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GENERAL Knowledge

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24-B, Next to Bikaner Sweets, S. K. Puri, Boring Road, Patna



82943945 19 | 7903086545

/clatgurukul admin@clatgurukul.com



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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

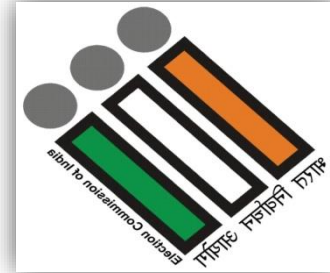
Part XV (Article 324-329) of the Indian Constitution: It deals with elections, and establishes a commission for these matters.

- **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.

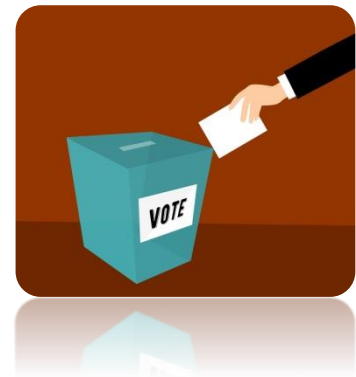
Limitations: The Constitution has not prescribed the qualifications (**legal, educational, administrative or judicial**) of the members of the Election Commission. The Constitution has not specified the term of the members of the Election Commission. The Constitution has not debarred the retiring election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

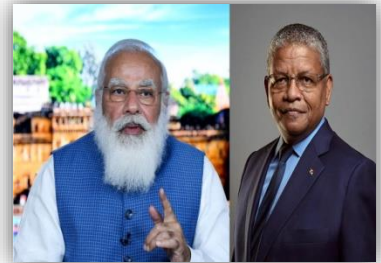
Government Security: A G-Sec is a tradable instrument issued by the Central Government or the State Governments. It acknowledges the Government's debt obligation. Such securities are short term (usually called treasury bills, with original maturities of less than one year- presently issued in three tenors, 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.

APPOINTMENT OF NEW DIRECTOR OF CBI

Recently, the **Central Government** has appointed '**Subodh Kumar Jaiswal**' as a new Director of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). The Director of the CBI is appointed as **per section 4A of the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act of 1946.**



ABOUT THE CENTRAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION (CBI)

The **CBI was set up in 1963 by a resolution of the Ministry of Home Affairs.** Now, the CBI comes under the administrative control of the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) of the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions. The establishment of the CBI was **recommended by the Santhanam Committee on Prevention of Corruption (1962–1964).** The CBI is not a statutory body. It derives its powers from the **Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, 1946.** The CBI is the main investigating agency of the Central Government. It also provides assistance to the Central Vigilance Commission and Lokpal. It is also the nodal police agency in India which coordinates investigations on behalf of Interpol Member countries. The **CBI is headed by a Director.** The CBI has jurisdiction to investigate offences **pertaining to 69 Central laws, 18 State Acts and 231 offences in the IPC.**

APPOINTMENT OF CBI DIRECTOR

The **Director of CBI as Inspector General of Police, Delhi Special Police Establishment,** is responsible for the administration of the organisation. The **Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act (2013) amended the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act (1946)** and made the following changes with respect to appointment of the Director of CBI:



Appointment Committee: The Central Government shall appoint the Director of CBI on the recommendation of a **three-member committee consisting of the Prime Minister as Chairperson**, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha and the Chief Justice of India or Judge of the Supreme Court (SC) nominated by him. The **Delhi Special Police Establishment (Amendment) Act, 2014** made a change in the composition of the committee related to the appointment of the Director of CBI. It states that where there is no recognized leader of opposition in the Lok Sabha, then the leader of the single largest opposition party in the Lok Sabha would be a member of that committee.

Tenure of Director: The Director of CBI has been **provided security of two-year tenure in office** by the CVC Act, 2003.

SC Rulings Related to CBI Director: The six-month minimum residual tenure rule was introduced by the Supreme Court in a March 2019 order. **No officer with less than six months' tenure remaining can be considered for the post of chief.** Though the order in the **Prakash Singh case** pertained to the appointment of DGPs, it was extended to CBI Director too. In the **Prakash Singh case, 2006** the SC had stressed the point that appointment of DGPs “should be purely on the basis of merit and to insulate the office from all kinds of influences and pressures”. The Director of CBI is to hold the post for not less than **two years as held by the Vineet Narain judgment of 1998**. He/she may not be transferred except with the previous consent of the high-level committee.

The **SC in Union of India versus C. Dinakar, 2001** case has held that “ordinarily IPS officers of the senior most four batches in service on the date of retirement of CBI Director, irrespective of their empanelment, **shall be eligible for consideration for appointment to the post of CBI Director**”.

DELHI SPECIAL POLICE ESTABLISHMENT ACT

The **Central Bureau of Investigation traces its origin to the Special Police Establishment (SPE)** which was set up in 1941 by the Government of India. The functions of the SPE then were

to investigate cases of bribery and corruption in transactions with the **War & Supply Deptt. Of India** during World War II. Even after the end of the War, the need for a Central Government agency to investigate cases of bribery and corruption by Central Government employees was felt. The Delhi Special Police Establishment Act was **therefore brought into force in 1946**. The **CBI's power to investigate cases is derived from this Act.**

CASES MAJORLY HANDLED BY CBI

Anti-Corruption Crimes - for investigation of cases under the **Prevention of Corruption Act** against Public officials and the employees of Central Government, Public Sector Undertakings, Corporations or Bodies owned or controlled by the Government of India.



Economic Crimes - for investigation of **major financial scams and serious economic frauds**, including crimes relating to Fake Indian Currency Notes, Bank Frauds and Cyber Crime, bank frauds, Import Export & Foreign Exchange violations, large-scale smuggling of narcotics, antiques, cultural property and smuggling of other contraband items etc.

Special Crimes - for investigation of **serious and organized crime under the Indian Penal Code and other laws on the requests of State Governments** or on the orders of the **Supreme Court and High Courts** - such as cases of terrorism, bomb blasts, kidnapping for ransom and crimes committed by the mafia/the underworld.

Suo Moto Cases - CBI can suo-moto take up investigation of **offences only in the Union Territories**. The Central Government can authorize CBI to investigate a crime in a State but only with the consent of the concerned State Government. The **Supreme Court and High Courts**, however, can order CBI to investigate a crime anywhere in the country without the consent of the State.

CONCLUSION

Delink the CBI from the administrative control of the government - As long as the government of the day has the power to transfer and post officials of its choice in the CBI, the **investigating agency will not enjoy autonomy** and will be unable to investigate cases freely. Providing statutory status through legislation equivalent to that provided to the **Comptroller & Auditor General and the Election Commission** will help maintain the independence of the institution.

CHINA COMPLETED STRATEGIC TIBET HIGHWAY

Recently, China has **completed construction of a strategically significant highway** enabling greater access to remote areas along the disputed border with **Arunachal Pradesh in India**.

The construction began in 2014 and is part of a wider infrastructure push in border areas in Tibet. The highway **passes through the Grand Canyon of the Brahmaputra River (Yarlung Zangbo in Tibet)**.

The Brahmaputra is the longest river in Tibet and its valley is the world's deepest with a 7,000-metre drop from the highest mountain peak to the lowest basin. It connects Pad Township in the city of **Nyingchi and Medog County**. Nyingchi and Medog County both are located in **Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR)**, China. Medog is the last county in Tibet, which is located close to the Arunachal Pradesh border. China claims Arunachal Pradesh as part of South Tibet, which is firmly rejected by India. The India-China border dispute covers the **3,488-km-long Line of Actual Control (LAC)**. The Highway will shorten the road length connecting the city proper of Nyingchi and Medog County and will reduce the travel time by eight hours.



OTHER STRATEGIC CONSTRUCTION BY CHINA

Railway Line: In 2020, China had begun work on a **strategically significant railway line** that will link **Sichuan province with Nyingchi in Tibet**, which lies close to Arunachal Pradesh border. It is the second major rail link to Tibet after the Qinghai-Tibet railway that opened in 2006.

New Villages: In January 2021, there were reports of **Chinese construction of three villages in Arunachal Pradesh 5 kilometres from the Bum La pass**. In 2020, satellite images emerged showing a new village called Pangda built 2-3 km into what Bhutan sees as its land. In 2017, the TAR government launched a plan to build moderately well-off villages in border areas. Under this plan 628 first line and second line villages — referring to those right on the border and

others in remote areas slightly further within — would be developed in the prefectures of **Ngari, Shigatse, Shannan and Nyingchi, along China's borders with India, Bhutan and Nepal.**

MAJOR CONCERNS FOR INDIA

The highway is also expected to play a key role in the surveying of and planning for the **mega Yarlung Zangbo hydro-power project** that China is planning to build at the canyon in the same Medog county, triggering unease among downstream countries like India. A highway connecting the border will largely improve the efficiency and convenience of military personnel and material transportation and logistical supplies in the border area.

STEPS TAKEN BY INDIA

India will spend 10% funds of the **Border Area Development Programme (BADP)** only to improve the infrastructure along the China border. The **Border Roads Organisation (BRO)** constructed the Daporijo bridge over Subansiri river in Arunachal Pradesh. It links roads leading upto the **LAC between India and China**. Foundation of a tunnel at Nechiphu in West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh has been laid down which will



shorten travel time for troops till the LAC through Tawang, which China claims to be its territory. A tunnel is being constructed under the Se La pass in Arunachal Pradesh which connects Tawang to the rest of Arunachal and Guwahati. The state government of Arunachal Pradesh has advocated selection of 10 census towns along the India-China border as pilot projects for infrastructure development in order to stop people living along its international borders, specifically with China, from migrating to faraway urban centres in the State.

Sisseri River Bridge, located at lower Dibang Valley in Arunachal Pradesh, connects Dibang Valley and Siang. In 2019, the Indian Air Force inaugurated resurfaced runway at **India's easternmost Village-Vijaynagar (Changlang district)** in Arunachal Pradesh. In 2019, the

Indian Army conducted exercise 'HimVijay' in Arunachal Pradesh and Assam with its newly created **Integrated Battle Groups (IBG)**.

Bogibeel bridge, which is India's longest road-rail bridge connecting Dibrugarh in Assam to Pasighat in Arunachal Pradesh was inaugurated in 2018.

It will facilitate quicker movement of troops and equipment to areas near the **India-China border**.

CONCLUSION

India needs to be vigilant enough for any new development in China near its border to protect its interests efficiently. Further, **it needs to build robust Infrastructure in difficult border areas** in its territory to ensure movement of personnel and other logistical supplies in an efficient manner.

CONCERNS RELATED TO IT RULES, 2021

The Government of India had framed the **Information Technology (Guidelines for Intermediaries and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021**, in February this year. These rules require the **social media intermediaries/ platforms** to adhere to a vastly tighter set of rules within three months, which ended on May 25. Till now almost all major social media intermediaries have not adhered to all the requirements. But **non-compliance can**



only make things worse, especially in a situation in which the relationship between some platforms such as Twitter and the Government seems to have broken down. While there are positive aspects about the said guidelines, there are, equally, **glaring ambiguities and susceptibilities** that appear to be in conflict with the basic tenets of democracy and constitutional values.

POSITIVES OF THE RULES:

The Rules must be credited for they mandate duties such as:

- Removal of **non-consensual intimate pictures within 24 hours**,
- **Publication of compliance reports** to increase transparency,
- Setting up a dispute resolution mechanism for **content removal**,
- Adding a label to information for users to know whether content is advertised, owned, sponsored or exclusively controlled.

ASSOCIATED ISSUES WITH THE RULES

Rules Ultra-vires to the IT Act: It is of significant concern that the **purview of the IT Act, 2000**, has been expanded to bring digital news media under its regulatory ambit without legislative action. There has been criticism about bringing in a plethora of new rules that ought to be normally triggered only via legislative action.

Depriving of Fair Recourse: An intermediary is now supposed to take down content within 36 hours upon receiving orders from the Government. This deprives the **intermediary of a fair recourse** in the event that it disagrees with the **Government's order due to a strict timeline**.

Undermining Free Speech: The rules place fetters upon **free speech by fixing the Government as the ultimate adjudicator of objectionable speech online**.

Traceability Issue: Till now social media platforms have the immunity that users received from end-to-end encryption was that intermediaries did not have access to the contents of their messages. Imposing this **mandatory requirement of traceability will break this immunity**, thereby weakening the security of the privacy of these conversations. The threat here is not only one of privacy but to the **extent of invasion and deprivation from a safe space**.

Counterproductive in Absence of Data Privacy Law: It could prove counterproductive in a country where the citizens still do not have a data privacy law to guard themselves against excesses committed by any party.

DATA PROTECTION PROVISIONS IN INDIA

Recently, the Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) has sent a notice to WhatsApp asking it to withdraw a controversial update to its privacy policy which might be a **threat to Data Protection of Indians**. According to WhatsApp's updated privacy policy, users would no longer be able to stop the app from sharing data (**such as location and number**) with its parent Facebook unless they delete their accounts altogether. Its



privacy updates are designed to make the business interactions that take place on its **platform easier while also personalising ads on Facebook**. That is how it will have to make its money. According to the Government, the messaging app discriminates against Indian users **vis-à-vis users in Europe on the matter of a choice to opt-out of the new privacy policy**. WhatsApp

users in Europe can opt-out of the new privacy policy owing to the laws in the **European Union (EU)** called the **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)**, which shield them from sharing data from Facebook or grant them the power to say no to **WhatsApp's new terms of service**.

LAWS FOR DATA PROTECTION IN INDIA

Information Technology Act, 2000: It provides for safeguard against certain breaches in relation to data from computer systems. It contains provisions to prevent the unauthorized use of computers, computer systems and data stored therein.

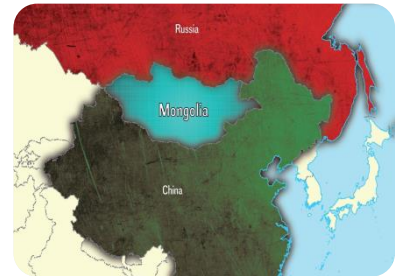


Personal Data Protection Bill 2019: The Supreme Court maintained the right to privacy as a fundamental right in the landmark decision of **K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India 2017** after which the Union government had appointed **Justice B.N. Srikrishna Committee** for proposing skeletal legislation in the discipline of data protection. The Committee came up with its report and draft legislation in the form of the **Personal Data Protection Bill, 2018**. In 2019, Parliament again revised the Bill and much deviation from the 2018 Bill was evident. **The new Bill was named as Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019**. The purpose of this Bill is to provide for protection of privacy of individuals relating to their **Personal Data** and to establish a **Data Protection Authority of India** for the said purposes and the matters concerning the personal data of an individual.

Concerns Related to Personal Data Protection Bill 2019: It is like a two-sided sword. While it protects the **personal data of Indians by empowering them with data principal rights**, on the other hand, it gives the central government with exemptions which are against the principles of processing personal data. The government can process even sensitive personal data when needed, **without explicit permission from the data principals**.

CULTURAL EXCHANGE B/W INDIA & MONGOLIA

Recently, the **Minister of State for Culture** discussed various issues under the **Cultural Exchange Programme** with his Mongolian counterpart.



HIGHLIGHTS OF MEETING HELD

Strengthening the strategic partnership- established in 2015. The Cultural Exchange Program between India and Mongolia stands renewed until 2023. **10 dedicated ICCR scholarships** for studying ‘Tibetan Buddhism’ have been allocated for Mongolians to study in specialized institutes of CIBS, Leh and CUTS, Varanasi, starting from 2020-2021. **The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)** is an autonomous organisation of the Government of India, involved in India's external cultural relations (cultural diplomacy), through cultural exchange with other countries and their peoples. **Tibetan Buddhism combines the essential teachings of Mahayana Buddhism with Tantric and Shamanic**, and material from an ancient Tibetan religion called Bon. India reiterated its commitment for digitization of Buddhist manuscripts in Gandan monastery and would consider Mongolia's request for assistance in setting up a museum-cum-library there. **The Ministry of Culture is likely to complete reprinting of about 100 sets of sacred Mongolian Kanjur by 2022** for distribution in the main centers of Buddhism in Mongolia. Mongolian Kanjur is a Buddhist canonical text in 108 volumes and is considered to be the most important religious text in Mongolia. It has been translated from Tibetan and is written in classical mongolian. In the **Mongolian language ‘Kanjur’ means ‘Concise Orders’**- the words of Lord Buddha in particular. Highlighted steps taken to **facilitate the visa and travel of Buddhist monks from Mongolia within India.**

INDIA & MONGOLIA BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP

India and Mongolia have interacted through Buddhism throughout history. India was the first country outside the former Soviet bloc of nations to open diplomatic relations with Mongolia in

1955. In 2015, Mongolia witnessed the first ever visit by the Prime Minister of India (**a part of India's Act East policy**).

INDIA'S ACT EAST & LOOK EAST POLICY

The '**Act East Policy**' announced in November, 2014 is the upgrade of the "**Look East Policy**". It is a diplomatic initiative to promote economic, strategic and cultural relations with the vast **Asia-Pacific region at different levels**. It involves intensive and continuous engagement with Southeast Asian countries in the field of connectivity, trade, culture, defence and people-to-people-contact at bilateral, regional and multilateral levels. Its Aim is to promote economic cooperation, cultural ties and developing a strategic relationship with countries in Indo-pacific region with a proactive and pragmatic approach and thereby improving the economic development of the **North Eastern Region (NER) which is a gateway to the South East Asia Region**.



Look East Policy: In order to recover from the loss of the **strategic partner -USSR (end of the Cold war 1991)**, India sought to build up a relationship with the USA and allies of the USA in Southeast Asia. In this pursuit, **former Prime Minister of India P V Narasimha Rao** launched **Look East policy in 1992**, to give a strategic push to India's engagement with the South-East Asia region, to bolster its standing as a regional power and a counterweight to the strategic influence of the People's Republic of China.

International Cooperation: Mongolia has publicly reiterated its support for India's membership to the permanent seat of the expanded **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)**. India has played an important role in getting Mongolia membership to key international forums, including the United Nations (UN), despite strong opposition from China and Taiwan. **India also championed the inclusion of Mongolia in the Non-Aligned Movement**. In a reciprocal gesture, Mongolia co-sponsored a 1972 UN resolution with India and Bhutan for the recognition of the newly liberated Bangladesh.

Other Forums of which both the countries are members: **Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), World Trade Organisation (WTO)**. India is a member whereas Mongolia is an observer state at the **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)**.

- **Economic Cooperation:** India - Mongolia bilateral trade was USD 35.3 million in 2020, down from USD 38.3 million in 2019. India has undertaken the ‘**Mongol refinery project**’ under its **Lines of Credit (LoC) programme**.
- **Cultural Cooperation between India and Mongolia:** The India-Mongolian Agreement on Cultural Cooperation, signed in 1961, has governed the **Cultural Exchange Programme (CEP) between the two countries**. The Agreement envisages co-operation in the fields of education by way of scholarships, exchange of experts, participation in conferences, etc.
- **Defence Cooperation: Joint defence exercises code-named Nomadic Elephant.** India is also an active participant in an annual week-long joint training exercise called the Khaan Quest, hosted by Mongolia.

CONCLUSION

Mongolia’s strategic position at the cross junction of **Central Asia, Northeast Asia, far East, China and Russia attracts major powers towards it**. India should consider Mongolia as a green zone of economic development that absorbs hi-tech features and production skills in a modernization process. To preserve and promote **the common heritage of Indo-Mongolian culture is important**. This should serve as the basis for nurturing and pursuing future common interests.

G7 FOREIGN MINISTER'S MEETING 2021

Recently, **Foreign Ministers from the Group of Seven (G7) countries (USA, UK, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan)** held a meeting in London, UK. The 47th G7 Summit will be held in June 2021. The UK is the host country.



ABOUT THE G7 FOREIGN MINISTER MEETING

Invited Guests: **Australia, India, South Korea, South Africa and the Chair (Brunei Darussalam) of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).** Australia, India, South Korea and South Africa will also join the G7 Summit in June.

Discussions: **Russia's Irresponsible and Destabilising Behaviour:** This includes the large build-up of **Russian military forces on Ukraine's borders and in illegally-annexed Crimea.**

Related to China: Human rights violations and abuses in **Xinjiang and in Tibet**, especially the **targeting of Uyghurs, members of other ethnic and religious minority groups.** Called on China to respect Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy and rights and freedoms (Basic Law). Condemned the military coup in Myanmar.

Indo-Pacific: Support for the centrality of ASEAN on the Indo-Pacific. Reiterated the importance of maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific which is inclusive and based on the rule of law, democratic values, territorial integrity, transparency, the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the peaceful resolution of disputes.

International Rules-based Order: This can be described as a shared commitment by all countries to conduct their activities in accordance with agreed rules that evolve over time, such as **international law, regional security arrangements, trade agreements, immigration protocols, and cultural arrangements.**

GROUP OF SEVEN (G-7)

The Group of Seven (G-7) is an informal bloc of industrialized democracies—**France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, Japan, the United States, and Canada**—that meets annually to discuss issues of common interest like global economic governance, international security and energy policy.



History: The G-7 has its roots in an informal meeting of the **finance ministers of France, West Germany, the U.S, Great Britain, and Japan** (the Group of Five) in the wake of the 1973 oil crisis. The French President invited the leaders of West Germany, U.S, Great Britain, Japan and Italy, to Rambouillet (France) in 1975 for further discussions on global oil crisis.

Membership: **France, West Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States** formed **the Group of Six in 1975 to provide a venue** for the industrialized democracies to address pressing economic concerns. In 1976, Canada was also invited to join the group and **the first meeting with all G-7 nations was hosted by the United States** which was held in **Puerto Rico in 1976**. The European Union has participated fully in the G-7 since 1981 as a "non enumerated" member. It is represented by the presidents of the European Council, which represents the EU member states' leaders, and the **European Commission (the E.U.'s executive branch)**. The G-7 was known as the G-8 for several years after the **original seven were joined by Russia in 1997**. The inclusion of USSR in G-7 was meant as a signal of cooperation between East and West after the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991. The group returned to being called G-7 after Russia was expelled as a member in 2014 following the annexation of the Crimea region of Ukraine. There are no formal criteria for membership, but participants are all highly developed democracies. The aggregate GDP of **G-7 member states makes up nearly 50% of the global economy and 10% of the world's population.**

Summit Participation: Summits are held annually and hosted on a rotation basis by the group's members. The host country not only holds the G7 presidency but also sets the agenda for the

year. Invitation to Global leaders are sent by host nation to participate in summit as special invitees. Countries like **China, India, Mexico, and Brazil** have attended summit at various occasions. The leaders of important international organizations like **European Union, IMF, World Bank and the United Nations** are also invited.

INDIA & G7 RELATIONSHIP

Previous Participation: The participation of India at the **45th summit in Biarritz, France, in August 2019** is a reflection of deepening strategic partnership and recognition of India as a major economic power. **India was also invited for the 2020 summit hosted by the USA** which could not take place due to the pandemic. Previously India had attended the **G8 summit (it became G7 from G8 with the expulsion of Russia in 2014)** five times between 2005 and 2009.



SIGNIFICANCE OF INDIA'S ENGAGEMENT WITH G7

It provides an opportunity for India to develop cordial relations with developed countries.

It will boost security cooperation with member countries in **Indo-Pacific, particularly the Indian ocean**. As current president of **Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa (BRICS)** and G20 president in 2023, India will play a key role driving in multilateral cooperation helping to build back better around the world.

INCREASED CHILD MARRIAGES IN LOCKDOWN

Recently, some activists and organisations of Karnataka have raised the issue of **increased child marriages in Lockdown with the Ministry of Women and Child Development**. According to a report published in December 2020 by **ChildLine India**, the pandemic and the subsequent lockdown have proved to be new drivers of **child marriages in rural Madhya Pradesh**.



Child Marriage: It is defined as a **marriage of a girl or boy before the age of 18** and refers to both formal marriages and informal unions in which children under the age of 18 live with a partner as if married. **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** estimates suggest that each year, at least 1.5 million girls under 18 get married in India, which makes it home to the largest number of child brides in the world - accounting for a third of the global total. Recent study by **The Lancet** shows that **up to 2.5 million more girls (below the age of 18)** around the world are at risk of marriage in the next 5 years **because of the Covid-19 pandemic**.

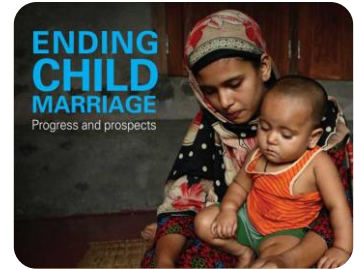
REASONS FOR INCREASED CHILD MARRIAGES

Lack of Alert Mechanism: Earlier, when child marriages happened at wedding halls, temples, etc, there were people who would alert the **relevant authorities or activists** who would be able to reach on time to stop it. But now, with marriages happening at homes, we may get fewer alerts and our **going there could be treated as trespass**.

Pandemic Induced Pressures: Economic pressures due to the pandemic have pushed poor parents to marry off girls early. With no schools, safety of children, particularly girls, was a major reason for **increase in violence against children and child marriages**.

GENERAL CAUSES OF CHILD MARRIAGES

Age Factor: Some parents consider the age period of **15-18** as **unproductive**, especially for girls, so they start finding a match for their child during this age period. Underaged girls are more prone to child marriage than boys. Further, the **Right To Education Act** makes education free and compulsory up to the age of 14 only.



Insecurity: Law and Order are still not able to provide a secure environment for the girls in adolescent age, so some parents get their girl child married at a young age. Other Reasons includes **Poverty, Political and financial reasons, Lack of education, Patriarchy and gender inequalities, etc.**

Impact: Delays Demographic Dividend: Child Marriage contributes to larger families and in turn, population growth. This delays the **demographic dividend** that would have come from **reduced fertility and investment in education.**

Bad for Family: Children married at a young age do not understand the responsibilities of marriage. This results in a lack of understanding among family members. Hence, **disturbs the institution of the family.**

On the Child Bride: It negatively influences children's rights to education, health and protection. A girl who is married as a child is more likely to be out of school and not earn money and contribute to the community. She is more likely to experience **domestic violence and become infected with HIV/AIDS.** There are more chances of her dying due to complications during pregnancy and childbirth.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES TO PREVENT CHILD MARRIAGES

The **Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929** restricts the practice of child marriage. The **Special Marriage Act, 1954** and the **Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006** prescribe 18 and 21

years as the minimum age of consent for marriage for women and men respectively. **The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006** was enacted to address and fix the shortcomings of the Child Marriage Restraint Act. The Union Ministry for Women and Child Development has set up a committee to examine matters pertaining to age of motherhood, imperatives of **lowering Maternal Mortality Ratio** and the improvement of nutritional levels among women. The **Committee is headed by Jaya Jaitely**. The Committee was proposed in the Union Budget 2020-21. **Prevention of Child Marriage is a part of SDG 5** which deals with **gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls**.

UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND (UNICEF)

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is a special program of the **United Nations (UN)** devoted to aiding national efforts to improve the health, nutrition, education, and general welfare of children. **UNICEF was created in 1946** as **International Children's Emergency Fund (ICEF)** by the **UN relief Rehabilitation Administration** to help children affected



by **World War II**. UNICEF became a permanent part of the United Nations in 1953. The name was shortened to **United Nations Children Fund** but it is still referred to as UNICEF. It is mandated by the United Nations General Assembly to advocate for the protection of children's rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential. **UNICEF is guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989**. It strives to establish children's rights as enduring ethical principles and international standards of behaviour towards children. UNICEF mobilizes political will and material resources to help countries, particularly developing countries. UNICEF is committed to ensuring special protection for the most disadvantaged children — victims of war, disasters, extreme poverty, all forms of violence and exploitation, especially those with disabilities. UNICEF works with all its partners **towards the attainment of the sustainable human development goals** adopted by the world community.

CONCLUSION

One way of keeping a check on **child marriages during the pandemic** would be to ensure that there is a **strong cohort of child protection workers among essential health workers**. India has a robust system of grassroots workers who have done commendable work in ensuring that health and other social security services reach people in these dire times. If such workers were incorporated into the system they could keep a check on **girl children at risk of early marriage and take steps to avert these**. This could be in the form of awareness counseling and helping some benefits reach the family concerned.

INDIA & UK LEADER'S VIRTUAL SUMMIT

Recently, the **Prime Ministers of India and the United Kingdom (UK)** held a bilateral virtual summit. India thanked the UK for the prompt medical assistance provided by it in the wake of the severe **second wave of Covid-19 in India**.

ADOPTED 'ROADMAP 2030'

It will elevate **bilateral ties to a “Comprehensive Strategic Partnership”**. It will provide a framework for **UK-India relations across health, climate, trade, education, science and technology, and defence**. This will expand the UK-India health partnership to enhance global health security and pandemic resilience. This includes firming up international supply chains to **ensure critical medicines, vaccines and other medical products reach those who need them most**. Agreed to expand the existing UK-India vaccines partnership.



Launched Enhanced Trade Partnership: It envisages facilitating market access in specific sectors. It will see **Britain open up its fisheries sector** to more Indian players, facilitate more opportunities for nurses, recognise Indian seafarers' certificates and enter into a joint dialogue on a social security agreement. In return, India lifted restrictions to enable British fruit producers to export their produce to the country and improved access for medical devices. They will also work towards reciprocal opening up of legal services. Announced their intent to negotiate a **comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (FTA)**, including consideration of an interim trade agreement to deliver early gains. Set an ambitious target of more than doubling bilateral trade by 2030.

INDIA-UK 'GLOBAL INNOVATION PARTNERSHIP'

The **UK is India's second largest partner in research and innovation collaborations.** The new partnership aims to support the transfer of inclusive Indian innovations to **select developing countries, starting with Africa.**



Security & Defence: Cooperation on Maritime Domain Awareness: This includes new agreements on maritime information sharing, an **invitation to the UK to join India's Information Fusion Centre in Gurgaon** and an ambitious exercise programme which includes joint trilateral exercises.

UK's Carrier Strike Group: The UK's Carrier Strike Group will visit India later this year to boost ties with Indian navies and air forces, undertaking joint training exercises to enable future cooperation on operations in the **Western Indian Ocean (UK's Indo-Pacific Tilt).**

Light Combat Aircraft Mark 2: To support India's indigenous development of the **Light Combat Aircraft Mark 2.**

Potential Collaborations: Discussed the potential for further industrial collaboration in areas such as **maritime propulsion, space and cyber, marking the start of a promising new era of UK-India research,** capability and industrial collaboration on Indian combat air and beyond.

Migration: Enhance their migration relationship, to make it easier for **British and Indian nationals to live and work in each other's countries.** Welcomed the signing of the **India-UK Migration and Mobility Partnership (MMP)** that is aimed at reducing illegal immigration into the UK. The issue of illegal immigration had been a sticking point between both sides for years. However it is understood that MMP will help genuine immigrants and students and will reduce immigration-related crimes.

Climate Change: Agreed to work together to ensure an ambitious outcome at **Conference of the Parties (COP) 26** and expand the **UK-India partnership** on tackling **climate change**, including by accelerating the development of clean energy and transport and new technology, protecting nature and biodiversity and helping developing countries adapt to the impact of climate change.

Bilateral Military Exercises

Air Force Exercise '**Indradhanush**'.

Navy Exercise **Konkan**.

Army Exercise '**Ajeya Warrior**'

India will elevate to a **21st century superpower**. It will soon be 'one of the biggest influences on the world'. It is looking for new partners in the global race. This represents a great opportunity for the UK. The UK has much to offer India in education, research, civil society and the creative sector.

Further, India's skilled labour, technological assistance and the vibrant market will open a lot of avenues for Britain which has recently parted ways with the European Union.

INDIA-UK NEEDING EACH OTHER

Rise of India: India is undergoing a transition that could have **significant consequences for the UK**. India is already the third largest economy in the world (at purchasing power parity exchange rates) and is expected to become the second largest in the coming decades. As its economy is transformed, its political, military and cultural power is also likely to increase, elevating India to a 21st

Century superpower. As **Jim O'Neill** has written, India will soon be '**one of the biggest influences on the world**'. It is looking for new partners in the global race. This represents a great opportunity for the UK.



Re-surging UK: UK has much to offer India in education, research, civil society and the creative sector. The massive growth of India's **English-speaking middle classes offers a critical window of opportunity** for the UK to become a partner of choice for trade, diplomacy, culture and education before India's next generation turns its attention elsewhere.

ASSOCIATED CHALLENGES IN UK-INDIA RELATIONSHIP

While **India's relations with countries as different as the US and France** have dramatically improved in recent years, ties with Britain have lagged. Following reasons can be cited for this:

Colonial Prism: One reason for this failure has been the colonial prism that has distorted mutual perceptions. **Anti-colonial resentment against Britain** is always seething barely below the surface among the **Indian political and bureaucratic classes**. Britain has found it difficult to shed its own prejudices about India.

Legacy of Partition: The bitter legacies of the Partition and Britain's perceived tilt to Pakistan have long **complicated the engagement between India and the UK**. Further, many former Prime Ministers of Indian have accused Britain of creating the Kashmir problem.

Recent Attitude of the Labour Party: While there is no way of **fully separating South Asian and British domestic politics**, India's problems have been accentuated by the British Labour Party's growing political negativity towards India. The Labour Party had become rather hostile on **India's internal matters, including on Kashmir**.

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ISRAEL IRON DOME AIR DEFENCE SYSTEM

Israel used its **Iron Dome air defence system** in recent violent clashes over Jerusalem. It is a short-range, ground-to-air, air defence system that includes a radar and Tamir interceptor missiles that track and neutralise any rockets or missiles aimed at Israeli targets. It is used for **countering rockets, artillery & mortars as well as aircraft, helicopters and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV)**. It is capable of being used in all weather



conditions, including during the day and night. It was developed by the **state-run Rafael Advanced Defense Systems and Israel Aerospace Industries and was deployed in 2011**. Rafael claims a success rate of over 90%, with more than 2,000 interceptions, however experts agree the success rate is over 80%. It can protect deployed and manoeuvring forces, as well as the **Forward Operating Base (FOB)** and urban areas, against a wide range of indirect and aerial threats.

COMPONENTS OF THE IRON DOME SYSTEM

The **Iron Dome** has three main systems that work together to provide a shield over the area where it is deployed which are:

- **Radar:** It has a detection and tracking radar to spot any incoming threats.
- **Weapon Control:** It has a **battle management and weapon control system (BMC)**,
- **Missile Fire:** It also has a missile firing unit. The BMC basically liaises **between the radar and the interceptor missile**.

INDIAN ALTERNATIVES

S-400 TRIUMF: India has **S-400 TRIUMF**, which also caters to the **three threats (rockets, missiles and cruise missiles)**. But they have much longer range. It has a much larger air defence

bubble to knock off threats. It is a mobile, **surface-to-air missile system (SAM) designed by Russia**. The system can engage all types of aerial targets within the range of 400km, at an altitude of up to 30km. The system can track **100 airborne targets and engage six of them simultaneously**.

Prithvi Air Defence and Advance Air Defence: It is a double-tiered system consisting of two land and sea-based interceptor missiles, namely the **Prithvi Air Defence (PAD) missile** for high altitude interception, and the **Advanced Air Defence (AAD) Missile** for lower altitude interception. It is able to intercept any incoming missile launched 5,000 kilometres away. The system also includes an overlapping network of early warning and tracking radars, as well as command and control posts.

Ashwin Advanced Air Defence Interceptor Missile: It is also an indigenously produced **Advanced Air Defence (AAD) interceptor missile** developed by **Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)**. It is the advanced version of the low altitude supersonic ballistic interceptor missile. The missile also has its own mobile launcher, secure data link for **interception, independent tracking and homing capabilities and sophisticated radars**. It uses an endo-spheric (within the Earth's atmosphere) interceptor that knocks out ballistic missiles at a maximum altitude of 60,000 to 100,000 feet, and across a range between 90 and 125 miles

BACKGROUND: TERRITORIAL PUZZLE

West Bank: The West Bank is sandwiched **between Israel and Jordan**. One of its major cities is Ramallah, the **de facto administrative capital of Palestine**. Israel took control of it in the 1967 war and has over the years established settlements there.



Gaza: The Gaza Strip located **between Israel and Egypt**. Israel occupied the strip after 1967, but **relinquished control of Gaza City and day-to-day administration** in most of the territory during the Oslo peace process. In 2005, Israel unilaterally

removed Jewish settlements from the territory, though it continues to control international access to it.

Golan Heights: The **Golan Heights** is a strategic plateau that Israel captured from Syria in the 1967 war. Israel effectively annexed the territory in 1981. Recently, the USA has officially recognized **Jerusalem and Golan Heights a part of Israel.**

Palestinian Authority- Created by the **1993 Oslo Accords**, it is the official governing body of the Palestinian people, led by **President Mahmoud Abbas of the Fatah faction.** Hobbled by corruption and by political infighting, the PA has failed to become the stable negotiating partner its creators had hoped.

Fatah- Founded by the **late Yasir Arafat in the 1950s**, Fatah is **the largest Palestinian political faction.** Unlike Hamas, Fatah is a secular movement, has **nominally recognized Israel, and has actively participated in the peace process.**

Hamas- Hamas is regarded as a terrorist organization by the U.S. government. In 2006, Hamas won the Palestinian Authority's legislative elections. **It ejected Fatah from Gaza in 2007,** splitting the Palestinian movement geographically, as well.

THE TWO STATE SOLUTION: ISRAEL & PALESTINE

The “**two state solution**” is based on a **UN resolution of 1947** which proposed two states - one would be a state where **Zionist Jews constituted a majority**, the other where the **Palestinian Arabs** would be a majority of the population. The idea was however rejected by the Arabs. For decades, it has been held by the international community as **the only realistic deal to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.**

Borders: There is no consensus about precisely where to draw the line – **with Israel building settlements** and constructing barriers in areas like the **West Bank that creates a de facto**

border. This makes it difficult to establish that land as part of an **independent Palestine, breaking it up into non-contiguous pieces.**

Jerusalem: Both sides claim Jerusalem as their capital and consider it a center of religious worship and cultural heritage making its division difficult.

In December 2017, **Israel declared Jerusalem as its capital** and the step found support from the USA, intensifying the situation in the region.

Refugees: Large numbers of Palestinians who fled their homes in what is now Israel, during the preceding wars as well as their descendants believe they deserve the right to return but Israel is against it.

Divided Political Leadership on Both sides: The Palestinian leadership is divided - two-state solution is supported by **Palestinian nationalists in West Bank but the leadership in Gaza does not even recognize Israel.** Further, while successive **Israeli Prime Ministers - Ehud Barak, Ariel Sharon, Ehud Olmert and Benjamin Netanyahu** - have all accepted the idea of a Palestinian state, they have differed in terms of what it should actually comprise.

KYRGYZSTAN-TAJIKISTAN BORDER TENSION

Recently, a **ceasefire on the border between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan** appeared to be holding after a day of intense fighting between the two countries that has killed about 40 people and wounded about 175. **Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan** belong to the central asia region. Other countries of the region are **Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.**



BACKGROUND OF THE ISSUE

Both nations have claimed the area around the **water supply facility in Kok-Tash**, a dispute dating back decades to **when they were both part of the Soviet Union.** The current configuration of the Kyrgyz-Tajik border is the product of Soviet mapmakers drawing the dividing lines for Soviet republics, after the **Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) collapsed in late 1991.** The meandering boundary between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan is particularly tense as over a third of its 1,000-km length is disputed. Restrictions on access to land and water that communities regard as theirs have often led to deadly clashes in the past.

International Response: Russia and European Union (EU) welcomed the ceasefire deal and emphasised the need for a lasting and peaceful solution.

IMPORTANCE OF CENTRAL ASIA FOR INDIA

Political: India has a very wide array of interests in Central Asia covering **security, energy, economic opportunities etc.** Security, stability and prosperity of Central Asia is imperative for peace and economic development of India. Central Asia serves as a land bridge between Asia and Europe, making it geopolitically axial for India.



Both India and Central Asian Republics (CARs) share many commonalities and perceptions on various regional and world issues and can play a crucial role in providing regional stability.

Economic: The region is rich in natural resources such as petroleum, natural gas, antimony, aluminum, gold, silver, coal and uranium which can be best utilized by Indian energy requirements. Central Asia has huge cultivable areas lying barren and without being put to any productive use, offering enormous opportunity for cultivation of pulses. **CARs are fast getting linked to the global market for production, supplies of raw materials and services.** They are also increasingly getting integrated into the **East-West Trans-Eurasian transit economic corridors.**

Indian Initiatives: India intends expansion of **International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC) to Afghanistan and Uzbekistan.** It will act as a vital gateway to access Eurasian markets and optimally operationalize its use, requiring a Central Asian state joining the project as a direct stakeholder.

India-Central Asia Dialogue: India has proposed setting up of ‘**India-Central Asia Development Group**’ to take forward development partnership between **India & Central Asian countries.** This group will help India to expand its footprints in the resource-rich region amid China’s massive inroads and to **fight terror effectively, including in Afghanistan.**

RELATIONSHIP B/W INDIA & KYRGYZSTAN

Political: India has **enjoyed strong bilateral ties with Kyrgyzstan since 1991.** India was one of the first countries to **establish diplomatic ties with Kyrgyzstan in 1992.**



Culture & Economic: Since 1992, the two countries have many agreements, including on **Culture, Trade and Economic Cooperation, Civil Aviation, Investment Promotion and Protection, Avoidance of Double Taxation, Consular Convention etc.**

Military: In 2011, the joint ‘Khanjar’ series of exercises was started.

Indian Diaspora: In Kyrgyzstan, about 9,000 Indian students are studying medicine in various medical institutions in the country. Also, there are many businessmen living in Kyrgyzstan who are involved in trade and several other services there.

Strategic: The Kyrgyz leaderships have been largely supportive of India’s stand on Kashmir. They also support India’s bid for a permanent seat at the **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)**.

RELATIONSHIP B/W INDIA & TAJIKISTAN

Political: India and Tajikistan elevated bilateral relations to the level of a Strategic Partnership in 2012. Tajikistan supported India’s membership to the **Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)** and also permanent membership of an expanded UNSC. India supported Tajikistan's accession to the **World Trade Organization in 2013**.



Culture & Economic: Trade between two sides is not to expectations despite efforts from both countries, due to more transit time and lack of readily accessible trade routes. Despite limitations, trade in **food processing, mining, pharmaceuticals, textiles, skill development, science & technology, Information Technology**, culture and tourism are continued between two countries.

India’s Assistance: India delivered major food assistance in 2001-02. To overcome a crisis caused by an unprecedented harsh winter in January-February 2008, India gave a grant of USD 2 million (USD 1 million as cash assistance and USD 1 million in kind, such as power cables, generators and pump sets). India provided 2 million doses of oral polio vaccine through the **United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) in November 2010**. In March 2018, India gifted

10 Russian-made ambulances to various regions of Tajikistan drawing substantial media coverage and appreciation from high offices.

Indian Diaspora: The total number of Indians is estimated at about 1550, out of which more than 1250 are students.

CONCLUSION

Geography has placed central asia at the nexus of crucial **political and economic transformations for centuries**. With the actualization of the Belt and Road Initiative, India's Connect Central Asia policy, and the EU's new **Central Asia strategy**, the **21st century could possibly be the most decisive period for the region**. Stemming from its historic cultural and economic bonds, India is now well placed to take a more active role in the development of the region. India's growing global visibility and key contributions to multilateral forums like the SCO have catapulted India from an observer into a critical stakeholder in the region. As India looks beyond its borders, **Central Asia provides India** with the right platform to leverage its **political, economic and cultural connections to play a leading role in Eurasia**.

MALERKOTLA AS 23RD DISTRICT OF PUNJAB

Recently, the **Punjab government** has announced the **formation of Malerkotla as the 23rd district of the state. Section 5 of the Punjab Land Revenue Act, 1887** says the “State government may, by notification, vary the limits and alter the numbers of tehsils, districts and divisions into which the State is divided.”



History of Malerkotla: The Malerkotla is former princely state and only Muslim-dominated town of Punjab. **Historically, Malerkotla owes its foundations in the 15th century** to Sufi saint Sheikh Sadrauddin Sadar-i-Jahan, **also known as Haider Sheikh.** After the decline of the Mughal empire, Malerkotla’s rulers exercised greater independence and at the time of the invasion of India by Ahmad Shah Abdali from Afghanistan, they aligned with him. **Ahmed Shah Abdali invaded India eight times from 1748 to 1767.** In 19th century, Malerkotla became one among the cis-Sutlej states. Malerkotla continued under the British protection and the alliance with the neighbouring Sikh states till 1947 when it became the only Muslim majority Sikh state in East Punjab. After the dissolution of the princely states in **1948, Malerkotla joined the new state of PEPSU or Patiala and East Punjab States Union (PEPSU).** PEPSU itself was dissolved in 1954 and Malerkotla became a part of Punjab.

CIS-SUTLEJ STATES

The **Cis-Sutlej states** were a group of small states in **Punjab region in the 19th century**, lying between the Sutlej River on the north, the Himalayas on the east, the Yamuna River and Delhi District on the south, and Sirsa District on the west. The states were called **Cis- Sutlej by the British** because they were on the British, or southern, side of the Sutlej River. The Cis-Sutlej states included Kaithal, Patiala, Jind, Thanesar, Malerkotla and Faridkot. Under the threat of absorption into **Sikh Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s kingdom**, they appealed to the British, who established dominance over them by the **Treaty of Amritsar with Ranjit Singh (1809).** The states survived until the independence of India (1947), at which time they were organized into

the **Patiala and East Punjab States Union (PEPSU)**. They subsequently were absorbed into the Indian states of Punjab and Haryana.

MALERKOTLA & THE SIKH COMMUNITY

‘Haa Da Naara’ Episode (1705): Malerkotla **Nawab Sher Mohammad Khan** had raised his voice (‘Haa Da Naara’) against brutal execution of Chote Sahibzade (youngest sons of Guru Gobind Singh — Zorawar Singh (9) and Fateh Singh (6) – by Nawab of Sirhind, Wazir Khan in 1705. Gurdwara Haa da Naara Sahib was built in Malerkotla to commemorate the voice raised by Sher Mohammad Khan.



Wadda Ghallugara (1762): The Nawab Bhikam Shah fought on the side of Abdali’s forces in a battle against the Sikhs in 1762. The battle is known as **‘Wadda Ghallugara’ or the Great Holocaust** where tens and thousands of Sikhs were killed.

Treaty of Friendship (1769): In 1769, a treaty of friendship was signed with **Raja Amar Singh** of Patiala by the then **Nawab of Malerkotla**.

Namdhari Massacre (1872): The British administration of **Malerkotla (Punjab)** was attacked by the contingents of Namdharis (a sect of Sikhs) under the leadership of Hira Singh and lehna Singh, on 15th January, 1872. The British Administration ordered that the Namdhari revolutionaries should be brought to the Parade Ground and blown up with cannons. That ground as a **symbol of martyrdom has been named now as ‘Kukian Da Shaheedi Park’**.

CREATION OF NEW DISTRICTS

Role of State: The power to create new districts or alter or abolish **existing districts rests with the State governments**. This can either be done through an executive order or by passing a law

in the State Assembly. Many States prefer the executive route by **simply issuing a notification in the official gazette.**

Purpose of Creation: States argue that smaller districts lead to better administration and governance. For example, in 2016, the Assam government issued a notification to upgrade the **Majuli sub-division to Majuli district for “administrative expediency”.**

Role of Centre: The Centre has no role to play in the **alteration of districts or creation of new ones.** States are free to decide.

Role of Home Ministry: The Home Ministry comes into the picture when a State wants to change the name of a district or a railway station. The State government’s request is sent to other departments and agencies such as the **Ministry of Earth Sciences, Intelligence Bureau, Department of Posts, Geographical Survey of India Sciences and the Railway Ministry** seeking clearance. A no-objection certificate may be issued after examining their replies.

Number of Districts in India: According to the 2011 Census, there were 593 districts in the country. **Between 2001-2011,** as many as 46 districts were created by States. Though the 2021 Census is yet to happen, currently there are **718 districts in the country.** The surge in number is also due to **bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh into A.P and Telangana in 2014.**

MARATHA RESERVATION STRUCK DOWN: SC

Recently, the Supreme Court (SC) declared a Maharashtra law which provides reservation benefits to the Maratha community, taking the quota limit in the State in excess of 50%, as unconstitutional.

BACKGROUND OF THE ISSUE

- **2017:** A 11-member commission headed by **Retired Justice N G Gaikwad** recommended Marathas should be given reservation under Socially and Educationally Backward Class (SEBC).
- **2018:** Maharashtra Assembly passed a Bill **proposing 16% reservation for Maratha community.**
- **2018:** The Bombay High Court while upholding the reservation pointed out that instead of 16% it should be **reduced to 12% in education and 13% in jobs.**
- **2020:** The SC stayed its **implementation and referred the case to Chief Justice of India for a larger bench.**



CURRENT RULING OF THE SUPREME COURT

Violation of Fundamental Rights: A separate reservation for the Maratha community violates **Articles 14 (right to equality) and 21 (due process of law)**. Reservation breaching the 50% limit will create a **society based on “caste rule”**. The Maratha reservation of 12% and 13% (in education and jobs) had increased the overall reservation ceiling to 64% and 65%, respectively. In the **Indira Sawhney judgment 1992**, SC had categorically said 50% shall be the rule, only in certain exceptional and extraordinary situations for bringing far-flung and remote areas' population into mainstream said 50% rule can be relaxed.

No Further Benefits: Appointments made under the **Maratha quota following the Bombay High Court** judgment endorsing the State law would hold, but they would get no further benefits.

Deprived States of the Power to Identify SEBCs: There will only be a single list of SEBC with respect to each State and Union Territory notified by the President of India, and that States can only make recommendations for inclusion or exclusion, with any subsequent change to be made only by Parliament. The Bench unanimously upheld the constitutional validity of the 102nd Constitution Amendment but differed on the **question whether it affected the power of states to identify SEBCs.**

Direction to NCBC: Asked the **National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC)** to expedite the recommendation of SEBCs so that the President can publish the notification containing the list of SEBCs in relation to **States and Union Territories expeditiously.**

102nd Amendment Act of 2018

It introduced Articles 338B and 342A in the Constitution. Article 338B deals with the newly established **National Commission for Backward Classes.** Article 342A empowers the President to specify the socially and educationally backward communities in a State. It says that it is for the Parliament to include a community in the Central List for socially and backward classes for grant of reservation benefits.

CONSTITUTION & RESERVATIONS PROVISION

77th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1995: The **Indra Sawhney verdict** had held there would be reservation only in initial appointments and not promotions. However, addition of the **article 16(4A) to the Constitution,** empowered the state to make provisions for reservation in matters of **promotion to SC/ST employees,** if the state feels they are not adequately represented.

81st Constitutional Amendment Act, 2000: It introduced **Article 16(4B)**, which says unfilled SC/ST quota of a particular year, when carried forward to the next year, will be treated separately and not clubbed with the regular vacancies of that year.

85th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2001: It provided for the reservation in promotion can be applied with 'consequential seniority' for the government servants belonging to the SCs and STs with retrospective effect from June 1995.

102nd, 103rd and 104th Amendments: In the last couple of decades, there have been several amendments to the constitution like the 102nd amendment, 104th amendment. **10% reservation for EWS. was made by the 103rd amendment to the Constitution.**

Article 335: It says that the claims of SCs and STs shall be taken into consideration constitutively with the maintenance of efficacy of the administration.

1992 JUDGEMENT & STATE'S ADHERENCE

Indra Sawhney & Others vs Union of India, 1992: The judgement on Indra Sawhney case was passed on 16 November, 1992. It was a **nine-judge verdict which decisively laid down several landmark propositions such as 50% threshold in reservations.** It said, "Reservation being an extreme form of protective measure should be confined to a minority of seats even though the constitution does not lay down any **specific**

bar, the principle of balancing equality; reservation of any manner shall not exceed 50%".

The concept of 'creamy layer' also gained importance through this judgment and provision that reservation for backward classes should be confined to initial appointments only and not extend to promotions. Earlier, the reservation was meant to be only for SCs and STs. It was the Mandal Commission case that brought Other Backward Classes (OBCs) under reserved category.



Adherence of the Limit by the States: Notwithstanding the **judgement passed by the Supreme Court**, since 1992, many states have passed laws breaching this limit of 50% such as **Maharashtra, Telangana, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh**. Besides, **Tamil Nadu, Haryana and Chhattisgarh**, have also passed similar laws, causing them to exceed the 50% reservation mark. The apex court has decided to look into Tamil Nadu's 69% quota law after deciding the Maratha quota case. The 69% quota in the state pre-dates the Indra Sawhney judgement. In January 2000, the Governor of the erstwhile state of **Andhra Pradesh declared 100% reservation to Scheduled Tribes (ST) candidates** in posts of school teachers in Scheduled Areas. However, it was ruled as unconstitutional by the apex court.

50% Reservation Not a Law: Although the **limit of 50%** is not set by any statute but it is laid down by the apex court and hence was binding to all the authorities. However, **the judgement itself said that in exceptional circumstances**, the percentage can be increased. The issue that arises with **the 'exceptional circumstance'** is that if it actually exists in a given case or not and if yes then by how much can the limit exceed.

G7 FOREIGN MINISTER'S MEETING 2021

Recently, **Foreign Ministers from the Group of Seven (G7) countries (USA, UK, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan)** held a meeting in London, UK. The 47th G7 Summit will be held in June 2021. The UK is the host country.



ABOUT THE G7 FOREIGN MINISTER MEETING

Invited Guests: **Australia, India, South Korea, South Africa and the Chair (Brunei Darussalam) of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)**. Australia, India, South Korea and South Africa will also join the G7 Summit in June.

Discussions: **Russia's Irresponsible and Destabilising Behaviour: This includes the large build-up of Russian military forces on Ukraine's borders and in illegally-annexed Crimea.**

Related to China: Human rights violations and abuses in **Xinjiang and in Tibet**, especially the **targeting of Uyghurs, members of other ethnic and religious minority groups**. Called on China to respect Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy and rights and freedoms (Basic Law). Condemned the military coup in Myanmar.

Indo-Pacific: Support for the centrality of ASEAN on the Indo-Pacific. Reiterated the importance of maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific which is inclusive and based on the rule of law, democratic values, territorial integrity, transparency, the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the peaceful resolution of disputes.

International Rules-based Order: This can be described as a shared commitment by all countries to conduct their activities in accordance with agreed rules that evolve over time, such as **international law, regional security arrangements, trade agreements, immigration protocols, and cultural arrangements.**

GROUP OF SEVEN (G-7)

The Group of Seven (G-7) is an informal bloc of industrialized democracies—**France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, Japan, the United States, and Canada**—that meets annually to discuss issues of common interest like global economic governance, international security and energy policy.



History: The G-7 has its roots in an informal meeting of the **finance ministers of France, West Germany, the U.S, Great Britain, and Japan** (the Group of Five) in the wake of the 1973 oil crisis. The French President invited the leaders of West Germany, U.S, Great Britain, Japan and Italy, to Rambouillet (France) in 1975 for further discussions on global oil crisis.

Membership: **France, West Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States** formed **the Group of Six in 1975 to provide a venue** for the industrialized democracies to address pressing economic concerns. In 1976, Canada was also invited to join the group and **the first meeting with all G-7 nations was hosted by the United States** which was held in **Puerto Rico in 1976**. The European Union has participated fully in the G-7 since 1981 as a "non enumerated" member. It is represented by the presidents of the European Council, which represents the EU member states' leaders, and the **European Commission (the E.U.'s executive branch)**. The G-7 was known as the G-8 for several years after the **original seven were joined by Russia in 1997**. The inclusion of USSR in G-7 was meant as a signal of cooperation between East and West after the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991. The group returned to being called G-7 after Russia was expelled as a member in 2014 following the annexation of the Crimea region of Ukraine. There are no formal criteria for membership, but participants are all highly developed democracies. The aggregate GDP of **G-7 member states makes up nearly 50% of the global economy and 10% of the world's population.**

Summit Participation: Summits are held annually and hosted on a rotation basis by the group's members. The host country not only holds the G7 presidency but also sets the agenda for the

year. Invitation to Global leaders are sent by host nation to participate in summit as special invitees. Countries like **China, India, Mexico, and Brazil** have attended summit at various occasions. The leaders of important international organizations like **European Union, IMF, World Bank and the United Nations** are also invited.

INDIA & G7 RELATIONSHIP

Previous Participation: The participation of India at the **45th summit in Biarritz, France, in August 2019** is a reflection of deepening strategic partnership and recognition of India as a major economic power. **India was also invited for the 2020 summit hosted by the USA** which could not take place due to the pandemic. Previously India had attended the G8 summit (it became G7 from G8 with the expulsion of Russia in 2014) five times between 2005 and 2009.



SIGNIFICANCE OF INDIA'S ENGAGEMENT WITH G7

It provides an opportunity for India to develop cordial relations with developed countries.

It will boost security cooperation with member countries in **Indo-Pacific, particularly the Indian ocean**. As current president of **Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa (BRICS)** and G20 president in 2023, India will play a key role driving in multilateral cooperation helping to build back better around the world.

PM MODI PARTICIPATED IN INDIA-EU LEADER'S MEETING

Recently, **Indian Prime Minister participated in the India-European Union (EU) Leaders' Meeting**. The meeting was held in a hybrid format with the participation of leaders of all the **27 EU Member States** as well as the President of the European Council and the European Commission. This is the first time that the EU hosted a meeting with India in the **EU+27 format**. The meeting was the initiative of the **Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU**.



Free Trade Negotiations: Agreed to relaunch free trade negotiations by resuming talks that were suspended for the **Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA)**. India and EU had launched talks for having a **wide-ranging Free Trade Agreement (FTA)**, officially called broad-based BTIA, long ago in 2007. The BTIA was proposed to encompass trade in goods, services and investments. However, the talks stalled in 2013 over differences on market access and movement of professionals. **The EU was India's largest trading partner in goods 2019-20, ahead of China and the US, with total trade close to USD 90 billion.**

Connectivity Partnership: Launched an **ambitious and comprehensive 'Connectivity Partnership'** which is focused on enhancing digital, energy, transport and people-to-people connectivity. It is based on the shared principles of **social, economic, fiscal, climate and environmental sustainability, and respect for international law and commitments**. It will catalyse private and public financing for connectivity projects. It will also foster new synergies for supporting connectivity initiatives in third countries, including in the Indo-Pacific. Also signed the contract for the second tranche of USD 150 million from the EU for the Pune Metro rail project.

Climate Change: Reiterated their commitment to achieving the **goals of the Paris Agreement and agreed to strengthen joint efforts for mitigation**, adaptation and resilience to the impacts of climate change, as well as providing means of implementation including finance in the context

of Conference of the Parties (COP 26). India welcomed the EU's decision to join the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI).

Technology: Agreed to enhance bilateral cooperation on **digital and emerging technologies such as 5G, Artificial Intelligence (AI)**, Quantum and High-Performance Computing including through the early operationalization of the Joint Task Force on AI and the Digital Investment Forum.

Strengthening Partnership: Desired to further strengthen the **India-EU Strategic Partnership** based on a shared commitment to democracy, fundamental freedoms, rule of law and multilateralism. India appreciated the prompt assistance provided by the EU and its member states to combat its second Covid wave. India also requested the EU's support for its joint proposal with South Africa for a **Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property (TRIPS) waiver on vaccine production-related patents in the World Trade Organisation (WTO)**. Recently, the US has supported the proposal. However, India failed to secure the support of the European leaders.

INDIA-EU STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

India-EU Strategic Partnership: A Roadmap to 2025 has been endorsed between India and EU as a common roadmap to guide joint action and further strengthen the Strategic Partnership over the next five years.



Same Values: India and EU both are "unions of diversity", sharing values of democracy, rule of law and human rights. Both are equally convinced of the necessity to preserve the **rules-based international order and effective multilateralism**.

Common Interests: Both have a common interest in each other's security, prosperity and sustainable development. They can **contribute jointly to a safer, cleaner and more stable world**.

Trade Pact: India and EU have agreed to launch a high-level trade dialogue to foster progress on “**balanced, ambitious and mutually beneficial**” trade and investment agreements, **address trade irritants and discuss supply chain linkages.** High-level trade dialogue will be held between the EU trade commissioner and India’s Commerce Minister. **India and EU had launched talks for having a wide-ranging Free Trade Agreement (FTA),** officially called broad-based **Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA), long ago in 2007.** The BTIA was proposed to encompass trade in goods, services and investments. However, the talks stalled in 2013 over differences on market access and movement of professionals. The EU is India’s largest trading partner grouping (**countrywise USA is India’s largest trading partner**), while **India is the EU 's ninth biggest trading partner.**

OTHER AREAS OF COOPERATION

Civil Nuclear Cooperation: A civil nuclear cooperation agreement was signed between the **European Atomic Energy Community or Euratom and Department of Atomic Energy, India.** The agreement will focus on research and development cooperation for peaceful uses of nuclear energy and on new ways of using nuclear energy.



Defence and Security Cooperation: The two sides also agreed to scale up defence and security ties which included: The launch of a new maritime security dialogue. Consultations on crisis management and deeper cooperation between the **Indian Navy and the European Union Naval Force Atalanta.** The EU’s counter-piracy military operation in the western Indian Ocean. The EU officials described the recent India-China border standoff on the **Line of Actual Control (LAC) as a matter of considerable concern.** India’s **Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)** and Europol launched negotiations to combat organised crime and terrorism. Both decided to intensify cooperation to tackle terror and its financing, radicalisation and abuse of the internet for such activities. **Pakistan’s support for terrorism** aimed at India and other countries in the region was also figured in the discussions.

ABOUT EUROPEAN UNION (EU)

European Union (EU), is an international organization comprising 27 European countries and governing common economic, social, and security policies. The **EU was created by the Maastricht Treaty**, which entered into force on November 1, 1993. The treaty was designed to enhance European political and economic integration by creating a single currency (the euro), a unified foreign and security policy, and common citizenship rights and by advancing cooperation in the areas of **immigration, asylum, and judicial affairs**.

CONCLUSION

India-EU Leaders' Meeting has set a significant milestone by providing a new direction to the **Strategic Partnership** and giving a fresh impetus for implementing the **ambitious India-EU Roadmap 2025 adopted at the 15th India-EU Summit** held in July 2020. There is a need for **comprehensive trade agreement** that brings in strong rules, removes barriers to trade in goods and services and investments and opens up free markets. Addressing the mutual trust deficit, facilitating people's mobility and connectivity can improve mutual understanding and create opportunities for innovation and growth. Enhanced business cooperation **between EU and India** can diversify their strategic value chains and reduce **economic dependency—notably on China**.

MoWCD WILL SET UP ONE STOP CENTRES

The **Ministry of Women and Child Development** will set up **One Stop Centres (OSCs)** across 10 countries to provide assistance to Indian women who are survivors of gender-based violence. The missions where the OSCs will come up are **Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, UAE, Jeddah and Riyadh in Saudi Arabia, Australia, Canada and Singapore**. It will also set up 300 OSCs in the country in addition to the nearly 700 existing ones across all districts.



About: It is a centrally sponsored scheme for addressing the problem of violence against women. **It was launched in April 2015**. It is a subscheme of the umbrella scheme for **National Mission for Empowerment of Women including Indira Gandhi Matritrav Sahyaog Yojana**. One stop centre will be established across the country and at least one OSC in every mission around the world to provide integrated support and assistance under one roof to women affected by violence. Indian missions represent an important form of contact between the Indians around the world and the government of India.

OBJECTIVES OF THE INITIATIVES

To support women affected by the violence that they may face **within the family or at the workplace or within the community, in private or public places**. Specially for women who face sexual, physical, psychological, emotional and economic abuse, irrespective of their caste, creed, race, class, education status, age, culture, or marital status.

Funding: It is funded through **Nirbhaya** Fund and the central government **provides 100% financial assistance** to the state governments /Union Territories administrations.

Nirbhaya Fund: The Nirbhaya Fund Framework provides for a non-lapsable corpus fund for safety and security of women. It was established in 2013. It is administered by the **Department**

of Economic Affairs (DEA) of the Ministry of Finance (MoF) of the Government of India. It can be utilized for projects and initiatives related to women safety.

Auditing: Audit will be done as per **Comptroller & Auditor General of India** norms and social audit will also be undertaken by civil society groups.

Services: Emergency response and rescue services, Medical assistance, Assistance to women in lodging the FIR, Psycho-social support and counselling, Legal aid and counselling, Shelter, Video conferencing facility.

INDIAN LEGISLATION TO PREVENT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

- **The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013:**

The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, built on the **Vishaka Guidelines issued by the Supreme Court in 1997**, is in place. The act was laid down to

ensure that women in particular are protected against sexual harassment at all workplaces, be it in public or private. It is mandated by law that every company with more than 10 employees have: a policy against sexual harassment, a trained Internal Complaints Committee with one external member, and mandatory training of employees on what is sexual harassment and how to seek help within the organization.



- **The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO), 2012:** The POCSO Act, 2012 was enacted to Protect the Children from Offences of **Sexual Assault, Sexual harassment and pornography** with due regard for safeguarding the interest and well-being of children. The Act defines a child as any person below eighteen years of age, and regards the best interests and welfare of the child as the matter of paramount importance at every stage, to ensure the healthy physical, emotional, intellectual and social development

of the child. The Act defines **different forms of sexual abuse, including penetrative and non penetrative assault, as well as sexual harassment and pornography.**

- **The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961:** Dowry Prohibition Act, Indian law, enacted on May 1, 1961, intended to prevent the giving or receiving of a dowry. Under the Dowry Prohibition Act, dowry includes **property, goods, or money given by either party to the marriage, by the parents of either party, or by anyone else in connection with the marriage.**

SOME OTHER INITIATIVES FOR WOMEN

- **Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY):** (PMUY) aims to safeguard the health of women & children by providing them with a **clean cooking fuel – LPG**, so that they don't have to compromise their health in smoky kitchens or wander in unsafe areas collecting firewood. Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana was **launched by Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi** on May 1st, 2016 in Ballia, Uttar Pradesh.



Under this scheme, 5 Cr LPG connections will be provided to BPL families with a support of Rs.1600 per connection in the next 3 years. **Ensuring women's empowerment, especially in rural India**, the connections will be issued in the name of women of the households. Rs. 8000 Cr. has been allocated towards the implementation of the scheme. Identification of the BPL families will be done through **Socio Economic Caste Census Data.**

- **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme:** The government has announced the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao initiative to ensure survival, protection, and empowerment of the girl child. This is being implemented through a **national campaign and focussed multisectoral action in 100 selected districts low in CSR**, covering all States and UTs. This is a joint initiative of the **Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Ministry of Human Resource Development.**

The objectives of this initiative are:

- Prevention of gender-biased sex-selective elimination
 - Ensuring survival & protection of the girl child
 - Ensuring education and participation of the girl child
- **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.
- **Kiran Scheme:** The **Knowledge Involvement in Research Advancement through Nurturing (KIRAN)** Scheme is one of the several pioneering initiatives started by the **Department of Science and Technology (DST)** for promoting women in science. The Department of Science and Technology (DST) is implementing '**Knowledge Involvement in Research Advancement through Nurturing (KIRAN)**' Scheme to provide various career opportunities to women scientists and technologists. It is primarily aimed to bring gender parity in the **Science & Technology sector** by inducting more women talent in the research & development domain through various programmes.

NASA'S OSIRIS-REX MISSION

Recently, NASA's **OSIRIS-REx** spacecraft departed from **asteroid Benu**, and started its two-year long journey back to Earth. **OSIRIS-REx** is NASA's **first mission** to visit a near-Earth asteroid, survey its surface and collect a sample from it.



ABOUT OSIRIS-REX MISSION

It is the **United States' first asteroid sample return mission**, aiming to collect and carry a pristine, unaltered sample from an asteroid back to earth for scientific study. The **OSIRIS-REx (Origins, Spectral Interpretation, Resource Identification, Security, Regolith Explorer)** spacecraft was launched in 2016 for the journey to Bennu. The mission is essentially a seven-year-long voyage and will conclude when at least 60 grams of samples are delivered back to the Earth (in 2023). As per the **National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)**, the mission promises to bring the largest amount of extraterrestrial material back to the Earth since the Apollo era. **Apollo was the NASA program** that resulted in American astronauts' making a total of 11 space flights and walking on the moon (1968-72). The spacecraft contains five instruments meant to explore Bennu including cameras, a spectrometer and a laser altimeter. Recently, the spacecraft's robotic arm called the **Touch-And-Go Sample Acquisition Mechanism (TAGSAM)**, made an attempt to **"TAG" the asteroid at a sample site and collected a sample.**

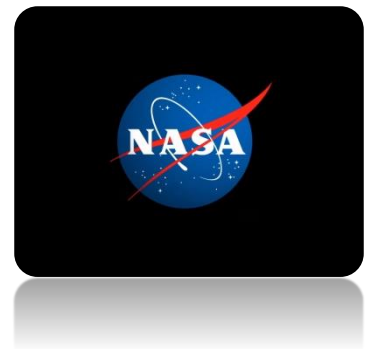
SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MISSION

Scientists will use the **asteroid samples to study the formation of the solar system** and of habitable planets such as Earth. NASA will also distribute a part of the samples to laboratories worldwide and will reserve about 75% of the samples for future generations who can study it with technologies not yet created.

Asteroid Bennu: Bennu is an ancient asteroid, currently more than 200 million miles from Earth. It is about as tall as the **Empire State Building (US)** and is named after an Egyptian deity. The asteroid was discovered by a team from the **NASA-funded Lincoln Near-Earth Asteroid Research** team in 1999. It is known that this asteroid is a B-type asteroid, implying that it contains significant amounts of carbon and various other minerals. **Because of its high carbon content, it reflects about 4% of the light that hits it**, which is very low when compared with a planet like Venus, which reflects about 65% of the light that hits it. Earth reflects about 30%. **Around 20-40% of Bennu's interior** is empty space and scientists believe that it was formed in the first 10 million years of the solar system's formation, implying that it is roughly 4.5 billion years old. There is a slight possibility that Bennu, which is classified as a **Near Earth Object (NEO)**, might strike the Earth in the next century, between the years 2175 and 2199. NEOs are comets and asteroids nudged by the gravitational attraction of nearby planets into orbits which allows them to enter the Earth's neighbourhood. Bennu is believed to have been born in the Main Asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter and because of gravitational tugs from other celestial objects and the slight push asteroids get when they release absorbed sunlight, the asteroid is coming closer to Earth. Bennu offers scientists a window into the early solar system as it was first taking shape billions of years ago and tossing ingredients that could have helped seed life on Earth. Significantly, Bennu hasn't undergone drastic changes since its formation over billions of years ago and therefore it contains chemicals and rocks dating back to the birth of the solar system. It is also relatively close to the Earth.

NATIONAL AERONAUTICS & SPACE ADMINISTRATION (NASA)

The **National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)** is an independent agency of the executive branch of the United States federal government responsible for the civilian space program, as well as aeronautics and aerospace research. **Established under the National Aeronautics and Space Act 1958.** Headquarters: **Washington, DC, USA**



History: Following World War II, the United States was in direct competition with the erstwhile Soviet Union (the superpower that was disbanded into several sovereign nations including the **Russian Federation, Kazakhstan, the Ukraine**, etc. in 1991). That **period was called “Cold War”**. It was the Soviet Union’s launch of Sputnik on October 4, 1957, that first put an object into orbit around Earth. It was followed in November by the even larger Sputnik II, which carried the dog Laika. Only in late January 1958, the United States could launch Explorer 1, hoisted aloft by the Army’s rocket team, using rocket technology developed from World War II. Though a small spacecraft weighing only 30 pounds, it discovered what are now **known as the Van Allen radiation belts**, named for the **University of Iowa scientist Dr. James Van Allen**, launching the new discipline of space science. Explorer 1 was followed in March, 1958 by the Navy’s Vanguard 1, 6 inches in diameter and weighing only 3 pounds. NASA’s birth was directly related to the launch of the Sputniks and the ensuing race to demonstrate technological superiority in space. Driven by the competition of the Cold War, on July 29, 1958, **President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the National Aeronautics and Space Act**, providing for research into the problems of flight within Earth’s atmosphere and in space.

WHAT ARE THE ASTEROIDS?

These are **rocky objects that orbit the Sun**, much smaller than planets. They are also called minor planets. **According to NASA, 9,94,383 is the count of known asteroids**, the remnants from the formation of the solar system over 4.6 billion years ago.



Asteroids are divided into three classes: First, those found in the **main asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter**, which is estimated to contain somewhere between 1.1-1.9 million asteroids. The second group is that of trojans, which are asteroids that share an orbit with a larger planet. The third classification is **Near-Earth Asteroids (NEA)**, which have orbits that pass close by the Earth. Those that cross the Earth’s orbit are called Earth-crossers. More than 10,000 such asteroids are known, out of which over 1,400 are classified as **Potentially Hazardous Asteroids (PHAs)**. PHAs are currently defined based on parameters that measure the **asteroid’s potential to make threatening close approaches to the Earth**.

Specifically, all asteroids with an **Earth Minimum Orbit Intersection Distance (MOID)** of 0.05 au or less and an absolute magnitude (H) of 22.0 or less are considered PHAs.

NZE ROADMAP 'NET ZERO BY 2050'

Recently, the **International Energy Agency's (IEA)** released its **Net Zero Emissions (NZE)** Roadmap - named 'Net Zero by 2050'. It is the World's first comprehensive energy roadmap which comes ahead of the **United Nations Conference of the Parties (COP) 26 climate change convention in Glasgow, Scotland** in November 2021. 'Net zero emissions' refers to achieving an overall balance between greenhouse gas emissions produced and greenhouse gas emissions taken out of the atmosphere.



Need: Climate pledges by governments till date even if fully achieved would fall well short of what is required to bring global **energy-related carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions** to net zero by 2050 and give the world an even chance of limiting the global temperature rise to 1.5 °C.

AIM OF THE ROADMAP (NZE 2050)

- **Examine Impact:** To examine the **impacts of announced NZE pledges** and what they might mean for the energy sector.
- **New Energy Pathway:** To develop a new energy-sector pathway **towards achieving NZE globally by 2050.**
- **Recommend Governments:** To set out key policy recommendations for governments to act upon in the near-term, and a long-term agenda for change to **achieve net-zero goals**, including with a view to reaching other **Sustainable Development Goals.**



PRINCIPLES TO BE FOLLOWED

- **Technology Neutrality:** **Technology neutrality**, with adoption driven by costs, technological readiness, country and market conditions and trade-offs with wider societal goals. Technology Neutrality is generally described as the freedom of individuals and

organizations to choose the most appropriate and suitable technology to their needs and requirements for development, acquisition, use or commercialisation, without dependencies on knowledge involved as information or data.

- **Universal Cooperation:** Universal international cooperation, in which all countries contribute to net zero, with an eye to a ‘just transition’ and where advanced economies lead.
- **Minimizing Volatility:** An orderly transition that seeks to minimise stranded assets where possible, while **ensuring energy security and minimising volatility in energy markets.**

Milestones Set by the Roadmap: More than 400 milestones to guide the global journey to **net zero by 2050 which include:**

- **Fossil Fuels:** No investment in new fossil fuel supply projects, and no further final investment decisions for new unabated coal plants.
- **Vehicle sale:** No sales of new **internal combustion engine passenger cars by 2035.**
- **Electricity Generation:** The global electricity sector should reach **net-zero emissions by 2040.** It calls for annual additions of solar power to reach 630 gigawatts by 2030, and those of wind power to reach 390 gigawatts. Together, this is four times the record level set in 2020.

It suggests the following on global electricity generation towards 2050:

- 714% more renewables.
- 104% more nuclear.
- 93% less coal (and all remaining coal with Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS)).
- 85% less natural gas (with 73% of that with CCS).

Significance: It is supposed to provide a pathway to bridge the current gap between rhetoric and reality in **reducing GreenHouse Gas (GHG) emissions** from the **energy and industry sectors.**

CRITICISM

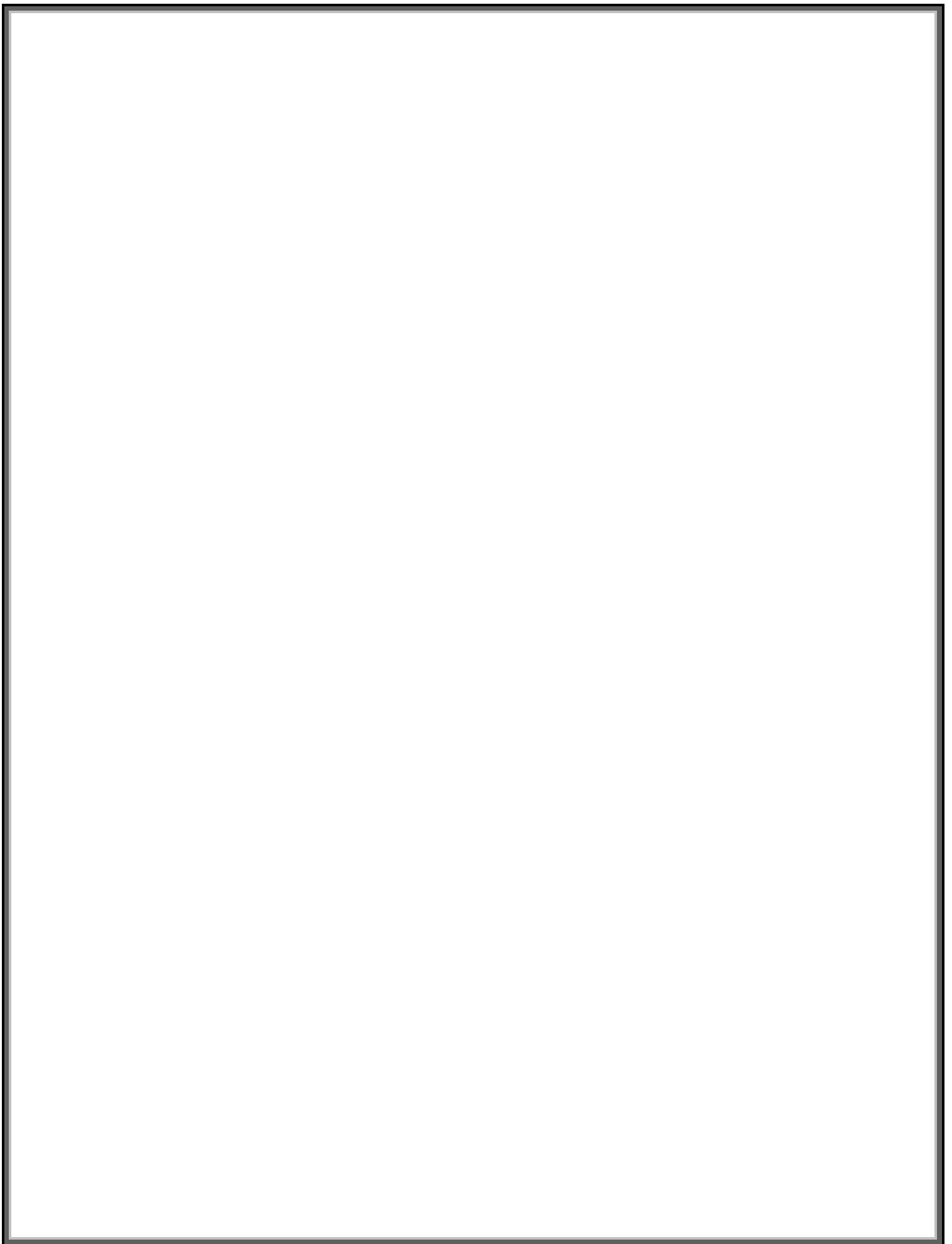
Ignorance: IEA did not consider historical emitters, ignoring the principle of ‘climate justice’. Developed countries benefited from the Industrial Revolution at the cost of emitting GHGs, leading to climate change. Hence, they have the **economies to decarbonise**, allowing space for poor and developing countries to get financing and innovation organised to switch to cleaner energy options.



Regulations Needed: There is potentially an over-reliance on behavioral change to consume less energy. Regulations will be essential to positively **motivate constructive social change in economies**.

INTERNATIONAL ENERGY AGENCY (IEA)

IEA is an autonomous **Intergovernmental Organisation established in 1974 in Paris, France**. **IEA** mainly focuses on its energy policies which include economic development, energy security and environmental protection. These policies are also **known as the 3 E's of IEA**. India became an Associate member of IEA in March 2017 but it was in engagement with IEA long before its association with the organization. Recently, India has inked a **Strategic Partnership Agreement with the IEA** to strengthen cooperation in global energy security, stability and sustainability. The **World Energy Outlook Report** is released by the **IEA annually**. Recently, it has released the **India Energy Outlook 2021 Report**. **IEA Clean Coal Centre** is dedicated to providing independent information and analysis on how coal can become a cleaner source of energy, compatible with the **UN Sustainable Development Goals**. The world is facing a formidable task of transforming the energy sector within 30 years in a cost-effective manner, even as the world economy more than doubles in size and the global population increases by 2 billion people. The need for the **world to reach NZE by 2050 lies in the major interim steps** that need to be taken through 2030 — to engineer cheap and green energy from hydrogen and **renewable energy while making them accessible to all**.



PM MODI PARTICIPATED IN INDIA-EU LEADER'S MEETING

Recently, **Indian Prime Minister participated in the India-European Union (EU) Leaders' Meeting.** The meeting was held in a hybrid format with the participation of leaders of all the **27 EU Member States** as well as the President of the European Council and the European Commission. This is the first time that the EU hosted a meeting with India in the **EU+27 format.** The meeting was the initiative of the **Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU.**



Free Trade Negotiations: Agreed to relaunch free trade negotiations by resuming talks that were suspended for the **Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA).** India and EU had launched talks for having a **wide-ranging Free Trade Agreement (FTA),** officially called broad-based BTIA, long ago in 2007. The BTIA was proposed to encompass trade in goods, services and investments. However, the talks stalled in 2013 over differences on market access and movement of professionals. **The EU was India's largest trading partner in goods 2019-20, ahead of China and the US, with total trade close to USD 90 billion.**

Connectivity Partnership: Launched an **ambitious and comprehensive 'Connectivity Partnership'** which is focused on enhancing digital, energy, transport and people-to-people connectivity. It is based on the shared principles of **social, economic, fiscal, climate and environmental sustainability, and respect for international law and commitments.** It will catalyse private and public financing for connectivity projects. It will also foster new synergies for supporting connectivity initiatives in third countries, including in the Indo-Pacific. Also signed the contract for the second tranche of USD 150 million from the EU for the Pune Metro rail project.

Climate Change: Reiterated their commitment to achieving the **goals of the Paris Agreement and agreed to strengthen joint efforts for mitigation,** adaptation and resilience to the impacts of climate change, as well as providing means of implementation including finance in the context

of Conference of the Parties (COP 26). India welcomed the EU's decision to join the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI).

Technology: Agreed to enhance bilateral cooperation on **digital and emerging technologies such as 5G, Artificial Intelligence (AI)**, Quantum and High-Performance Computing including through the early operationalization of the Joint Task Force on AI and the Digital Investment Forum.

Strengthening Partnership: Desired to further strengthen the **India-EU Strategic Partnership** based on a shared commitment to democracy, fundamental freedoms, rule of law and multilateralism. India appreciated the prompt assistance provided by the EU and its member states to combat its second Covid wave. India also requested the EU's support for its joint proposal with South Africa for a **Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property (TRIPS) waiver on vaccine production-related patents in the World Trade Organisation (WTO)**. Recently, the US has supported the proposal. However, India failed to secure the support of the European leaders.

INDIA-EU STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

India-EU Strategic Partnership: A Roadmap to 2025 has been endorsed between India and EU as a common roadmap to guide joint action and further strengthen the Strategic Partnership over the next five years.



Same Values: India and EU both are "unions of diversity", sharing values of democracy, rule of law and human rights. Both are equally convinced of the necessity to preserve the **rules-based international order and effective multilateralism**.

Common Interests: Both have a common interest in each other's security, prosperity and sustainable development. They can **contribute jointly to a safer, cleaner and more stable world**.

Trade Pact: India and EU have agreed to launch a high-level trade dialogue to foster progress on “**balanced, ambitious and mutually beneficial**” trade and investment agreements, **address trade irritants and discuss supply chain linkages.** High-level trade dialogue will be held between the EU trade commissioner and India’s Commerce Minister. **India and EU had launched talks for having a wide-ranging Free Trade Agreement (FTA),** officially called broad-based **Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA), long ago in 2007.** The BTIA was proposed to encompass trade in goods, services and investments. However, the talks stalled in 2013 over differences on market access and movement of professionals. The EU is India’s largest trading partner grouping (**countrywise USA is India’s largest trading partner**), while **India is the EU 's ninth biggest trading partner.**

OTHER AREAS OF COOPERATION

Civil Nuclear Cooperation: A civil nuclear cooperation agreement was signed between the **European Atomic Energy Community or Euratom and Department of Atomic Energy, India.** The agreement will focus on research and development cooperation for peaceful uses of nuclear energy and on new ways of using nuclear energy.



Defence and Security Cooperation: The two sides also agreed to scale up defence and security ties which included: The launch of a new maritime security dialogue. Consultations on crisis management and deeper cooperation between the **Indian Navy and the European Union Naval Force Atalanta.** The EU’s counter-piracy military operation in the western Indian Ocean. The EU officials described the recent India-China border standoff on the **Line of Actual Control (LAC) as a matter of considerable concern.** India’s **Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)** and Europol launched negotiations to combat organised crime and terrorism. Both decided to intensify cooperation to tackle terror and its financing, radicalisation and abuse of the internet for such activities. **Pakistan’s support for terrorism** aimed at India and other countries in the region was also figured in the discussions.

ABOUT EUROPEAN UNION (EU)

European Union (EU), is an international organization comprising 27 European countries and governing common economic, social, and security policies. The **EU was created by the Maastricht Treaty**, which entered into force on November 1, 1993. The treaty was designed to enhance European political and economic integration by creating a single currency (the euro), a unified foreign and security policy, and common citizenship rights and by advancing cooperation in the areas of **immigration, asylum, and judicial affairs**.

CONCLUSION

India-EU Leaders' Meeting has set a significant milestone by providing a new direction to the **Strategic Partnership** and giving a fresh impetus for implementing the **ambitious India-EU Roadmap 2025 adopted at the 15th India-EU Summit** held in July 2020. There is a need for **comprehensive trade agreement** that brings in strong rules, removes barriers to trade in goods and services and investments and opens up free markets. Addressing the mutual trust deficit, facilitating people's mobility and connectivity can improve mutual understanding and create opportunities for innovation and growth. Enhanced business cooperation **between EU and India** can diversify their strategic value chains and reduce **economic dependency—notably on China**.

SIX PLACES ADDED TO UNESCO'S WORLD HERITAGE SITE

Recently, six Indian places have been added to the tentative list of UNESCO's (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) world heritage sites. The submissions were made by Archaeological Survey of India, which is responsible for the conservation and preservation of Indian monuments.



Tentative List: As per Operational Guidelines, 2019 of UNESCO, it is mandatory to put any monument/site on the **Tentative List (TL) for one year before** it is considered for the final nomination dossier. Once the nomination is done, it is sent to the **World Heritage Centre (WHC)**. India has 48 sites in the TL as of now.

UNESCO'S WORLD HERITAGE SITES

Any of various areas or objects inscribed on the **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage List**. The sites are designated as having “outstanding universal value” under the Convention Concerning the Protection of the **World Cultural and Natural Heritage 1972**. The **World Heritage Centre** is the Secretariat to the 1972 Convention. It provides a framework for international cooperation in preserving and protecting cultural treasures and natural areas throughout the world. There are three types of sites: **Cultural, Natural, and Mixed**. **Cultural heritage sites** include hundreds of historic buildings and town sites, important archaeological sites, and works of monumental sculpture or painting. Natural heritage sites are restricted to those natural areas that have excellent ecological and evolutionary processes, unique natural phenomena, habitats of rare or endangered species etc. Mixed heritage sites contain elements of both natural and cultural significance. **India has 38 world heritage sites, including 30 cultural properties, 7 natural properties and 1 mixed site. The latest one included is Jaipur city, Rajasthan.**

NEW SIX PLACES IN TENTATIVE LIST

- **Satpura Tiger Reserve (Madhya Pradesh):** Home to 26 species of the Himalayan region including reptiles, and 42 species of Nilgiri areas. It is the **largest tiger-occupied forest and also has the largest tiger population.**



- **Ghats of Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh):** The ghats date back to the **14th century but most were rebuilt, along with Varanasi,** in the 18th century by Maratha rulers. They have special significance in Hindu mythology, and are primarily used for bathing and Hindu religious rituals.
- **Megalithic Site of Hire Benkal (Karnataka):** This 2,800-years-old megalithic site is one of the largest prehistoric megalithic settlements where some funerary monuments are still intact. The granite structures are burial monuments that may also have served many ritual purposes. Due to the extremely valuable collection of Neolithic monuments, the site was proposed for recognition.
- **Maratha Military Architecture in Maharashtra:** There are 12 forts in Maharashtra dating back to the era of the **17th century Maratha king Chhatrapati Shivaji.** They are **Shivneri, Raigad, Torna, Rajgad, Salher-Mulher, Panhala, Pratapgad, Lohagad, Sindhudurg, Padmadurga, Vijaydurg and Kolaba.** These forts offer new insight in various forms of architecture including rock cut features, construction of perimeter walls in layers on hill tops and slopes, temples, palaces, markets, residential areas, and almost every form of medieval architecture.
- **Bhedaghat-Lametaghat in Narmada Valley- Jabalpur (Madhya Pradesh):** Bhedaghat, referred to as the **Grand Canyon of India,** is a town in the Jabalpur district. It is known for its marble rocks and their various morphological forms on either side of the Narmada river which flows through the gorge. Several dinosaur fossils have been found in the **Narmada valley,** particularly in the **Bhedaghat-Lameta Ghat area of Jabalpur.** River Narmada

narrows down on its way through marble rocks and plunges in a waterfall giving out the appearance of a smoke cascade.

- **Temples of Kanchipuram (Tamil Nadu):** Kanchipuram is known for its spirituality, serenity, and silk. It is situated on the banks of River Vegavathi. This historical city once had 1,000 temples, of which only 126 (108 Shaiva and 18 Vaishnava) now remain. Its rich legacy has been the **endowment of the Pallava dynasty**, which made the region its capital between the 6th and 7th centuries and lavished upon its architectural gems that are a fine example of Dravidian styles.

WHAT IS UNESCO?

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations (UN). It seeks to build peace through international cooperation in Education, the Sciences and Culture. It is also a member of the **United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG)**, a coalition of

UN agencies and organizations aimed at fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). **UNESCO's Headquarters** are located in Paris and the Organization has more than 50 field offices around the world. It has 193 Members and 11 Associate Members (As of April 2020) and is governed by the General Conference and the Executive Board. Three UNESCO member states are not UN members: **Cook Islands, Niue, and Palestine**. While three UN member states (Israel, Liechtenstein, United States) are not UNESCO members.



UNESCO focuses on a set of objectives such as:

- Attaining quality education for all and lifelong learning
- Mobilizing science knowledge and policy for sustainable development
- Addressing emerging social and ethical challenges
- Fostering cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue and a culture of peace

- Building inclusive knowledge societies through information and communication
- Focuses on global priority areas - “Africa” and “Gender Equality”.

History: In 1942, during the Second World War, the governments of the European countries, which were confronting Germany and its allies, met in the United Kingdom for the **Conference of Allied Ministers of Education (CAME)**. Upon the proposal of CAME, a United Nations Conference for the establishment of an educational and cultural organization was convened in London in November 1945. At the end of the conference, UNESCO was founded on 16 November 1945. The first session of the **General Conference of UNESCO was held in Paris during November-December of 1946.**

TRIPS WAIVER FOR COVID-19 VACCINES

Recently, **India and South Africa** have piloted the proposal to waive key provisions of the TRIPS agreement on **Covid-19 vaccines, drugs, therapeutics, and related technologies**. This proposal has been now backed by the U.S also. The TRIPS waiver proposal would give immunity to member countries from a legal challenge at the WTO if their **domestic Intellectual Property**



Regulation (IPR) laws suspend or do not enforce IP protection. The core idea behind this TRIPS proposal is that the IPR should not become barriers in scaling up production of medical products essential to combat Covid-19. However, the TRIPS waiver is unlikely to solve India's Covid-19 vaccine shortage. Instead of trying to obtain an IP waiver, the Indian government must enable vaccine manufacturers to expand production (**through compulsory licensing**) & **reduce inefficiencies in procurement & distribution**.

TRIPS AGREEMENT & INDIA LAW

The **TRIPS agreement was negotiated in 1995** at the WTO, it requires all its signatory countries to enact domestic law. It guarantees minimum standards of IP protection. Such legal consistency enables innovators to monetise their intellectual property in multiple countries. **In 2001, the WTO signed the Doha Declaration**, which clarified that in a public health emergency, governments could compel companies to license their patents to manufacturers, even if they did not think the offered price was acceptable. **This provision, commonly referred to as “compulsory licensing”, was already built into the TRIPS Agreement and the Doha declaration** only clarified its usage. **Under Section 92 of the 1970 Indian Patents Act**, the central government has the power to allow compulsory licenses to be issued at any time in case of a national emergency or circumstances of extreme urgency.

Why is the TRIPS waiver unlikely to solve India's Covid-19 vaccine shortage?

Complex Intellectual Property Mechanism: The process of vaccine development and manufacturing has several steps, and involves a complex intellectual property mechanism.

Different types of IP rights apply to different steps and there is no one kind of IP that could unlock the secret to manufacturing a vaccine. The expertise to manufacture it may be protected as a trade secret, and the data from clinical trials to test vaccine safety and efficacy may be protected by copyright.

Complex Manufacturing Mechanism: Manufacturing vaccines will need to design the process for manufacturing the vaccines, source necessary **raw materials, build production facilities, and conduct clinical trials** to get regulatory approvals. The manufacturing process itself has different steps, some of which may be subcontracted to other parties. Thus, a patent waiver alone does not empower manufacturers to start vaccine production immediately.

NEED FOR INVOKING COMPULSORY LICENSING

Plugging Shortage of Vaccine: The richest countries have **cornered about 80 percent of vaccine supplies so far.** While India needs to supplement its output to ensure that a population of over 900 million which is above 18 years of age **gets about 1.8 billion doses at the earliest.** Thus, compulsory licensing can be used to augment the supply of drugs and other therapeutics.



Nudging Voluntary Licensing: An assertive posture on compulsory licences would also have the advantage of forcing **several pharmaceutical companies to offer licences voluntarily.**

Leading By Example: Licensing Covaxin widely would enable India to live up to its reputation of being the **'pharmacy of the world'** and also put pressure on developed countries to transfer their vaccine technology to developing countries. Thus, the government should not only transfer **Covaxin's technology to domestic pharmaceutical companies,** to boost national supplies, but also offer it to foreign corporations. By unlocking its vaccine technical know-how to the world, India would demonstrate its resolve to walk the talk on the TRIPS waiver.

CHINA TO SUPPORT GLOBAL TRIPS WAIVER

China on May 17, 2021, said that it will support India's and South Africa's proposal for a temporary waiver of **Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS)** for coronavirus vaccines.

It further mentioned that Beijing will contribute to all actions of the developing countries to help them in their **fight against coronavirus. India and South Africa**, in October 2020, had

requested the **World Health Organization (WHO)** for **TRIPS** waiver of certain IP provisions of COVID-19 vaccines so that that developing countries can amplify vaccine production and provide access to COVID vaccines to the poorest of the poor people. **Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian** said in a press briefing that China, as the largest developing country is supportive of the developing world's demand for an IPR waiver for COVID-19 vaccines. He further said that China will back all actions so that developing countries can acquire vaccines in an equitable way to fight against the coronavirus.



WHAT IS TRIPS AGREEMENT?

TRIPS (Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights) is an international agreement among the member countries of the **World Trade Organization (WTO)**. TRIPS establishes standards and regulations protection of IP (intellectual property) rights like industrial designs, patents, copyright, and protection of confidential information or trade secrets. **TRIPS (Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights)** came into effect in January 1995. TRIPS enables each WTO member countries to negotiate compulsory licenses for each patent or protection applying to each product. The concern of the **developing countries in 2001** over the narrow reading of **TRIPS by developed countries led to a round of talks** that later became the Doha Declaration, a WTO statement that enlists the scope of TRIPS.

WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY (WPDF): 3RD MAY

The **World Press Freedom Day (WPDF)** is an annual celebration of press freedom, observed on 3rd May every year. The main celebration is organized by the **UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)**. It is also known as **World Press Day**. The day also pays tribute to journalists who have lost their lives. It is announced by the **United Nations General Assembly** on 3rd May to spread awareness about the importance of Freedom of the Press in functioning, information providing, its significance and to awaken the government of its duty to uphold and respect the right to freedom of expression. The **theme of World Press Freedom Day 2021 is “Information as a Public Good”**. The theme focuses on the importance of cherishing information as a public good and explores ways to strengthen journalism.



The day highlights three key topics:

- Ways to ensure the economic viability of news media.
- Mechanisms for making sure about the transparency of internet companies.
- To strengthen **Media and Information Literacy (MIL)** capacities that will help people to recognise and value journalism as an important part of information as a public good.

The theme of World Press Freedom Day 2020 was "**Journalism without Fear or Favour**". A global campaign was launched by UNESCO on media and social media channels focussing on **Journalism without Fear or Favour**. On 4 -6 May 2020, various events including **High-level Dialogue on Press Freedom and Tackling Disinformation in the COVID-19 context**, webinars, and online discussions through Facebook Live, Youtube, and Microsoft teams, amongst other digital platforms will be held. **On the site of UNESCO, debates are available.**

Sub-themes of the year 2020 are as follows:

- Safety of Women and Men Journalists and Media Workers.
- Independent and Professional Journalism free from Political and Commercial Influence.
- Gender Equality in all aspects of the Media.

BACKGROUND OF THE DAY

The day was proclaimed by the **UN General Assembly in 1993**, following the recommendation of **UNESCO's General Conference in 1991**. The day also marks the 1991 **Windhoek Declaration (adopted by UNESCO)**. It aimed towards the 'development of a free, independent and pluralistic press'.

World Press Conference 2021: The 2021 Global Conference was hosted by **UNESCO and the Government of Namibia**. It called for urgent attention to the threat of extinction faced by local news media around the world, a **crisis worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic**. It put forward ideas to tackle the challenges of our online media environment, push for more transparency of internet companies, strengthen safety of journalists, and improve their working conditions.

FREEDOM OF PRESS IN INDIA

Freedom of press is not expressly protected by Indian legal system but it is impliedly **protected under article 19(1) (a) of the constitution**, which states - "**All citizens shall have the right to freedom of speech and expression**". In 1950, the Supreme Court in **Romesh Thappar v. State of Madras** observed that freedom of the press lay at the foundation of all democratic organisations.



However, **Freedom of press is also not absolute**. It faces **certain restrictions under Article 19(2), which are as follows-** Matters related to interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India,

the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence.



Related Rankings/Findings: India has been ranked **142nd out of 180 nations in the World Press Freedom Index, 2021**, published by Reporters Sans Frontieres (RSF) or Reporters Without Borders. Reports such as **‘Freedom in the World 2021 (Freedom House, US)’**, **‘2020 Human Rights Report (US State Department)’**, **‘Autocratisation Goes Viral (V-Dem Institute, Sweden)’** have all highlighted intimidation of journalists in India.

CONCLUSION

Several cultural events are organised to determine the significance of press freedom. Initiatives of several nations are coordinated by the **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)** and most of the time it serves as an organising partner to foster the freedom of expression. UNESCO conferred awards to deserving organisations, individuals or institutions that have made commendable contributions in the promotion and defence of press freedom in any part of the world. In India, it is celebrated to salute the media journalists who risked their lives in providing information or sometimes lost their lives in the duty itself. Various Government officers, ministers take part while organising several events like art exhibitions; honour awards for the journalists who have risked their lives on duty etc. on this day in India. **But due to the COVID-19 pandemic**, the celebration goes online. **World Press Freedom Conference 2020** provides an opportunity to journalists, civil society representatives, national authorities, academics etc. to discuss the **emerging challenges to press freedom and journalist's safety and to work together to find out the solutions**. Since 1993, the conference is organised annually. It will be from 18-20 October, 2020 in the Hague, The Netherlands.

According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, everyone has the **right to freedom of opinion and expression**; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers. – **Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights**. We all know that in the development of any country, **media plays a crucial role**. It does not only aware of people what

is going on around the surrounding but also about the events which affect their lives. **Freedom of the Press should be taken seriously as the safety of journalists** while delivering information during their duties is of utmost importance. **Also, freedom of speech and expression right should be respected.**

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