

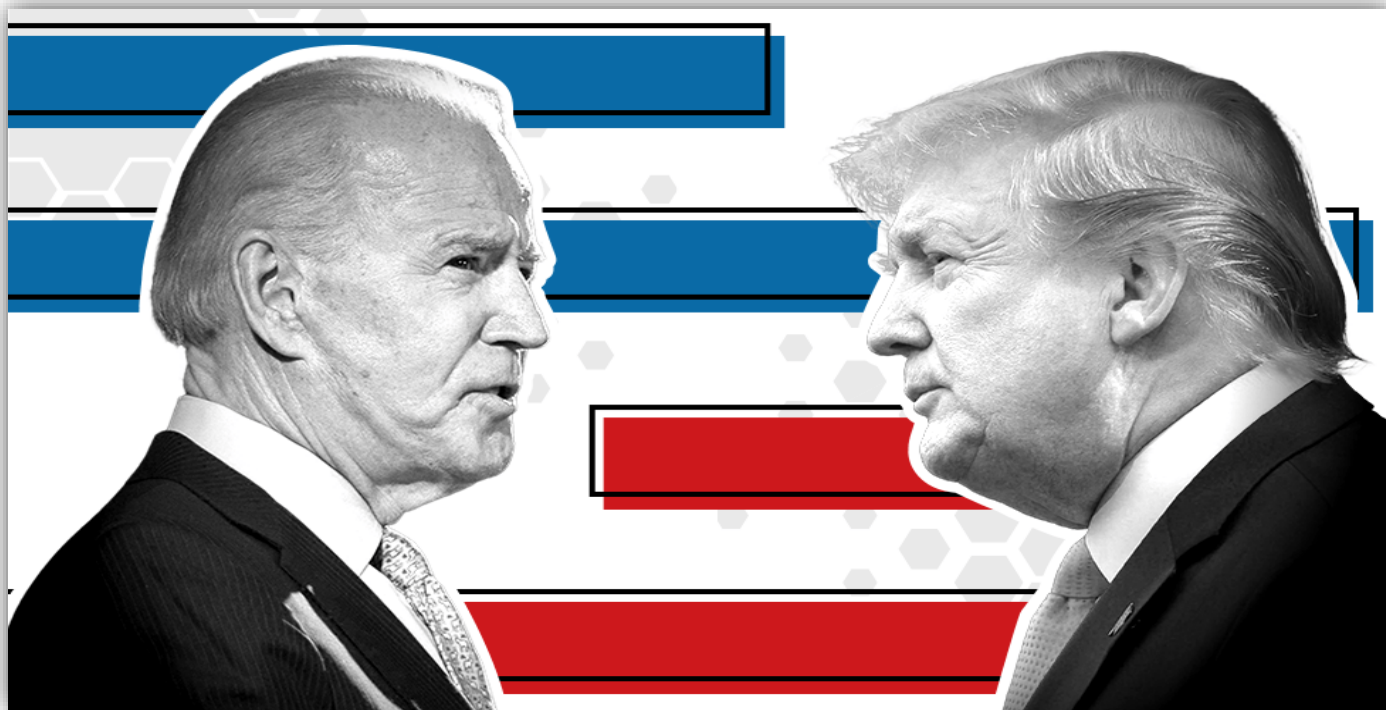
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

MOST IMPORTANT (LAST 6 MONTHS)



#NEWLY SWORN JOE BIDEN UNDO TRUMP'S POLICIES

- Newly sworn-in US President Joe Biden signed **almost 15 executive orders** from the Oval Office on the first day of his administration to undo his predecessor Donald Trump's key policies over the last four years.
- **Within hours of taking the oath of office, President Biden** recommitted the US to battling the **COVID-19 pandemic**, economic crisis and climate crisis.
- He said that the executive actions will help change the course of the **COVID crisis, combat climate change** in a way they had not done before, advance racial equity in support of underserved communities and rebuild economies.



Joe Biden reverses Trump policies

- The **first executive order signed by President Joe Biden was on COVID-19**, aimed at boosting the federal response to the **coronavirus crisis**. The order mandates masks to be worn and social distancing be kept on Federal property. The **second-order signed by President Biden commits support to underserved communities**.
- The **third order recommits the United States to the Paris Climate Accord**, from which former President Trump had formally **withdrawn the US in 2020**. The new President also halted US withdrawal from the **World Health Organisation** and recommitted to fight alongside the international body.
- **President Biden also ended Trump's Muslim travel ban**, which blocked travel to the US from several predominantly **Muslim and African countries**.
- He also halted the construction of **Trump's border wall with Mexico by terminating the administration's national emergency declaration** that helped fund the building of the wall. He also

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

revoked the presidential permit that was granted to the Keystone XL Pipeline project. Several environmentalists had been protesting against the project since over a decade.

- Biden has also signed an order to strengthen the **Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals** program to protect immigrants who were brought to the United States as children from deportation.
- He has also signed an executive order, revoking the **Trump administration's plan to exclude non-citizens** from the census count. He has also revoked a Trump executive order that demanded aggressive action to find and deport unauthorized immigrants.

US to rejoin Paris agreement

- As the **46th President of the United States, Joe Biden** signed an executive order on January 20, 2021 to rejoin the Paris accord.
- The order read, "I, **Joseph R Biden Jr, President of the United States of America**, having seen and considered the Paris Agreement, done at Paris on December 12, 2015, do hereby accept the said Agreement and every article and clause thereof on behalf of the United States of America." read the order.
- President Biden said that "we are going to combat climate change in a way we have not done so far." The signing of the executive order means that the **US will be a member of the accord in 30 days**.
- The new president has ordered federal agencies to begin reviewing and reinstating over 100 environmental regulations, which were revoked by **former president Donald Trump**.
- **Former President Trump** had withdrawn the **US from the Paris climate agreement in 2017**. The Paris climate agreement seeks to limit global warming to well below 2° Celsius, and preferably limit it to 1.5° Celsius, compared to pre-industrial levels.
- It was adopted by **196 countries at Conference of the Parties COP 21 in Paris** in December 2015 and signed on April 22, 2016.

US to rejoin World Health Organization

- **President Joe Biden informed United Nations Director-General Antonio Guterres** on January 20, 2021 about the US' decision to re-join **the World Health Organisation**, undoing the former President's plan to withdraw the US from the body.
- **President Biden** said that the United States intends to remain a member of the **World Health Organization and will be a part of WHO's fight against the coronavirus**.
- He added saying that WHO plays a crucial role in the world's fight against the deadly COVID-19 pandemic as well as countless other threats to global health and health security and that the US will continue to be a full participant and a global leader in confronting such threats and advancing global health and health security.
- **Former President Donald Trump** had pulled out the **US from the WHO in July 2020 after criticising its handling of COVID-19** and accusing the body of covering up the outbreak, which emerged in China in 2019.
- The US had also backed out of a joint global effort led by the WHO to develop, **manufacture and distribute a vaccine to cure corona virus**. The decision would have come into effect from July 6, 2021 but now will stand revoked.

Biden ends Trump's Muslim travel ban

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- **President Joe Biden** also ended his predecessor's '**Muslim travel ban**', which blocked travel to the US from several Muslim-majority nations.
- He **has directed the state department to restart the visa process** for individuals from affected countries and come up with ways to address the harm caused to those who were stopped from coming to the US due to the ban.
- The **Muslim travel ban was implemented during Trump's first week in office in 2017** and it restricted travel from seven Muslim-majority nations: Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen. Though had faced several legal challenges, the US Supreme Court had upheld the final version of the measure in 2018.
- Till recently, the ban restricted citizens from 12 nations - **Kyrgyzstan, Yemen, Iran, Libya, Syria, Nigeria, Myanmar, Eritrea, Somalia, Tanzania, North Korea and Sudan** from obtaining US visas.

#PRO TRUMP VIOLENCE IN US

A **ceremonial session of Congress** to formally declare **President-elect Joe Biden's victory** devolved in an instant into a scene of violence and mayhem in the Capitol on Wednesday when a **pro-Trump mob** stormed the building, **halting the counting of electoral votes**.



What were the protesters targeting?

- **Allegation of Fraud in Election: Mr. Trump** has refused to concede the 3 November election, repeatedly alleging fraud without providing any evidence.
- **Opposition to results by Republicans:** A joint session of Congress was being held to certify Mr Biden's election victory on 3 November. The proceedings are usually brief and ceremonial but Republican lawmakers have been objecting to some results.
- **Pressure from Trump:** For days **Mr Trump**, who has lost the election, had also been putting pressure on **Mr Pence (acting Vice-President)**, who is presiding over the session, to block certification of the result.
- **Mobilisation of Trump Supporters:** The protesters arrived at the Capitol from a "**Save America Rally**", where Mr Trump had urged them to support those legislators opposing Mr Biden's confirmation.
- **Obstructing Certification Process:** The protestor's attack on the capitol forced lawmakers to flee the **US Capitol and resulted in the death of one woman**, disrupted the process of certification of Biden as the winner.
- **Demands of Protestors to restore Trump:** The conviction of protestors is that the election was stolen from **President Trump**, and the lawmakers inside the building should do their duty and somehow award the election to him.
- **Incitement by Trump:** Even though Mr Trump recorded a video message on Twitter calling on **supporters to leave the Capitol**, but he continued to make unsubstantiated claims that Democrats had stolen the election. There are also reports of protests at state legislatures around the country.

How is the situation now?

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- **Election result is secured:** As lawmakers and staff rushed out, aides grabbed hold of the boxes containing the Electoral College certificates, making sure that the vandals could not literally steal the **results of the election**.
- **Curfew by Mayor: Troops and police were mobilised in neighbouring states**, and the FBI was deployed to help Capitol police. Mayor of the city announced curfew to help bring the situation under control.
- **Action by Social Media Platforms: Trump's Twitter and Facebook** account was locked for 12 hours after he pushed baseless claims about the election, and the social media platform warned him of permanent ban if he didn't remove his rule-breaking tweets.
- **Judiciary's Actions:** Multiple state and federal courts, including the US Supreme Court, have already dismissed or ruled against Trump and his allies in the Republican Party in lawsuits seeking to change the election results.

Critical Analysis & Reaction:

- **International Reaction:** Several world leaders including **UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson**, New Zealand Prime Minister **Jacinda Ardern** and UN Secretary-General **Antonio Guterres** expressed their shock over the incident.
- **Shows Unpredictable Behaviour of Mr Trump:** His use of tariffs as a political weapon against trade partners like **Europe and China**, his divisive rhetoric since long before his election in 2016, and his refusal to accept electoral loss in 2020, are continuation of his unpredictable behaviour. The violence is unlikely to be the last such challenge by **Trump to established US System**.
- **Sets Dangerous Precedent: Pro-Trump supporter's** efforts to **overturn a U.S. election** would send its democracy into a death spiral.
- **Investor Sentiment tested:** America is a safe haven for financial investors around the world. The violence puts the United States and its sanctuary status to a serious test.
- **Faith in US Institutions put to test:** If Washington gets back to work quickly, faith in U.S. institutions may be strengthened, else the **credibility of US system**, which is torchbearer of Democracy in the world, will be hampered.
- **Fault lines in Society:** Biden has called for peace and unity, but fractures in U.S. society remain. Pro-Trump supporters are not in mood to accept the defeat of Mr. Trump (that is partly aided by **Trump's unfounded allegations & rumours**). This has further widened the faultlines in US Society.

Conclusion

- **Institutional integrity**, a robust system of checks and balances, mostly means that people do their jobs. For the most part, it doesn't **require heroism or bravery**.

TRUMP FIRST US PRESIDENT TO BE IMPEACHED TWICE

- **US President Donald Trump** on January 13, 2021 became the first US President to be impeached twice by the **House of**



Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

Representatives. The House voted to charge him for inciting the mob violence at the **US Capitol building** on January 6.

- **Trump was impeached by the US House of Representatives** with 232 - 197 votes on a single charge of incitement of insurrection at the Capitol, which left five dead.
- The impeachment motion received support from all Democrats and 10 Republicans, including **Liz Cheney, Wyoming lawmaker and the daughter of former Vice President Dick Cheney** who condemned and denounced Trump's role in US Capitol riots.
- With this **Trump** became the **first president in the history of US politics to be impeached twice**. He was previously impeached on charges of abuse of power and obstruction of **Congress over the Ukraine scandal**.

What happened next

- After securing enough votes to pass the **US House of Representatives**, the impeachment resolution will now go to the **US Senate**.
- The **Senate** will be required to set up a trial, however, it will not hold it before January 20th, when **President-elect Joe Biden** will be **inaugurated as the next President of the United States**. This means that Donald Trump will escape the risk of being removed from office.
- This doesn't mean that Trump will escape trial, as he will have to face a Senate trial later and if convicted he might be barred in a follow-up vote from seeking **the presidency again in 2024**.
- **Ten Republicans** broke their party ranks to vote in favour of the impeachment resolution, creating history including party's number three in the **House Liz Cheney and John Katko, a ranking member of the House Committee on Homeland Security**. Others included Adam Kinzinger, Fred Upton, Jaime Herrera Beutler, Dan Newhouse, Anthony Gonzalez, Peter Meijer, David Valadao and Tom Rice.
- The lawmakers condemned the role played by the President in inciting the mob, which overwhelmed the police and **breached the security at the US Capitol**, causing destruction and violence inside the building and trespassing in congressional chambers at a time when **Electoral College votes** were being counted inside the building under the supervision of **Vice President Mike Pence**.
- All **Congress leaders** including the **Vice President had to be evacuated to safety**.
- Three US Presidents have been impeached by Congress- **Donald Trump, Andrew Johnson and Bill Clinton**. Among them, only Trump has been impeached twice in a single term.
- Besides them, only one other US President has faced formal impeachment inquiries in the **US House of Representatives- Richard Nixon**. However, no **US President** has ever been removed from office **through impeachment**.

Background

- **Donald Trump** faced the **first impeachment resolution** almost a year ago when the **Republican-controlled Senate** had acquitted him of using his office to try and get information on Biden's family before the election.
- This time he faced impeachment because of a speech he gave on January 6, in which he claimed that Biden had stolen the **presidential election** and asked his supporters to march on the **Congress to show strength**.

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- The mob **stormed into the US Capitol building**, causing violence and destruction, wrecking furniture and interrupting the counting of Electoral College votes that would confirm **Joe Biden's victory and forcing evacuations** of lawmakers present inside and Vice President Mike Pence who was presiding over the counting process.
- The riots fatally wounded one police officer and one protester was shot dead and three other people died of **"medical emergencies," bringing the death toll to five.**

Process of Impeachment in India:

(1) **When a President** is to be impeached **for violation of the Constitution**, the charge shall be preferred by **either House of Parliament**.

(2) No such charge shall be preferred unless—

(a) **the proposal to prefer such charge** is contained in a resolution which has been moved after at least fourteen days' notice in writing **signed by not less than one-fourth of the total number of members of the House** has been given of their intention to move the resolution, and

(b) **Such resolution** has been passed by a majority of not less than two-thirds of the total membership of the House.

(3) When a charge has **been so preferred by either House of Parliament**, the other House shall investigate the charge or cause the charge to be investigated and the President shall have the right to appear and to be represented at such investigation.

(4) If as a result of the **investigation a resolution is passed** by a majority of not less than two-thirds of the total membership of the House by which the charge was investigated or caused to be investigated, declaring that the charge **preferred against the President has been sustained**, such resolution shall have the effect of removing the President from his office as from the date on which the resolution is so passed.

#JOE BIDEN REVOKES TRUMP'S GREEN CARD BAN

- **US President Joe Biden** on February 24, 2021 **revoked** former President Trump's decision to **freeze green card applications** and certain types of visas.
- **Former President Donald Trump** had **issued the green card ban** last year amid the COVID-19 pandemic, saying that it was necessary to protect the **US workers amid high unemployment**. Trump had blocked many green card applicants from entering the United States.



- **President Biden, reversed the ban**, saying that the ban had prevented certain family members of US citizens and lawful permanent residents from reuniting with their **families in the United States and harmed US businesses and hurt industries and individuals alike.**
- The newly elected US President had pledged to reverse many of Trump's hardline immigration policies.

Trump's Green Card ban

- **Former US President Donald Trump** had banned issuance of green cards for new immigrants and also halted temporary work visas for skilled workers, managers and au pairs in the **H-1B, H-4, H-2B, L-1 and J categories.**
- The **Former President** had argued that the move was necessary to **safeguard the US labor market during the corona virus outbreak.**

Biden overturns Trump's anti-immigration policies

- Since assuming office, **President Joe Biden's administration** has worked to overturn several of Trump's **anti-immigration policies, including the Muslim ban** and a policy that forced asylum seekers to wait in Mexico while their asylum applications are processed.
- The White House has also proposed a law that will **provide an eight-year path to citizenship for almost 11million undocumented immigrants living in the US.**

#USA TO RE-JOIN UNHCR

The **Joe Biden administration in United States** is all set to **re-join the UN Human Rights Council.** The United States had withdrawn from the council in the year 2018 under Presidency of the Donald Trump.

Background

- **Donald Trump withdrew from the world body's main human rights** because of its disproportionate focus on Israel. Israel had received the largest number of critical council resolutions so far with respect to

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

any other country.

- So, the **Trump administration discussed the issue with the body's membership**. The members include **Cuba, China, Russia, Eritrea and Venezuela**. All these countries have been accused of human rights abuses.

About UN Human Rights Council (UNHCR)

- **UNHRC is an inter-governmental body within the UN system**. The agency is involved in strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights across the world.
- It looks after the situations of human rights violations and recommends on the situations. **The council was created in the year 2006 by the UN General Assembly Resolution 60/251**. The first session of the council took place in **2006 three months after its establishment**.
- The agency is involved in discussing all the thematic human rights issues. The UNHRC was created after replacing the **United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR)**. The council comprises of the **47 UN Member States**. The member states are **elected by the UNGA by a direct and secret ballot**.

UNHRC Sessions

- The **UNHRC held three regular sessions in a year**. The session lasts for a total of 10 weeks. The **session take place for four weeks in the month of March**, three weeks in the month of June and three weeks in the month of September. The sessions are held at the **UN Office Geneva in Switzerland**.

#US PRESIDENT BIDEN LETS H-1B VISA BAN EXPIRE

- The **President of the United States of America** on April 1, 2021, has **let the ban on foreign workers visa, especially H-1B visas**, lapsed as the notification issued by his predecessor Trump expired. The move is expected to **benefit thousands of Indian IT professionals in the US**.
- **Donald Trump in June 2020**, amid the national lockdown in the US and COVID-19 crisis, had issued a proclamation suspending the entry to the country of the applicants for non-immigrant or temporary visa categories, **it included H-1B visa**.
- **However, US President Joe Biden** did not issue a fresh proclamation **for the ban on H-1B visa** to continue after March 31, 2021. During the election campaign, he had promised to lift the suspension on visa stating that **Trump's immigration policies were cruel**.



H-1B Visa:

- **The H-1B Visa is a non-immigrant visa**. It permits the companies in the United States to employ foreign workers in specialty occupations requiring technical or theoretical expertise. Tech companies, in particular, depend on it to **hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like China or India**.
- **The expiry of the proclamation issued by Donald Trump will now result in the issuing of H-1B visas by the American Diplomatic missions overseas**. It will further result in bringing in talented technology

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

professionals inside the country by the US Companies.

No new proclamation by President Biden:

- No new proclamation regarding the ban was issued by the US President till the mid-night of March 31, 2021. It resulted in an automatic end to the ban on issuing fresh H-1B visas to the eligible applicants.
- It was reported that the White House will not renew a ban on H-1B visa as well as on other work-based visas imposed in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic that is set to expire on March 31.

Republicans urge to continue the ban on H-1b Visa:

- A Republican Senator from Missouri had requested President Biden to issue a fresh proclamation in order to continue with the ban on H-1B visa.
- Senator Josh Hawley in a letter highlighted that millions of Americans are out of work and now is not the time to open gates to thousands of foreign workers who will be competing with the American workers for scarce resources and jobs.

Background:

- As the former President of the United States, Donald Trump had banned the foreign workers' visa; he had argued that these visas present a risk to the US labour market amid the economic recovery.
- On December 31, 2020, he further extended the order to March 31, 2021, and mentioned that the extension was warranted as the pandemic continued to disrupt American lives and the problem of job loss and unemployment still prevails.

#RESPONSE OF INDIA TOWARDS POLITICAL CRISIS IN NEPAL

Nepal has drifted into a political crisis following its Prime Minister (PM) KP Sharma Oli's decision to dissolve Parliament, a move promptly approved by President Bidhya Devi Bhandari. Oli also announced general elections would be held in April and May 2021, more than a year ahead of schedule.

Background of Nepal's Political Parties

- Three major parties dominate Nepal's politics: Nepali Congress Party; Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist led by Oli, and Nepal Communist Party (Maoist) led by Prachanda.
- Prachanda led the Maoist insurgency for a decade (1996-2006) before joining mainstream politics. Oli was a fierce critic of the politics of violence that caused more than 17,000 deaths.
- But Oli approached the Maoists in 2017 for a merger between their parties, pre-empting the possibility of an alliance between the Maoists and the Nepali Congress that may have come in the way of Oli's prime ministerial ambitions.



Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- Following the merger, the two leaders agreed that they would lead the government by turn, a promise that Oli did not honour at the end of his two-and-a-half years, thus sowing the seeds of separation. Now, as a split appears inevitable, **Oli is hoping to continue in power with those following him.**

Critical Analysis of the Dissolution of Parliament

- **Reasons for Oli's decision:** Oli took the step when he realised that a factional feud within the party had reached the point of no return and he faced possible expulsion both as party chief and as Prime Minister.
- **End of Coalition: Dissolution of Parliament effectively** ended the unity forced among the left forces that had led to the creation of the single, grand Nepal Communist Party three years ago.
- **Uncertainty over Nepal's new Constitution: Dissolution of the House is not new in Nepal**, but this is the first such instance after the new Constitution of 2015 that places safeguards against dissolution. The new constitution does not envisage such a step without exploring formation of an alternative government.
- **Accountability of caretaker government:** The dissolution came hours before a **Standing Committee meeting** that was expected to order a probe into corruption charges levelled against him by party **co-chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda**. With Parliament dissolved and with a **President seen as favourable to him**, Oli will have the power to rule without being accountable to none.
- **The Army:** The **Nepal Army** has made it clear that it will remain neutral in the ongoing political developments. This implies that if Oli tries to rule with the help of security forces to maintain law and order and contain protests, it is uncertain how far the Army will play along.
- **The China Factor:** China has been a big factor in Nepal's internal politics since 2006. It is seen as having lobbied, visible or secret, to prevent the split. **China has also invested in crucial sectors like trade and Investment, energy, tourism and post-earthquake reconstruction, and is Nepal's biggest FDI contributor.**
- **Judiciary's decision awaited:** Since dissolution, a dozen petitions have been filed in the Supreme Court challenging the dissolution with two years left of the present House's tenure. The constitutional validity of Oli's move has been questioned, and is awaiting decision by the Supreme Court.

How India handled this Political Crisis?

- **Ire not directed at India:** Unlike on previous occasions, Oli has refrained from blaming India for destabilising his regime. The PM's ire has been directed at his senior party colleagues for not allowing him to govern smoothly.
- **India's subtle support to Oli: Anti-Oli forces** were quietly cheered to dump him, but when they failed, India subtly extended a helping hand to a desperate Oli struggling for survival. PM Modi positively responded to **Oli's telephonic greetings on India's Independence Day**. A series of important visits from India followed.
- **Continuing bilateral relationship:** Energy and trade officials from the two countries have met each other, border talks are on board, and Nepal's foreign minister is visiting India for the joint commission.
- **India has achieved its tactical goals:** Through these moves, India has achieved its immediate tactical goals. Oli has been emboldened to stick to power even by breaking the party. In the process, the shallowness of Oli's opportunistic and politically driven anti-Indian nationalism has been exposed.

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- **Embarrassment to China:** India has played its cards cautiously and craftily. With an assiduously cultivated façade of non-interference, it let China smear itself into the mud of micromanaging the ruling party's internal conflicts. **The unity and dominance of the ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP) has been shattered, and China, as its patron, has been embarrassed.**
- **Support for elections:** On the sidelines of these developments, India has also fuelled and fed **Hindutva forces** under the leadership of a discarded monarchy, possibly as a ploy in the **unfolding realignment of political forces in Nepal**. Towards that end, India has now come out openly in favour of fresh elections.

Critical Analysis of India's moves in Nepal Political Crisis

- All this puts India on the side of undemocratic, unconstitutional and **opportunistic** players in Nepal, which South Block strategists think is a small price to be paid for the significant gains otherwise made.
- Seeking a **friendly regime in the neighbourhood is a recognised norm in the realist world of international relations**. India is no exception. It has often invested heavily in Nepal to have a friendly, even a pliant, regime.
- But in the long-term, this approach has largely **resulted in the erosion**, rather than consolidation, of India's vital security and economic interests. With **China deeply pitched in the regime change business in Nepal**, prospects of this approach in coming years seem expensive and uncertain.

Challenges Ahead for India

- **Let Nepal deal with its internal mess:** Irrespective of whether Nepal has elections or witnesses the **restoration of Parliament**, a prudent course for India would be to let **Nepal cope with its internal political mess**.
- **Improve its own popular profile:** As no major development in bilateral relations appears likely during the prevailing uncertainty, India must encourage **consolidation of a people-driven polity, and improve its own popular profile**.
- **Resolve Controversial Issues:** India can pick up pending controversial issues such as the 1950 treaty, the **Kalapani border dispute, and trade and investment matters**, and categorical state its position, drawing red lines that Nepal should not cross.
- **New Indo-Nepal Treaty:** Nepal has asked for a revision of the 1950 treaty, and this has been accepted by India. But the issue remains stuck because Nepal does not clarify how to strike a proper balance between India's security concerns and Nepal's developmental aspirations. Without this balance, **no new treaty is possible, and Nepal, seemingly, is not prepared to abrogate the old treaty**.
- **India's Stand should be made clear:** India's policy towards immediate neighbours has never been driven by territorial nationalism. This has been evident in the **case of Sri Lanka (Katchatheevu), Bangladesh (territorial waters), and even Pakistan and China**.
- **Bridge trade imbalance:** On trade and investment issues, India needs to be more accommodative. Nepal **sells less than \$1billion worth** of products to India while importing nearly \$8 billion of them. This is **unsustainable**, despite the fact that trade deficits are governed by the nature of economies. India can and must move to remove structural and procedural impediments to the entry of genuine Nepali goods into Indian markets.

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- **China Factor:** In redefining **India's approach to Nepal**, **India also needs to shed a great deal of its Sinophobia**. China is no doubt politically assertive and financially spread out in Nepal, but most of its promises, such as transit through Chinese ports and railroad connections, are politically driven.

#KP SHARMA OLI EXPELLED FROM NEPAL COMMUNIST PARTY

- **Nepal PM KP Sharma Oli** has been **expelled from the ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP)** over his decision to dissolve the Parliament.
- The **Prime Minister was removed from the party by a Central Committee** at a meeting of the party's splinter group held on January 24, 2021.
- The decision comes **amid repeated threats by the rival faction leaders** who had said that they would revoke Oli's membership over his decision to dissolve the Nepal Parliament.
- The **rival faction spokesperson Narayankaji Shrestha** said that the party leaders are planning further action against Oli after his ouster from the party.
- The splinter group **led by former Prime Ministers Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Madhav Kumar** had earlier asked PM Oli for explanation for his unconstitutional decisions.
- The faction had even sent a letter to the **Prime Minister's residence to seek clarification. However, PM Oli did not respond to the letter.**
- The rival faction spokesperson said that they waited for long for a reply from the Prime Minister but he didn't reply to them. He added that the latest decision was taken by exercising the executive rights provided by the Central Committee of the party.



What had happened?

- **Nepal went into a political crisis on December 20, 2020 after Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli** recommended the dissolution of the Parliament amid a tussle for power with former **PM Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda**.
- **Nepal President Bidhya Devi Bhandari** had accepted the recommendations of the Prime Minister and the Parliament was dissolved. The Parliamentary elections are now scheduled to be held between April 30 and May 10, 2021.
- The **rival faction led by Former PM Prachanda** had come down heavily on the move saying that by dissolving the House, **the Prime Minister** has given a blow to the **Constitution as well as the democratic republic system**.

#PM KP OLI LOST VOTE OF CONFIDENCE

- The **Prime Minister of Nepal KP Sharma Oli** has lost the **vote of confidence in the House of Representatives on May 10, 2021**.
- The decision has come as a major setback to the premier who was seeking to tighten his grip on the power after the **CPN (Maoist Centre)**, which is led by **Pushpakamal Dahal 'Prachanda'**, withdrew support to

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

Oli's government.

- **Nepal PM KP Sharma Oli** secured 93 votes in the Lower House of the Parliament during a special session which was convened on the orders of the **Nepal President Bidya Devi Bhandari**.
- The **Prime Minister of Nepal** required at least 136 votes in the 275 member House of Representatives for winning the confidence motion as the 4 members are currently under suspension. A total of 124 members in the House of Representatives voted against him.
- **KP Sharma Oli** will be submitting his resignation to the President of Nepal Bidya Devi Bhandari who in turn will ask the **Parliament for the formation of the new Government within a week**.

Key Highlights:

- The **Vote of Confidence that the Nepal PM Oli placed before the House of Representatives** secured 93 'Yes' votes against the 124 'No' votes.
- Of 271, only 232 members were present in the House. Those who were absented or abstained included 28 dissident members from the **Ruling Communist Nepal Party- Unified Marxist Leninist abstained**.
- This was also the first vote of confidence which was unsuccessfully sought by the first government elected under the new Constitution promulgated in 2015.

Oli faces defeat in Parliament:

- **KP Sharma Oli** faced defeat in the Parliament and exited from power after leading the Nepal Government for 38 months.
- While commenting on the result, he stated that it was unfortunate that the government that tirelessly worked for the development of the country and nation-building is now being targeted by narrow partisan interests.
- **Oli also asked the opposition not to label false accusations against anyone**.
- The **prominent opposition leaders** had blamed Oli for the failure to tackle the pandemic that resulted in an increasing number of cases and fatalities in the country. He was also blamed for blocking the **timely supply of delivery of vaccines from India**.

Nepal Political Crisis: Background

- **After its alliance, the Nepal Communist Party Maoist centre** which is led by Prachanda withdrew its support to the Government, **KP Sharma Oli's government** was reduced to a minority one.
- The country plunged into the political crisis in December 2020 after the President of Nepal decided to dissolve the House and announced fresh elections to be held on April 30 and May 10, 2021, at the recommendation of PM Oli, amidst the power tussle within the ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP).

Motion of No-confidence in India

- If the government has **to demonstrate its strength on the floor of the House**, it can have a **motion of confidence**.

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- However, the opposition parties (or any member) can move a motion **expressing want of confidence (no confidence) in the Council of Ministers**.
- The procedure is laid down under **Rule 198 of the rules of procedure and conduct of the business of the Lok Sabha**. A **no-confidence motion** need not set out any grounds on which it is based.
- Even when grounds are mentioned in the notice and read out in the House, they do not form part of the no-confidence motion.

Procedure of Motion of No-confidence

- A **no-confidence motion can be moved by any member of the House**. It can be moved only in the **Lok Sabha and not Rajya Sabha**.
- **Rule 198 of the Rules of Procedure and conduct of Lok Sabha** specifies the procedure for moving a no-confidence motion. The member has to give written notice of the motion before 10 am which will be read out by the Speaker in the House.
- A **minimum of 50 members have to accept the motion and accordingly**, the Speaker will announce the date for discussion for the motion.
- The allotted date has to be within 10 days from the day the motion is accepted. Otherwise, the motion fails and the member who moved the motion will be informed about it. If the **government is not able to prove its majority in the House, then the government of the day has to resign**.

#KP SHARMA OLI REAPPOINTED AS PM OF NEPAL

- **KP Sharma Oli was reappointed as the Prime Minister of Nepal by President Bidhya Devi Bhandari** after the opposition parties failed to put together a coalition government by the 9 pm deadline on May 13, 2021. **Oli would be taking the oath of office today**.
- **KP Sharma Oli had lost the trust vote in Nepal's House of Representatives** on May 10, 2021. He will now get 30 days to prove that he has majority support in the House.
- This came after the main contender for the PM **post, Sher Bahadur Deuba, the leader of Nepal's main opposition party Nepali Congress**, informed his allies shortly ahead of the deadline that he would not be able to put together a coalition government with a majority in the House.
- **Sher Bahadur Deuba's** formal withdrawal left the Nepali President with no other option but to invite Oli to form the government again.

Key Highlights

- **K P Sharma Oli** was reappointed as Nepal Prime Minister after the **Opposition alliance of Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre)** failed to muster required support to form the next government.
- **Nepal's President Bidya Devi Bhandari** had given the Opposition parties time till 9pm on May 13th to come up with the majority support to form a coalition government in the nation after Oli lost the trust vote in the House of Representatives.

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- However, the opposition parties failed to claim **majority government under article 76 (2) of the Constitution**.
- The **two opposition parties-Nepali Congress and Maoist Centre** have only 61 and 49 seats respectively in the lower house and their combined strength of 110 was not enough seats to win majority vote in the 275-member house.
- The parties required at least 136 votes to form the majority government in the nation. Though Nepali Congress President **Sher Bahadur Deuba** had received support from **CPN Maoist chairman Pushpakamal Dahal 'Prachanda'**, he could not get the support from **Janata Samajwadi Party (JSP)**.
- **Another party JSP's President Upendra Yadav** had assured to support **Deuba** but the party's other president **Mahanta Thakur** reportedly rejected the idea.
- **KP Sharma Oli's CPN (UML)** has 121 seats in the House of Representatives, making it the single largest party and closest to the majority mark.
- Earlier, **the dissident faction led by Madhav Nepal within the CPN-UML** with their 28 members had decided to resign from the Parliament, paving way for Deuba to claim for the post of Prime Minister.
- However, **Madhav Kumar did a U-turn** after his last-minute meeting with Oli and his faction decided to tender their resignations.
- If the 28 MPs would have resigned then the total strength of **the House of Representatives would have been reduced to 243 and only 122 votes** would have been sufficient to stake claim for a majority government.
- Currently, **Nepal's 275-member House of Representatives has 271 valid members**.

Why was KP Sharma Oli reappointed as Nepal PM after he lost the trust vote?

- As per **Nepal's constitution**, in cases where no party has a clear majority in the House, the President shall appoint a member of the House as the prime minister who can command the majority in the lower house of the Parliament with the support of two or more parties.
- However, if two or more political parties fail to give a majority Prime Minister then the President can invite parties to submit the name of a minority **Prime Minister from the single largest party as per Article 76 sub-clause 3 of the Constitution**.
- Under this clause, **Oli whose party has 121 seats in the House, can again stake claim to form government in the nation**. However, the Minority Prime Minister will need to win the vote of confidence within 30 days from the date of the appointment.

Background

- Nepal was plunged into a political crisis in **December 2020 when President Bhandari** had dissolved the **House of Representatives** and announced fresh elections on April 30th and May 10th at the recommendation of **Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli**.
- Oli's move to dissolve the House of Representatives had sparked protests from a large section of the **NCP led**

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

by his rival 'Prachanda'.

- The Supreme Court of Nepal reinstated the dissolved House in February 2021. **This was a major setback for Oli who was preparing for snap polls.**
- KP Sharma Oli had earlier served as the Prime Minister of Nepal from October 11, 2015 to August 3, 2016.

#NEPAL PRESIDENT DISSOLVES PARLIAMENT

- **Nepal President Bidhya Devi Bhandari** on May 22, 2021, dissolved the country's House of Representatives on the recommendation of the cabinet and called for fresh elections in November.
- The **President's Office** issued a release to announce the dissolution of the House of Representatives for the second time as per **Article 76 (7) of the Constitution of Nepal**. Fresh elections will be conducted on November 12 and 19, 2021 as per the recommendation of the Cabinet.
- A cabinet meeting was called just after **President Bhandari declared that neither Nepali Congress (NC) President Sher Bahadur Deuba** nor incumbent caretaker Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli can be as appointed as the next PM **wherein President Bhandari**, on the recommendation of Oli, announced to dissolve the House.

Why did President Bhandari dissolve the Parliament?

- **Incumbent caretaker Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli** had claimed that he had secured the support of 153 lawmakers including members of the **Janata Samajbadi Party** while **Nepali Congress President Deuba claimed he has signatures of 149 parliamentarians**.
- The claims did not add up as Nepal's House of Representatives is made up of only 275 members. On the basis of the claims and signatures, President Bhandari was not convinced of both claimants to get the vote of confidence.
- Hence, President Bhandari, on the recommendation of Oli, announced the dissolution of the house for the second time **as per Article 76 (7) of the Constitution of Nepal** pointing out that neither Oli nor Deuba have the majority of lawmakers to pass the floor test.

What is Article 76 (7) of the Constitution of Nepal?

- **As per Article 76 (7) of the Constitution of Nepal**, if the Prime Minister appointed under Clause (5) fails to get the vote of confidence or if no member can be appointed as Prime Minister, the President shall, on the recommendation of Prime Minister, dissolve the House of Representatives and fix a date to conduct another election within six months.
- Clause (5) mentioned here states that the Prime Minister appointed must get the vote of confidence.

Nepal Political Crisis: Background

- **In May 2018, Oli-led CPN-UML and Prachanda-led National Communist Party (Maoist Centre)** merged and decided to serve as joint chairmen of the ruling party.



Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- CPN-UML is the largest party in the House of Representatives of Nepal. However, the increasing rivalry within the ruling part resulted in a split, one led by Prachanda and another by Oli.
- In December 2020, the **Prachanda-led faction of the Communist Party of Nepal** ousted Prime Minister Oli as the co-Chair, and Prachanda was made the first Chairman while Madhav Nepal the second Chairman.
- In December 2020, amid the political crisis within the ruling party, **President Bhandari announced to dissolve the House of Representatives** on the recommendation of Oli. Fresh elections were held on April 30 and May 10 on the recommendation of PM Oli.
- The **Supreme Court in February 2021**, reinstated the dissolved house stating that the **dissolution was unconstitutional**. Oli defended his move for dissolution stating that he had no other choice as the opponents in the ruling party were not letting him work.
- On May 10, Oli lost the vote of confidence in the House of Representatives. However, when Sher Bahadur Deuba contesting for the PM post failed to form a coalition government, **KP Sharma Oli was reappointed as the PM of Nepal on May 14, 2021, under Article 76 (3)**
- Oli had served as PM of Nepal earlier from October 11, 2015, to August 3, 2016.

#GULF RECONCILIATION SUMMIT IN SAUDI ARABIA

The **Gulf reconciliation summit**, in **Al-Ula, Saudi Arabia**, where the kingdom and its allies decided to end their **blockade of Qatar**, has brought to an end, for now, their long feud.



Feud between Qatar and Saudi allies

- **Accusation of Qatar funding Terrorism:** In 2017, Saudi Arabia, under the leadership of **Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS)**, the **UAE, Bahrain and Egypt** imposed the blockade and severed diplomatic ties, accusing the tiny Gulf country of supporting terrorism.
- **List of Demands for Normalisation:** They also issued 13 demands for it to be lifted, which included shutting down the **Qatar-funded TV network, Al Jazeera**, closing a Turkish military base and reducing diplomatic relations with Iran.

Did Qatar submit to the coercive tactics of Saudi Arabia & its allies?

- Qatar did not budge despite the heavy economic cost. When the Saudi and Emirati airspaces were closed, **Iran offered Qatar global connectivity**. Al Jazeera is still live.
- Qatar has invited **more Turkish troops**, bolstering its ties with Ankara, which is eager to play a bigger role in West Asia.
- Moreover, it played an **important role in the U.S.-Taliban deal** and continued to host talks between Taliban representatives and the Afghan government.
- If the **original Saudi plan** was to isolate Qatar and make it kneel, it **has backfired**. And in the last weeks of the Trump administration, MBS and his allies seem to have realised their strategic folly.

Steps announced to end the feud

- Qatar has made **few concessions to reach the reconciliation**. **The 13 specific demands were replaced** by a broad agreement on non-intervention in other countries' internal affairs and cooperating to ensure regional stability and security, which can be **open to different interpretations for different sides**.

Reasons for Saudi Arabia stepping down from its demands

The **Saudi U-turn** could be the result of a genuine tactical rethink. The **rift in the Gulf helped Iran and Turkey, Riyadh's main rivals**, while it failed to scuttle Qatar's standing. Iran, reeling under U.S. sanctions, also got some financial relief from Qatari payouts for using its airspace. By lifting the air and sea blockades, the Saudis and the Emiratis could deny Iran of those funds and also try to **put economic pressure on Iran**. Saudi Arabia also tries to up a **united Arab regional front** as Joe Biden is preparing to renegotiate the Iran nuclear deal. The Saudis may also be hoping that **bridging the Gulf between two American allies (Saudi Arabia & Qatar)** would help them warm up to the Biden administration.

Conclusion

- While ending the feud is welcome, it cannot be overlooked that this unnecessary crisis was born out of an **ill-thought-out Saudi-Emirati strategy of coercion**. It reflects poorly on them
- **Saudi & its allies should learn from the mistakes** and build ties based on mutual interests and cooperation, not on threats and coercion.

#WEST ASIA PEACE CONFERENCE

Recently, **Russia** backed a Palestinian proposal for a **West Asia Peace Conference**. The Conference is intended to **focus on a two-state solution**, under which Israel and a future Palestinian state would coexist. The support for the Conference came as the USA, which had sided with Israel under the administration of Donald Trump, intends to "restore credible USA engagement with Palestinians as well as Israelis."



Participants in the Conference:

- The 10 participants would include **Israel, the Palestinians, the four members of the West Asia diplomatic quartet** (Russia, the **United Nation**, the USA and the **European Union**), along with four Arab states — **Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan and the UAE**.
- Russia suggested that the **West Asia Peace Conference** could be held at the **ministerial level**.
- The **Abraham Accord** between Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain is mediated by the USA. It was the first Arab-Israeli peace deal in 26 years. Palestinians are worried about the impact of the Accords.

Israel-Palestine Conflict

- **British Phase:**

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- Britain took control of the area known as Palestine after the ruler of that part of the Middle East, the **Ottoman Empire**, was defeated in **World War I**.
- The land was inhabited by a Jewish minority and Arab majority.
- Tensions between the two peoples grew when the **international community gave Britain the task of establishing a "national home" in Palestine for Jewish people**.
- For Jews, it was their ancestral home, but Palestinian Arabs also claimed the land and opposed the move.
- In **1948**, unable to solve the problem, British rulers left and **Jewish leaders declared the creation of the state of Israel**.
- **Post British Phase:** In another war in **1967**, Israel occupied **East Jerusalem** and the **West Bank**, as well as most of the **Syrian Golan Heights**, and **Gaza** and the Egyptian Sinai peninsula.
- Most Palestinian refugees and their descendants live in Gaza and the West Bank, as well as in neighbouring Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.
- Neither they nor their descendants have been allowed by Israel to return to their homes - Israel says this would overwhelm the country and threaten its existence as a Jewish state.
- **Israel still occupies the West Bank**, and although it pulled out of Gaza the **United Nations (UN)** still regards that piece of land as part of occupied territory.
- Israel claims the whole of Jerusalem as its capital, while the **Palestinians claim East Jerusalem as the capital of a future Palestinian state**.
- In the **past 50 years Israel has built settlements in these areas, where more than 6,00,000 Jews** now live.
- Palestinians say these are illegal under international law and are obstacles to peace, but **Israel denies this**.

Shift in the Stand of the USA:

- The USA has played a partisan role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- In the last few years, developments in the USA mark a clear shift from the **Oslo Accords in favor of support for Israeli plans** to annex a large fraction of the West Bank and design a new settlement of the conflict according to its interests.
- USA's peace plan (**Peace to Prosperity: A Vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People**) would have guaranteed that Israel would control a unified Jerusalem as its capital and not require it to uproot any of the settlements in the West Bank.
- The plan was drawn without any meaningful Palestinian participation and was loaded in Israel's favour.
- In **1993** under the Oslo Accords, **Israel** and the **Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO)** agreed to officially recognize each other and renounce the use of violence.
- The Oslo Accords also **established the Palestinian Authority**, which received limited autonomy in the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank.
- However, recently after the **change in administration**, the USA said it would **move towards renewing ties with the Palestinians**.

India's Stand:

- India was one of the few countries to **oppose the UN's partition plan in November 1947**, echoing its own experience during independence a few months earlier. In the decades that followed, the Indian political leadership actively supported the Palestinian cause and withheld full diplomatic relations with Israel.

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- India **recognised Israel in 1950** but it is also the first non-Arab country to recognise PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian.
- India is also one of the first countries to recognise the statehood of Palestine in 1988.
- In 2014, India favored the **United Nations Human Rights Council's (UNHRC)** resolution to probe Israel's human rights violations in Gaza. Despite supporting the probe, India abstained from voting against Israel in UNHRC in 2015.
- As a part of Link West Policy, India has **de-hyphenated its relationship with Israel and Palestine in 2018** to treat both the countries mutually independent and exclusive.
- In June 2019, India voted in favor of a decision introduced by Israel in the **UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)** that objected to granting consultative status to a Palestinian non-governmental organization.
- So far **India has tried to maintain the image of its historical moral supporter for Palestinian self-determination, and at the same time to engage in the military, economic, and other strategic relations with Israel.**

#RUSSIA PULLS OUT FROM OPEN SKIES TREATY

Russia has announced that it was leaving the **Open Skies Treaty (OST)**. In November 2020, **USA left the OST after accusing Russia** of violating the pact- allegations that Russia denied. Moscow has now **blamed Washington** for its own decision of leaving the treaty.

What is the Open Skies Treaty?

- It is an accord that allows participants to **fly unarmed reconnaissance flights** over any part of their fellow member states.
- First proposed in 1955 by **former US President Dwight Eisenhower** as a means to deescalate tensions during the **Cold War**. Claiming the initiative would be used for extensive spying, Moscow rejected Eisenhower's proposal.



Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- However, the landmark treaty was eventually **signed in 1992** between NATO members and former Warsaw Pact countries following the demise of USSR.
- It **went into effect in 2002** and had 35 signatories, including key players US and Russia, along with one non-ratifying member (Kyrgyzstan).
- The OST aims at **building confidence among members** through mutual openness, thus reducing the chances of accidental war.
- Under the treaty, a **member state can “spy” on any part of the host nation**, with the latter’s consent. A country can undertake **aerial imaging over the host state** after giving notice 72 hours before, and sharing its exact flight path 24 hours before.
- The information gathered, such as on troop movements, military exercises and missile deployments, has to **be shared with all member states**.
- **Only approved imaging equipment** is permitted on the surveillance flights, and officials from the host state can also stay on board throughout the planned journey.

Signatories of the Treaty

35 states – Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Kyrgyzstan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Significance of the Open Skies Treaty

- **Importance for Intelligence Gathering:** The **OST was signed in 1992**, much before the advent of advanced satellite imaging technology which is currently the preferred mode for intelligence gathering. Yet, **surveillance aircraft provide key information** that still cannot be gathered by satellite sensors, such as thermal imaging data.
- **Helps Smaller Countries party to Treaty:** Though satellites can provide the same, and even more detailed, information, not all of the treaty states-parties have such capabilities.
- **Confidence Building Tool:** The treaty is also aimed at building confidence and familiarity among states-parties through their participation in the over flights.
- **USA has utilized the treaty more than Russia:** **Between 2002 and 2016**, the U.S. flew 196 flights over Russia compared to the 71 flights flown by Russia. A former Trump official had also hailed OST data gathered during the 2014 Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Why did the US leave the Open Skies Treaty?

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- While it was envisaged as a key arms control agreement, many in US had for over a decade **accused Russia of non-compliance** with OST protocols, blaming Moscow of obstructing surveillance flights on its territory, while misusing its own missions for gathering key tactical data.
- **US President Donald Trump** was also unhappy that a Russian reconnaissance flew over his golf course in **New Jersey State** in 2017.
- In May 2020, the Trump administration announced its intention of withdrawing from the OST, accusing Russia of **“flagrantly and continuously violating the Treaty in various ways for years”**, and left it in November 2020.

Why did Russia leave after the US?

- A contentious issue regarding Russia’s compliance with the OST was its alleged **reluctance to allow flights over Kaliningrad**, its exclave in Eastern Europe that sits between NATO allies **Lithuania and Poland**.
- Russia defended its position by saying that the restrictions were permissible under treaty rules, and gave the example of the **US imposing similar limits on flights over Alaska**.
- After the US left the **OST**, Russia **sought assurances from NATO allies** who continued to remain on the treaty that they would not transfer data collected by their flights over Russia to Washington. In its statement, Russia said that these **requests were not backed** by the NATO members, prompting it to **leave the treaty**.

**#PM MODI ADDRESSED WEF'S DAVOS
DIALOGUE**



Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- **PM Modi** addressed the **Davos Dialogue of World Economic Forum** virtually on January 28, 2021.
- The **session was attended by more than 400 top industry leaders** from across the globe where **PM Modi spoke about the Fourth Industrial Revolution**- using technology for the good of humanity. Prime Minister will also interact with the CEOs during the dialogue.
- **Prime Minister Modi** had informed about the session through his official Twitter account where he mentioned that he has been looking forward to speaking on a wide range of subjects related to the reform trajectory of India, **increased usage of technology, and other issues.**

PM Modi at World Economic Forum:

- **Prime Minister Modi** during his address at the **World Economic Forum** talked about the message of positivity, confidence, and hope for the world **on behalf of more than 1.3 billion Indian people.**
- While mentioning the **ongoing mega vaccination programme in India**, **PM Modi** informed that in just 12 days, India has vaccinated more than 2.3 million healthcare workers. He added that in the next months, the country would achieve its target of vaccinating 300 million elderly people and people with comorbidities.
- PM Modi also highlighted **India's progress while mentioning that there are two Made in India COVID-19 vaccines** and WEF will be relieved to know that in time many vaccines will come from India.
- Prime Minister during this address highlighted India's role and how it undertook **global responsibility from the beginning.**
- He mentioned that at the time when airspace was closed in many nations, India took more than 1 lakh citizens to their countries and also delivered essential medicines to more than 150 nations.
- In its fight against the pandemic, **Prime Minister Modi talked about India's role in saving the lives of people in many other countries by sending COVID-19 vaccines** and also developing the required infrastructure for the vaccination.
- As India is making progress in its health infrastructure, Prime Minister at the global platform shared that the country will **start working on a Unique Health ID to provide easy healthcare to its 1.3 billion citizens.**
- While talking about **India's Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan**, Prime Minister informed the world leaders that the abhiyan is committed towards global good and global supply chain. He added that India definitely has the capacity, reliability, and **capability to strengthen the global supply chain.**
- During his address, **PM Modi assured India has launched 'Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan'** with the purpose of increasing the capacity of the country's economy. He added that the government has made one reform after another to provide high growth to the economy in this decade. These reforms by the government were long-awaited.
- Discussing the plan of infrastructure and economy, Prime Minister informed that it has been estimated that India's infrastructure needs **by 2040 will be around 4.5 tn dollars.** This goal will be achieved only if government and industry come together. The Indian government has also been working in providing a stable environment and other help.

Opening of all sectors for market participation

- With the **purpose of welcoming more investment**, PM Modi informed that India believes in opening all the sectors for market participation. While giving the example of UPI, he added that the transactions at the

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

UPI platform have crossed 2 billion per month and the major portion of these transactions are taking place through the apps that are developed by private players.

- India has also been promoting the investment in frontier technologies such as **additive manufacturing, AI, and interdisciplinary cyber-physical systems**.
- On the issue of data theft, Prime Minister assured the world leaders that India has been working on the strict law on data protection in the country.

Significance of the forum

- The World Economic Forum annual meeting in Davos will be **engaging the top leaders of the world to shape regional, global, and industry agendas at the beginning of 2021**. The Davos Dialogue Agenda will mark the launch of the **WEF's Great Reset Initiative** in the post-COVID-19 world.

The Great Reset Initiative:

- It is the name of the June **2020 50th annual meeting of WEF**. It brought together the high profile political and business leaders convened by WEF and Prince of Wales with the theme of rebuilding the society and economy in a much more sustainable way post-COVID-19 pandemic.
- In June 2020, the **theme of the 51st WEF annual meeting to be held in January 2021 was announced as 'The Great Reset'**. It will be connecting both in-person and online world leaders in Davos with a network in 400 cities globally.

#MILITARY COUP IN MYANMAR

Recently, the **Myanmar military has grabbed power in a coup** - the **third time in the nation's history** since its independence from British rule in 1948.

- A **one-year state of emergency** has been imposed and **democratically elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi has been detained**.
- **'Coup'** is generally described as a sudden, violent, and illegal seizure of power from a government.

Myanmar Geographical location and Polity

- **Location:** Myanmar, also known as Burma, is in South East Asia and neighbours Thailand, Laos, Bangladesh, China and India.
- **Demography:** It has a population of about 54 million, most of whom are Burmese speakers, although other languages are also spoken. The biggest city is Yangon (Rangoon) but the capital is Nay Pyi Taw.
- **Religion:** The main religion is **Buddhism**. There are many ethnic groups in the country, including **Rohingya Muslims**.
- **Polity:** The country **gained independence from Britain in 1948**. It was ruled by the armed forces from 1962 until 2011, when a new government began ushering in a return to civilian rule.
- In the 2010s, **the military regime decided to transition the country towards democracy**. Although the armed forces remained powerful, political opponents were freed and elections were allowed to be held.
- **The NLD won the 2015 election**, the country's first free and fair election participated by multiple parties, and formed the government, raising hopes that the country is on its way to full transition to democracy.

Myanmar operates de-jure as a unitary assembly independent republic under its 2008 constitution. On February 1st, 2021, Myanmar's military took over the government in a coup. **Anti-coup protests are ongoing as of February 24th, 2021**. The history of Myanmar, formerly called Burma, began with the Pagan Kingdom in 849. Although each kingdom has constantly been at war with their neighbors, it was the largest South East Asian Empire during the 16th century under the **Sadest Dynasty**. The British Burma began with its official recognition on the colonial map that marks its new borders containing over 100 ethnicities. **It was named Burma**, after the dominant **ethnic group Bamar who makes up 68 percent of the population**. During World War II, a coalition that mostly consisted the Bamar ethnic group volunteered themselves to fight alongside the Japanese in hopes of overthrowing the occupying British forces. Meanwhile, many other ethnic groups supported the Allied forces against the Bama backed Japanese forces. This conflict would come to be very significant in the aftermath of World War II when Burma was granted its independence from **Great Britain in 1948**.

About the Military Coup:

- In the **November 2020 parliamentary election**, Suu Kyi's party **National League for Democracy (NLD)** secured the majority of the seats.

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- In the Myanmar's Parliament, **the military holds 25% of the total seats according to the 2008 military-drafted constitution** and several key ministerial positions are also reserved for military appointees.
- When the newly elected Myanmar lawmakers were to **hold the first session of Parliament in 2021**, the **military imposed a state of emergency** for one year **citing massive voting fraud** in the parliamentary elections.

Global Reaction:

- **China:** 'All parties in Myanmar will properly handle their differences under the constitution and legal framework to maintain political and social stability'.
- **USA:** The USA President **threatened to reimpose sanctions on Myanmar** following a coup by the country's military leaders and called for a **concerted international response** to press them to relinquish power.
- **ASEAN Countries:** ASEAN's current chair, Brunei, called for 'dialogue among parties, reconciliation and the return to normalcy'.
- Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia expressed concern, while Thailand, Cambodia, and the Philippines noted that this was Myanmar's 'internal affair'.
- **India's Reaction:** India supports the process of democratic transition in Myanmar. Though India has expressed deep concern over recent developments in Myanmar, **cutting off from the Myanmar military is not a viable option** as India has significant economic and strategic interests in Myanmar and its neighbourhood.

India's Relationship with Myanmar Military:

- **India's military-diplomatic outreach to Myanmar became a cornerstone** of its Act East policy.
- **On the eve of the recent visit of the Foreign Secretary Chief of the Army Staff to Myanmar in 2020**, Myanmar handed over 22 Indian insurgents from across the border **and it was decided to ramp up the sale of military hardware to Myanmar, including 105 mm light artillery guns, naval gunboats and more recently, lightweight torpedoes.**
- **Recent example of cooperation is that Myanmar has begun to vaccinate itself with the 1.5 million doses of Covid vaccine sent by India, while putting China's 3,00,000 doses on hold.**

India's Interests in Myanmar:

- **Infrastructure and Connectivity:** India has cultivated several infrastructure and development projects with Myanmar, which it sees as the "gateway to the East" and **ASEAN** countries:
- **Operationalisation of the crucial Sittwe port** in Myanmar's Rakhine state by 2021 is committed.
- India assists infrastructure projects such as the **India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway** and the **Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project.**
- The Kaladan project will link **Kolkata to Sittwe** in Myanmar and then from Myanmar's Kaladan river to India's north-east.
- The two countries signed the **Land Border Crossing Agreement in 2018**, which allowed bona fide travellers with valid documents to cross the border at two international points of entry/exit- Moreh-Tamu and Zokhawthar-Rih.

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- **Security:** India has been concerned over some militant groups like the **United National Liberation Front (UNLF)** and **National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB)** from the North-East region taking shelter in Myanmar.
- Indian needs perpetual support and coordination from Myanmar for the **maintenance of security and stability along its North East border areas.**
- **Rohingya Issues:** India is committed to ensuring safe, sustainable and speedy return of Rohingya refugees from refugee camps of India and Bangladesh.
- Building on the progress made under the **Rakhine State Development Programme (RSDP)**, India has recently proposed to finalise projects under phase-III of the programme, including setting up of a skills training centre and upgrading of agricultural mechanisation.
- **Investment:** With Indian investments of over USD 1.2 billion, Myanmar holds considerable importance than any other country in South Asia.
- **Energy:** The two countries are also expanding partnership in the area of energy cooperation.
- Recently, India approved an investment of over USD 120 million in the **Shwe Oil and Gas project.**

#UNSC ON POLITICAL SITUATION IN MYAMMAR

- The **United Nations Security Council** will hold a meeting on **February 2, 2021**, to discuss the latest developments and potential responses from the international entities to the military coup in Myanmar.
- The **United Kingdom which took over the presidency of the UNSC informed** that it plans to discuss the political crisis in Myanmar on an urgent basis.
- Barbara Woodward, Britain's UN Ambassador mentioned that the council members have been informed that the UK will bring forward the plans for the Security Council meeting on the Myanmar crisis.
- On February 1, **Myanmar Military had declared a state of emergency for one year, following the coup.** It detained President U Win Myint, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, and other senior officials.



Global leaders condemn the military coup in Myanmar:

- The global leaders, following the coup in Myanmar, **had given a clarion call to release the detainees immediately** and had also urged the military to respect the national elections in the country which took place in November 2020.
- The **President of the European Council, Charles Michel**, while condemning the coup in Myanmar, called the military to release people who have been **unlawfully detained in the raids in Myanmar** and to respect the election results.
- **Similarly, the Foreign Policy Chief of the European Union, Joseph Borrell**, called the military to respect the **constitution and the election results** and that the people of Myanmar want democracy in their country. He assured that the European Union stands with the citizens.

Military coup in Myanmar:

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- As the **military announced the coup in Myanmar**, it went on to seize the power by overthrowing the civilian government of the country. The military claims that there **has been voting fraud in the November 2020 elections**.
- The **state power has now been handed over to Min Aung Hlaing, Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services**, while the first Vice-President of Myanmar, MyintSwe will be serving as the acting President of the country under the military rule.
- As per **the Myanmar Military, the new elections in the country will be held after one-year of emergency**. The military had also called for the postponement of the newly-elected lower house of Parliament which was due to be convened on February 1.

Military rule in Myanmar: Background

- The **military rule in Myanmar had lasted from 1962 to 2011** and has been resumed in February 2021. In 1948, the country gained its independence from the British as a democratic nation, under the Burmese Independence Army.
- However, in **1958, the first military rule began in the country and the direct military rule started through a coup de tat in 1962**. During this time, systematic and consistent violations of human rights were reported by the UN and other organisations.
- In 2011, the military rule was officially dissolved because of the 2010 general elections and people supported civilian government came into power in the country. In February of 2021, the **armed forces of Myanmar again took over the control and detained several government leaders** along with the President and State Counsellor.

#US IMPOSES SANCTIONS ON MYANMAR

The President of United States, Joe Biden, announced sanctions on the military leaders in Myanmar on February 10, 2021.

About the sanctions of the US

- The **sanctions were put by the Biden's administration** in order to prevent the Myanmar's generals from accessing the **\$1 billion of government funds** which is held in the US.
- The **government would identify the first round of sanctions targets** and impose the export controls. Biden also asked the Myanmar military to release detainees immediately.
- The Biden administration has **put the sanctions on military leaders in Myanmar** in the backdrop of **Military rule in Myanmar**.



Military Rule in Myanmar

- The **military in Myanmar took over the control** in the country and announced one-year state of emergency on February 1, 2021. The military also detained the **State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and other government leaders**.

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- This step was taken by the military in the backdrop of **victory of Suu Kyi's party in election that was held in November 2020**. The military took over the country as it found the victory a result of frauds.
- Following that, **the Myanmar Civil Disobedience Movement** has been started in opposition to the military's takeover.

How did military get the power?

- The **state emergency was announced after the Suu Kyi's government** was failed in tackling the situation of the country amid the **Corona Pandemic**.
- Despite that, the **Suu Kyi's party won the election again in November 2020**. Thus, the military took over in the country in accordance with the Article 417 of the Myanmar's constitution.
- This article **gives power to the military to take over the country in times of emergency**. The military had framed the constitution of Myanmar in 2008. Thus the **military retains the power under the charter at the expense of democratic and the civilian rule**.

#FRANCE PASSED ANTI-RADICALISM BILL

The **lower house of the French parliament has approved the Anti-Radicalism bill** in a bid to fight the Islamic radicalism.

Anti-Radicalism Bill

- The **bill seeks to strengthen the government oversight** of mosques and religious schools. It will also take strong actions against the polygamy and forced marriage.
- The **bill provides for measures with the aim of rooting out the Islamic radicalism**. It is a part of the **broader French efforts** that it initiated with the aim of fighting extremism.
- It will also **promote respect for French values**.



Background of the bill

- The **bill was passed in the backdrop of fighting extremism in the country**. This fight against extremism gained momentum after a **teacher was beheaded in October 2020**.
- **Many of the French Muslims** stated that this draft law will limit the religious freedom. They are of the view

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

that this **bill unfairly targets** them since there are already enough laws to fight the **terrorist violence in the country**.

- Further, the **critiques are of the view** that this bill was passed keeping in view the **Presidential election of 2021** in order to win the support from **conservative and far-right voters**.

French Parliament

- **The French Parliament is a bicameral legislature of the French Republic.** It comprises of the Senate and the National Assembly. Both of the assembly conducts the **legislative sessions at different locations in Paris**.
- **The senate holds the sessions at the Palais du Luxembourg** while the National Assembly holds the **sessions at Palais Bourbon**. Both the houses have their own regulations and rules of procedure.

Radicalism

- It was a **historical political movement of the 18th and 19th centuries** in the domain of liberalism. This movement is a precursor to the social liberalism.
- The **movement seeks to transform or replace the fundamental** principles of society through the **social change, revolution, structural change or radical reform**.

#FIRST FEMALE CHIEF OF WTO: OKONJO IWEALA

- **The former Finance Minister of Nigeria, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala** has become the **next Chief of the World Trade Organisation** after US President **Joe Biden's administration** gave her its complete support on February 5, 2021. She will hold the position from March 1, 2021, to August 31, 2025.
- **Okonjo-Iweala** has become the **first woman and African to hold the position at WTO**. The support by Biden's administration is another change of direction from Trump's administration, which had earlier obstructed the selection procedure by supporting **South Korean trade minister Yoo Myung-hee, in opposition to many other countries**.
- However, **Yoo Myung-hee** decided to pull out on February 5 after consulting with the new US administration, which also had been her main supporter, leaving the way open for the **selection of Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala**.



Current US administration backs Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala:

- The **United States Trade Representative defended its support of the Nigerian candidate** by mentioning that she has a wealth of knowledge in international diplomacy and economics as well as has a proven experience in managing a **large international organization**.
- The representative added that the Biden administration looks forward to working with the new Director-General of the **World Trade Organisation** for finding paths forward to achieve the **required substantive**

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

and procedural reform of the WTO.

Biden administration breaks deadlock over selection:

- The **World Trade Organisation** traditionally chooses its leader through consensus among 164 member states, but the selection procedure was brought to a deadlock in October 2020 by the **refusal of the Trump administration to back down over its chosen candidate.**
- The **former President** had also **threatened to leave the organization** because of the ongoing trade disputes with China as well as the constant attacks from the US which crippled the functionality of the **dispute settlement appeal system of WTO.**
- The **spokesperson of WTO** had informed that the next **General-Council meeting** can be called at short notice since the previous one in October 2020 was suspended because of the deadlock.
- The move by the **current US administration will also allow WTO to finally replace Roberto Azevedo** who had stepped down in August 2020.

About Ngozi Okonjo- Iweala:

- The **66 years old Ngozi Okonjo- Iweala** is trained as a development economist. She acquired her degrees from **Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)** and has worked previously as the **Managing Director of World Bank.**
- In her home country Nigeria, she was **the first female Foreign Minister** as well as held the **position of Finance Minister twice.**

#PAKISTAN RETAINED ON FATF'S GREYLIST

The **Financial Action Task Force (FATF)** has decided to retain **Pakistan on the "greylist"** till the next review of its performance on its recommendations during the June Plenary session.

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

Background

- During the **October-2020 Plenary, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Pakistan was given an extension** for full compliance with the 27-point action plan till February 2021.
- It had then not fully complied with 6 of the 27 directives.
- **The FATF had issued the 27-point action plan** after placing **Pakistan on the 'Grey List' in June 2018**. The action plan pertains to curbing **money laundering** and terror financing.

About the issue

- **FATF acknowledged Pakistan's significant progress in combating terrorism**, however it was **still to fully comply with three of the 27-point action plan**.
- **The three points** pertain to **effective steps in terms of financial sanctions and penalties** against the terror funding infrastructure and the entities involved.
- After assessing the measures taken during the **June 2021 session, the FATF** would verify the implementation and test the sustainability of reforms undertaken by Pakistan, to review its inclusion or exclusion on the grey list.

The **Financial Action Task Force (FATF)** is an intergovernmental organisation founded in 1989 on the initiative of the G7 to develop policies to combat money laundering. **In 2001**, its mandate was expanded to include terrorism financing. The objectives of **FATF are to set standards and promote effective implementation of legal**, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering, terrorist financing and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system. FATF is a "policy-making body" that works to generate the necessary political will to bring about national legislative and regulatory reforms in these areas. FATF monitors progress in implementing its Recommendations through "peer reviews" ("mutual evaluations") of member countries. Since 2000, FATF has maintained the **FATF blacklist (formally called the "Call for action")** and the FATF greylist (formally called the "Other monitored jurisdictions").

Significance:

- **In Pakistan's case, the FATF** has taken cognisance of the inaction against several banned organisations **involved in raising funds for terror activities and those linked to global terrorists like Jaish-e-Mohammed chief Masood Azhar and Lashkar-e-Taiba's Hafiz Saeed and its operations chief Zaki-Ur Rahman Lakhvi**.
- **On several occasions, India has also raised the involvement of elements within Pakistan in a number of terror cases, including the 26/11 Mumbai and Pulwama attacks**.
- Perpetual containment of Pakistan **on the grey list of FATF would further pressurise Pakistan to take adequate measures to prevent such terrorist attacks on India from its soil**.

#PM MODI AT THE VIRTUAL QUAD SUMMIT 2021

- The **first-ever summit of the leaders of QUAD** took place in a virtual mode on March 12, 2021. PM Modi participated in the discussion between the leaders.



- The summit also witnessed the participation of the **Prime Minister of Japan Yoshihide Suga, President of the United States Joe Biden, and Prime Minister of Australia Scott Morrison.**
- As per the statement by the External Affairs Ministry, the Quad leaders will be discussing the ongoing efforts to combat the pandemic.
- They will also explore the opportunities for collaboration in ensuring equitable, safe as well as **affordable vaccines in the Indo-Pacific region.**

QUAD is the force for Global good

- **Prime Minister Modi** while addressing the first summit of **Quad leaders** mentioned that today's agenda of the Quad leaders covering areas such as **climate change, vaccine, and emerging technologies make Quad a force** for global good.
- Our agenda today covering areas like vaccines, climate change and emerging technologies makes the Quad, a force for global good.
- While highlighting the **significance of Quad in today's world, PM Modi** stated that Quad has come of age and will remain an important pillar of stability in the indo-pacific region.
- Quad has come of age and will remain an **important pillar of stability in the Indo Pacific.**

Promoting stable, secular & prosperous Indo-pacific

- **PM Modi** noted that he sees the positive vision of Quad as an extension of India's ancient philosophy of '**VasudhaivaKutumbakam**' which regards the world as one family.

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- He further added that the leaders of Quad will work together as closely as ever before to advance **shared values as well as promote stable, secular, and prosperous indo-pacific**.
- I see this positive vision as an extension of India's ancient philosophy of '**VasudhaivaKutumbakam**' which regards the world as one family. We will work together closely as ever before for advancing shared values & promoting secular, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific.

Indo-pacific to shape the destiny of the world

- **During his address at the virtual summit of Quad**, the Prime Minister of Australia highlighted that Indo-Pacific will now shape the destiny of the world in the 21st century.
- He further added that as the four leaders of great democracies in the indo-pacific region, let this **partnership be an enabler of stability, peace, and prosperity. It's the Indo-Pacific** that'll now shape the destiny of the world in the 21st Century.
- As four leaders of great democracies in **Indo-Pacific**, let our partnership be an enabler of peace, stability & prosperity and to do so inclusively with many nations in the region

US committed to achieve stability in the region

- The **President of the United States Joe Biden assured** that the country is committed to beworking with the Quad leaders and with other allies in the region to achieve stability.
- The **President further added that this group** is particularly significant as it is dedicated to concrete results and practical solutions. **United States** is committed to working with you & with all our allies in the region to achieve stability.
- This group is particularly important because it is dedicated to the practical solutions and concrete results. The **US President during the summit** also informed that the country will be launching a new **joint ambitious partnership that will boost the vaccine manufacturing** for the global benefit and will strengthen vaccinations to benefit the **entire indo-Pacific**.
- We are launching a new ambitious joint partnership that is going to boost vaccine manufacturing for the global benefit, strengthen vaccinations to benefit the entire Indo-Pacific.

Regional & Global issues on agenda

- During the **virtual summit of the Quad- Quadrilateral Security Summit** on March 12, the leaders of the powerful economies will discuss the global and regional issues of mutual interest. They will also talk about the practical areas of cooperation for **maintaining an open, free, and inclusive Indo-pacific region**.
- The summit in a virtual mode will provide an opportunity to exchange views and ideas on contemporary challenges such as emerging and critical technologies, resilient supply chains, climate change, and maritime security.

Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD)

- **Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)** is the 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**.
- The idea of Quad was first mooted by **Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007**. However, the idea couldn't move ahead with Australia pulling out of it, apparently due to Chinese pressure.

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- In December 2012, Shinzo Abe again floated the **concept of Asia's "Democratic Security Diamond"** involving Australia, India, Japan and the US to safeguard the maritime commons from the Indian Ocean to the western Pacific.
- In November 2017, **India, US, Australia and Japan** gave shape to the long-pending "Quad" Coalition to develop a new strategy to keep the critical sea routes in the Indo-Pacific free of any influence (especially China).

#JOE BIDEN INVITATION TO PM MODI: CLIMATE SUMMIT

- **US President Joe Biden** has invited **40 world leaders including Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping** for a virtual leaders summit on climate next month.
- As per a statement by the White House on March 26, the **leaders' summit on climate** will focus on the urgency and the economic benefits of stronger climate action. The **two-day summit will be held between April 22-23, 2021**.
- The climate summit will be a key milestone on the road to the **United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26)**, which is scheduled to take place in November 2021 in Glasgow, United Kingdom.



Climate Summit Theme

- **The summit's theme will include galvanising efforts by the world's major economies to:**
 - Reduce emissions** to keep a limit to warming of 1.5 degree Celsius within reach
 - Mobilise public and private sector finance** to drive the net-zero transition
 - Help vulnerable countries cope with climate impacts.**

Key Highlights

- Forty leaders from across the world have been invited to participate in the summit including **Indian Prime Minister, Russian President Vladimir Putin, Chinese President Xi Jinping, Chinese President Xi Jinping, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Bhutan Prime Minister LotayTshering.**
- The **US President** also invited the heads of countries that are demonstrating strong climate leadership, those that are **most vulnerable to climate impact** and those charting innovative pathways to achieve a net-zero economy

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- **Few civil society leaders and business leaders** are also expected to participate in the Climate Summit. The US President has urged the leaders to use the summit as an opportunity to **outline how their countries can contribute to stronger climate action.**
- The **United States is expected to announce an ambitious 2030 emissions target** as its new Nationally Determined Contribution under the Paris Agreement.
- The **Climate summit will reconvene the US-led Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate**, which brings together 17 countries responsible for almost 80 percent of global emissions and global GDP.

#US NUCLEAR DEAL WITH IRAN (JCPOA)

- **Recently, Joe Biden has been sworn as the 46th president of the United States.** On the foreign policy front, Biden has promised to move quickly to rejoin the nuclear deal with Iran which is also known as the **Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).**
- **JCPOA was signed in 2015**, but former US President Trump has withdrawn from it (in 2018) and embarked on a policy of 'maximum pressure' to coerce Iran back to the negotiating table.
- The **maximum pressure campaign devastated Iran's economy** but failed to push Iran back to the negotiating table or to curtail its involvement in Iraq, Syria, or Lebanon.
- **Joe Biden has reiterated a return to the JCPOA provided Iran** returns to full compliance. The return of the US to JCPOA may be a positive step towards regional peace. However, there are many challenges for the **US and Iran to return to the negotiating table.**

JCPOA: Timeline & Background

- The **JCPOA** was the result of prolonged negotiations from 2013 and 2015 between **Iran and P5+1 (China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the European Union, or the EU).**
- It happened, thanks to the backchannel talks between the **U.S. (U.S. President Barack Obama)** and Iran, quietly brokered by Oman, in an attempt to repair the accumulated mistrust since the 1979 Islamic revolution.
- The JCPOA obliged Iran to accept constraints on its enrichment program verified by an intrusive inspection regime in return for a partial lifting of economic sanctions.
- However, faced with a **hostile Republican Senate, President Obama** was unable to get the nuclear deal ratified but implemented it on the basis of periodic Executive Orders to keep sanction waivers going.
- When **Donald Trump became president, he withdrew from the deal and called it a "horrible, one-sided deal that should have never, ever been made".**
- The U.S. decision was criticized by all other parties to the **JCPOA (including the European allies)** because Iran was in compliance with its obligations, as certified by the **International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).**
- Tensions rose as the U.S. pushed ahead with its unilateral sanctions, widening its scope to cover nearly all Iranian banks connected to the global financial system, industries related to metallurgy, energy, and shipping, individuals related to the defense, intelligence, and nuclear establishments.
- For the first year after the U.S. withdrawal, Iran's response was muted as the **E-3 (France, Germany, the U.K.) and the EU promised to find ways to mitigate the U.S. decision.**

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- The E-3's promised relief Instrument in **Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX)**, created in 2019 to facilitate limited trade with Iran.
- However, by May 2019, Iran's strategic patience ran out as the anticipated economic relief from the E-3/EU failed to materialize. As the sanctions began to hurt, **Tehran shifted to a strategy of 'maximum resistance'**.

Iran's Policy of 'Maximum Resistance'

- **Beginning in May 2019, Iran began to move away from JCPOA's constraints incrementally: exceeding the ceilings of 300kg on low-enriched uranium and 130 MT on heavy-water; raising enrichment levels from 3.67% to 4.5%; stepping up research and development on advanced centrifuges; resuming enrichment at Fordow, and violating limits on the number of centrifuges in use.**
- **In January 2020, following the drone strike on Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps commander Gen. Qasem Soleimani, Iran announced that it would no longer observe the JCPOA's restraints.**
- **The collapse of the JCPOA drags Iran towards nuclear brinkmanship, like North Korea, which has created major geopolitical instability in the region and beyond.**

Roadblocks in Restoration of Deal

- **Regional Cold War Between Iran & Saudi Arabia:** Saudi Arabia is the cornerstone of US' Middle East policy. The US has strengthened its relationship with Saudi-Arabia, to act as a counterweight against Iran.
- However, traditional Shia vs Sunni conflict precipitated into a regional cold war between Iran & Saudi Arabia.
- Thus, a major challenge for the **US to restore the nuclear deal is to maintain peace between the two regional rivals.**
- **Iran Gone too Far:** The challenge in resuming the agreement in its present form is that Iran is currently in violation of several of its important commitments, such as the limits on stockpiles of enriched uranium.
- **The International Atomic Energy Agency** noted that Iran now had more than 2,440 kilograms, which is more than eight times the limit set by the 2015 nuclear deal.
- Further, Iran says it wants the US to pay for the billions of dollars in economic losses it incurred when it pulled the United States out of the Iran deal in 2018 and reinstated sanctions that it had lifted.

Impacts on India For Restoration of JCPO

- **Restoration of JCPOA may ease many restrictions over the Iranian regime, which may directly or indirectly help India.** This can be reflected in the following examples:
- **Boost to Regional Connectivity:** Removing sanctions may revive **India's interest in the Chabahar option, Bandar Abbas port, and other plans for regional connectivity.**
- This would further help India to neutralize the **Chinese presence in Gwadar port, Pakistan.**
- Apart from Chabahar, India's interest in the **International North-South Transit Corridor (INSTC)**, which runs through Iran, which will improve connectivity with five Central Asian republics, may also get a boost?
- **Energy Security:** Due to the pressure linked to the **US' Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)**, India has to bring down oil imports to zero.
- Restoration of ties between the US and Iran will help India to procure cheap Iranian oil and aid in energy security.

16TH INDIA-EU LEADER'S SUMMIT

- The **16th India-European Union (EU) Leaders' Summit** that was scheduled to be held in Porto, Portugal will now be held virtually on May 08, 2021, due to an unprecedented surge in corona virus cases across the world. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will not be going to Porto, Portugal.
- As per the statement by Arindam Bagchi, official Spokesperson, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "In view of the COVID-19 situation, it has been decided, in consultation with the EU and Portuguese leadership, to hold the India-EU Leaders' Meeting in a virtual format on 8 May 2021."
- **Bagchi said that the India-EU Leaders' Meeting in the EU+27 format being held for the first time reflects the shared ambition of both countries to further strengthen the 'strategic partnership'.**
- The **Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between India and the European Union** will be a key focus during the 16th India-EU Leaders' Summit. The FTA between both countries was launched in 2007 and suspended in 2012.
- The **15th India-EU Leaders' Summit** was also conducted virtually on July 15, 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



India-EU Relations:

- India was amongst the first countries to develop diplomatic relations with the European Union (EU) back in the 1960s. Both the countries signed a cooperation agreement in 1994 and in 2004, India and EU became 'strategic partners'.
- India and the EU adopted a Joint Action Plan in 2005 to further strengthen the political and economic ties, expand trade and investments channels, and forge friendly relations between people and cultures of both countries.
- The **first India-EU Summit was held in June 2000 in Lisbon.** The EU is the largest trading partner of India. The EU is also the second-largest sources of Foreign Direct Investment inflow for India. India is the 10th largest trading partner of the European Union (EU).

PUTIN TO STAY IN POWER TILL 2036

- The **President of Russia Vladimir Putin** on April 5, 2021, gave his final approval to the legislation that allows him to hold office for two additional 6-year terms. It gives him the



Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

possibility to stay in power till 2036.

- **According to a copy posted on the legal information portal**, the 68-years old President, who has already been in power for more than two decades, signed off on the bill on April 5.
- Vladimir Putin had proposed the change as part of the constitutional reforms that were overwhelmingly backed by the Russians in a vote in July 2020. **Lawmakers also approved the bill in March 2021.**
- The **opponents of the Kremlin** have criticized the latest legislation that allows Putin to run for two more terms. They call it a pretext to allow **Putin to become 'President for Life'**.

Outcome of a new law signed by Putin:

- **Vladimir Putin** has been currently serving his fourth Presidential Term, which is set to end in the year 2024.
- However, the legislation, passed by him, can allow him to serve **for two more 6-year terms, in case he chooses to stand for and win the re-election both times.**

What does the latest law signed by Putin state?

- **A number of provisions of the law** were developed on the basis of the amendments to the Constitution. One of the new amendments was the restriction on the number of Presidential terms for one person. It will be applied to the existing President regardless of the previous Presidential terms, **allowing the current head of state to contest the Presidency twice.**
- The law **states that eligible for the Presidential office is any Russian citizen not younger than 35 years of age** and who has been a resident in Russia's territory for no less than 25 years. They must never have had the citizenship or the permanent residence permit of another country.
- The **rule will not concern the Russians** who earlier had the citizenship of another nation and eventually were admitted to the **Russian Federation in accordance with Federal Constitutional Law.**
- **Vladimir Putin as Russia's President: Background**
- **Vladimir Putin** was first elected as the President of Russia in 2000 and had served for two consecutive four-year terms. In 2008, **his ally Dmitry Medvedev took his place**, which critics also saw as a way around Russia's limit on the **2 consecutive terms for the country's President.**
- However, while in office, **Dmitry Medvedev** signed off the legislation that extended the **terms to 6 years starting with the next President.**
- **Vladimir Putin returned to Kremlin in 2012** and served the extended 6-year terms. He won the re-election in 2018.

#POLITICAL CRISIS IN JORDAN

- **Jordan is a unitary state that is ruled under a Constitutional Monarchy.** Unitary state is a state that is governed as a single entity where the central government is ultimately supreme. In a Constitutional monarchy, a monarch (ruler or king) exercises



Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

authority in accordance to a written or unwritten constitution.

What is Jordan Crisis?

- The **former crown prince Hamzah** was recently placed under de facto house arrest. He is the half-brother of **the King Abdullah. Hamzah** was accused of undermining national security.
- This was because **he attended the meetings with tribal leaders** that openly criticized the ruling monarch. **According to Jordanian Government**, there had been an attempt for a political coup to destabilize the country. The Government also says that **foreign entities also attended the meeting**.

What is the significance of stability in Jordan?

- **Jordan was created after the First World War.** It has remained stable for decades in a part of the world that is prone to conflict and political uncertainty. According to the Gulf and Western countries, Jordan is a strategic partner that can be relied upon for further political objectives in the region.
- The **support of Jordanian intelligence is highly important to fight against terrorism in the region.** The conflicts in the region include **Syrian crisis, Israel-Palestine conflict**, etc. Jordan has served as a good host to the refugees from the war prone zones. Today refugees make up half of population of Jordan.
- **During 2003 US invasion of Iraq, Jordan** had welcomed refugees from Iraq. It currently hosts 10 lakh refugees from Syria. Jordan is highly important for the **future peace deals between Israel and Palestine.**

How did Jordan get amidst regional powers?

- Initially Jordan maintained close relations with the US and also with the **Sunni Muslim powers of UAE and Saudi Arabia.** They together stand against the Shia of Iran.
- In 1994, Jordan signed a peace deal with Israel and since then the two countries maintain diplomatic relations. However, the friction began after the **Saudi-UAE's blockade of Qatar in 2017.** Saudi and UAE moved to punish **Qatar for its ties with extremist groups.** Jordan too downgraded its relations with Qatar.
- However, it **maintained cordial terms with Qatar.** It even **accepted financial assistance from Qatar.** This created tensions between Jordan and Saudi Arabia and its allies in the region.
- Jordan also faced criticisms for maintaining strong ties with Turkey. Jordan disagreed to **back Syrian crisis along with UAE and Saudi Arabia.** Later Jordan ended up in trouble after being exposed for munitions support for Libyan strongman Khalifa Haftar.
- After **UAE normalized** its relations with Israel, **the role of Jordan as the Interlocutor of the region** has diminished. Interlocutor is a person who takes part in a dialogue or conversation.

#THE SAUDI GREEN INIATIVE

Recently, Saudi Arabia launched **Saudi Green Initiative** and the **Middle East Green Initiative** to combat the threat of **climate change.**

Background and G20 Summit:

- One of the main pillars of the Saudi **G20** presidency was to **safeguard the planet.**

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- In 2020, G20 introduced initiatives like establishing a **Global Coral Reef Research and Development Accelerator Platform** and the **Circular Carbon Economy (CCE) Platform**.
- Saudi Arabia reiterated that it is committed to lead regional efforts to address climate change and has been making steady progress in this direction. Saudi Arabia established the **Environmental Special Forces in 2019**.

Saudi Green Initiative:

- **Aim:** To raise the vegetation cover, reduce carbon emissions, combat pollution and land degradation, and preserve marine life.
- **Features:** 10 billion trees will be planted in the Kingdom.
- To reduce carbon emissions by more than 4% of global contributions, through a renewable energy programme that will generate 50% of Saudi's energy from renewables by 2030.
- Saudi Arabia is working towards raising the percentage of its protected areas to more than 30% of its total land area, exceeding the global target of 17%.



Middle East Green Initiative :

- **Aim:** To preserve marine and coastal environments, increase the proportion of natural reserves and protected land, improve the regulation of oil production, accelerate the transition to clean energy and boost the amount of energy generated by renewables.
- **Features:** Saudi Arabia will work with the **Gulf Cooperation Council** countries and regional partners to plant an additional 40 billion trees in the West Asian region.

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- **It represents 5% of the global target of planting one trillion trees and reducing 2.5% of global carbon levels.**
- Saudi Arabia will **convene an annual summit called the Middle East Green Initiative** which will host leaders from the government, scientists and environmentalists to discuss the details of implementation.
- In partnership with participating countries, **innovative methods will be researched** to irrigate from treated water, cloud seeding and other purpose-driven solutions such as planting native trees which requires support for three years to grow and will then be able to survive on their own with natural irrigation.
- As part of the Middle East Green initiative, Saudi Arabia will work with the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and regional partners to plant an additional 40 billion trees in the West Asian region.
- **It represents 5% of the global target of planting one trillion trees** and reducing 2.5% of global carbon levels.
- Saudi Arabia has been sharing its expertise and know-how with its neighbouring countries to reduce carbon emissions resulting from hydrocarbon production in the region by 60% and globally by 10%.
- **Current Support:** Saudi Arabia has been sharing its expertise and know-how with its neighbouring countries to **reduce carbon emissions resulting from hydrocarbon production in the region by 60% and globally by 10%.**
- Saudi Arabia currently operates the **largest carbon capture and utilisation plant in the world**, it also operates one of the **region's most advanced CO₂-enhanced oil recovery plants** that captures and stores 8,00,000 tonnes of CO₂ annually.

Appreciating Indian Efforts:

- Saudi Arabia also appreciated India's remarkable commitments to tackle climate change as India is on track to achieve its **Paris Agreement** targets.
- India's **renewable energy capacity is the fourth largest in the world.** India has an ambitious target of achieving **450 gigawatts of renewable energy capacity by 2030.**

Significance of the mission

- The "Saudi Green Initiative" aims to raise vegetation cover, land degradation, preserve marine life and reduce carbon emissions. Under this initiative, 10 billion trees will be planted within the kingdom in the years to come. With this initiative, the kingdom will contribute to raising the percentage of the protected area to more than **30 per cent of its total land area, representing 600,000 square kilometres.**
- **It will also reduce carbon emissions by more than 4 per cent of global contributions** which will be achieved by **adopting a renewable energy program** that would generate 50 per cent of the **kingdom's energy from renewables by 2030.**

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- **Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman** also announced The "**Middle East Green Initiative**" and the kingdom under this initiative will coordinate with neighbouring countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council states and Middle Eastern Countries.
- Under this initiative, **40 billion trees will be planted in the Middle East**. This tree plantation program is claimed to be largest reforestation program in the world, double the size of the Great Green Wall in the Sahel which is the second-largest such regional initiative.
- The "Middle East Green" initiative announced by Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman aims to plant 50 billion trees in the world. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has opted for a more sustainable future with the **launch of "Green Saudi" and "Middle East Green" initiatives**. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman has called the leaders of Qatar, Iran, Sudan, Kuwait, Bahrain to talk about the tree planting project.
- The initiatives that have been announced by the Crown Prince on March 27 will help in reducing carbon emissions by 60 per cent in the region, reported by The Saudi Press agency.
- The initiative launched by the Crown Prince aimed to chart a path that would support the kingdom and the region in protecting the planet.
- The Saudi Press Agency quoted the Crown Prince as saying that being the leading global oil producer, the kingdom recognizes its responsibility in advancing the fight against climate change. The Crown Prince added that the Kingdom and the region face climate changes such as desertification which is an immediate economic risk to the kingdom and region.

Saudi Arabia's carbon mission

- Saudi Arabia currently operates the largest carbon capture and utilisation plant in the world, turning half a million tonnes of CO₂ annually into products such as fertilizers and methanol.
- It also operates one of the region's most advanced CO₂-enhanced oil recovery plants that captures and stores 8,00,000 tonnes of CO₂ annually.

Related Indian Initiatives

- **National Clean Air Programme (NCAP): It was launched in January 2019.**
- The Central government launched a five-year action plan with a tentative target of 20-30% reduction in concentrations of PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5} by 2024, with 2017 as the base year.
- Unlike earlier initiatives which focussed largely on the national capital region, this is a comprehensive pan-India air pollution abatement scheme for 102 cities which were identified by Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) on the basis of their ambient air quality data between 2011 and 2015.

Bharat Stage Norms

- The Bharat Stage (BS) are standards instituted by the government to regulate the emission of air pollutants from motor vehicles.

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- With appropriate fuel and technology, they limit the release of air pollutants such as nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, hydrocarbons, Particulate Matter (PM) and sulfur oxides from vehicles using internal combustion engines.
- As the stage goes up, the control of emissions becomes stricter.
- The standards and the timeline for implementation are set by the **Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)** under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
- The standards are based on European regulations that were first introduced in 2000.

Unnat Jyoti by Affordable LEDs for All (UJALA)

- It was launched in **2015** with a target of replacing 77 crore incandescent lamps with LED bulbs and to nullify the high-cost of LEDs that acted as a barrier previously in the adoption of energy-efficient systems.
- The scheme was implemented to set up a phase-wise LED distribution.
- The **objective** is to promote efficient lighting, enhance awareness on using efficient equipment that will reduce electricity bills and preserve the environment.
- It is the **world's largest domestic lighting project**.

International Solar Alliance

- The **launch** of the International Solar Alliance (ISA) was announced by the **Prime Minister of India** (Narendra Modi) and former **President of France** (Francois Hollande) on **30th November 2015**, at the **21st session of United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP-21)** in Paris, France.
- It was conceived as a coalition of solar-resource-rich countries (which lie either completely or partly between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn) to address their special energy needs.
- **67 countries** have signed and ratified the ISA framework agreement.
- The **Assembly of the ISA is the apex decision-making body** which comprises representatives from each Member Country.
- It **aims** at lowering the cost of technology and finance and thereby facilitate deployment of over 1,000 GW of solar energy and mobilize more than USD 1,000 billion into solar power by 2030 in Member countries.
- Solar is a key source of affordable and reliable energy, thus it could play a significant role in achieving the **universal energy access goal (SDG 7)**.
- The Government of India has allotted 5 acres of land to the ISA in **National Institute of Solar Energy (NISE)** campus, **Gurugram** and has released a sum of Rs. 160 crore for creating a corpus fund, building infrastructure and meeting day to day recurring expenditure of the ISA up to the year 2021-22.

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- The **National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC)** was launched in **2008** by the **Prime Minister's Council on Climate Change**.
- It aims at creating awareness among the representatives of the public, different agencies of the government, scientists, industry and the communities on the threat posed by climate change and the steps to counter it.

#WTO TRIPS AGREEMENT & INDIA'S CONCERN

- The **Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement** is in the news now because of the recent US decision to support the temporary waiver of patent rules for the coronavirus vaccines. This is an important topic from multiple perspectives for the UPSC exam including economy, international relations, current affairs, etc.

TRIPS Agreement

- **Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Right (TRIPS) is an agreement on international IP rights.**
- TRIPS came into force in 1995, as part of the agreement that established the **World Trade Organisation (WTO)**.
- TRIPS establishes minimum standards for the availability, scope, and use of seven forms of intellectual property namely, trademarks, copyrights, geographical indications, patents, industrial designs, layout designs for integrated circuits, and undisclosed information or trade secrets.
- It applies basic international trade principles regarding intellectual property to member states. It is applicable to all WTO members.
- **TRIPS Agreement** lays down the permissible exceptions and limitations for balancing the interests of intellectual property with the interests of public health and economic development.
- **TRIPS is the most comprehensive international agreement on IP** and it has a major role in enabling trade in creativity and knowledge, in resolving trade disputes over intellectual property, and in assuring WTO members the latitude to achieve their domestic policy objectives.
- **It frames the IP system in terms of innovation, technology transfer and public welfare.**



Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- The TRIPS Council is responsible for administering and monitoring the operation of the **TRIPS Agreement**.
- TRIPS was negotiated during the Uruguay Round of the **General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)** in 1986–1994. The TRIPS Agreement is also described as a “Berne and Paris-plus” Agreement

What are Intellectual Property Rights

- **Intellectual property rights** are the rights given to persons over the creations of their minds. Intellectual property rights (IPRs) are legal rights that protect these creations.
- In contrast to rights over tangible property, IP rights give their owners rights to exclude others from making use of their creations only for a limited period. IP rights entitle the owners to receive a royalty or any sort of financial compensation or payment when another person uses their creations.

What is Intellectual Property?

- **“Intellectual property”** refers to **creations of the mind**. These creations can take many different forms, such as artistic expressions, signs, symbols and names used in commerce, designs and inventions.
- **IP rights are generally classified into two categories:**
- **Copyright and rights related to copyright:** This rights relates to rights protecting art works, literary works, computer programmes, films, musical compositions, sculptures, paintings, etc. Related rights also include rights of performers, broadcasting organisations, and producers of phonograms (sound recordings). The main purpose of protection of copyright and related rights is to encourage and reward creative work.
- **Industrial property:** There are two main areas of rights under this head.
- The protection of distinctive signs, especially trademarks (which differentiate the goods or services of one organisation/establishment from those of other undertakings) and geographical indications. These rights are aimed at protecting and ensuring fair competition consumer protection.
- The **second type of industrial property rights** are protected primarily to stimulate innovation, design and the creation of technology. These rights protect innovations by patents, trade secrets and industrial designs.

TRIPS Significance

- The TRIPS Agreement makes protection of intellectual property rights an integral part of the multilateral trading system, as embodied in the WTO. **The agreement is often termed one of the three “pillars” of the WTO, the other two being trade in goods (the traditional domain of the GATT) and trade in services.**
- **Before TRIPS**, the extent of protection and enforcement of IP rights varied widely across nations and as intellectual property became more important in trade, these differences became a source of tension in international economic relations.
- Therefore, it was considered prudent to have new trade rules for IP rights in order to have more order and predictability, and also to settle disputes in an orderly manner.

TRIPS Agreement Latest Concern

- In view of the **COVID-19 pandemic**, **India and South Africa** had proposed to the WTO in October 2020 that the TRIPS Agreement (that included patent protection to pharmaceutical products including COVID vaccines) be waived off for COVID vaccines, medicines and diagnostics for the time period of the pandemic in order to make vaccines and drugs for COVID available to a maximum number of people worldwide.
- If the **vaccines are patent protected**, **only a few pharmaceutical companies from developed western countries** would be able to manufacture it, making such drugs unavailable or inaccessible due to the high costs to people of other countries, especially, developing and least developed countries.
- The **US, which was opposed to any TRIPS waiver**, has backed this proposal, along with the EU. This move has been welcomed by many since it might lead to the manufacture of more volumes of COVID vaccines enabling the whole world to get rid of the **coronavirus at the earliest**.
- However, pharmaceutical companies have protested the move saying this would not necessarily ensure vaccine availability since developing countries did not have the capability to produce the vaccines.

Arguments in favour of relaxing TRIPS rules

- This would make the vaccines more **available to people of developing countries and also LCDs**.
- Life-saving drugs and vaccines should be made available to everyone and pharmaceutical companies should not be looking to make profits out of these. There is an ethical and moral issue here.
- With particular reference to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is said that no one is safe unless everyone is safe. In this respect, it is imperative that vaccines are made available to everyone in countries affected since it can easily spread to all countries as seen in the first wave.
- Rules granting monopolies that **place the right to access basic healthcare in a position of constant peril must end**.

Arguments made by opponents of TRIPS waiver

- Unless corporations are rewarded for their inventions, they would be unable to **recoup amounts invested by them in research and development**.
- Without the right to **monopolise production** there will be no incentive to innovate.
- They also claim that companies in the developing world do not have the capacity to manufacture vaccines or drugs on a large scale.

Concerns

- **Just a waiver of the IP rights** rules without further assistance such as technology transfer to generic pharmaceutical companies in developing countries would render the move useless.

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- This is because there would also necessitate tech transfer for the pharmaceutical companies to start the production since vaccines like the mRNA vaccines require highly sophisticated manufacturing equipment.
- **Not only technology and equipment, raw materials and probably personnel** would also need to be transferred for developing countries to be able to produce vaccines on a large scale.
- It could also take several years before the **generic pharmaceutical companies' plants become operational** at optimal capacity and produce vaccines, which is a problem because it is doubted whether vaccines produced today would be effective against any new strain of the virus.

US support for waiving IP protection of COVID vaccines

- The **United States** has announced the **support for waiving Intellectual Property (IP) protection for Covid-19 vaccines**.
- The decision is a breakthrough in India and South Africa's attempts to get **World Trade Organisation (WTO)** member countries to agree to such a waiver to fight the pandemic equitably.

Need to Waive Patents on Covid Vaccines:

- **Monopoly of Drug Companies:** At present, only drug companies which own patents are authorised to manufacture Covid vaccines.
- A lifting of patents will allow the formula to be shared with other companies.
- **Vaccine Cost:** Once the formula is shared, any company which possesses the required technology and infrastructure can produce vaccines.
- This will lead to **cheaper and more generic versions** of Covid vaccines and will be a **big step in overcoming vaccine shortage**.
- **Inequitable Distribution of Vaccines:** This has opened up a glaring gap between developing and wealthier countries now.
- The countries having surplus doses of vaccines have already vaccinated a considerable percentage of their population and are returning to normalcy.
- Whereas, the poorer nations continue to face shortages, have overburdened healthcare systems and hundreds dying daily.
- **Against the Interests of the World:** The longer Covid circulates in developing nations, there is a greater chance of more vaccine-resistant, deadly mutations of the virus emerging.

Significance for India:

Help in Increasing Production: **The bulk of the vaccine doses produced in India are taken up by foreign countries which** could pay more for the doses.

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

This move can help scale up production to meet demand **besides making the vaccines** more affordable for everyone.

Preparation for the Third Wave: **Indian authorities have stated that the third wave of the pandemic is inevitable.**

Once the number of cases and deaths plateau, addressing shortages and making more affordable vaccines readily accessible could be the best way to prepare for the surge once again.

Counter Arguments:

Vaccine Quality and Safety may get Compromised: Lifting of patents would be a compromise on control of safety and quality standards for vaccine manufacturing.

Disincentive Pharmaceutical Companies: Lifting of patents would be a huge deterrent to investing heavily on vaccine development during pandemics in the future.

Can Lead to Confusion: Eliminating those protections would undermine the global response to the pandemic, including ongoing effort to tackle new variants.

It will create confusion that could potentially undermine public confidence in vaccine safety, and create a barrier to information sharing.

#MAITRI SETU BETWEEN INDIA & BANGLADESH

- **PM Modi inaugurated 'MaitriSetu' connecting India and Bangladesh** virtually on March 9, 2021. During the event, he also laid the **foundation stone and inaugurated multiple infrastructure projects in Tripura.**
- **The 'MaitriSetu' bridge between India and Bangladesh** has been constructed over the Feni river which flows between



Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

Bangladesh and the Indian boundary in Tripura. The name **MaitriSetu** is the symbol of the growing **friendly and bilateral relations** between both the neighbouring countries.

- The **Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina** also attended the launch of **MaitriSetu via video conference**. While speaking on the occasion, the PM of Bangladesh mentioned that the opening of any bridge is testimony to the Bangladesh government's continued commitment to support India in strengthening the connectivity in the region, particularly Northeast India.

MaitriSetu: India & Bangladesh

- The **building of MaitriSetu** was taken up by the **National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited at a cost of Rs. 133 crores**.
- The **1.9 km long bridge will join Sabroom in India with Ramgarh in Bangladesh**. It will start a new chapter for trade and people and to people movement between the two countries.
- With the **inauguration of MaitriSetu**, Tripura will become the Gateway of the Northeast region with access to Chittagong Port in Bangladesh, just 80 km from Sabroom.

Integrated Check Post at Sabroom:

- PM will lay the foundation stone to set up an **integrated check post at Sabroom**. The check post will help in easing the movement of passengers and goods between India and Bangladesh.
- It will also provide new market opportunities for the products of **Northeast states and will assist in the seamless movement of passengers**.
- The project has been taken up by the **Lands Port Authority of India worth Rs. 232 crores**.

Laying the foundation stone of NH 208:

- **PM Modi will lay the foundation stone of NH 208**. It will connect the Unakoti district headquarters at Kailashahar in the state with the **Khowai district headquarters**.
- The **80 km long NH 208 will provide** an alternative route to NH 44. Its construction has been taken up by the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited worth Rs. 1,078 crores.
- **Other projects to be inaugurated in Tripura:** PM Modi will inaugurate State Highways and other district roads which have been developed by the state government worth Rs. 63.75 crores. The roads will provide all-weather connectivity to the citizens of Tripura.
- **Prime Minister Modi** will inaugurate 40,978 houses that have been constructed under the government's **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (urban) and has been completed at a cost of Rs. 813 crores**.
- The integrated Command and Control Centre that has been built under **Agartala Smart City Mission** will also be inaugurated.
- **PM Modi** will also lay the foundation stone for the development of **Commercial Complex and Multi-Level Car parking** at Old Motor Stand which has been developed at a cost of Rs. 200 crores.
- The **foundation stone** will be laid for expanding the current road from Lichubagan to the airport in the state from 2 lanes to 4 lanes. The project has been implemented by **Agartala Smart City Mission at a cost of Rs. 96 crores**.

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

Recently, the USA President has envisaged a **New Peace Initiative (Plan)** to decide on the roadmap for peace in Afghanistan.

- Under the plan, the USA proposed a **regional conference** under the **United Nations** auspices with **foreign ministers of the USA, India, Russia, China, Pakistan and Iran** to discuss a “**unified approach**” on Afghanistan.



USA President's New Peace Initiative:

- **Delay in Withdrawal of Troops:** This peace plan has kept open the possibility that the USA troops, currently deployed in Afghanistan, might stay on for a longer time.
- Under the earlier **USA- Taliban Deal**, the USA had promised to withdraw all troops by May, 2021.
- **Immediate Action:** The USA is pressing the Taliban to accept an immediate agreement to reduce violence for 90 days that will provide the space for the peace initiative.
- **Inclusive Process:** The USA will **not be “dictating terms”** to the Afghan parties, but **facilitating** an inclusive interim government, an agreement on the “**foundational principles**” for a new political order, and a “**permanent and comprehensive ceasefire**”.
- **Turkey's Role:** The USA is asking **Turkey to convene a meeting of the government** in Kabul (capital of Afghanistan) and the Taliban to finalise a peace settlement.
- **Unified Approach:** The USA asked the **United Nations** to convene a meeting of the **foreign ministers from China, Russia, Pakistan, Iran, India and the United States** to develop a “unified approach” to peace in Afghanistan.

India's Role in Peace Process Through “Unified Approach”:

- India is an **important player** in the peace process – it has also been acknowledged by the USA.
- India supports all efforts for peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan which are **inclusive** and **Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled**.
- India has invested heavily in infrastructure developments, training security forces and supplying them with necessary equipment.
- **India has a major stake** in the **stability of Afghanistan** since it has invested considerable resources in Afghanistan's development.
- India hopes to have a role in setting the terms **especially concerning terrorism, violence, women's rights and democratic values**.

India's Interest in Afghanistan:

- **Economic and Strategic Interest:** Afghanistan is a gateway to the oil and mineral-rich **Central Asian republics**.
- Anyone who is in power in Afghanistan controls the land routes connecting India with Central Asia (via Afghanistan).
- **Developmental Projects:** The massive reconstruction plans for the country to offer a lot of opportunities for Indian companies.

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- Major projects include **the Afghan Parliament, the Zaranj-Delaram Highway, and the Afghanistan-India Friendship Dam (Salma Dam).**
- Also India's assistance of more than **USD 3 billion in projects**, hundreds of small development projects (of schools, hospitals and water projects) have cemented its position in Afghanistan.
- Security Interest:** India has been the victim of **state-sponsored terrorism** emanating from Pakistan supported terrorist group operating in the region (e.g. Haqqani network). Thus, setting up a friendly government in Afghanistan can help tackling Pakistan supported terrorism.

Challenges Ahead:

- The **Afghan government as well as Taliban** is unwilling for any power sharing.
- Taliban is even not willing to give up its sanctuaries in Pakistan.** Nor will it accept any dilution of the strict Islamic system that it wants to enforce.
- Also, the Taliban is fragmented or divided internally. It is composed of **various regional and tribal groups acting semi-autonomously.**
- Therefore, it is possible that some of them **may continue to engage in violence impacting the peace process and dialogue.**

ITALY JOINS INTERNATIONAL SOLAR ALLIANCE

- The **Spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs, Anurag Srivastava** has informed that Italy on March 17, 2021, signed a framework agreement of the International Solar Alliance with India.
- The official mentioned in a tweet that the **Italian Republic signed a framework agreement of ISA** after the amendment to the framework agreement of ISA entered into force on January 8, 2021, opening the membership of the alliance to all the member states of the United Nations.
- The **Framework Agreement was signed by the Ambassador of Italy Vincenzo De Luca.**
- The Additional Secretary (ER),** as the representative of the External Affairs Ministry, received the signed copies of the framework agreement. The **Ministry is also the depository of the International Solar Alliance framework agreement.**



India welcomes Italy to ISA:

- Earlier on March 17, **Harsh Vardhan Shringla, Foreign Secretary of India** met the Ambassador of Italy Vincenzo De Luca. He also welcomed Italy's accession to the International Solar Alliance.
- During the meeting, **the Foreign Secretary also discussed the G20 Presidency of Italy** which it currently holds.
- They also discussed the **'Vaccine Maitri' initiative** under which India has been using its vaccine production and delivery capacity to export the vaccine doses to other countries in order to fight the crisis created by the

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

pandemic.

International Solar Alliance:

- **ISA is an alliance of over 120 nations** that have been initiated by India. Most of the member countries are the sunshine ones which lie either entirely or partly between the Tropic of Capricorn and Tropic of Cancer.
- It was **jointly launched by the French President and Prime Minister Modi** during the United Nations Climate Change Conference, 2015 or COP21, in Paris, France.
- The global alliance aims at contributing to the **implementation of the Paris Climate Agreement** through the massive and rapid deployment of sustainable solar energy.

#ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CLASHES IN JERUSALEM

- The **clashes between the Israeli police and Palestinian protestors** have been taking place on a daily basis in and around **Jerusalem's Old City**, for weeks now. **Jerusalem is home to major religious sites that are sacred to Jews, Muslims, and Christians and is also the epicenter of Middle East Conflict.**
- For 100 years, Jerusalem has been the **place of violent confrontations between Arabs and Jews** and has remained one of the most bitterly contested cities known.
- However, the **latest clashes in Jerusalem** started a month ago with an Israeli move to stop some Palestinian gatherings at the beginning of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, it is already a time of heightened religious sensitivities.
- After the restrictions by Israel were eased, tensions over a plan of evicting dozens of Palestinians from an east Jerusalem neighborhood continue to fuel the confrontations between the two groups.
- On May 10, 2021, stun grenades echoed all over the holy hilltop compound. **Hundreds of Palestinians were hurt** in the clashes between the stone-throwing protestors and Israeli Police firing tear gas and rubber bullets. **Police amid the clash was also injured.**
- Even with strong global condemnation, the clashes and confrontation between Israel and Palestine have continued.



Jerusalem: Capital of Israelis and Palestinians

- **The people of Israel have viewed Jerusalem as its 'unified, eternal' capital. The country had captured east Jerusalem, which also includes the Old City, during the 1967 Mideast war, along with Gaza and West Bank.**
- **On the other hand, the people of Palestine demand those territories for their future state, with East Jerusalem serving as an eventual capital. But Israeli government annexed the eastern part of Jerusalem in a move that is not recognized internationally.**

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- The conflict has led to the path where the fate of east Jerusalem has **become one of the thorniest issues in the peace process, leading to a halt more than a decade ago.**
- On May 10, 2021, Israelis were set to mark Jerusalem Day. It is a national holiday celebrating the annexation.
- In the past years, thousands of Israelis- mainly the religious nationalists-have marched through the old city of Jerusalem, including the densely populated Muslim Quarter, in a display that has been considered provocative by many Palestinians.

Significance of the Holy Hilltop:

- The clashes on May 10, 2021, took place in and around the Al-Aqsa Mosque in the Old City of Jerusalem. The mosque is considered to be the third-holiest site in Islam and it sits on a sprawling plateau that is home to **the iconic golden Dome of the Rock**. Muslims refer to the Holy Hilltop Compound as the Noble Sanctuary.
- For Jews, the walled plateau is also the holiest site. They refer to it as the temple mount as it was the location of biblical temples. In 70 A.D., the Romans destroyed the Second Temple, with only the Western Wall remaining.
- The mosques by Muslims were built centuries later. **Neighbouring Jordan** has been serving as the custodian of the site, which is **operated by an Islamic endowment called the Waqf.**
- The groups of the religious and nationalist Jews, in recent years, escorted by the police have been seen visiting the **Holy Hilltop Compound in greater number**. They have also been holding prayers in defiance of the rules that were established after 1967 by Jordan, Israel, and Muslim religious authorities.
- These frequent visits and **attempted prayers by Jews have been seen by the Palestinians as a provocation which often leads to more serious violence.**
- Some Israelis have stated that the site must be opened to all the worshippers. However, the Palestinians refuse and fear that Israelis will take over the site or partition it. The officials of Israel have said that they have no intention of changing the status quo.

Policy discrimination between Israeli and Palestinians:

- **Jews who are born in east Jerusalem are Israeli citizens**, while the **Palestinians from East Jerusalem are given a form of permanent residency** which can be revoked by the authorities if they live outside the city for an extended period.
- Jewish settlements have been built by Israel in east Jerusalem that is home to around 2,20,000 people. The settlements have severely limited the growth of Palestinian neighborhoods which leads to **overcrowding as well as unauthorized construction of thousands of homes that are at risk of demolition.**
- The **New York-based- Human Rights Watch and Israeli Rights Group B”Tselem** pointed the discriminatory policies in east Jerusalem and argued that Israel is guilty of the crime of apartheid. Israel, on the other hand, has rejected those allegations stating that Jerusalem residents are treated equally.
- **Jerusalem violence leads to wider unrest:**
- The violence in Jerusalem and particularly in Al-Aqsa is often reflected across the region. **The Palestinian**

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

Militant Group Hamad, which rules Gaza, has called for a new uprising, same as the one triggered by an **Israeli Politician's visit to Al-Aqsa in 2000**. The militants of Gaza have also fired rockets and balloons with devices attached to them in support of the Palestinian protestors.

- The protests have been held in the **occupied West Bank and in the Arab communities which are inside Israel**. Jordan as well as other Arab nations that have friendly relations with Israel have condemned its crackdown on the protests, while the archenemy of Israel Iran has encouraged the Palestinian protests.
- **The United States and European Union** have also condemned the violence and have expressed concerns about the evictions.

Israel-Palestine Conflict

- The seeds of the conflict were laid in **1917** when the then British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour expressed official support of Britain for a Jewish "national home" in Palestine under the Balfour Declaration. The lack of concern for the "rights of existing non-Jewish communities" i.e. the Arabs led to prolonged violence.
- Unable to contain Arab and Jewish violence, **Britain withdrew its forces from Palestine** in 1948, leaving responsibility for resolving the competing claims to the newly created United Nations. The UN presented a partition plan to create independent Jewish and Arab states in Palestine. Most Jews in Palestine accepted the partition but most Arabs did not.
- In **1948**, the Jewish declaration of Israel's independence prompted surrounding Arab states to attack. At the end of the war, Israel controlled about 50 percent more territory than originally envisioned UN partition plan. Jordan controlled the West Bank and Jerusalem's holy sites, and Egypt controlled the Gaza Strip.
- **1964: Founding of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)**
- **1967: In Six-day Arab- Israeli war**, Israeli forces seize the Golan Heights from Syria, the West Bank & East Jerusalem from Jordan and Sinai Peninsula & Gaza strip from Egypt.
- The United Nations grants the PLO observer status in **1975** and recognizes Palestinians' right to self-determination.
- **Camp David Accords (1978):** "Framework for Peace in the Middle East" brokered by U.S. set the stage for peace talks between Israel and its neighbors and a resolution to the "Palestinian problem". This however remained unfulfilled.
- **1981:** Israel effectively annexes the Golan but this is not recognized by the United States or the international community.
- **1987: Founding of Hamas**, a violent offshoot of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood seeking "to raise the banner of Allah over every inch of Palestine" through violent jihad.
- **1987:** Tensions in the occupied territories of West Bank and Gaza reached boiling point resulting in the First **Intifada** (Palestinian Uprising). It grew into a small war between Palestinian militants and the Israeli army.
- **1988:** Jordan cedes to the PLO all the country's territorial claims in the West Bank and Eastern Jerusalem.

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- **1993:** Under the **Oslo Accords** Israel and the PLO agree to officially recognize each other and renounce the use of violence. The Oslo Accords also established the **Palestinian Authority**, which received limited autonomy in the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank.
- **2005:** Israel begins a unilateral withdrawal of Jews from settlements in Gaza. However, Israel kept tight control over all border crossings (blockade).
- **2006: Hamas scores a victory in Palestinian Authority elections.** The vote leaves the Palestinian house divided between Fatah movement, represented by President Mahmoud Abbas, and Hamas, which will control the cabinet and parliament. Efforts at cohabitation fail almost immediately.
- **2007: Palestinian Movement Splits** after few months of formation of a joint Fatah-Hamas government. Hamas militants drive Fatah from Gaza. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas appoints a new government in Ramallah (West Bank), which is quickly recognized by the United States and European Union. Gaza remains under Hamas control.
- **2012-** UN upgrades Palestinian representation to that of "non-member observer state".
- **2014-** Israel responds to the kidnapping and murder of three Jewish teenagers in the West Bank by arresting numerous Hamas members. Militants respond by firing rockets from Gaza. Clashes end in uneasy Egyptian-brokered ceasefire.
- **2014-** Fatah and Hamas form a unity government, though distrust remains between the two factions.

The 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.

Two-State Solution

- 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.

Why is the solution so difficult to achieve?

- **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.

#ISRAEL IRON DOME AIR DEFENCE SYSTEM

Israel used its **Iron Dome** air defence system in recent violent clashes over Jerusalem.

About the system

- 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**,



Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

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 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**.

#UNSC MEETING OVER ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CLASHES

- The **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)** held a meeting on the Israel-Palestine situation on May 16, 2021. The meeting was chaired by the Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi.
- **UN Secretary-General António Guterres** was the first of nearly two dozen speakers on the meeting's agenda. He called the hostilities between the two parties 'utterly appalling' and said, "the current violence in Gaza & Israel only perpetuates the cycles of death, destruction & despair, and pushes farther to the horizon any hopes of coexistence & peace." He asserted that the fighting must stop immediately.
- This was **UNSC's first public meeting on the Israeli-Palestine conflict**. The UNSC had met privately twice last week over the worsening violence.



- **Israel- Palestine Clashes**
- The **hostilities between Israelis and Palestinians** have escalated to such a high level that was not seen since the 2014 war.
- The **United Nations** was forced to step up its diplomatic engagement and the UNSC met to discuss the conflict in public for the **first time with the conflict stretching into its seventh straight day**.
- However, the **UN Security Council** took no action even as all its member decried the death and devastation.
- The airstrikes in Gaza by both Israel and Hamas have killed over dozens of people including many women and children. Several buildings have been reduced to rubbles in the airstrikes with workers combing through to look for survivors.

China's Solutions

- China holds UNSC's rotating presidency for the month of May. **Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi** said in his statement that the escalating conflict between Israel and Palestine has caused a large number of casualties, including women and children and the situation is extremely critical and severe.
- He asserted that the international community must act urgently to prevent the situation from further deteriorating.
- **China advocated the following in response to current tensions between Israel and Palestine:**
- **Ceasefire is a current priority:** China called upon both parties to the conflict to immediately stop military

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- actions and any action that worsens the situation including rocket launches, airstrikes and ground offensives.
- **Humanitarian assistance is an urgent need:** China urged Israel to earnestly fulfill its international treaty obligations and lift the blockade and siege of Gaza as soon as possible and guarantee the safety and rights of civilians in the occupied Palestinian territory. It also called upon the international community to provide humanitarian assistance to Palestine.
 - **International support is an obligation:** China urged that the UNSC must take effective action on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and reiterate its **firm support for the "two-state solution,"** and calm down the situation.
 - The nation also called on the United States to support the Security Council in playing its due role in easing the tensions, rebuilding trust, and resolving the situation. China also called all the organisations and countries that have an influence in the region to play a more active role in the situation and make more effective effort.
 - **Two-state solution is the ultimate way out:** China outlined that an ultimate way out of the Palestinian issue lies in the **implementation of the two-state solution.** China extended its support to the resumption of peace talks between Palestine and Israel as soon as possible on the basis of the "two-state solution".
 - China also advocated for the establishment of a fully sovereign and independent Palestinian state based on the 1967 border, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

US Ambassador to UN

- The **US Ambassador to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield** said that US President Joe Biden had spoken with Israeli and Palestinian leaders, while US Secretary of State Antony Blinken had also been engaging with his counterparts in the region.
- **She called on Hamas to stop its rocket launches against Israel** and expressed concerns about inter-communal violence and warned against incitement on both sides and said the United States is prepared to lend its support and good offices should the parties seek a cease-fire.
- US President Joe Biden had earlier on May 15th spoken with **Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu and President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas** in separate calls to speak about efforts to broker a cease-fire.
- **Other Nations:** The envoys from all of UNSC's 15 members have though urged an immediate de-escalation; there is no indication of what next steps the council will take to resolve the situation.

#ISRAEL & HAMAS AGRED TO CEASEFIRE

- **Israel and Hamas** have finally agreed to a ceasefire, after almost two weeks of violence that claimed hundreds of lives and reduced many structures to rubbles. The ceasefire came into effect from May 21, 2021.
- **Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Security Cabinet** voted on May 20, 2021 in favor of halting their military activity in the Gaza Strip. The Israeli security cabinet unanimously adopted Egypt's initiative for a bilateral ceasefire.



Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

The Palestinian militant group Hamas also agreed to a "mutual and simultaneous" cease-fire.

- The Palestinians across the **Gaza Strip were seen celebrating in the streets** after the ceasefire decision came into effect on May 21st. The ceasefire came after mounting international pressure calling for an end to the violence between both sides.

Palestine's Response

- **Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki** welcomed the unilateral ceasefire by Israel but he said it is not enough because Jerusalem remains the key issue.
- **US Statement:** US President Joe Biden hailed the ceasefire agreement reached between Israel and Hamas. He added that the US would help Gaza with humanitarian relief aid and also replenish Israel's Iron Dome missile defense system.
- The ceasefire came hours after the White House spokesperson Jen Psaki informed the media that the US believes that **Israel has achieved significant objectives in Gaza** that they had laid out to achieve to protect its own people and respond to thousands of rocket attacks from Hamas.
- He added saying that, this is why the **US believes Israel is in a position to start winding down its military operation.**
- **11-day war casualties**
- **According to Gaza Health Ministry**, at least **230 Palestinians** have been killed in the recent conflict including 65 children and 39 women, while around 12 people have been killed in Israel, as per Israeli authorities. The **casualties in Israel include an Indian National, Soumya Santosh, a 32-year-old caregiver.**

Background

- The latest round of fighting between Israel and Hamas ended inconclusively like the three previous wars. The conflict had begun on May 10, 2021 when Hamas fired long-range rockets toward **Jerusalem after days of clashes between Palestinian protesters and Israeli police at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound.**
- In response to the rocket attack, Israel launched hundreds of airstrikes into the **Gaza strip, reportedly targeting Hamas' military infrastructure.**

#INDIA, ISRAEL & PALESTINE

- Recently, India's permanent representative to UN made a carefully crafted statement at the UN Security Council "open debate" on the escalating Israel-Palestine violence, striving to maintain balance between India's historic ties with Palestine and its blossoming relations with Israel.
- Evolution of India's relationship with Israel & Palestine: **Nehru and Indira Gandhi era - Idealism & unequivocally pro-Palestine**

India stopped at recognising Israel

- **India's recognised Israel in 1950.** PM Nehru's reasoning was that it was "an established fact", and that not doing so would create rancour between two UN members. However, India did not have full diplomatic ties with Israel.
- All there was to show for the bilateral relationship was a consulate in Mumbai, established in 1953, mainly for issuing visas to the Indian Jewish community, and to Christian pilgrims. There was no Indian embassy in Israel till 1992.
- In 1948, India was the **only non-Arab-state among 13 countries** that voted against the UN partition plan of Palestine in the General Assembly that led to the creation of Israel.

Reasons for India siding with Palestine (and a cold shoulder for Israel) was

- India's own Partition along religious lines (**Historical basis**)
- Solidarity with the Palestinian people who would be dispossessed (**HR Perspective**)
- To ward off Pakistan's plan to isolate India over Kashmir (**Geopolitical reason**)
- Later, India's energy dependence on the Arab countries also became a factor (**Economic & Pragmatism**)
- To appeal to the sentiments of India's own Muslim citizens (**Domestic Politics**)

India and Palestine

- The relationship with Palestine was almost an article of faith in Indian foreign policy for over four decades. At the 53rd UN session, India co-sponsored the draft resolution on the right of the Palestinians to self-determination.
- In the 1967 and 1973 wars, India lashed out at Israel as the aggressor. In the 1970s, **India rallied behind the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organisation)** and its leader Yasser Arafat (received as Head of State) as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.
- In 1988, when the **PLO declared an independent state of Palestine with its capital in East Jerusalem, India granted recognition immediately.**

Changes after 1991- Pragmatism

- The **opening of an Indian embassy in Tel Aviv in January 1992** marked an end to four decades of giving Israel the cold shoulder.
- **India's decision to normalise ties with Israel in 1992** came against the backdrop of the break-up of the Soviet Union, need for economic pragmatism (i.e. access to Israeli technology), common threats of terrorism and massive shifts in the geopolitics of West Asia on account of the first Gulf War in 1990.
- The **India-Israel relationship continued to grow, mostly through defence deals, and in sectors such as science and technology and agriculture.**
- There were few high-profile visits, and they all took place when the BJP-led NDA-1 under Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee was in office.

India's balancing act with Palestine

- **Despite growing Indo-Israel ties**, New Delhi remained firmly on the side of the PLO, which was seen as ready for a political solution, and had accepted the two-state solution.
- In 1996 India opened a Representative Office in Gaza, which later moved to Ramallah.
- During the UPA's 10 years in office, the balancing act intensified, **and Mahmoud Abbas, head of the Palestinian Authority** that administers the West Bank, visited in 2005, 2008, 2010 and 2012.
- **India voted for Palestine to become a full member of UNESCO in 2011.** In 2021, India co-sponsored the UN General Assembly resolution that enabled Palestine to become a "non-member" observer state at the UN without voting rights.
- India also supported the **installation of the Palestinian flag on the UN premises in September 2015.**

Balancing act with Palestine

- India voted in favour of a resolution in the General Assembly opposing the Trump administration's recognition of Jerusalem as the Israeli capital.
- **At the UNHRC's 46th session** in Geneva earlier this year, India voted against Israel in three resolutions –
 - **one on the right of self-determination of the Palestinian people**
 - **A second on Israeli settlement policy, and**
 - **A third on the human rights situation in the Golan Heights.**
- In the current context of violence, India in its official statement appears to implicitly hold Israel responsible for triggering the current cycle of violence by locating its beginnings in East Jerusalem rather than from Gaza.
- The statement was also emphatic that "the historic status quo at the holy places of Jerusalem including the **Haram al Sharif/Temple Mount** must be respected. (The site, administered by Jordan, is revered in both Islam and Judaism. Jewish worshippers are not allowed inside, but have often tried to enter forcibly).

#INDIA AND UK BILATERAL 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.**



Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- 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**.

Announcement of a new 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**.

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- 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**'

#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.



Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- 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.**

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- **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

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- **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**.

#IRAN'S FARZAD-B GIANT GAS FIELD

- The **state-owned ONGC Videsh Ltd (OVL)** has lost its development and operating rights in Iran's Farzad-B giant gas field to Iranian Petropars Group.
- **The OVL**, which is the overseas investment arm of state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corp (ONGC), **owns 40 percent participating interest (PI) in the block**.

Farzad-B gas field's discovery

An ONGC-led consortium had first discovered the giant gas field in the Farsi offshore exploration block in 2008. **It was later named Farzad-B.**

The other partners in its consortium included Indian Oil Corporation and Oil India. **The ONGC consortium had offered to put in investment up to USD 11 billion for the development of the gas field.**

Key Highlights

- The Indian consortium had so far invested around USD 400 million in the gas block. However, issues in negotiations between **OVL and Iranian authorities** as well as US sanctions led to the failure of multiple negotiations between the company and Iranian regulators to **finalize a development plan**.
- The **National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC)** signed a contract worth \$1.78 billion with Petropars Group for the development of Farzad B Gas Field in the Persian Gulf.
- The deal was signed in Tehran on May 17, 2021 in the **presence of the Iranian Minister of Petroleum Bijan Zangeneh**. The contract envisages daily production of about 28 million cubic meters of sour gas in the next five years.
- **Farzad-B gas field: Significance**
- The **Farzad-B gas field comprises 23 trillion cubic feet** of in-place gas reserves, out of which 60 percent is estimated to be recoverable.

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- The gas field also holds gas condensates of about 5,000 barrels per billion cubic feet of gas. The 3,500 sqkm Farsi block sits in a water depth of **20-90 metres on the Iranian side of the Persian Gulf.**
- **Why has OVL lost its operating rights in the Farzad-B gas field?**
- OVL, which had 40 percent operatorship interest, had signed the **Exploration Service Contract (ESC)** for the gas block on December 25, 2002. The **other partners of OVL- Indian Oil Corp (IOC)** holds 40 percent Participating Interest, while Oil India holds the remaining 20 percent Participating Interest.
- The OVL had first discovered gas in the block, which was declared commercially viable by NIOC on August 18, 2008. The exploration phase expired on June 24, 2009.
- The OVL had submitted a **Master Development Plan (MDP)** of **Farzad-B gas field** in April 2011 to **Iranian Offshore Oil Company (IOOC)**, the then designated authority by NIOC for the development of the gas field.
- Though a **Development Service Contract (DSC)** was negotiated till November 2012, but it could not be finalized due to difficult terms and international sanctions on Iran.
- The negotiations began again with the Iranian authorities in April 2015 under a **new Iran Petroleum Contract (IPC)**. **Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC)** was introduced as NIOC's representative for negotiations this time.
- In April 2016, the two sides negotiated to develop the Farzad-B gas field under an integrated contract. The contract covered both upstream and downstream as well as monetization and marketing of the processed gas. The negotiations though remained inconclusive.
- The **NIOC informed OVL** on October 18, 2020 of its intention to award the contract for Farzad-B's development with an Iranian company, after sitting over OVL's proposal for years.

Background

- India had previously on several occasions emphasized on the need for early completion of all necessary procedures for **India's participation in the Farzad-B field**. India had also expressed its desire to participate in other **oil and gas explorations in Iran as well.**

Other Recent Developments:

- Indian merchants have almost entirely stopped signing new export contracts with Iranian buyers due to caution about **Iran's falling rupee reserves with Indian banks.**
- Iran in 2020 dropped India's USD 2-billion offer and decided to build the Chabahar railway link (**Chabahar-Zahedan Railway Line**) on its own.

Concerns for India

- **Growing Influence of China:** In April 2021, China and Iran signed a **25-year "strategic cooperation pact"** which includes political, economic and strategic components.
- China is also concluding a **security and military partnership with Iran.**

Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

- The **China Iran strategic partnership** may be an impediment for Indian entry routes into Afghanistan through Chabahar and further connectivity to **International North South Transportation Corridor (INSTC)**, although Iran has not given any signals of disruption of these projects.
- Further, **Iran seems to be sceptical of India's diplomatic ties with the US.**

India's Energy Security:

- India has **stopped purchasing Iranian oil**, which accounts for around **90% of its imports from the Islamic nation.**
- India was Iran's leading oil client after China until mid-2018.
- India needs gas and Iran remains one of the best options as geographically, **Iran is closest to India of all the countries in the Persian gulf region.**
- Further, the **Farzad-B Gas Field could have improved India-Iran ties** as the crude oil import from Iran remains impacted due to the US sanctions.
- **India's Role in the Region:**
- Maintaining ties with Iran even as it forges a new relationship with Saudi Arabia and Israel is **critical for India's balancing policy in West Asia.**

Connectivity to Central Asia:

- Chabahar is not only a key to maritime relations between both the countries, but also **provides an opportunity to India to reach Russia and Central Asia.**
- Further, it **allows India to bypass Pakistan** which had blocked Indian aid to Afghanistan and all trade over land.

Peaceful Afghanistan:

- India, having made **significant investments in Afghanistan**, will always hope for an Afghan elected, Afghan led, Afghan owned peace and reconciliation process and a popular democratic government in Afghanistan.
- However, India has to be watchful of **Iran - Pakistan- China axis developing in the neighbourhood of Afghanistan**, with tentacles in the form of terror groups inside it.

#CHINA HALTS ECONOMIC DIALOGUE WITH AUSTRALIA

- **China on May 6, 2021 "indefinitely" suspended all activity under the China-Australia Strategic Economic Dialogue.** This is the latest setback in the already strained relations between the two nations.
- **China's National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC)** issued a short statement on the decision, which read, "Recently, some Australian Commonwealth Government officials launched a series of measures to disrupt the normal exchanges



Important International Current Affairs for CLAT

and cooperation between China and Australia out of Cold War mindset and ideological discrimination,"

- The commission did not mention say what specific measures prompted the action on their part. **The Australian dollar fell sharply following the news, as low as 0.7701 to the US dollar from \$0.7747.**

Australia's Reaction

Australian Trade Minister Dan Tehan commented on the decision saying it was "disappointing" because the economic dialogue was "an important forum for both the nations to work through issues relevant to their economic partnership. Tehan said in a statement that Australia remains open to holding the dialogue and engaging at the ministerial level with China.

Australia-China Strained Bilateral Ties

- The **bilateral ties between China and Australia** have been under strain since 2018 after Australia became the **first country to publicly ban Chinese tech giant Huawei from its 5G network.**
- Australia was also one of the countries that called for an independent investigation into the origins of the novel coronavirus in 2020, which **worsened the relations between the two and prompted trade reprisals from China.**
- The Australian government also cancelled two Belt and Road cooperation deals struck by the state of Victoria in April 2021, which again prompted the Chinese embassy to warn that the ties between the two nations were bound to worsen.
- **China has retaliated by imposing a series of trade sanctions on Australian exports ranging from wine and beef to coal.**
- The successive Australian trade ministers failed to secure a phone call with their Chinese counterparts since diplomatic tensions worsened in 2020.
- The last meeting of the trade ministers of the two nations was in Beijing in 2017, when Australia's trade minister had signed an agreement on cooperation on Belt and Road projects in third-party countries

Background

- **China is one of Australia's biggest trading partners, accounting for 29 percent of Australia's trade** with the world in 2019. This is as per the data of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.
- However, **Chinese investment in Australia fell by 61% in 2020**, the lowest number in around six years, as per the Australian National University's Chinese Investment in Australia Database. China's recent trade sanctions have **affected several key Australian industries including wine, barley and coal.**