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# GENERAL Knowledge

## TOPICS

- April, 2021 Important Current Events
- Monthly Compendium
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24-B, Next to Bikaner Sweets, S. K. Puri, Boring Road, Patna



**82943945 19 | 7903086545**

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## APPOINTMENT OF CHIEF ELECTION COMMISSIONER (CEC)

Recently, the **President appointed Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra as the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC)**. He replaces Sunil Arora who has retired.



**About the Election Commission of India:** The Election Commission of India (ECI) is an **autonomous constitutional authority** responsible for **administering Union and State election processes in India**. It was established in accordance with the Constitution on 25th January 1950 (celebrated as national voters' day). The secretariat of the commission is located in New Delhi. **The body administers elections to the Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, and State Legislative Assemblies in India, and the offices of the President and Vice President in the country.** It is not concerned with the elections to panchayats and municipalities in the states. For this, the Constitution of India provides for a separate State Election Commission.

## RELATED CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS

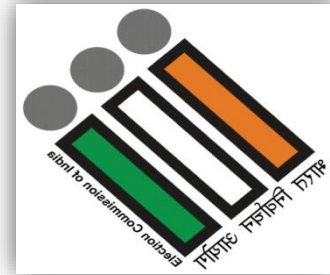
**Part XV (Article 324-329) of the Indian Constitution:** It deals with elections, and establishes a commission for these matters.

- **Article 324:** Superintendence, direction and control of elections to be vested in an Election Commission.
- **Article 325:** No person to be ineligible for inclusion in, or to claim to be included in a special, electoral roll on **grounds of religion, race, caste or sex**.
- **Article 326:** Elections to the House of the People and to the Legislative Assemblies of States to be on the basis of adult suffrage.
- **Article 327:** Power of Parliament to make provision with respect to elections to Legislatures.

- **Article 328:** Power of Legislature of a State to make provision with respect to elections to such Legislature.
- **Article 329:** Bar to **interference by courts in electoral matters.**

## STRUCTURE OF ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA

Originally the commission had only one election commissioner but after the **Election Commissioner Amendment Act 1989**, it has been made a multi-member body. The Election Commission shall consist of the **Chief Election Commissioner (CEC)** and such number of other election commissioners, if any, as the President may from time to time fix. Presently, it consists of the **CEC and two Election Commissioners**. At the state level, the election commission is helped by the Chief Electoral Officer who is an IAS rank Officer.



**Appointment & Tenure of Commissioners:** The President appoints **CEC and Election Commissioners**. They have a fixed tenure of six years, or up to the **age of 65 years, whichever is earlier**. They enjoy the same status and receive salary and perks as available to Judges of the Supreme Court (SC) of India.

## REMOVAL OF CHIEF ELECTION COMMISSIONER & EC

They can resign anytime or can also be removed before the expiry of their term. The **CEC can be removed from office only through a process of removal similar to that of a SC judge by Parliament**. Judges of High Courts and SC, CEC, Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) may be removed from office through a motion adopted by Parliament on grounds of 'proved misbehaviour or incapacity'. Removal requires a **special majority of 2/3rd members present and voting supported by more than 50% of the total strength of the house**. The Constitution does not use the word '**impeachment**', for the removal of the judges, CAG, CEC. The term

'Impeachment' is only used for removing the President which requires the special majority of 2/3rd members of the total strength of both the houses which is not used elsewhere.

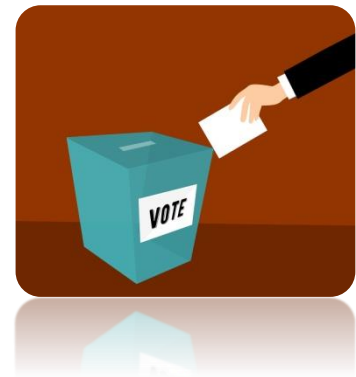
**Limitations:** The Constitution has not prescribed the qualifications (**legal, educational, administrative or judicial**) of the members of the Election Commission. The Constitution has not specified the term of the members of the Election Commission. The Constitution has not debarred the retiring election commissioners from any further appointment by the government.

## POWER & FUNCTIONS OF THE ELECTION COMMISSION

**Administrative:** To determine the territorial areas of the electoral constituencies throughout the country on the basis of the **Delimitation Commission Act of Parliament**. To prepare and periodically revise electoral rolls and to register all eligible voters.

**To grant recognition to political parties and allot election symbols to them.** Election Commission ensures a level playing

field for the political parties in election fray, through strict observance by them of a **Model Code of Conduct** evolved with the consensus of political parties.



**Advisory Jurisdiction & Quasi-Judicial Functions:** Under the Constitution, the Commission has advisory jurisdiction in the matter of post election disqualification of **sitting members of Parliament and State Legislatures**. The opinion of the Commission in all such matters is **binding on the President or, as the case may be, the Governor to whom such opinion is tendered**. Further, the cases of persons found guilty of corrupt practices at elections which come before **the SC and High Courts are also referred to the Commission for its opinion** on the question as to whether such person shall be disqualified and, if so, for what period. The Commission has the power to disqualify a candidate who has failed to lodge an account of his election expenses **within the time and in the manner prescribed by law**.

## COOPERATION B//W INDIA & OTHER NATIONS OF BIMSTEC

Recently, the foreign ministers of **BIMSTEC (the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation)** met in a virtual conference. This is the first ministerial since the globe has been hit by the Covid-19 pandemic. **BIMSTEC as a regional organization** has achieved a lot in Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief and security, including counterterrorism, cyber security, and coastal security cooperation. However, there are many obstacles that limit the regional body in realizing its full potential.



## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE MEETING

The **foreign ministers** cleared the draft for the **BIMSTEC charter**, recommending its early adoption. They endorsed the rationalization of sectors and sub-sectors of activity, with each **member-state serving as a lead for the assigned areas of special interest**. The ministers also conveyed their support for the **Master Plan for Transport Connectivity**, which will be adopted at the **next summit in Sri Lanka**. Preparations have been completed for the signing of three agreements relating to mutual legal assistance in criminal matters, cooperation between diplomatic academies, and the establishment of a technology transfer facility.

## EVOLUTION & OBJECTIVES OF BIMSTEC

BIMSTEC was established as a grouping of four nations — **India, Thailand, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka** — through the Bangkok Declaration of 1997. BIMSTEC was expanded later to include three more countries — **Myanmar, Nepal, and Bhutan**. Initially, BIMSTEC didn't hold much geopolitical weight. This can be reflected by only just three summits in the first 20 years of its formation. **However, BIMSTEC suddenly received special attention** as India chose to treat it as a more practical instrument for regional cooperation, as SAARC continues to remain defunct.



The **BIMSTEC Leaders' Retreat**, followed by their Outreach Summit with the BRICS leaders in Goa in October 2016, drew considerable international limelight to the low-profile regional grouping. At the second swearing-in of the Indian Prime Minister in May 2019, the leaders of BIMSTEC, not SAARC, were invited as honored guests. Soon thereafter, the External Affairs Minister observed that India saw a mix of “**energy, mindset and possibility**” in BIMSTEC.

Creating an enabling environment for the **rapid economic development of the sub-region**. Encouraging the **spirit of equality and partnership**. Promoting active collaboration and mutual assistance in the areas of common interests of the member countries. Accelerating support for each other in the **fields of education, science, and technology, etc.**

Potential: **Bridge between South and South-East Asia** and represents a reinforcement of relations among these countries. **Platform for intra-regional cooperation between SAARC and ASEAN members**. Home to around 1.5 billion people that constitute around **22% of the global population**. With a combined gross domestic product (GDP) of 2.7 trillion economy, BIMSTEC Member States have been able to **sustain an average 6.5% economic growth trajectory** in the last five years. A fourth of the world's traded goods cross the bay every year.

### **ASSOCIATED CHALLENGES WITH IT:**

Unfinished Economic Agenda: BIMSTEC Free Trade Area Framework Agreement, was signed in 2004, but over 20 rounds of negotiations it is still to be operationalized.

**Internal Tussle:** A strong BIMSTEC presupposes cordial and **tension-free bilateral relations among all its member-states**. This has not been the case, given the trajectory of **India-Nepal, India-Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh-Myanmar** ties in recent years. Moreover, both Nepal and Sri Lanka want the SAARC summit revived. However, India maintains that terror and talks can't go hand in hand.

**China's Intrusion:** China's decisive intrusion in the **South-Southeast Asian** space is causing a limiting effect on India's zone of influence. Moreover, a renowned Bangladeshi scholar argued



at a **recent conference that BIMSTEC** would make progress if China is accepted as its principal interlocutor and partner.

**Myanmar Coup:** The military coup in Myanmar, brutal crackdown of protesters, and continuation of popular resistance resulting in a protracted impasse have produced a new set of **border management challenges for India.**

## CONCLUSION

**BIMSTEC FTA:** In 2018, a study by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry had suggested that **BIMSTEC urgently needed a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement** to be a real game-changer. It should cover **trade in goods, services, and investment; promote regulatory harmonization; adopt policies that develop regional value chains, and eliminate non-tariff barriers.**

**Balancing Security & Economy:** India has led through constant focus and follow-up — to the extent that some member-states have complained about the **‘over securitization of BIMSTEC.** Hence, there is a need to ensure maintaining security and forging solid arrangements for economic cooperation.

**Gujral Doctrine:** India would have to counter the impression that **BIMSTEC is an India-dominated bloc,** in that context India can follow the Gujral doctrine that intends to chalk out the **effect of transactional motive in bilateral relations.**

## GLOBAL GENDER GAP REPORT 2021

India has fallen 28 places in the **World Economic Forum's (WEF) Global Gender Gap Report 2021**. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, One Stop Centre (OSC) Scheme, Ujjawala Scheme are some the initiatives launched by the government to address the **issue of gender inequality**. Further, the principle of gender equality is enshrined in the **Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles**.



## OTHER INITIATIVES TO PROMOTE WOMEN

- **Vigyan Jyoti Scheme:** **Vigyan Jyoti Scheme** is launched by the **Department of Science & Technology (DST)**. It is intended to create a level-playing field for the meritorious girls in high school to pursue **Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)** in their higher education. It also offers exposure for girl students from the rural background to help to plan their journey from school to a job of their choice in the field of science.
- **GATI Scheme:** The **Gender Advancement for Transforming Institutions (GATI)** will develop a comprehensive Charter and a framework for assessing **Gender Equality in STEM**
- **KIRAN Scheme:** Knowledge Involvement in Research Advancement through Nurturing (**KIRAN**) Scheme is started by the **Department of Science and Technology (DST)** aimed to bring gender parity in the Science & Technology sector by inducting more women talent in the research & development domain.

## GLOBAL GENDER GAP REPORT

It was **first published in 2006 by the WEF**. It benchmarks 156 countries on their progress towards gender parity in four dimensions: **Economic Participation and Opportunity**, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, Political Empowerment. Over the Index, the **highest possible score is 1 (equality) and the lowest possible score is 0 (inequality)**. Its aim is to serve as a compass to track progress on



relative gaps between women and men on health, education, economy and politics. Through this annual yardstick, the stakeholders within each country are able to set priorities relevant in each specific economic, political and cultural context.

## INDIA'S POSITION: OVERALL RANKINGS

**India is now one of the worst performers in South Asia**, it is now ranked 140 among 156 countries. In South Asia, Bangladesh ranked 65, Nepal 106, Pakistan 153, Afghanistan 156, Bhutan 130 and Sri Lanka 116. **India had ranked 112th among 153 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index 2020.**

**Political Empowerment:** India has declined on the political empowerment index as well by 13.5 percentage points, and a decline in the number of women ministers, from 23.1% in 2019 to 9.1% in 2021. However, it has still performed relatively well compared to other countries, **ranking at 51 in women's participation in politics.**

**Education Attainment:** In the index of education attainment, **India has been ranked at 114.**

**Economic Participation:** The report notes that the economic participation **gender gap actually widened in India by 3% this year**. The share of women in professional and technical roles declined further to 29.2%. The share of women in senior and managerial positions also is at 14.6% and only 8.9% firms in the country have top female managers. The estimated earned income of women in India is **only one-fifth of men's, which puts the country among the**

**bottom 10 globally on this indicator.** In Pakistan and Afghanistan, the income of an average woman is below 16% of that of an average man, while in India it is 20.7%.

**Health and Survival index:** On this India has fared the worst, ranking at 155. The only country to **have fared worse is China.** The report points to a skewed sex ratio as the major factor. It says the ratio can be attributed to norms of son preference and gender-biased prenatal sex-selective practices. China and India together account for **about 90 to 95% of the estimated 1.2 to 1.5 million** missing female births annually worldwide due to gender-biased prenatal sex selective practices.

## GLOBAL SCENARIO: REGION WISE RANKING

- **South Asia** incidentally is one of the worst performing regions, followed only by the **Middle East and northern Africa.**
- **Political Empowerment:** The gender gap in political empowerment remains the largest: women represent only 26.1% of some 35,500 parliament seats and just 22.6% of over 3,400 ministers worldwide. In 81 countries, there has never been a woman head of state, as of 15th January, 2021. Bangladesh is the **only country where more women have held head-of-state positions than men in the past 50 years.**
- **Economic Participation:** The countries with the largest gender gaps in economic participation include **Iran, India, Pakistan, Syria, Yemen, Iraq, and Afghanistan.**
- **Timeframe to Close the Gap:** It will take **South Asia 195.4 years** to close the gender gap, while Western Europe will take 52.1 years.



## WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM (WEF)

The **World Economic Forum** is the **International Organization for Public-Private Cooperation.** It was established in 1971 as a not-for-profit foundation and is headquartered in



**Geneva, Switzerland.** It is independent, impartial and not tied to any special interests. The Forum strives in all its efforts to demonstrate entrepreneurship in the global public interest while upholding the highest standards of governance.

Some major reports published by WEF are:

- **Energy Transition Index.**
- **Global Competitiveness Report.**
- **Global IT Report**
- **WEF along with INSEAD, and Cornell University publishes this report.**
- **Global Gender Gap Report.**
- **Global Risk Report.**
- **Global Travel and Tourism Report**

## INDIA'S REFUGEES POLICY AMIDST ILLEGAL MIGRATION

Recently, there has been an **influx of illegal migrants into India** after the military coup and subsequent crackdown in Myanmar. The current plight of the Myanmar people has been preceded by that of **another group of Myanmar people, the Rohingya**. Historically, India has witnessed an inflow of refugees from many neighboring countries. The **refugee issue poses a problem for the state as it puts an economic burden**, may trigger demographic changes in the long term, and poses security risks as well. However, taking care of refugees is the core component of the human rights paradigm. Further, in any case, refugee flows to India are unlikely to end any time soon given the **geopolitical, economic, ethnic, and religious contexts of the region**. Hence, there is an urgent need today to clinically address the issue of refugee protection in India and put in place appropriate legal and institutional measures.



## REFUGEE'S POLICY OF INDIA

**India lacks specific legislation to address the problem of refugees**, in spite of their increasing inflow. **The Foreigners Act, 1946**, fails to address the peculiar problems faced by refugees as a class. It also gives unbridled power to the Central government to deport any foreign citizen. Further, the **Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 (CAA)** strikingly excludes Muslims from its purview and seeks to provide citizenship only to **Hindu, Christian, Jain, Parsi, Sikh, and Buddhist immigrants** persecuted in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Moreover, **India is not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol**, the key legal documents pertaining to refugee protection. In spite of not being a party to **the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol**, India has had a stellar record on the issue of refugee protection. India has a moral tradition for assimilating foreign people and culture. Further, the constitution of India also respects the life, liberty, and dignity of human beings.



The **Supreme Court in the National Human Rights Commission vs. State of Arunachal Pradesh (1996)** held that “while all rights are available to citizens, persons including foreign citizens are entitled to the right to equality and the right to life, among others.”

## INDIA'S REASON FOR NOT SIGNING 1951 CONVENTION

The **definition of refugees in the 1951 convention** only pertains to the violation of civil and political rights, but not economic rights, of individuals. For instance, a person, under the definition of the convention, could be considered if he/she is deprived of **political rights**, but not if **he/she is deprived of economic rights**. If the violation of economic rights were to be included in the definition of a refugee, it would clearly pose a major burden on the developed world. On the other hand, this argument, if used in the South Asian context, could be a problematic proposition for India too.

## CHALLENGES RELATED WITH INDIA'S REFUGEES POLICY

**Refugees vs. Immigrants:** In the recent past, many people from **neighboring countries tend to illegally immigrate to India**, not because of state persecution but in search of better economic opportunities in India. While the reality is that much of the debate in the **country is about illegal immigrants, not refugees**, the two categories tend to get bunched together. Due to this, policies and remedies to deal with these issues suffer from a lack of clarity as well as policy utility.



**Ambiguity in the Framework:** The main reason why our **policies towards illegal immigrants and refugees are confused is that as per Indian law**, both categories of people are viewed as one and the same and are covered under the **Foreigners Act, 1946**.

**Ad-hocism:** The absence of such a **legal framework also leads to policy ambiguity** whereby India’s refugee policy is guided primarily by ad hocism. Ad hoc measures enable the government in office to pick and choose ‘**what kind**’ of refugees it wants to admit for whatever political or

geopolitical reasons. This results in a discriminatory action, **which tends to be a violation of human rights.**

**Discriminatory CAA:** The Government of India has **passed the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA)**. CAA envisages **providing citizenship to people who are religious minorities in India's neighborhood and persecuted by the state.** However, CAA is not the answer to the refugee problem primarily because of its deeply discriminatory nature, as it doesn't include a particular religion under its ambit. Further, many political analysts have dubbed the **CAA as an act of refugee avoidance, not refugee protection.**

## CONCLUSION

In spite of not being a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, India has been one of the largest recipients of refugees in the world. However, if India had domestic legislation regarding refugees, it could have deterred any oppressive government in the neighborhood to persecute their population and make them flee to India.



## MAOIST/NAXALITE ATTACK IN SUKMA DISTRICT

A team of security forces was attacked by a **People's Liberation Guerilla Army (PLGA)** unit in the Tarrem area near the **Sukma-Bijapur district border, Chhattisgarh**. Several security personnel were killed and many were injured. **PLGA was founded in 2000**. It has been declared as a terrorist organisation and banned under the **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act-1967 (UAPA)**.



About the Sukma District: Located in the **southern tip of the state of Chhattisgarh**, the district was carved out of Dantewada in the year 2012. It is covered with the semi-tropical forest and is a mainland of tribal community Gond. One major river that flows through the district is **Sabari (a tributary of Godavari river)**. Over a few decades, this region has become a fostering ground for **Left Wing Extremism (LWE) activities**. Uneven terrains and the tricky geographic locations made this region a safer hideout for the LWE activists.

## UNLAWFUL ACTIVITIES (PREVENTION) ACT 1967

The **UAPA was originally passed in 1967**. It is an upgrade on the **Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act - TADA (lapsed in 1995)** and the **Prevention of Terrorism Act - POTA (repealed in 2004)**. Till the year 2004, "unlawful" activities referred to actions related to secession and cession of territory. Following the 2004 amendment, "**terrorist act**" was **added to the list of offences**. The Act assigns absolute power to the central government, by way of which if the Centre deems an activity as unlawful then it may, by way of an Official Gazette, declare it so. Under the UAPA, the **investigating agency can file a charge sheet in maximum 180 days after the arrests** and the duration can be extended further after intimating the court. Both Indian and foreign nationals can be charged. It will be applicable to the offenders in the same manner, even if crime is committed on a foreign land, outside India. It has death penalty and life imprisonment as highest punishments.

Amendment in 2019: **In August 2019, Parliament cleared the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Bill, 2019** to designate individuals as terrorists if the individual commits or participates in acts of terrorism, prepares for terrorism, promotes terrorism or is otherwise involved in terrorism. A similar provision already existed in Part 4 and 6 of the legislation for organisations that can be designated as a “**terrorist organisation**”. The Act empowers the **Director General of National Investigation Agency (NIA) to grant approval of seizure or attachment of property** when the case is investigated by the said agency. The Act also empowers the officers of the NIA, of the rank of Inspector or above, to investigate cases of terrorism in addition to those conducted by the DSP or ACP or above rank officer in the state.

## LEFT-WING EXTREMISM IN INDIA

**Left-wing extremists, popularly known as Maoists worldwide and as Naxalites in India.** The term Naxalism derives its name from the village **Naxalbari of West Bengal**. It originated as a rebellion against local landlords who bashed a peasant over a land dispute. The rebellion was initiated in 1967, with an objective of rightful redistribution of the land to working peasants under the leadership of



**Kanu Sanyal and Jagan Santhal.** The movement has spread across the Eastern India in less developed areas of states such as **Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh**. It is considered that Naxals support Maoist political sentiments and ideology. **Maoism is a form of communism developed by Mao Tse Tung.** It is a doctrine to capture State power through a combination of armed insurgency, mass mobilization and strategic alliances.

## REASONS OF LEFT-WING EXTREMISM

Tribal Discontent: **The Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980** has been used to target tribals, who depend on forest produce for their living. Massive displacement of tribal population in the naxalism-affected states due to development projects, mining operations and other reasons.

Easy Target for Maoists: Such people who do not have any source of living are taken into naxalism by Maoists. Maoists provide arms and ammunition and money to such people.

Gaps in the Socio-Economic system of the Country: **Government measures its success on the basis of the number of violent attacks** rather than the development done in the naxal-affected areas.

Absence of strong technical intelligence to fight with naxalites. Infrastructural problems, for instance, some villages are not yet connected properly with any communication network. No Follow-Up from Administration: It is seen that even after police take hold of a region, administration fails to provide essential services to the people of that region. Confusion over tackling naxalism as a social issue or as a security threat.

## RELATED GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

***Greyhounds:*** It was raised in 1989 as an elite anti-naxal force.

***Operation Green Hunt:*** It was started in 2009-10 and massive deployment of security forces was done in the naxal-affected areas.

***LWE Mobile Tower Project:*** To improve mobile connectivity in the LWE areas, the Government in 2014, approved installation of mobile towers in LWE affected States.

***Aspirational Districts Programme:*** Launched in 2018, it aims to rapidly transform the districts that have shown relatively lesser progress in key social areas.



SAMADHAN: It stands for

**S- Smart Leadership,**

**A- Aggressive Strategy,**

**M- Motivation and Training,**

**A- Actionable Intelligence,**

**D- Dashboard Based KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) and KRAs (Key Result Areas),**

**H- Harnessing Technology,**

**A- Action plan for each Theatre, and**

## **N- No access to Financing.**

This doctrine is the one-stop solution for the LWE problem. It encompasses the entire strategy of government from short-term policy to long-term policy formulated at different levels.

## **CONCLUSION**

Though the number of incidents of LWE violence has come down in the recent past, continued efforts and focus are needed in eliminating such groups. Government needs to ensure two things; **security of the peace-loving people** and **the development of the naxalism-affected regions.** Centre and states should continue with their coordinated efforts in development and security both where **Centre should play a supportive role with state police forces taking the lead.** Government needs to undertake technological solutions such as the use of drones to minimize loss of lives of security personnel.



## MEETING OF INDIA-RUSSIA FOREIGN MINISTERS

To build on the **common “resilient” ground**, **Indian and Russian Foreign Ministers** addressed each other’s concerns on a wide range of issues. The issues range from defence supplies to the **S-400 air defence system**, India’s role in **Afghanistan and Taliban’s involvement** in power-sharing to cooperation on Covid vaccines and **India’s participation in the Quad grouping**.



**Discussed Cooperation in Following Sectors:** Economic opportunities in the Russian Far East. The **Russian Far East stretches from Lake Baikal**, the world’s largest freshwater lake, to the Pacific Ocean and comprises roughly a third of Russia’s territory. Although it is rich in natural resources including minerals, hydrocarbons, timber and fish, it is an economically underdeveloped region.

**Leveraging the Atmanirbhar Bharat campaign** to boost manufacturing in India. Connectivity through the **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)**. INSTC is a multi-modal transportation established in September 2000 in **St. Petersburg, by Iran, Russia and India** for the purpose of promoting transportation cooperation. The **Chennai-Vladivostok Eastern maritime corridor**. It is a maritime route covering approximately 5,600 nautical miles, aimed at increasing bilateral trade between India and Russia. Long standing partnership in space and nuclear sectors.

## S-400 AIR DEFENCE SYSTEM

Issues regarding the sale of the **S-400 air defence system** figured in the discussions. The S-400 Triumf is a mobile, **surface-to-air missile system (SAM) designed by Russia**. It is the most dangerous operationally deployed modern long-range SAM (MLR SAM) in the world, considered much ahead of the US-developed **Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system (THAAD)**. While India is keen on



buying it, the USA has expressed reservations by threatening sanctions under **Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)**.

**Views on Military Alliance and Indo-Pacific:** Military Alliance: Russian **Foreign Minister** clarified that the **Russia-China relations** are at the highest in the history, but these relations do not pursue a goal of establishing a military alliance. He also referred to the **Quad grouping and called it an "Asian NATO"**, a term sometimes used by China. **Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)** is an informal strategic dialogue between India, USA, Japan and Australia with a shared objective to ensure and support a "free, open and prosperous" Indo-Pacific region.

**Indo-Pacific:** Russia and India are working for stability and connectivity in the Asia-Pacific and urged that "military alliances" should not come up in Asia. Russia referred to the **formulation of "Asia Pacific"** while India referred to **"Indo-Pacific"**.

**Afghan Peace:** There is a need to "harmonise" the interests of **various stakeholders that are active in and around Afghanistan**. The peace process should be based on foundational principles and a political solution should mean independent, sovereign, united and **democratic Afghanistan**. Decision on the settlement in Afghanistan should foresee the participation of all political, ethnic and religious groups in the country. Otherwise the solution will not be stable. It needs to be noted that India was not a part of a recent meeting led by Russia on Afghan peace.

**Medical Cooperation:** The Russian Fund for Direct Investment has signed contracts with various Indian manufacturers for Sputnik V vaccines for **700-750 million doses**. Both ministers also took up the possible export of the **Covaxin to Russia** which is likely to be cleared by experts.

## RELATIONSHIP B/W INDIA & RUSSIA

**Political (Annual Summit):** The Annual Summit meeting between the **Prime Minister of India and the President of the Russian Federation** is the highest institutionalized dialogue mechanism in the strategic partnership between India and Russia.

**Economic: India-Russia trade**, amounting to USD 10.11 billion in 2019-2020, is far below the potential. Both countries have set the bilateral trade target at USD 30 billion by 2025.

Defence and Security: **BrahMos Missile System** as well as the licensed production in India of **SU-30 aircraft and T-90 tanks**, are examples.

Cooperation in Nuclear Energy: **Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant (KKNPP)** is being built in India with Russian cooperation. Cooperation in Space Sector: **Cooperation in Gaganyaan program**.

## COMMON MULTILATERAL FORUM B/W BOTH THE COUNTRIES

**BRICS:** BRICS is an acronym for the grouping of the world's leading emerging economies, namely **Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa**. The BRICS Leaders' Summit is convened annually. BRICS does not exist in the form of organization, but it is an annual summit between the supreme



leaders of five nations. The Chairmanship of the forum is rotated annually among the members, in accordance with the **acronym B-R-I-C-S**. **BRICS** cooperation in the past decade has expanded to include an annual programme of over 100 sectoral meetings. Together, BRICS accounts for **about 40% of the world's population** and about 30% of the GDP (Gross Domestic Product), making it a critical economic engine. It's an emerging investment market and global power bloc.

**Shanghai Cooperation Organisation:** SCO is a permanent intergovernmental international organisation. It's a Eurasian political, economic and military organisation aiming to maintain peace, security and stability in the region. It was created in 2001. The SCO Charter was signed in 2002, and entered into force in 2003. It is a statutory document which outlines the organisation's goals and principles, as well as its structure and core activities. The **SCO's official languages are Russian and Chinese**. Prior to the creation of SCO in **2001, Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan** were members of the Shanghai Five. **Shanghai Five (1996)** emerged from a series of border demarcation and demilitarization talks which the four former

Soviet republics held with China to ensure stability along the borders. Following the accession of Uzbekistan to the organisation in 2001, the Shanghai Five was renamed the SCO. **India and Pakistan became members in 2017.**

## CONCLUSION

**India Engaging Russia Into Indo-Pacific Narrative:** India should pursue and facilitate **Russia's engagement in the Indo-Pacific**. Russia's active engagement in the region would contribute to making the Indo-Pacific truly "**free and inclusive**".

**Prioritizing RIC (Russia, India & China) in Indian Foreign Policy:** India can also promote a mutually beneficial trilateral cooperation between **Russia, China, and India** that could contribute towards the reduction of mistrust and suspicion **between India and China**.

## RATAN TATA VERSUS CYRUS MISTRY

Cyrus Mistry's family Shapoorji Pallonji (SP) owns **18.46% equity capital in Tata Sons**, the main holding company of **Tata Group**. **66% of Tata Sons** is owned by **Tata Trusts**, currently controlled by Ratan Tata, the **group's former Chairman**.



## TIMELINE OF THE CONTROVERSY

- **December 2012–Appointment of Mistry:** Cyrus Mistry is appointed Chairperson of Tata Sons Limited.
- **October 2016- Removal of Mistry:** He is sacked from the post of Executive Chairperson by most of the Board of Directors.
- **February 2017– Case filed against Tata Sons:** The shareholders vote for Mistry's removal from the board of Tata Sons during an extraordinary general meeting. Mistry, subsequently, files a suit under various sections of the Companies Act, 2013, alleging oppression and mismanagement in Tata Sons.
- **July 2018- Tatas win in NCLT:** The Mumbai Bench of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) dismisses Mistry's plea against Tata Sons. While rejecting his allegations, NCLT rules that the Board of Directors are competent enough to remove him as Chairman. The tribunal also states that it found no merit in the arguments on mismanagement in Tata Sons.
- **December 2019– Tatas lose in NCLAT:** The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) overturns the NCLT judgment, and states that Mistry's removal as Chairman of Tata Sons was illegal.

**NCLAT also found that the affairs of Tata Sons** were conducted in a manner prejudicial and oppressive to its minority shareholders, namely **Cyrus Mistry & his family companies**, as well as to the interests of the company itself. **January 2020- Appeal to SC:** Tata Sons and Ratan Tata challenge the **NCLAT decision** before the Supreme Court saying that the **NCLAT verdict** undermined Corporate Democracy and the rights of its Board of Directors.

Subsequently, the **Supreme Court stays the NCLAT judgment** to reinstate Mistry as the **executive chairman of Tata Sons**. September 2020: The Supreme Court restrains **Mistry's Shapoorji Pallonji Group** from pledging its shares in Tata Sons to raise funds.

**March 2021: Final Verdict on the case**

## ALLEGATIONS & CONCERNS RAISED BY MISTRY

**Rights of Minority Shareholder's oppressed:** SP Group had also alleged that Tata Sons was being run and operated in a manner which was **"oppressive" and "prejudicial" to the rights of minority shareholders**. It was alleged that the removal of Cyrus Mistry meant oppression of minority shareholders. **Article 75 of the Articles of Association of the Tata Group**. Article 75 gives the company the right to purchase shares from a minority or a small shareholder at a fair market value. Fearing that the **Tata Group may use it to try and buyout the SP Group**, the latter urged the company law tribunals and the Supreme Court to not allow Article 75 to be used.



**Decisions disproportionately impacted minority shareholders:** Apart from this, the Mistry camp had also alleged that the Tata Group had taken several commercial decisions which did not yield the desired result and thus resulted in more loss for the **minority shareholders than the majority shareholders**.

## DECISION OF THE SUPREME COURT

**No Entitlement to seat on Board:** Discussing the rights of minority and small shareholders and their importance in the board of a company, the **Supreme Court** held that minority shareholders or their representatives are not automatically entitled to a seat on the private company's board



like a small shareholder's representative. This meant that SC set aside **NCLAT order and dismissed the appeals of Mistry & SP Group.**

**Small Vs Minority Shareholder:** SC noted that the provisions contained in the 2013 Companies Act only protects the rights of small shareholders of listed companies by asking such companies to have on their board at least one director elected by such small shareholders. Small shareholders, **according to the Companies Act**, is a shareholder or group of shareholders who hold shares of nominal value of not more than Rs 20,000. Since the Mistry family and the SP Group were not **“small” shareholders, but “minority shareholders”**, there was no statutory provision which gave them the “right to claim proportionate representation,” on the board of Tata Sons.

**No Right to Proportionate Representation:** SC noted that the right to claim proportionate representation is not available for the SP Group even contractually, in terms of the Articles of Association. **Neither SP Group nor CPM (Cyrus Pallonji Mistry) can request the Tribunal (NCLAT) to rewrite the contract, by seeking an amendment of the Articles of Association.** The Articles of Association, as they exist today, are binding upon **SP Group and CPM.**

## IMPACT OF THE JUDGEMENT

The **Supreme Court** has not negated the concept of **quasi-partnership or a contractual agreement.** Though the judgment does not directly impact the right of minority shareholders, it does mean that going ahead, such shareholders will have to ensure that they have a contract with the majority shareholders or the promoters of the company to **ensure they have adequate representation on the board.**



## **NATIONAL COMPANY LAW APPELLATE TRIBUNAL**

The **NCLAT** was constituted under **Section 410** of the Companies Act, 2013 to hear appeals against the orders of the **National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT)**. NCLT is a quasi-judicial body that adjudicates issues relating to companies. It is also the appellate tribunal for orders passed by the **NCLT(s) under Section 61 of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), 2016**, and for orders passed by the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) under **Sections 202 and 211 of the IBC**. Any person aggrieved by any order of the NCLAT may file an appeal to the Supreme Court. NCLAT is also the Appellate Tribunal to hear and dispose of appeals against any direction issued or decision made or order **passed by the Competition Commission of India (CCI)**.

## RBI MONETARY POLICY: RATES REMAIN UNCHANGED

The **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** has released the Monetary Policy Report for the month of April 2021.



- **Unchanged Policy Rates:**
- Repo Rate - 4%
- Reverse Repo Rate - 3.35%.
- Marginal Standing Facility (MSF) - 4.25%.
- Bank Rate- 4.25%.
- GDP Projection: Real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth for 2021-22 has been retained at 10.5%.

**Inflation: RBI has revised the projection for Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation to:**

- 5.0% in Quarter 4 of 2020-21.
- 5.2% in Quarter 1 of 2021-22.
- 5.2% in Quarter 2 of 2021-22.
- 4.4% in Quarter 3 of 2021-22.
- 5.1% in Quarter 4 of 2021-22.

**Accommodative Stance:** The RBI decided to continue with the accommodative stance as long as necessary to sustain growth on a durable basis and **continue to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 on the economy**, while ensuring that inflation remains within the target going forward. An accommodative stance means a central bank will cut rates to inject money into the financial system whenever needed.

**Support to Financial Institutions:** RBI would extend **fresh support of Rs. 50,000 crore to the All India Financial Institutions for new lending in Financial Year (FY) 2021-22**. National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) will be provided a Special Liquidity Facility (SLF) of Rs. 25,000 crore for one year to support agriculture and allied activities, the

rural non-farm sector and **Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) - Micro-Finance Institutions (MFIs)**. An SLF of Rs. 10,000 crore will be extended to the National Housing Bank for one year to support the housing sector. **Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) will be provided Rs.15,000 crore** under this facility for up to one year for funding of Micro, Small and Medium enterprises (MSMEs). All three facilities will be available at the prevailing policy repo rate.

**Review Committee for ARC's:** Signalling the importance of **Asset Reconstruction Companies (ARCs)** to deal with bad loans, the RBI would constitute a committee to undertake a comprehensive review of the working of ARCs in the financial sector ecosystem. The committee will recommend suitable measures for enabling such entities to meet the growing requirements of the financial sector.

**Extension of Priority Sector Lending:** A six-month extension to September 30,2021 for Priority Sector Lending (PSL) classification for lending by banks to NBFCs for 'on-lending' to sectors that contribute significantly to the economy in terms of export and employment — has been approved. **On-lending means to lend (borrowed money) to a third party.** This would provide an impetus to NBFCs providing credit at the bottom of the pyramid.

**Government Securities Acquisition Programme (G-SAP) 1.0:** The RBI, for the year 2021-22, has decided to put in place a secondary market **Government Security (G-sec) Acquisition Programme or G-SAP 1.0**. It is part of RBI's Open Market Operations. Under the programme, the RBI will commit upfront to a specific amount of Open Market Purchases of government securities. The **first purchase of government securities for an aggregate amount of Rs. 25,000 crore** under G-SAP 1.0 will be conducted on 15th April, 2021.

Objective: To **avoid volatility in the G-sec market** in view of its central role in the pricing of other financial market instruments across the term structure and issuers, both in the public and private sectors

Significance: It will provide certainty to the bond market participants with regard to RBI's commitment of support to the bond market in FY22. The announcement of this structured programme will help reduce the difference between the repo rate and the 10-year government bond yield. That, in turn, will help to reduce the **aggregate cost of borrowing for the Centre and states in FY 2021-22**. It will enable a stable and orderly evolution of the yield curve amidst comfortable liquidity conditions. **A yield curve is a line that plots yields (interest rates) of bonds having equal credit quality but differing maturity dates.** The slope of the yield curve gives an idea of future interest rate changes and economic activity.

## RELATED KEY TERMINOLOGIES

**Repo and Reverse Repo Rate:** Repo rate is the rate at which the central bank of a country (**Reserve Bank of India in case of India**) lends money to commercial banks in the event of any shortfall of funds. Here, the central bank purchases the security. **Reverse repo rate is the rate** at which the RBI borrows money from commercial banks within the country.



**Bank Rate:** It is the rate charged by the RBI for **lending funds to commercial banks**.

**Marginal Standing Facility (MSF):** MSF is a window for scheduled banks to borrow overnight from the RBI in an emergency situation when interbank liquidity dries up completely. Under **interbank lending, banks lend funds to one another for a specified term**.

**Open Market Operations:** These are market operations conducted by RBI by way of sale/purchase of government securities to/from the market with an objective to adjust the rupee liquidity conditions in the market on a durable basis. If there is excess liquidity, RBI resorts to sale of securities and sucks out the rupee liquidity. Similarly, when the liquidity conditions are tight, **RBI buys securities from the market, thereby releasing liquidity into the market**. It is one of the quantitative **(to regulate or control the total volume of money)** monetary policy

tools which is employed by the central bank of a country to control the money supply in the economy.

**Government Security: A G-Sec is a tradable instrument** issued by the Central Government or the State Governments. It acknowledges the Government's debt obligation. Such securities are short term (usually called treasury bills, with original maturities of less than one year- presently issued in three tenors, namely, 91 day, 182 day and 364 day) or long term (**usually called Government bonds or dated securities with original maturity of one year or more**).

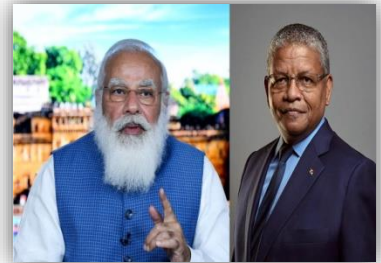
**Inflation:** Inflation refers to the rise in the prices of most goods and services of daily or common use, such as food, clothing, housing, recreation, transport, consumer staples, etc. **Inflation measures the average price change in a basket of commodities and services over time.** Inflation is indicative of the decrease in the purchasing power of a unit of a country's currency. This could ultimately lead to a deceleration in economic growth.

**Consumer Price Index:** It measures price changes from the perspective of a retail buyer. It is **released by the National Statistical Office (NSO)**. The CPI calculates the difference in the price of commodities and services such as food, medical care, education, electronics etc, which Indian consumers buy for use.



## VIRTUAL MEET B/W LEADERS OF INDIA & SEYCHELLES

**Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Seychelles President Wavel Ramkalawan** jointly inaugurated a range of Indian projects in Seychelles during a high-level virtual meeting. The projects include the inauguration of a **new Magistrates' Court Building, one MW solar power plant, 10 High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDPs) and handing over of a new Fast Patrol Vessel to Seychelles Coast Guard.** These projects are a part of India's Indo-Pacific vision. This was the first interaction between **Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Seychelles President Wavel Ramkalawan** after the latter came to power following a landmark victory in October 2020 elections.



**Assistance in Time of need:** He said that India is honoured to have played the role of a **strong partner of Seychelles in this fight against COVID-19.** He highlighted how India was able to supply essential medicines and 50,000 doses of vaccine during the time of need and assured that India will stand firmly with Seychelles in its effort for **post-COVID-19 economic recovery.**

**Son of India:** The Prime Minister also called the Seychelles President Wavel Ramkalawan "son of India" **due to his Bihar roots and said that all Indians feel proud of his achievements.** He said that his election as president shows people of Seychelles have a dedication to public service.

**On Climate Change :** The Prime Minister highlighted that climate change especially poses a threat to island countries and therefore, India is handing over a **one MegaWatt solar power plant in Seychelles that was built with India's assistance.** He further said that India will remain committed to strengthening the maritime security of the Seychelles and for the same, India is handing over a new, state of the art, Made-in-India **Fast Patrol Vessel to the Seychelles Coast Guard.**

## EVENTS AT THE MEET OF BOTH THE LEADERS

**Joint Inauguration:** Inaugurated the new magistrates' court building in Mahé constructed with a USD 3.5-million, a 1 MW solar power plant built at a cost of USD3.4 million, and 10 community development projects in Seychelles. All the projects were built by the help of India. India has so far taken up **29 small people-oriented development projects in Seychelles**, while the 1MW solar project was built in addition to installing solar systems at 146 government buildings and domestic households. The solar plant will meet the electricity needs of around 400 houses round the year.

**Fast Patrol Vehicle:** India handed over a fast patrol vessel (PS Zoroaster) to the island nation. The 48.9-metre patrol boat was built by **Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineering (under the administrative control of the Ministry of Defence)** at a cost of Rs. 100 crore and has a top speed of 35 knots and an endurance of 1,500 nautical miles. The vessel will be used for multi-purpose operations, such as patrolling, anti-smuggling and anti-poaching operations, and search and rescue. India gifted similar vessels to the Seychelles in 2005, 2014 and 2016.

**India's Stand:** India is honoured to be a partner of Seychelles in the development of its security capabilities and in **meeting its infrastructural and developmental needs.**

## RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INDIA & SEYCHELLES

**Diplomatic ties were established with Seychelles after its independence in 1976.** When Seychelles attained freedom, a contingent from the Indian Naval Ship, **INS Nilgiri**, took part in the Independence Day celebrations. Since then the tradition of Indian military participation at the Seychelles National Day celebrations has continued till date. An **Indian Mission was**

**established in 1979 in Victoria, Seychelles** with the **High Commissioner based in Dar-es-Salaam (Tanzania)** and concurrently accredited to Seychelles. The first resident High



Commissioner was appointed in 1987, while Seychelles opened its resident mission in New Delhi in early 2008.

**Economic Relation:** India exported goods worth USD 84.49 million and imported goods worth USD 5.27 million from Seychelles during the financial year 2018-19. **Tax Information Exchange Agreement (TIEA) between India and Seychelles** was signed in August 2015. Seychelles is also keen to sign the **Double Tax Avoidance Agreement (DTAA)**.

**Energy & Environment: Blue Economy Protocol between India and Seychelles** was signed in August 2015. Recently, India has been accepted as an observer of the Indian Ocean Commission, of which Seychelles is a member. With the ratification of the **International Solar Alliance (ISA) Framework Agreement** in September 2017, Seychelles has officially become one of the **Founding Members of ISA. ISA is an Indian Initiative.**

## SECURITY & GROWTH FOR ALL IN THE REGION (SAGAR)


**Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR)** was launched in 2015. It is India's strategic vision for the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Through SAGAR, India seeks to deepen economic and security cooperation with its maritime neighbours and assist in building their maritime security capabilities. Further, India seeks to safeguard its national interests and ensure Indian Ocean region to become inclusive, collaborative and respect international law. The **key relevance of SAGAR emerges when seen in conjunction** with India's other policies impacting the maritime domain like Act East Policy, Project Sagarmala, Project Mausam, India as 'net security provider', focus on Blue Economy etc.



## CONCLUSION

Seychelles has been a strategic destination for several major powers with vested interests in the region, however India's image and visibility in Seychelles is very high as compared to others.

The geo-strategic importance of Seychelles's location remains undiminished in contemporary times, and will become enhanced and China is fighting to get an upper hand which India must not allow. There is also a need to strengthen shared efforts of both the countries to combat drug trafficking, IUU (Illegal, unreported and unregulated) fishing, piracy and climate change while protecting the ocean ecosystem.

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