, Pakistan and Sri Lanka have been included under the Neighborhood First policy.

Under this policy, India uses regional forums like SAARC, BIMSTEC, Bangladesh Bhutan – India – Nepal (BBIN) to maintain dialogue and communication with its neighboring countries.

Recommendations made in the report:

- A common platform should be established to deal with terrorism.
- There is a need to establish coordination between 'Neighbourhood First Policy' and 'Act East Policy' for the development of the North Eastern region.
- There is a need to set up a cell on relations with neighboring countries. It will identify specific initiatives that can be taken in this direction by individual Ministries and Departments.
- Development projects should be completed within a time frame by strengthening Joint Project Monitoring Committees and inspection mechanism.



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Challenges before the Neighborhood First Policy:

- India often faces threats from neighboring countries emanating from cross-border terrorism, illegal migration, trafficking, drug and arms smuggling, etc.
- The delay in the implementation of development projects creates a hindrance in relations.
- China's Belt and Road Initiative and America's Indo-Pacific vision and competition among these countries also present challenges. This is because India's neighboring countries are also in their center.
- There is limited exchange at the parliamentary level with neighboring countries.
- Lack of infrastructure in border areas, especially in the North Eastern Region (NER), is also affecting connectivity with neighboring countries.

Various initiatives taken under the policy:

- Geographical connectivity: Agreements have been signed on the use of Chabahar port (Iran), Kaladan project (Myanmar) and Chittagong and Mongla ports (Bangladesh).
- Energy Connectivity: Grid interconnection with Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh; establishment of Maitree Super Thermal Power Project in Bangladesh; Establishment of Mangdechhu Hydroelectric Project in Bhutan are some of the prominent examples of energy connectivity.
- Trade connectivity: Examples are exclusive market access; financial help; Establishment of Customs Stations on the border with Bangladesh, providing Line of Credit to Sri Lanka etc.
- Humanitarian Assistance: India has been providing humanitarian assistance to neighboring countries by providing Early Warning System (EWS) services and disaster assistance.
- Some examples are providing Tsunami EWS, post earthquake relief assistance to Nepal, assistance during COVID-19 etc.

29. 8th India-Australia Defence Policy Talks held in Canberra

Recently the 8th meeting of the India-Australia Defense Policy Dialogue (DPT) has been held in Canberra, Australia.

8th DPT reviewed the results of 1st 2+2 to be held in 2021. Both sides have agreed to finalize the Hydrography Agreement at the earliest.



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The meeting was held to identify ways to strengthen the partnership in co-development and co-production of equipment between the two countries. During this, both sides have expressed their commitment to fully implement the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

The Indian side highlighted the potential of the Indian defense industry with the capability and competence to collaborate with the Australian Armed Forces in shipbuilding and maintenance plans.

India-Australia Defense Relations:

- India and Australia have upgraded their bilateral relations from 'Strategic Partnership' in 2009 to 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership' in 2020.
- The two countries have expanded their strategic partnership with a focus on maritime security, counter-terrorism and regional stability in the Indo-Pacific region.
- **Initiation of Strategic Dialogue:** In the year 2020, Australia and India elevated their Secretaries 2+2 dialogue (Defence and Foreign Affairs) to the Ministerial level. The ministers now meet once every two years to discuss progress made under the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.
- **Malabar Exercise:** In 2020, Australia participated in Malabar naval exercise thus joining India, US and Japan.
- The exercise brought together four regional defense partners and democracies, symbolizing a collective resolve to support an open and prosperous Indo-Pacific.
- **AUSINDEX:** Important bilateral exercise called AUSINDEX is conducted between Royal Australian Navy and Indian Navy.
- **Exercise Pitch Black:** An important start to the defense meet was when, for the first time, the Indian Air Force joined Exercise Pitch Black in Darwin in 2018. Australia's multidimensional exercise involves air forces from a number of Australian allies and partner countries.
- **Mutual Logistics Support Arrangement and Defense Science and Technology Implementation Arrangement:** India and Australia achieved Mutual Logistics Support Arrangement in 2020.
- The agreement enables more intelligent operational cooperation, enabling increasingly complex military engagements and enhanced collective responsiveness to regional humanitarian disasters.
- **Shared Military Platform:** The Indian and Australian armies have become increasingly inter-operable due to the increasing number of shared media, increasing opportunities for shared training.



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- **Exchange of military officers for training:** India shapes its relationship with its defense forces through regular personnel and training exchanges, such as short specialist courses and long-term posts.
- Every year, India and Australia send officers to attend each other's premier military educational institutions.

30. Taipei Economic and Cultural Center to come up in Mumbai

Recently Taiwan has announced the establishment of new "Taipei Economic and Cultural Center" (TECC) in Mumbai.

TECC will help expand mutually beneficial trade and investment opportunities between Taiwan and India.

Due to India's 'One China Policy', formal diplomatic relations have not been established between India and Taiwan. In the absence of the Embassy, TECC will act as the representative of Taiwan's interests in India.

The establishment of TECC is part of Taiwan's 'China-plus-one strategy'. It aims to encourage businesses to expand their operations outside China while maintaining their presence in China.

India-Taiwan Relations

- Bilateral trade between the two countries was projected to increase nearly six times from \$1.19 billion in 2001 to about \$7.7 billion in 2021.
- Under its New Southbound Policy, Taiwan will promote exchanges and cooperation in science and technology, education, culture and people-to-people ties between Taiwan and India.

Importance of Taiwan for India –

- Taiwan produces about 70 percent of the world's semiconductors and more than 90 percent of the most advanced chips needed for almost all electronic equipment.



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- India has wider interests in maintaining peace and status quo in the Taiwan Strait. The Taiwan Strait is a major point of trade for India.
- Taiwan can play an important role in India's industrial upgrading and hi-tech development.
- Taiwan plays an important role in balancing China economically and technologically.

31. Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar

Why in news?

The Central Government has decided to introduce 56 awards (3 Vigyan Ratna, 25 Vigyan Shri, 25 Youth Science Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar, 3 Science Team Awards) under the category of National Science Awards to honor scientists.

These awards will be announced every year on the occasion of National Technology Day on 11th May and will be presented on National Space Day on 23rd August in the year 2024.

- The objective of the award is to recognize the notable and inspiring contribution made by the scientists, technologists, and innovators individually or in teams in various fields of science, technology and technology led innovation.
- It shall be one of the highest recognitions in the field of science, technology, and innovation in India.
- Scientists/ technologists/innovators working in government, private sector organizations or any individual working outside any organization, who have made distinguished contributions in terms of path-breaking research or innovation or discovery in any field of science, technology, or technology- led innovation shall be eligible for the awards.
- People of Indian Origin staying abroad with exceptional contributions benefiting the Indian communities or society shall also be eligible for the awards

The awards shall be given in following four categories:-

- Vigyan Ratna (VR) award will recognize lifetime achievements & contributions made in any field of science and technology.



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- Vigyan Shri (VS) award will recognize distinguished contributions in any field of science and technology.
- Vigyan Yuva-Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar (VY-SSB) award will recognize & encourage young scientists up to the age of 45 years who made an exceptional contribution in any field of science and technology.
- Vigyan Team (VT) award to be given to a team comprising of three or more scientists/researchers/innovators who have made an exceptional contribution working in a team in any field of science and technology.

Scientists, technologists, and innovators working in any field of science in government or private organizations who have contributed or carried out a path breaking research, technology led innovation or discovery in any field of science or development of innovative technologies/products having significant societal impact shall be eligible for the award.

Scientists, technologists, and innovators of Indian origin abroad with exceptional contributions benefitting the Indian communities or society at large shall also be eligible.

The Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar shall be given in the 13 domains, namely Physics, Chemistry, Biological Sciences, Mathematics & Computer Science, Earth Science, Medicine, Engineering Sciences, Agricultural Science, Environmental Science, Technology & Innovation, Atomic Energy, Space Science and Technology, and Others. The representation from each domain/field, including gender parity will be ensured.

All nominations received for the Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar awards shall be placed before the Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar Committee (RVPC) to be headed by the Principal Scientific Adviser (PSA) to Government of India and comprising Secretaries of Science Departments, members of Science and Engineering Academies and some distinguished scientists and technologists from different fields of science and technology.

The nominations for this bouquet of awards will be invited every year on 14th January which would remain open till 28th February (National Science Day) every year. These awards shall be announced on 11th May (National Technology Day) every year. The Award Ceremony for all categories of awards will be held on 23rd August (National Space Day). All Awards will have a Sanad & a medal.



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These new National Awards is a transformative step in recognizing achievements of Scientific community at the highest level by the Government of India. With transparency and fairness in the entire selection process, work done by all sections of Scientific Innovators and Technologists will be awarded providing at par status with other National Awards

National Technology Day:

Introduction:

- This day was first celebrated in the year 1999, its purpose is to remember the scientific and technological achievements of Indian scientists, engineers.
- This day was named by former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.
- Every year, the Technology Development Board of India under the Ministry of Science and Technology celebrates this day by honoring individuals with National Awards for their contribution to science and technology.

Importance:

- This is the day when India successfully tested the nuclear bomb in Pokhran on May 11, 1998.
- India successfully test-fired its Shakti-1 nuclear missile in the operation named Pokhran-II, also known as Operation Shakti.

32. PM Vishwakarma Scheme

Why in news?

Recently, the Prime Minister of India has launched the 'Prime Minister (PM) Vishwakarma Scheme' on the occasion of Vishwakarma Jayanti.

About

PM Vishwakarma, is a Central Sector Scheme with an outlay of ₹13,000 crore to provide end-to-end support to artisans and craftspeople who work with their hands and tools.

It has been launched to improve the quality as well as the reach of products and services of artisans and craftspeople in rural and urban areas across India.



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The Scheme covers artisans and craftspeople engaged in 18 trades, such as carpenter (Suthar); boat maker; armourer; blacksmith; potter; sculptor, tailor; fishing net maker etc.

The Scheme envisages provisioning of the following benefits to the artisans and crafts persons:

- (i) Recognition: Recognition of artisans and craftspeople through PM Vishwakarma certificate and ID card.
- (ii) Skill Upgradation: Basic Training of 5-7 days and Advanced Training of 15 days or more, with a stipend of Rs. 500 per day;
- (iii) Toolkit Incentive: A toolkit incentive of upto Rs. 15,000 in the form of e-vouchers at the beginning of Basic Skill Training.
- (iv) Credit Support: Collateral free 'Enterprise Development Loans' of upto Rs. 3 lakh in two tranches of Rs. 1 lakh and Rs. 2 lakh with tenures of 18 months and 30 months, respectively, at a concessional rate of interest fixed at 5%, with Government of India subvention to the extent of 8%. Beneficiaries who have completed Basic Training will be eligible to avail the first tranche of credit support of upto Rs. 1 lakh. The second loan tranche will be available to beneficiaries who have availed the 1st tranche and maintained a standard loan account and have adopted digital transactions in their business or have undergone Advanced Training.
- (v) Incentive for Digital Transaction: An amount of Re. 1 per digital transaction, upto maximum 100 transactions monthly will be credited to the beneficiary's account for each digital pay-out or receipt.
- (vi) Marketing Support: Marketing support will be provided to the artisans and craftspeople in the form of quality certification, branding, onboarding on e-commerce platforms such as GeM, advertising, publicity and other marketing activities to improve linkage to value chain.



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Objectives:

- To ensure that artisans are seamlessly integrated into both domestic and global value chains, thus enhancing their market access and opportunities.
- Preservation and promotion of India's rich cultural heritage of traditional crafts.
- Assisting artisans in transitioning to the formal economy and integrating them into global value chains.

Significance:

- Vishwakarmas (Traditional Artisans) play a critical role in society regardless of technological advancements.
- There is a need to recognize and support these artisans and integrate them into the global supply chain.

What are the Government Initiatives for the Upliftment of Artisans?

- Mega Cluster Scheme
- One District One Product
- Comprehensive Handicrafts Cluster Development Scheme
- Atmanirbhar Hastshilpkar Scheme
- Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts
- National Handicraft Development Programme
- Ambedkar Hastshilp Vikas Yojana

33. Women's Reservation Bill

In News:

- Recently the Union Cabinet approved the Women's Reservation Bill, which provides for 33% reservation for women in Parliament and state assemblies.

Background:

- The 81st Constitution Amendment Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha in 1996. In this, there was a demand to reserve one-third seats for women in Parliament and state assemblies. The bill was referred to the Joint Parliamentary Committee, but the bill lapsed after the dissolution of the Lok Sabha.



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- In 1998, the bill was reintroduced in the 12th Lok Sabha. This time also the bill was canceled after not getting any support.
- In 2008, the Women's Reservation Bill was reintroduced in the Rajya Sabha and later referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee, which recommended passing the Bill in its present form without any delay. In 2010, the Rajya Sabha passed this bill with a two-thirds majority.
- However, due to differences within the Cabinet, the Bill could never be introduced in the Lok Sabha and it lapsed with the dissolution of the 15th Lok Sabha.

Why is there a need for women's reservation in legislatures?

- This issue is becoming popular because the number of women candidates contesting the Lok Sabha elections is continuously increasing, in the second Lok Sabha election (1957) there were only 45 women candidates, which increased to 726 in 2019.
- Voting percentage of women is also continuously increasing. In 1962, while there were 62% male voters, the number of female voters was 46.6%.
- Women outnumbered men in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections with 67.2% voting compared to 67%. Correspondingly, the number of women candidates in Parliament has also increased.

Important facts:

- Out of total 489 members in the first Lok Sabha, there were 22 women MPs.
- The number of women elected in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections is 78, the highest in previous Lok Sabha elections, but it is still only 14.36% of the total members. This is less than half of the 33% seats set aside for women by the Women's Reservation Bill.
- According to Global Gender Gap 2023, India is ranked 127th among 146 countries in the index.
- In 1988, the National Perspective Plan for Women suggested that reservation be provided to women from Panchayat to Parliament level. Accordingly, the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments to the Constitution were passed as a result of which state governments had to mandatorily reserve one-third of the seats in Panchayats and urban local bodies for women.

34. General Crop Estimation Survey



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Why in news

The mobile application and the web portal for the General Crop Estimation Survey (GCES) have been launched.

About the Portal

This revolutionary portal and mobile application have been designed to transform agricultural practices across the nation.

Developed by: Department of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare.

Objectives: It has been designed to enhance data accuracy and improve digital data governance in agriculture.

- To provide more accurate and real time monitoring of crop yields.

Key Features: Comprehensive Information: It provides a comprehensive repository of yield estimation including village wise plan and plot details where the crop cutting experiments are conducted, post harvesting crop weight and drilage weight of the crop.

Geo-referencing: It is one of the key features which enables the primary worker to draw the boundary of the experimental plot and upload photos of the plot as well as of the crops. It will ensure transparency and accuracy of the data as well.

Key Challenges Addressed by GCES Web Portal and Mobile Application:

1. **Delay in Reporting**– Till date data collection, compilation and yield estimation is completely manual process which cause delay in reporting by states. In the new process, the field data will be collected using GPS enabled mobile application and will be stored in the server which ensures on time reporting of crop statistics.
2. **Transparency**– GPS enabled devices provide precise latitude and longitude coordinates for data collection points. This information ensures that data is linked to specific geographic locations, leaving no room for ambiguity or manipulation of data regarding where it was collected.

Key Features of the GCES Web Portal and Mobile Application:





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1. **Comprehensive Information-** The portal and the app provide a comprehensive repository of yield estimation including village wise GCES plan and plot details where the crop cutting experiments are conducted, post harvesting crop weight and drilage weight of the crop.
2. **Geo-referencing- Geo-referencing** is one of the key features of the mobile application, which enables the primary worker to draw the boundary of the experimental plot and upload photos of the plot as well as of the crops through it. This feature will ensure transparency and accuracy of the data as well.

35. OPERATION SAJAG

Why in news

The Indian Coast Guard conducted a coastal security drill named 'Operation Sajag' along the west coast.

About Operation Sajag:

- During the drill, extensive checking and verification of documents and crew passes of all fishing boats, barges and craft at sea was undertaken.
- A total of 118 ships including those from Customs, Marine Police, Ports & Indian Navy participated in the drill.
- In order to strengthen the coastal security construct, a slew of measures have been incorporated ranging from Issuance of Biometric cards for the fishermen, colour coding of fishing boats as per each state, manning of fish landing centres and access control at entry/exit check points, coastal mapping, designating specific marine band frequency for security agencies, training of marine police personnel by Indian Coast Guard amongst others.
- Biometric card readers have also been issued to security agencies.
- The drill facilitates revalidation of the coastal security mechanism and bring awareness among the fishermen at sea.

Indian Coast Guard



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- The Indian Coast Guard is a maritime law enforcement and search and rescue agency of India with jurisdiction over its territorial waters including its contiguous zone and exclusive economic zone.
- It was established in 1977 by the Coast Guard Act, 1978 of the Parliament of India.
- Parent Agency: Ministry of Defence
- Headquarters: New Delhi
- Head: Director General Indian Coast Guard (DGICG)

Missions of Indian Coast Guard

- Safety and protection of artificial islands, offshore terminals and other installations.
- Protection and assistance to fishermen and mariners at sea.
- Preservation and protection of marine ecology and environment including pollution control.
- Assistance to the Department of Customs and other authorities in anti-smuggling operations.

36. Shrinking lion numbers in Africa

Why in news?

The Study by Journal Nature Communications highlighted the concerns with respect to the population of Lions lying well below the carrying capacity across 62 geographic locations of African countries which also have socio-economic connotation to that.

What are the Key Highlights

- The study Socio-political and ecological fragility of threatened, free-ranging African lion populations, published in journal Nature Communications, observed that “Somalia was the most fragile lion range country, followed by Sudan.”
- The threatened species under the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) were estimated to be between 20,000 and 25,000 in number and may be declining, the report said.
- Lions may have been extirpated from about 92 per cent of their historical ranges, it estimated, adding a 36 per cent decline in species range has been witnessed over the past 21 years.



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- “On average, lions were estimated to be at around 33.3 per cent (range 1.9 per cent-328.2 per cent) of predicted carrying capacity,” it stated.
- The research observed that southern African countries such as Botswana, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia have recorded an increase of population by 12 per cent between 1993 and 2014. But the remaining lion habitats have seen a decline by 60 per cent, especially in west and central Africa.

Protection Status:

- **Asiatic Lion** – Endangered.
- **IUCN Red List:** Vulnerable
- **Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972:** Schedule I
- **CITES:** Appendix I for populations of India, all other populations are included in Appendix II.
- **Scientific Name:** Panthera leo

37. State of Working India 2023 Report

Why in news?

- Recently the “State of Working India 2023” report was published by the Center for Sustainable Employment of Azim Premji University, which provides information about the Indian workforce.
- The report analyzes unemployment rates, women’s participation, inter-generational mobility and caste-based workforce mobility.

Important points of the report:

Changes in regular salaried jobs:

- The share of workers receiving wages on a regular or monthly basis has increased since 2004, after stagnation since the 1980s.
- Between 2004 and 2019, the share of regular wage or salaried workers increased from 18% to 25% for men and from 10% to 25% for women.
- Nearly 5 million regular-wage jobs were created annually between 2017 and 2019, up from 3 million before 2017.

Gender Pay Gap:

- In 2004, female salaried workers’ earnings were 70% of men’s earnings.



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- By 2017, this gap had narrowed and women's income was 76% of men's total income. Since then this gap has remained stable till the year 2021-22.

Unemployment rate and education status:

- The overall unemployment rate declined from 8.7% in 2017-18 to 6.6% in 2021-22.
- Graduates under the age of 25 had a high unemployment rate of 42.3%.
- The unemployment rate for persons who had completed upper secondary education was 21.4%.

Post-pandemic workforce:

- After the Covid-19 pandemic, 60% of women were self-employed, whereas earlier this figure was 50%.
- Self-employment income also declined along with the increase in workforce participation.

Intergenerational and caste mobility:

- Inter-generational upward mobility increased, indicating socio-economic progress.
- Compared to the general castes, the trend of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes still remains quite weak.
- In the year 2018, sons of 75.6% of SC/ST men engaged in casual wage work were also involved in casual wage work.
- In comparison, the figure was 86.5% in 2004, indicating that sons of casual wage workers belonging to SC/ST category have joined other forms of employment, especially informal regular wage work.
- Workforce participation by caste has changed over the years. The share of Scheduled Caste workers in casual wage work has declined significantly, but this decline is more pronounced in the General Caste category.

Challenges faced in job creation and salaried employment:

- Economic growth does not create jobs proportionately; Employment generation capacity decreases with GDP growth.
- Transition from agriculture to other sectors does not guarantee salaried employment. Jobs with reasonable benefits and good wages are becoming less important.

Initiatives taken by the government to control unemployment:

- Employment fair
- Start-up India Scheme
- Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY)
- Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA)
- PM DAKSH Scheme (PM-DAKSH)
- SMILE Scheme



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38. Hoysala Temples on UNESCO Heritage List

Why in news?

The Sacred Ensembles of the Hoysala, the famed Hoysala temples of Belur, Halebid and Somanathapur in Karnataka have been added to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage list. This inclusion marks the 42nd UNESCO World Heritage Site in India.

About Hoysala temples

- The sacred ensembles of the Hoysalas, constructed during the 12th and 13th centuries are represented here by the three components of Belur, Halebid, and Somanathapura.

The temples included in the ensemble are:

- The Channakeshava Temple, Belur, Hassan district (Commissioned by King Vishnuvardhana, dedicated to God Vishnu)
- The Hoysalesvara Temple, Halebidu, Hassan district (Commissioned by King Vishnuvardhana, dedicated to God Shiva)
- The Kesava Temple, Somanathapura, Mysuru district (Consecrated by Somanatha Dandanayaka, a general of the Hoysala King Narasimha III, dedicated to God Vishnu)
- While the Hoysala temples exhibit a fundamental Dravidian morphology, they also showcase strong influences from the Bhumija mode of Central India, the Nagara traditions of northern and western India, and the Karnataka Dravida modes favoured by the Kalyani Chalukyas.
- This eclectic blend of architectural elements and innovative modifications resulted in the birth of the distinctive 'Hoysala Temple' form.
- The Hoysalas ruled over parts of southern India from the 11th to the 14th century from their capital at Halebidu (Dwarasamudra). Their reign saw the development of art, architecture and religion in southern India.

About UNESCO World Heritage Sites

- A World Heritage Site is a place that is listed by UNESCO for its special cultural or physical significance.
- The list of World Heritage Sites is maintained by the international 'World Heritage Programme', administered by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee.
- India has three types of UNESCO World Heritage Sites – cultural, natural and mixed.

Significance of World Heritage Sites for India





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- According to UNESCO, when a country becomes a signatory to the World Heritage Convention and has its sites inscribed on the World Heritage List, it often brings about increased recognition and appreciation for heritage preservation among both its citizens and government.
- Furthermore, the country may avail itself of financial assistance and expert guidance from the World Heritage Committee to bolster efforts aimed at safeguarding these precious sites.

World Heritage sites can signify Cultural sites:

- The achievements of human creativity and ingenuity
- The diversity of human cultures and traditions
- The importance of cultural identity and heritage

Natural sites:

- The beauty and wonder of the natural world
- The importance of biodiversity and conservation
- The interconnectedness of nature and culture

Selection Criteria for UNESCO World Heritage Site

For a site to be inscribed as a World Heritage Site, it must go through a rigorous nomination and evaluation process.

- UNESCO's advisory bodies – the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) – assess each nominated site.
- A site must demonstrate Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) by meeting one or more criteria defined in the Convention to make it worthy of special protection for all humanity.

Criteria for determining Outstanding Universal Value (OUV)

To assess OUV, sites must meet at least one of ten criteria. For Cultural Sites, six criteria examine their significance vis-a-vis:

- Representing a masterpiece of human creative genius.
- Exhibiting important cultural interchange or a civilization.
- Bearing unique testimony to a tradition or civilization.



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- Being an outstanding example of a type of architecture, technology or landscape.
- It is an outstanding example of traditional settlement, land use or sea use.
- Being directly or tangibly associated with events or ideas of universal significance.

For Natural Sites, four criteria examine their natural significance vis-a-vis:

- Containing superlative natural phenomena, formations or features.
- It is an outstanding example of the major stages of Earth's evolutionary history.
- It is an outstanding example of significant ecological and biological processes.
- Containing the most important and significant habitats of biological diversity.

What is a World Heritage site?

- A World Heritage Site is an area or object listed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, recognized for its "outstanding universal value" under the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage 1972.
- These sites, categorized into three types – Cultural, Natural, and Mixed, are internationally acknowledged for their cultural, natural, or combined significance.
- As of 2023, there are 42 World Heritage Sites located in India. Out of these, 34 are cultural, 7 are natural, and one, the Khangchendzonga National Park, is of mixed type. India has the sixth-largest number of sites in the world.

39. Special Session of Parliament

Why in news?

The Union Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, announced that a "special session" of Parliament would be held in September 2023.

Central Idea

- The Union government of India has announced a special session of Parliament to be held in the newly constructed building.
- This session holds particular significance as it marks the first official use of the new parliamentary facility.



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Special Session of Parliament: An Overview:

- A special session of Parliament refers to a unique meeting convened outside of the regular parliamentary
- The term “special session” is not explicitly mentioned in the Constitution of India.
- Its convening is carried out as per the provisions of Article 85(1) of the Constitution.

Procedure of calling such Session

Article 85(1) of the Indian Constitution stipulates the procedure for summoning Parliament.

This constitutional provision grants the President the authority to call Parliament into session, including special sessions, as deemed necessary.

Historical Context of Special Sessions:

Special sessions of Parliament have varied in their focus and format over the years:

[A] Special Sessions with Debates:

2015: A special session commemorated Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s 125th birth anniversary.

1997: Parliament convened to mark India’s 50th anniversary of independence.

1962: The agenda included a discussion on the India-China war situation.

[B] Midnight Special Sessions (Without Debates):

1972: A session was held to celebrate 25 years of India’s independence.

1992: A special session marked the 50th anniversary of the Quit India Movement.

2017: A session was convened to mark the rollout of the Goods and Services Tax (GST).

Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha Meeting

- Pre independence- The Central Assembly met for a little more than 60 days a year.
- Post-independence- It increased to 120 days a year in the first 20 years after Independence. Since then, the sitting days of the national legislature have declined.
- Between 2002 and 2021, Lok Sabha averaged 67 working days.
- In 2022, 28 state Assemblies met for 21 days on average.
- Recommendations- Conference of presiding officers has recommended that Parliament should meet for more than 100 days.
- The National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution set up in 2000 made a similar recommendation.



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- Private member bill- Individual MPs have introduced private member Bills that stipulated increased sitting days for Parliament.
- Private member Bill in 2017 suggested that Parliament should meet for 4 sessions in a year, including a special session of 15 days for debating matters of urgent public importance.
- Lok Sabha committee 1955- It recommended that the Parliament would be in session for 8 months every year.
- International practice-The US Congress and parliaments of Canada, Germany, and the UK are in session throughout the year.

What does the Constitution say about Parliamentary sessions?

- The framers of the Constitution borrowed it from the Government of India Act of 1935.
- It allowed the British Governor General to call a session of the central legislature at his discretion, requiring that the gap between two sessions should not be more than 12 months.
- However, the Constitution specifies that 6 months should not elapse between two parliamentary sessions.

Bills listed for consideration and passing:

- The Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Bill, 2023.
- The Advocates (Amendment) Bill, 2023.
- The Repealing and Amending Bill, 2022.
- The Post Office Bill, 2023.
- The Press and Registration of Periodicals Bill, 2023

40. Promotion of Tribal Products for North East Region (PTP-NER 2.0)

Why in news?

The Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India Ltd. (TRIFED) has launched phase 2 of the 'Promotion of Tribal Products for North East Region' (PTP-NER 2.0) scheme.



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About the Promotion of Tribal Products for North East Region' (PTP-NER 2.0) scheme:

- It is a Central Sector scheme which was launched by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs.
- Vision: To strengthen livelihood opportunities for tribal artisans through increased efficiency in procurement, logistics and marketing of tribal products.
- It will be implemented in the States of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim.

It is being implemented in two phases:

- In the First Phase of the scheme, 8 states and 38 districts were covered. Organisation of 64 Tribal Artisans Empanelment Melas (TAeM) were done by the teams of TRIFED and North Eastern Handicrafts and Handlooms Development Corporation (NEHDC).
- In the Second Phase of the scheme, 29 districts will be covered by the teams of TRIFED and NEHDC to reach out to tribal artisans and showcase their cultural heritage.

Significance of the Scheme

- It will strengthen the job opportunities for tribal artisans by promoting their products.
- It will improve tribal products' global value chain and create sustainable livelihoods for tribal communities.
- The scheme would uplift the socio-economic status of tribal artisans while preserving and promoting their rich traditional craftsmanship and cultural heritage.

41. Hybrid seeds in India

Why in news ?

The increase in the share of private companies in India's seed market has promoted use of these seeds. Hybrid seeds could threaten the country's crop diversity and the hardy traditional varieties suited to grow in their native climate.

What are hybrid seeds?

In agriculture and gardening, hybrid seed is produced by deliberately cross-pollinated plants which are genetically diverse.

Hybrid seeds are used to improve the characteristics of the resulting plants, such as better yield, greater uniformity, improved color, disease resistance. An important factor is the heterosis or combining ability of the parent plants. Crossing any particular pair of inbred strains may or may not result in superior offspring.



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Hybrid seeds in India:

- The origin of hybrids can be traced to India's Green Revolution in the 1960s, when the government's effort was primarily to increase agricultural productivity. For this, the National Seed Corporation was set up to develop, store and distribute high yield variety seeds.
- Till the 1980s, the public sector had a firm control on the seed market and supplied open pollinated variety (OPV) seeds to farmers.
- From the 1990s onwards, the government allowed development and distribution of hybrid varieties by private players.

National Seeds Corporation Limited (NSC):

- National Seeds Corporation Limited (NSC) was incorporated in 1963 to undertake production of foundation and certified seeds.
- It is wholly owned by the government of India under the administrative control of the ministry of agriculture and farmers welfare.
- It is a Miniratna Category-I company.

Benefits of Hybrid Seeds:

- **Natural Resilience:** It is very much less affected by the different types of environmental stress such as insects and plants diseases etc.
- **Better Yield:** They produce plants with larger fruit, higher yields, disease resistance, and longer shelf life than heirlooms.

Disadvantages of hybrid seeds:

- The yield of hybrid seeds decrease after 2-3 years.
- Sometimes the yields of hybrid varieties are exaggerated.
- The Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act, 2001, has changed community ownership of seeds to individual, which favours seed breeders and developers.

Issue with Hybrid seeds

- Use of hybrid seeds can also damage diversity of crops over the years.
- It requires more technical skills for hybrid production.



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Why in news?

The India Ageing Report 2023 was released recently by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS).

Main body

- By 2050, the share of the elderly in India's total population can reach more than 20 per cent, according to the India Ageing Report 2023 released on September 27, 2023 by the International Institute for Population Sciences and the United Nations Population Fund.
- The number of elderly will also be higher in proportion to the number of children aged 0-14 years. The number of working age people in the age group of 15-59 years will decrease. Also, women will live longer than men, due to which the number of older women will be more than older men. A large number of them will be rural women.
- Population statistics usually refer to the population aged 60 or 65 years and above as 'old'.
- The percentage of the elderly in India has been increasing rapidly in recent years and this trend is likely to continue in the coming decades as well, according to the India Ageing Report 2023.
- It noted that the decadal increase in India's elderly population since 1961 was medium to high. This pace was slow until 2001 but is expected to spike in the coming decades:
- As of July 1, 2022, the number of people above 60 years of age, that is, the elderly, in India was 149 million, which was 10.5 per cent of India's population. By 2050, 20.8 per cent or 347 million Indians will be senior citizens. This number will reach over 36 per cent by century-end.
- The report said the global population has been increasing even as people are living longer. Increasing life expectancy and declining fertility have had an impact on all countries of the world, due to which both the share and number of older persons will increase worldwide in the coming years.
- In 1991, there were 930 elderly women per 1,000 men, according to the report. After this, the ratio started to change and will continue to do so. The report estimates that by 2031, there will be 951 men for 1,078 women.
- According to the report, in India, a man aged 60 years can live another 18.3 years, while women can live 19 years. Apart from this, it also depends on the different life expectancy of the states. In Kerala and Himachal Pradesh, women can be up to 4 years more than men.



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What is UN Population Fund (UNFPA)?

- It is trust fund under the jurisdiction of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).
- UNFPA was formerly (1969–87) known as United Nations Fund for Population Activities.
- Established in 1969, the UNFPA is the largest international source of assistance for population programs.
- It is the leading UN organization for the implementation of the 1994 Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development.

International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS)

- IIPS is a research and training centre for population studies in Mumbai, India.
- It was established in 1956 by the Government of India, the United Nations, and Sir Dorabji Tata Trust.
- The institute is a regional centre for the Asia and Pacific region.
- IIPS is an autonomous organization of the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India.

The report's key findings encompass a range of analyses related to elderly well-being, including:

- The enhancement of geriatric care to cater to the unique healthcare needs of seniors.
- A multitude of government schemes and policies addressing the health, financial empowerment, and capacity building needs of the elderly population.
- Community-based organizations actively engaged in digital empowerment through computer and internet usage sessions.
- Ministerial committees dedicated to shaping policies for elderly welfare.
- Corporate efforts for joyful aging, social assistance, old age homes, and elder abuse awareness campaigns.

43. Statue of Oneness (ekatmata ki murti)

Why In News:

- Recently, Acharya Shankar's 108 feet high multi-metal statue of unity was unveiled in Omkareshwar. Omkareshwar is located in Khandwa district of Madhya Pradesh.

Main point:

- The 'Statue of Unity' is a 108 feet tall multi-metal statue of 12 year old Kishore Shankar, with a 16 feet high stone base in the shape of a lotus.



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- In this statue, a 45 feet high stone 'Shankar Stambh' has been installed, on which the life journey of Acharya Shankar has been depicted.
- 250 tonnes of 316L grade stainless steel has been used in the construction of this statue. Also, a mixture of 100 tonnes of bronze, 88 tonnes of copper, 4 tonnes of zinc and 8 tonnes of tin has been used.
- The lifespan of this statue is about 500 years. In this statue, the feelings of 12 year old teenager Acharya Shankar will be vividly reflected, which will instill a feeling of unity in the minds of people and will provide positive energy to the lives of the people.

Why is the Statue of Unity in Omkareshwar only?

- Bal Shankar came to Omkareshwar while walking on the banks of river Narmada in search of Guru and it was here that he took Guru Shiksha from Govind Bhagavadpada. Stayed here for 3 years and got education.
- Narmadashtakam was composed by Acharya Shankaracharya in Omkareshwar.

About Adi Shankaracharya:

- Shankaracharya was born in 788 AD in 'Kaldi Village' located in Kerala, South India. His mother's name was Aryamba and father's name was Shiv Guru.
- Shankaracharya took Samadhi at Kedar Tirtha at the age of 33.
- He was a devotee of Shiva.
- The 'Advaita Vedanta sect' established by him became quite popular in the 9th century.
- Shankaracharya was opposed to Buddhist philosophy.
- To propagate Sanatan Dharma, he established four monasteries in four directions of India – Shringeri, Puri, Dwarka and Badrinath.
- His main works are Brahmasutrabhashya (commentary on Brahmasutra), Bhajagovind Stotra, Nirvana Shatakampra and Karan Granth.

44. Manis Mysteria

Why in news?

Adding to the eight known species of pangolins, scientists recently discovered a ninth variety, tentatively named "Manis mysteria"

Manis Mysteria

- **Findings** – eight species of pangolin (4 Asian and 4 African varieties).
- It is now updated to nine with the newly discovered pangolin named Manis Mysteria.



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- **Manis Mysteria** – This species bears similarities to the Asian branch of the pangolin family, known as Manis.
- The researchers gave it the name Manis Mysteria, in reference to its enigmatic nature.
- **Origin** – Most of the Asian pangolins are thought to have originated in South-East Asia.
- **Threats** – which is a victim of global trafficking, are coveted in particular for use in traditional medicine.
- The small animal is also highly prized for its meat.

What are Pangolins?

- They are mammals known for their distinctive appearance and protective scales.
- They are often referred to as “scaly anteaters” due to their characteristic scales and their diet, which primarily consists of ants and termites.
- Pangolins are found in parts of Africa and Asia and are known for their elusive nature and status as the most trafficked mammals in the world.

Threat:

- All pangolin species are listed on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species.
- The Indian pangolin, also called thick-tailed pangolin, is classified as Endangered under the IUCN Red List.

45. World Tourism Day 2023

Why in news?

The World Tourism Day is celebrated every year on 27 September.

Theme of World Tourism Day 2023

This World Tourism Day 2023, the UNWTO, under the theme “**Tourism and green investment**” highlights the need for more and better-targeted investments for the Sustainable Development Goals, the UN roadmap for a better world by 2030. Now is the time for new and innovative solutions, not just traditional investments that promote and underpin economic growth and productivity.

Historical background

The World Tourism Day 2023 was celebrated for the first time during 1980. This day was coined to raise awareness regarding the importance of the tourism industry. The UNWTO



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General Assembly established the day. This day was decided to be celebrated as the adoption of the UNWTO Statutes that was initiated on 7 September 1970.

Significance

When we talk about World Tourism Day, it reflects an immense significance. This day serves as a reminder to make the audience understand the influence of tourism. Moreover, it also regards cultural exchange and economic growth among different countries.

What is the Scenario of Tourism in India?

- India attracted a lot of travellers in the past due to its fabled wealth. Visit of Hieun-tsang, a devout Chinese Buddhist is an example of this.
- Pilgrim Travel got a boost when Emperors like Ashoka and Harsha started building rest houses for pilgrims.
- Arthashastra' pointing out the importance of the travel infrastructure for the state, which played an important role in the past.

What are the Initiatives Related to Tourism?

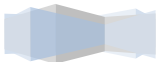
1. Buddhist Conclave
2. Swadesh Darshan Scheme
3. Dekho Apna Desh Initiative
4. Iconic Tourist Site

46. Global innovation Index 2023

Why in news?

- Recently, the Global Innovation Index 2023 was released by the Geneva-based World Intellectual Property Organization, in which India is ranked 40th among 132 countries.

Important point:





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- India is ranked 40th out of 132 economies in the Global Innovation Index 2023 ranking published by the World Intellectual Property Organization.
- India was ranked 46th in 2021 and 81st in 2015.
- The steady improvement in GII ranking is due to greater knowledge capital investment, vibrant start-up ecosystem and amazing work done by public and private research organizations.
- All departments of the Government, including scientific departments such as the Department of Science and Technology; Along with Departments like Department of Biotechnology, Department of Space and Atomic Energy and Ministry of Electronics and IT, Department of Telecommunications, Department of Agricultural Research and Education and Department of Health Research have played an important role in enriching the national innovation ecosystem.
- NITI Aayog is working tirelessly to ensure optimization of national efforts to bring policy-led innovations in various sectors like electric vehicles, biotechnology, nanotechnology, space, alternative energy sources etc.
- This year, NITI Aayog in partnership with CII and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) is hosting the India launch of GII 2023.

India's performance:

- India is an innovation leader in the lower middle income group.
- It is a world leader in exports of ICT services, along with top rankings on other indicators including venture capital realization value, finance for startups and scaleups, graduates in science and engineering, labor productivity growth and domestic industry diversification.

About Global Innovation Index (GII):

- The Global Innovation Index (GII) is an annual index prepared on the basis of countries' capacity and success in innovation.
- A large number of countries use the GII to assess and improve their innovation ecosystems and use the GII as a reference in economic planning and policies.
- The GII has been recognized by the United Nations Economic and Social Council as an official benchmark in the 2019 resolution on Science, Technology and Innovation for Development to measure innovation in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

With reference to the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO):

- WIPO is the global platform for intellectual property (IP) services, policy, information and cooperation.
- It is a self-financing agency of the United Nations with 193 member states.



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- Its purpose is to lead the development of a balanced and effective international IP system that enables innovation and creativity for the benefit of all.
- Its mandate, governing bodies and procedures are set out in the WIPO Convention, which established WIPO in the year 1967.

47. Global Report on Hypertension 2023

Why in news?

- Recently the World Health Organization (WHO) released its first report on the global impact of high blood pressure.

Main point:

- The global report on high blood pressure reports that nearly four out of every five people with high blood pressure are not receiving adequate treatment.
- However, if countries could expand their coverage of hypertension treatment, it could potentially prevent 76 million deaths between 2023 and 2050.

Theme:

- “Global Report on High Blood Pressure: The Race Against a Silent Killer”

Statistics on High Blood Pressure:

- Hypertension is a significant risk factor for death and disability in India, with less than one-fourth of hypertensive patients having their blood pressure under control during 2016-2020.
- The prevalence of hypertension has increased in India, with 24% of men and 21% of women reported to have hypertension in the 2019-2020 National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5).
- The number of high blood pressure cases has doubled from 650 million to 1.3 billion between 1990 and 2019.
- More than three-quarters of adults with high blood pressure live in low- and middle-income countries.
- WHO recommends lifestyle changes, such as a healthy diet, quitting tobacco, and increasing physical activity, as ways to reduce blood pressure.



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Recommendations on high blood pressure:

- There is a need to strengthen hypertension control programs which are given low priority and receive little funding.
- The report recommends that ensuring hypertension control should be an integral part of every country's path towards universal health coverage.

High blood pressure in low- and middle-income countries:

- The prevalence of hypertension varies across different regions and income groups of the country. The WHO African Region has the highest prevalence of hypertension (27%) while the WHO Americas Region has the lowest prevalence of hypertension (18%).
- The number of adults with hypertension increased from 594 million in 1975 to 1.13 billion in 2015, with the increase seen primarily in low- and middle-income countries. This increase is primarily due to increased risk factors for hypertension in those populations.

In terms of high blood pressure:

- High blood pressure (hypertension) occurs when the pressure in your blood vessels is too high (140/90 mmHg or higher). This is normal, but can become serious if left untreated.
- People with high blood pressure may not feel symptoms. The only way to find out is to get your blood pressure checked.
- Blood pressure is written as two numbers. The first (systolic) number represents the pressure in the blood vessels when the heart contracts or beats. The second (diastolic) number shows the pressure in the vessels when the heart rests between beats.
- High blood pressure is diagnosed when it is measured on two separate days, the systolic blood pressure reading is ≥ 140 mmHg on both days and/or the diastolic blood pressure reading is ≥ 90 mmHg on both days.
- Most people with high blood pressure do not feel any symptoms. Very high blood pressure can cause headaches, blurred vision, chest pain, and other symptoms.

48. M.S. Swaminathan: Father of the Indian Green Revolution

Why in news?

Agricultural scientist Mankombu Sambasivan Swaminatha (Dr. M.S. Swaminathan), the man behind India's Green Revolution, passed away

The Genesis of Green Revolution



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Swaminathan's legacy finds its roots in his development of high-yielding varieties (HYV) of wheat during the 1960s. Collaborating with scientist like Norman Borlaug, he played a pivotal role in averting a potential mass famine in India. This break-through marked the genesis of the Green Revolution in the country, earning Swaminathan his distinguished title.

Leadership and Global Impact

Swaminathan's contribution transcended national borders. He served as the Director General of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research from 1972-1979, influencing key agricultural policies. Later he assumed the role of Principal Secretary of the Indian Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation from 1979-1980.

Honors

Swaminathan's contributions led him to receive various honors and awards which are as follows:

- Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Award in 1961
- Padma Vibhushan in 1989
- Ramon Magsaysay Award in 1971
- UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Gold Medal in 1999

How Swaminathan contributed to the Green Revolution

- After Swaminathan's work on rice, he and other scientists would work on doing the same to enhance productivity for the wheat crop.
- "Wheat was a different story because we had to get Norin dwarfing genes from Norman Borlaug in Mexico," Swaminathan said. Borlaug was an American scientist who was working on developing more productive crop varieties. He would go on to win the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970.

The side effects of the Green Revolution

Despite its landmark role in achieving food sufficient in India, the Green Revolution has been criticised on multiple counts, such as benefiting the already prosperous farmers as it was introduced in states with higher productivity.



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Contributions to Kuttanad and Kerala's biodiversity:

- Kuttanad Package: The over ₹1,800-crore Kuttanad Package, recommended by the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF), recommended declaring the wetland system a 'Special Agricultural Zone,' protecting water spread areas, modernizing infrastructure, and encouraging short-duration paddy varieties.
- Biodiversity Conservation: The MSSRF's 2008 report on the Idukki District (the Idukki Package) and the establishment of the 'Community Agrobiodiversity Centre' in Wayanad reflected his commitment to biodiversity conservation.
- He advocated public awareness, community participation, and economic incentives for in situ and on-farm conservation traditions.

Benefits of the Green Revolution

- It has positive effects on the overall food security in India. It led to an increase in agricultural production, especially in Haryana, Punjab, and Uttar Pradesh.
- The Green Revolution led to the high productivity of crops through adapted measures, such as
 - Increased area under farming,
 - Double-cropping, which includes planting two crops rather than one, annually,
 - Adoption of HYV of seeds,

49. Green Hydrogen Fuel cell bus

Why in news ?

Union Minister of Petroleum & Natural Gas Hardeep Singh Puri launched India's first green hydrogen fuel cell bus at Kartavya Path in Delhi.

What is Green Hydrogen?

- Green hydrogen is hydrogen gas (H₂) produced through a process called electrolysis, using renewable energy sources such as wind, solar, or hydropower.
- Unlike "grey" or "blue" hydrogen, which are produced from natural gas and emit carbon dioxide (CO₂) during production, green hydrogen is considered environmentally friendly and carbon-neutral.

Production of Green Hydrogen

- Electrolysis: Green hydrogen is primarily produced through water electrolysis. This process involves passing an electric current through water to split it into hydrogen and oxygen gases. Two common types of electrolyzers are proton exchange membrane (PEM) and alkaline electrolyzers.



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- **Renewable Energy Sources:** To ensure the “green” status of hydrogen, it is crucial to power the electrolysis process with renewable energy sources, such as wind, solar, or hydropower. This ensures that no carbon emissions are associated with the hydrogen production process.

Fuel Cells

- Fuel cells are electrochemical devices that convert the chemical energy stored in hydrogen and oxygen into electrical energy, with water as the only byproduct.
- They are highly efficient and have various applications, making them a crucial component of the green hydrogen ecosystem.

Advantages

- **Clean Energy:** Green hydrogen is produced without emitting greenhouse gases, making it a clean energy source.
- **High Energy Density:** Hydrogen has a high energy density, making it suitable for long-duration energy storage.
- **Versatility:** Hydrogen can be used in various sectors, from transportation to industry, making it a versatile energy carrier.

Challenges

- **Storage and Transportation:** Hydrogen is challenging to store and transport due to its low density, requiring infrastructure development.
- **Efficiency:** Electrolysis processes and fuel cells need further advancements to improve energy efficiency.

50. Parliament Panel on the New Education Policy

Why in news?

Recently The Parliament Standing Committee on Education tabled a report during the special session of Parliament on the “Implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 in Higher Education.”

About the Report:

- The 31-member panel discussed on the issues such as;
- the rigid separation of disciplines,
- limited access to higher education in socio-economically disadvantaged areas,
- lack of higher education institutes (HEIs) that teach in local languages,



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- the limited number of faculty,
- lack of institutional autonomy,
- lesser emphasis on research,
- ineffective regulatory system and
- Low standards of undergraduate education

About National Education Policy (NEP) 2020:

- The National Education Policy, approved by the Union Cabinet in July 2020, outlines the vision of India's new education system.
- The committee that drafted the NEP 2020 was headed by Shri K Kasturirangan.
- NEP 2020 focuses on five pillars: Affordability, Accessibility, Quality, Equity, and Accountability – to ensure continual learning.
- The new policy replaces the previous National Policy on Education, 1986 and forms a comprehensive framework to transform both elementary and higher education in India by 2040.
- This is the 3rd such education policy since India's independence.
- The earlier two were launched in 1968 & 1986.

MEME System:

- The National Education Policy (NEP) suggests implementing a multiple entry and multiple exit (MEME) system in higher education.
- This system in education is a flexible approach that allows students to enter and exit academic programs at various points, rather than following a linear and fixed path.

What are the Way forwards for implementing the New Education Policy 2023?

- **Fulfillment of Goals:** By 2030, every district in the country should have at least one multidisciplinary HEI and that the GER in higher education, including vocational education, should be increased to 50% by 2035.
- **Research and Innovation:** There is steady progress in the field of higher education and specific impetus is required in new education policy 2023 to be assigned to factors like anusandhan (research), that can help the country's ranking in patent filing.
- **Effective Funding:** Higher Education Financing Agency (HEFA) needs to diversify its funding sources beyond government allocations and explore partnerships with private sector organizations, philanthropic foundations, and international financial institutions.

Committee made several recommendations, including:





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- **Funding for SEDGs:** The report recommended allocating suitable funds specifically for the education of Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) to address educational disparities. Adequate financial resources are essential to provide equitable opportunities.
- **Enrollment Targets for SEDGs:** Clear targets for increasing the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of SEDGs in higher education institutions were proposed. This initiative aimed to enhance their representation and ensure equal access to higher education.
- **Gender Balance:** To promote gender equity and inclusivity, the report suggested measures to enhance gender balance in admissions to higher education institutions. This promotes equal educational opportunities for all genders.

51. Palm Oil Production

Why in news?

- In recent years the European Union (EU) has taken important steps to prevent deforestation and address environmental concerns through the European Union Deforestation-Free Regulation (EUDR) regarding palm oil production.
- The European Union has made large-scale efforts to phase out palm-oil-based biofuels by 2030 through the Deforestation-Free Regulation.

In the context of the European Union Deforestation-Free Regulation (EUDR):

- On 6 December 2022, the EU reached an agreement on a new law to prevent companies from placing goods linked to deforestation and forest degradation on the EU market or exporting them from the EU.
- EUDR aims to eliminate deforestation from the supply chains of goods used every day in the EU.
- Keeping the year 2030 as the target, a law was introduced in the year 2023 in Brussels, the capital of Belgium, and administrative burden was imposed on palm-oil exporters wishing to sell in the European Union.
- The EUDR provides that the regulation requires companies to ensure that product exported to the EU is grown on land where deforestation has not occurred after December 31, 2020.

Important facts related to palm oil:



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- According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), palm oil is the world's most widely used vegetable oil, with global production exceeding 73 million tonnes (MT) in 2020.
- Palm oil is an edible vegetable oil obtained from the mesocarp (reddish pulp) of the oil palm fruit.
- The oil is used in food manufacturing, beauty products, and as a biofuel.
- This makes palm oil easier to stabilize and maintain flavor and consistency quality in processed foods, so it is often used by food manufacturers.
- Demand for palm oil has also increased for other uses, such as cosmetics and biofuels, creating greater demand on supply that encourages the growth of palm oil plantations in tropical countries.
- The largest producing countries of palm oil are Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Nigeria. Indonesia produces biodiesel mainly from palm oil.

India's position in palm oil imports:

- India is the largest importer of palm oil, accounting for 40% of its total vegetable oil consumption.
- India imports half of its annual 8.3 metric tonne palm oil requirement from Indonesia.
- India unveiled the National Mission on Edible Oil-Palm Oil in the year 2021 to boost its domestic palm oil production.

Given the benefits associated with palm oil for India's cooking needs, Indian farmers should be encouraged to intensify palm oil acreage expansion efforts to increase palm oil production in the country.