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THE HINDU

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Biden seeks to boost Asia alliances

Context:

- U.S. Secretary of State and National Security Adviser are set to meet their Chinese counterparts in Alaska, in the first face-to-face interaction between the Biden administration and China.
- The meeting is happening after a volley of diplomatic efforts by the Biden administration to strengthen America's relations with its allies and partners in Asia.

Biden's foreign policy approach towards China:

- There is a consensus within the Biden administration that China, not Russia, is America's primary rival.
 - The Interim National Security Strategic Guidance, released by the administration, calls China the only competitor potentially capable of combining its economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to mount a sustained challenge to a stable and open international system.
 - According to the Secretary of State, the U.S.'s relationship with China will be the biggest geopolitical test of the 21st century.
- The Alaska meet suggests that the Biden administration would seek to engage with China on matters of mutual interest even if overall relations remain tense.
 - Climate change and the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic are such areas.
- There are geopolitical areas as well where both sides can continue cooperation.
 - The U.S. has already proposed a multilateral UN-led conference involving the representatives of China, Russia, India, Iran, Pakistan and the U.S. to find a lasting solution to the Afghan conflict.
 - The Biden administration has made its intention clear to revive the Iran nuclear deal.
 - China, along with other permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany and the EU, is a signatory to the deal.

- The U.S. would need China's diplomatic support in its effort to bring the nuclear accord back on track.
- The main theatre of the U.S.-China rivalry is set to be the Indo-Pacific region.
 - That a Quad summit was held within the first 50 days of the Biden administration points to the high priority Mr. Biden gives to the grouping in its Indo-Pacific strategy.

America's Indo-Pacific Alliance:

- Among the Quad countries, India is the only country that shares a land border with China.
- For Japan, South Korea and Australia, China is their top trade partner and uninterrupted trade with China is important for their continued prosperity.
- However, all these countries share security concerns with a fast-rising China.
- The same is the case with countries in the region such as Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and even communist Vietnam.
- The U.S. is trying to tap these concerns while seeking to stitch together an Indo-Pacific alliance system.

Conclusion:

While the U.S. has been a strong proponent of a stronger Quad, it is to be seen whether Mr. Biden would be able to regroup the Quad and other American allies in the region such as South Korea against China in an emerging bipolar contest.

2. The limits of POCSO

Context

- A single bench of the Madras High Court recently allowed a petition seeking to quash a case of kidnap, aggravated penetrative sexual assault and aggravated sexual assault of a minor.

Aggravated Penetrative Sexual Assault

- These include cases when a police officer, a member of the armed forces, or a public servant commits penetrative sexual assault on a child.
- It also covers cases where the offender is a relative of the child, or if the assault injures the sexual organs of the child or the child becomes pregnant, among others.

Aggravated sexual assault

- Under the Act, “sexual assault” includes actions where a person touches the vagina, penis, anus or breast of a child with sexual intent without penetration.
- “Aggravated sexual assault” includes cases where the offender is a relative of the child, or if the assault injures the sexual organs of the child, among others.

Minor’s consent is ‘no consent in eyes of law’

- Under POCSO, the consent of a person under the age of 18 is irrelevant, regardless of the nature and circumstance of the sexual interaction, or the particulars of the person with whom it takes place.
- This means that any sex with a minor is rape.

Sexual tendencies of adolescents

- The act has provisions that criminalize consensual sexual intercourse between two people below the age of 18.
- The court while analyzing the case has taken a view that adolescence and young adulthood form a continuum because of the physical, biological, neurological, and social changes that occur during adolescence.
- So the court came to a conclusion that the relationship of the **minor ‘victim’** with the **accused respondent** is a loving, rather than an abusive, one.

What did the Court say?

- The judgment echoes the arguments that child rights activists have been making for years: by ignoring the natural sexual tendencies of adolescents, POCSO can and does become a tool for the persecution of young people in consenting sexual relations.
- The judgment concluded that the case could be quashed because it was purely individual in nature and doing so would not affect any overriding public interest.
- It held “Punishing an adolescent boy who enters into a relationship with a minor girl by treating him as an offender, was never the objective of the POCSO Act”.

Violation of established precedents

- In following the above-mentioned reasoning the court has ignored the established precedent against quashing cases of rape, a heinous and serious offence, held by the Supreme Court to be a public concern, and not a private matter.

Views of the Parliamentary Committee (Rajya Sabha)

- The committee had considered the POCSO Bill, 2011 and it criticized the clause providing for the possibility of consent in cases of sexual intercourse with minors between the ages of 16 and 18.
- It believed that a uniform age of 18 would ensure that trials of child rape would focus on the conduct of the accused and the circumstances of the offence, instead of putting victims on trial as is often the case when the consent of the victim is in question.
- This would indicate that adolescent sexuality was not meant to be an exception to POCSO's bright-line approach.

Law and Justice

- It has thus forced courts to choose between applying the law and doing justice, especially in cases where the minor victim has willingly eloped with or married the accused or is carrying his child, for imprisoning him would only do her harm.

Way forward

- POCSO should be amended to take such cases into consideration.
- The legislature should take into consideration cases of this nature involving adolescents involved in relationships and swiftly bring in necessary amendments under the Act.

Conclusion

- Therefore, the judgment was intuitively just, even though it was not in line with precedent.
- It highlighted the urgent need for a reconsideration of the absolutist approach of POCSO when it comes to the sexual interactions of adolescents with other young people.

3. Adani Ports confirms role in Colombo terminal project

Context:

Adani Ports and Special Economic Zones confirmed its role in the West Container Terminal (WCT) project in Sri Lanka's strategic Colombo Port.

Details:

- The Adani Group's investment in the WCT project comes after the Sri Lankan government dropped India and Japan out of a 2019 trilateral agreement to jointly develop the East Container Terminal (ECT) at the Colombo Port.
 - It said that the decision was taken as the trade unions opposed foreign involvement in the country's national assets.

Details:

- Approval has been granted to develop the WCT with private investors nominated by India and Japan.
- The decision comes a month after the Rajapaksa government ejected the two partners from a 2019 tripartite agreement to jointly develop the East Container Terminal (ECT), citing resistance to foreign involvement.
- Sri Lanka had backed out of an agreement with India and Japan to develop the East Container Terminal (ECT) at the Colombo Port. Both India and Japan had expressed displeasure about Colombo unilaterally pulling out of the 2019 agreement.

West Container Terminal (WCT) development:

- In the ECT project agreed upon earlier, the Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA) was to hold a majority 51%, but in the WCT proposal, India and Japan will be accorded an 85% stake, as is the case in the nearby Colombo International Container Terminal (CICT).
- China Merchants Port Holdings Company Limited holds an 85% stake in CICT.
- While the ECT was partially in use, the WCT has to be built from scratch, requiring a much higher investment.
- The WCT is adjacent to the China-run CICT and just a couple of kilometres away from the China-backed Port City being built on reclaimed land.
 - This makes WCT a strategically desirable spot for India.

Timing of Sri Lanka's move:

- The alternative offer comes at a time when Sri Lanka is seeking support from India at the ongoing UN Human Rights Council session, where a resolution on its rights record will soon be put to vote.

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4. Poll position

Context

- The article analyses the challenges faced by the local governments and the recent judgment of the Supreme Court in reference to the State Election Commissioner.

Background

- The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments have provided functional autonomy to the Rural and Urban local bodies.
- In spite of its existence for more than a quarter-century, experts have agreed there has been inadequate devolution of powers to them.

Issues related to local bodies in India

- Local body elections are beset with controversies.
- Local polls are often marred by violence, and charges of arbitrary delimitation and reservation of wards.
- For conducting elections in a free and fair manner we need an independent State Election Commissioner (SEC).
 - Unfortunately, most political parties in the states appoint senior bureaucrats from among their favourites to this office. In practice, SECs frequently face charges of being partisan.
 - This pattern cannot be generalized with respect to all the states, but the SECs do not seem to enjoy the confidence of political parties and the public to the same extent as the Election Commission of India does as far as their independence is concerned.

It is in this backdrop that the Supreme Court's judgment declaring that a State Election Commissioner should be someone completely independent of the State government acquires salience.

- The State Election Commission is a Constitutional Authority that came into existence after the promulgation of the 73rd and 74th amendment to the Constitution of India to conduct elections to rural and urban local bodies in the states.
 - It was constituted under the provisions of Article **243K** read with Article **243ZA** of the Constitution of India.
- The powers and functions of the state election commission under articles 243K and 243ZA of the Constitution of India are identical to those vested in the Election Commission of India constituted under Article 324 of the Constitution of India in their respective domains.

The ECI and SECs have a similar mandate; do they also have similar powers?

- In 2006, the Supreme Court emphasised the two constitutional authorities enjoy the same powers.
- In *Kishan Singh Tomar vs Municipal Corporation of the City of Ahmedabad*, the Supreme Court directed that state governments should abide by orders of the SECs during the conduct of the panchayat and municipal elections, just like they follow the instructions of the EC during Assembly and Parliament polls.

Supreme Court observation on giving the Law Secretary an additional charge as SEC

- The Goa government had given its Law Secretary the additional charge of State Election Commissioner.
- The Supreme Court held that independent persons and not bureaucrats should be appointed State Election Commissioners.

Details

- Under the constitutional mandate, it is the duty of the State to not interfere with the functioning of the State Election Commission
- The SC said giving government employees the additional charge of State Election Commissioners is a “mockery of the Constitution”.
- The top court directed that the States should appoint independent persons as Election Commissioners all along the length and breadth of the country.
- By invoking its extraordinary power under Article 142 of the Constitution, the Court has asked all SECs who are under the direct control of the respective State governments to step down from their posts.

Grey Area

- In practice, most States appoint retired bureaucrats as SECs. Whether the apex court’s decision would have a bearing on those who are no more serving State governments remains to be seen.

However, it is clear that these governments will now have to find a way to appoint to the office only those who are truly independent and not beholden to it in any manner.

Significance

- The verdict will help secure the independence of SECs in the future.
- More significantly, the Court has boosted the power of the election watchdog by holding that it is open to the SECs to countermand any infractions of the law made by the State government in the course of preparing for local body polls.

Conclusion

- Political parties should accept the new reality, respect the views of the Supreme Court and should avoid controlling the local body elections like in the past.

5. Bill to define Delhi L-G's powers moved in LS

Context:

The bill to define the powers of Delhi's Lieutenant-Governor moved in Lok Sabha.

Key highlights of the bill:

- The bill moved by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) proposes that the "government" in the National Capital Territory of Delhi meant the Lieutenant-Governor of Delhi.
- The Bill gives discretionary powers to the L-G even in matters where the Legislative Assembly of Delhi is empowered to make laws.
- It also seeks to ensure that the L-G is necessarily granted an opportunity to give her/his opinion before any decision taken by the Delhi Cabinet is implemented.
- The Bill proposes to amend Sections 21, 24, 33 and 44 of the 1991 Act.

The Union Territory of Delhi

Delhi is a Union Territory with a legislature and it came into being in 1991 under Article 239AA of the Constitution inserted by the Constitution (Sixty-ninth Amendment) Act, 1991.

- As per the existing Act, the Legislative Assembly has the power to make laws in all matters except public order, police and land.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

6. 'India's arms imports down by 33%'

Context:

According to a report from a Swedish think tank, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), India's arms imports decreased by 33% between 2011-15 and 2016-20.

Key findings of the report:

- Despite a fall in imports, India continues to remain the second-largest arms importer after Saudi Arabia.
- A drop in arms imports between 2011–15 and 2016–20 seems to be mainly due to its complex and lengthy procurement processes, combined with its attempts to reduce its dependence on Russian arms by diversifying its network of arms suppliers.
- Russia was the largest arms supplier in both periods.
- Russia's deliveries dropped by 53% between the two periods and its share of Indian arms imports fell from 70 to 49%.
- The U.S. was the second-largest arms supplier to India in 2011–15 but in 2016–20, India's arms imports from the U.S. were 46% lower than in the previous five-year period, making the U.S. the fourth-largest supplier in 2016–20.
- France and Israel were the second and third largest arms suppliers in 2016–20.

India's plans over the next 5 years:

- As India perceives increasing threats from Pakistan and China and as its ambitious plans to produce its own major arms have been significantly delayed, it is planning large-scale programmes for arms imports.
- Based on its outstanding deliveries of combat aircraft, air defence systems, ships and submarines, India's arms imports are expected to increase over the coming 5 years.

7. WPI inflation quickens to 27-month high

What's in News?

The wholesale price-based inflation rose for the second consecutive month to a 27-month high of 4.17% in February 2021 as food, fuel and power prices spiked.

- The Wholesale Price Index (WPI) is the price of a representative basket of wholesale goods.
- WPI reflects changes in the average prices of goods at the wholesale level – that is, commodities sold in bulk and traded between businesses or entities rather than goods bought by consumers.
- WPI is released by the Economic Advisor in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Wholesale price-based inflation:

- While retail inflation looks at the price at which the consumer buys products, WPI is measured based on prices at the wholesale level.
- WPI does not include services.
- The extent of the rise in WPI is used to measure the level of wholesale inflation in the economy.
- WPI provides estimates of inflation at the wholesale transaction level for the economy overall.
- It also helps in timely intervention by the government to monitor inflation before the price hike spills over to retail prices.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Maritime border dispute between Kenya and Somalia

In a move that is set to further undermine stability in East Africa, Kenya has said that it will not take part in proceedings of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) over its maritime border dispute with neighbouring Somalia.

What is the news?

- Nairobi has accused the top UN body of bias.
- The move comes after Somalia's decision to sever diplomatic relations with Kenya in December after it accused Nairobi of meddling in its internal affairs.
- The maritime dispute is said to form a crucial part of the diplomatic quarrel between the two countries.

The disputed area

- The main point of disagreement between the two neighbours is the direction in which their maritime boundary in the Indian Ocean should extend.
- According to Somalia, the sea border should be an extension of the same direction in which their land border runs as it approaches the Indian Ocean, i.e. towards the southeast.

- Kenya, on the other hand, argues that the territorial southeast border should take a 45-degree turn as it reaches the sea, and then run in a latitudinal direction, i.e. parallel to the equator.
- Such an arrangement would be advantageous for Kenya, whose coastline of 536 km is more than 6 times smaller than Somalia's (3,333 km).

Why is this area important?

- The triangular area thus created by the dispute is around 1.6 lakh sq km large and boasts of rich marine reserves.
- It is also believed to have oil and gas deposits.
- Both Somalia and Kenya have accused each other of auctioning off blocks from this area, Al Jazeera reported.

How have Kenya and Somalia tried to resolve the dispute?

- After negotiations to resolve the issue bilaterally failed, Somalia in 2014 asked the ICJ to adjudicate.
- Kenya resisted, arguing that the world court did not have jurisdiction to hear the case.
- In 2009 both countries had a commitment to settle the dispute out of court.
- However, in February 2017, the ICJ ruled that it did have the right to rule in the case, and in June 2019 said that it would begin public hearings.
- These hearings never took place, as Kenya successfully applied to have them postponed thrice- the last one being in June 2020, when it cited difficulties due to the Covid-19.

2. Statue of Unity

Why in News

Recently, the '**Statue of Unity**' at **Kevadia** in **Gujarat's Narmada district** has crossed the mark of **50 lakh visitors** since its inauguration in **2018**.

- India's **first seaplane service** in Gujarat started from **31st October, 2020**. It connects **Sabarmati Riverfront in Ahmedabad to the Statue of Unity in Kevadia**.

Key Points

- **About:**
 - The **Statue of Unity** is built in honour of **Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel**. Sardar Patel is credited with **uniting 560 princely states** in pre-

independent India hence the name of the **statue is christened as 'Statue of Unity'**.

- It was inaugurated on **31st October, 2018** to mark the **143rd birth anniversary of Sardar Patel**.
- The Statue of Unity is the **tallest statue in the world**. At **182 metres**, it is 23 metres taller than China's Spring Temple Buddha statue and almost double the height of the Statue of Liberty (93 metres tall) in the US.
- In January 2020, it was added in the '**Eight Wonders**' of the **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)**.
- **Location:**
 - It is **located** on the **Sadhu Bet island on the Narmada river**, which flows **between the Satpura and the Vindhya mountain ranges**.
- **Designed:**
 - The Statue of Unity was **designed by Padma Bhushan recipient sculptor Ram V Sutar** and intricate **bronze cladding work was done by a Chinese foundry, the Jiangxi Toqine Company (JTQ)**.

Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel

- **Born:**
 - 31st October 1875 in Nadiad, Gujarat.
- **Achievements:**
 - First Home Minister and Deputy Prime Minister of India.
 - Headed various Committees of the Constituent Assembly of India, namely:
 - Advisory Committee on **Fundamental Rights**.
 - Committee on **Minorities and Tribal and Excluded Areas**.
 - **Provincial Constitution Committee**.
 - Integrated the farmer's cause in **Kheda Satyagraha (1918)** and **Bardoli Satyagraha (1928)** with the national freedom movement.
 - Women of Bardoli bestowed the title 'Sardar' on Vallabhbhai Patel, which means 'a Chief or a Leader'.
 - Known as the "**Iron Man of India**" for playing an important role in unification and integration of Indian princely states into the Indian federation and for convincing princely states to align with the Indian Union.
 - Requested the people of India to live together by uniting (Ek Bharat) in order to create a foremost India (Shresth Bharat).
 - This ideology still reflects in the **Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative** which seeks to make India self-reliant.
 - Remembered as the '**Patron Saint of India's Civil Servants**' as he established the modern all-India services system.

- **Death:**
 - 15th December 1950 in Bombay.

3. Mission Sagar-IV

As part of Mission Sagar-IV, Indian Naval Ship Jalashwa has arrived at Port Anjouan, Comoros to deliver 1,000 Metric Tonnes of rice.

Mission Sagar

- SAGAR is a term coined by PM Modi in 2015 during his Mauritius visit with a focus on the blue economy.
- It is a maritime initiative that gives priority to the Indian Ocean region for ensuring peace, stability and prosperity of India in the Indian Ocean region.
- The goal is to seek a climate of trust and transparency; respect for international maritime rules and norms by all countries; sensitivity to each other's interests; peaceful resolution of maritime issues; and an increase in maritime cooperation.
- It is in line with the principles of the Indian Ocean Rim Association.

Earlier such missions

- This is the second visit of an Indian Navy ship to the island country within a span of one year.
- Earlier, as part of Mission Sagar-I, in May-June 2020, the Indian Navy had delivered essential medicines to the nation.
- Mission Sagar-II was undertaken in May-June 2020, wherein India reached out to Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, Madagascar and Comoros, and provided food aid and medicines.
- Sagar-III was undertaken in Sihanoukville Port, Cambodia.

4. What India needs for population stabilisation

Achieving replacement levels of fertility

- **The National Population Policy 2000** affirmed a commitment to achieve **replacement levels of fertility** (total fertility rate of 2.1) by 2010.
- Ten states – **Karnataka, Punjab, Gujarat, Assam, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Kerala** – and Jammu and Kashmir, have achieved this goal.
- This fertility decline over half of India has **cut across all sections of society** – the privileged and the poor, those educated or not, and the high and low caste.

- The National Family Health Survey-4 has shown how TFR has reduced even among **illiterate women from all religions** in the southern states.

Growing gap between North-South

- The difference between the progressive South and the Central- North is becoming disproportionately skewed.
- **UP and Bihar are 23 per cent of India's population** and are projected to grow by over 12 per cent and 20 per cent in the next 15 years.
- Their **high TFR pervades all religious groups**.
- Action to **prevent unwanted pregnancies** particularly in these two Hindi belt states is urgently required.
- For decades UP has had a dedicated agency – SIFPSA (State Innovations in Family Planning Services Agency). But its website gives dated information.
- Women in rural UP are still giving birth to four or more children.
- In some districts, the contraceptive prevalence rate is less than 10 per cent.
- In many districts neither Hindus nor Muslims use modern family planning methods.
- In such a scenario, **demographics will eclipse economic growth** and destroy the gains from a young populace.
- **UP's over-reliance on traditional methods of contraception** needs to be swiftly replaced with reliable and easy alternatives.
- Bihar has **the highest fertility rate in the country** and also the highest outmigration.

Which method should be used

- While national and state policies **emphasise male vasectomy**, politicians never champion its adoption.
- No other country in the world uses **female sterilisation** as excessively as India.
- Indonesia and Bangladesh **introduced injectables right from the late 1980s** but India only did so in 2016.
- Executed properly, one jab renders **protection from pregnancy for three months**.
- This method needs greater impetus given the helplessness of women who carry the burden of unwanted pregnancies.

Way forward

- Three things are needed:
 - 1) Incentivise **later marriages** and child births.
 - 2) Make **contraception easy for women**.

- 3) Promote **women's labour force participation**.
- Some other disturbing nationwide trends must also be counteracted without delay because **stabilisation isn't only about controlling population growth**.
- A balanced sex ratio is essential to secure social cohesion.
- The **inheritance law favouring women's rights** to ancestral property is far from being implemented.
- And then there is ageing. Paradoxically, it is the Southern states that will face problems in future.
- Having largely **redeemed their demographic dividend**, the cohort of the elderly will start outstripping the working age population.
- The theoretical possibility that younger people from the **Central-Northern states may fill the growing gap in services** will need strong political support.
- The freeze on **the state-wise allocation of seats in Parliament until 2026** was extended through the Constitutional (84th Amendment) Act, 2002, to serve "as a motivational measure to pursue population stabilisation".
- This goal has not been achieved.
- In the absence of further extension, **it will be politically destabilising**.

Conclusion

The population momentum, if managed properly in the Hindi belt, will remain India's biggest asset until 2055. By 2040, India will be the undisputed king of human capital.

5. The Quad's importance to India's strategic autonomy

Is India's participation in BRICS and Quad contradictory?

- Global Times, the Chinese newspaper last week speculating on the implications of the historic Quad summit for the BRICS.
- In calling the Quad a "negative asset" for the BRICS the Global Times was highlighting what it sees **as a contradiction in India's participation in both the forums**.
- The paper argues that India has worsened "India-China and India-Russia relations" and halted progress "in the development of BRICS and SCO".
- Global Times warns that if India continues to get closer to Washington, India "will eventually lose its strategic autonomy".

Understanding India's strategic autonomy

- "Strategic autonomy" is the framework that guided Delhi's international relations since the Cold War.
- In the early 1990s, strategic autonomy was about **creating space for India against the overweening American power**.

- Why the space was needed? It was mainly because of the U.S. stance on two important aspects: Kashmir issue and nuclear program.
- President Bill Clinton had questioned the legitimacy of Jammu and Kashmir's accession to India and declared the US's intent to resolve Delhi's Kashmir dispute with Pakistan.
- Washington insisted that rolling back India's nuclear and missile programmes was a major objective of US foreign policy.
- All that changed over the last three decades.

8 elements of transformation of India's relations with the U.S and China

- A rising China has emerged as the biggest challenge to India and the **US is increasingly an important part of the answer.**
- A few elements stand out.
- First, China has become more assertive on the contested boundary, therefore, the support from the US and its Asian allies has been valuable.
- Second, on the Kashmir question, China raises the issue at the UNSC while the **US is helping India to block China's moves.**
- Third, **on cross-border terrorism**, the US puts pressure on Pakistan and China protects Rawalpindi.
- Fourth, the US has **facilitated India's integration with the global nuclear order** while Beijing blocks Delhi's membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group.
- Fifth, the US backs India's **permanent membership of the UNSC**, China does not.
- Sixth, India now sees the trade with China hollowing out India's **manufacturing capability.**
- Its objective on diversifying its economy away from China is shared by the US and the Quad partners.
- Seventh, India opposes China's Belt and Road Initiative as a **project that undermines India's territorial sovereignty** and regional primacy.
- **India is working with Quad partners** to offer alternatives to the BRI.
- Finally, India sees China's rising military profile in the subcontinent and the Indian Ocean as a problem and is working with Washington to redress the unfolding imbalance in India's neighbourhood.

India's approach to BRICS and SCO

- The BRICS was part of **India's strategy in the unipolar moment that dawned at the end of the Cold War.**
- India's current enthusiasm for the Quad is about limiting the dangers of a **unipolar Asia dominated by China.**

- But India will continue to attach some value – diplomatic if not strategic – to a forum like the BRICS.
- After all, the BRICS forum provides a **useful channel of communication** between Delhi and Beijing at a very difficult moment in the evolution of their bilateral relations.
- The BRICS is also about **India’s enduring partnerships with Russia, Brazil, and South Africa.**
- India also values its ties with the Central Asian states in the SCO.
- The BRICS could certainly become a productive forum someday – when Delhi and Beijing mitigate their multiple contentions.

Conclusion

No amount of words in a BRICS declaration can hide the sharpening contradictions between India and China today. The absence of joint statements did not mask the growing strategic congruence among the Quad nations in recent years.

6. Kenya-Somalia Dispute

Why in News

Kenya has declined to take part in proceedings of the **International Court of Justice (ICJ)** over its maritime border dispute with **neighbouring Somalia.**

Key Point

- **Direction of Maritime Boundary:**
 - The main point of disagreement between the two neighbours is the **direction** in which their **maritime boundary** in the Indian Ocean should extend.
- **Somalia’s Stand:**
 - The sea border should be an **extension of the same direction** in which their land border runs as it approaches the Indian Ocean, i.e. **towards the southeast.**
- **Kenya’s Stand:**
 - The maritime border should **run parallel to the equator.**
- **Importance of Disputed Area:**
 - The triangular area thus created by the dispute is around 1.6 lakh sq. km. large, and **boasts of rich marine reserves.**
 - It is also believed to have oil and gas deposits.

International Court of Justice

- ICJ was established in **1945** by the **United Nations charter** and started working in April 1946.
- It is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, **situated at the Peace Palace in The Hague (Netherlands)**.
- It **settles legal disputes** between States and gives advisory opinions in accordance with international law, on legal questions referred to it by authorized United Nations organs and specialized agencies.
- Its **rulings are binding**, though the court has no **enforcement powers** and countries have been known to ignore its verdicts.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

7. Draft Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2021

The draft Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2021, issued by the MoEFCC has necessitated a few changes in the country's handling of its plastic waste.

Background

- The Environment Ministry had first notified the Plastic Waste Management Rules in March 2016.
- It had provisions for effective and improved collection, segregation, processing, treatment and disposal of plastic waste.

What are the 2021 rules?

Phasing out Single-use Plastics

Single-use plastics have been defined under the rules as “a plastic commodity intended to be used once for the same purpose before being disposed of or recycled”.

- The rules have proposed to ban the manufacture, use, sale, import and handling of some single-use plastic items on a 'pan India basis.
- The provisions will also apply to 'multi-layered packaging' – involved extensively in e-commerce and deliver services- but will exempt packaging used for imported goods.

- They shall apply to every waste generator, local body, Gram Panchayat, manufacturer, Importers and producer as well as 'brand-owner and "plastic waste processor (recycler, co-processor, etc.)
- Thermoset plastic and Thermoplastic will also fall within the ambit of these rules.
- These provisions will, however, not apply to commodities (including carrying bags) made of compostable plastic material, according to the rules.

The draft is proposed to be implemented in three stages starting this year and culminating in mid-2022.

Stage I

- The first set of rules propose that each sheet of non-woven plastic carry bag shall not be less than 60 (GSM per square metre) or 240 microns in thickness. A carry bag made of virgin or recycled plastic shall not be less than 120 microns, with effect from the same date.

Stage II

- The second stage will come into effect when six categories of single-use plastic – earbuds with plastic sticks, plastic sticks for balloons, plastic flags, candy sticks, ice-cream sticks, polystyrene (thermocool) for decoration – will be banned for sale, use, manufacture, stocking, import and distribution.

Stage III

- In the third stage, the list of banned items will grow to include single-use plastic plates, cups, glasses, cutlery such as forks, spoons, knives, straw, trays, wrapping/packing films around sweet boxes; invitation cards; cigarette packets, plastic/PVC banners less than 100 micron and stirrers.

Local bodies and state pollution control boards will ensure the implementation and enforcement of these rules.

What else is covered?

One, the amendment has extended the applicability of the rules to brand-owner, plastic waste processor, including the recycler, co-processor, etc. It will also include new definitions of:

- Non-woven plastic bag
- Plastic waste processing
- Single-use plastic (SUP) item

- Thermoset plastic
- Thermoplastic

Why such a move?

- As much as 3.3 million metric tonnes of plastic waste was generated in India in 2018-19, according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) report 2018-19.
- The total municipal solid waste generation is 55-65 million tonnes; plastic waste is approximately 5-6 per cent of the total solid waste generated in the country.
- Goa has the highest per capita plastic waste generation at 60 grams per capita per day, which is nearly double what Delhi generates (37 grams per capita per day).
- Clearly, we do not know the amount of plastic we generate as a country, as the increase in wealth and affluence contributes to a higher generation of plastic waste.
- Despite the Plastic Waste Management legislation of 2011, followed by numerous changes in the recent past, most parts of the country lack systematic efforts required to mitigate the risks associated with plastic waste.

Way ahead

Managing plastic waste requires effective knowledge, not only among those who produce plastic but also among those who handle it.

- Brand owners, consumers, recyclers and regulatory authorities need to take long strides in ensuring that we first inventorize the total amount of plastic waste that we generate by means of proper calculations.
- The second step would be to identify the avenues where the use of plastic can be minimised.
- Third, the brand owner and manufacturer should try and understand the fates a plastic packaging material would meet after its purpose of packaging has been served.
- Last, as consumers, we should ensure that all plastic waste leaving our homes is segregated and is not contaminated with food waste.

Conclusion

- Plastic, without a doubt, is a miracle commodity that has uses ranging from increasing shelf lives of eatables to medical equipment and automotive.
- Their waste management needs due attention. And the draft policies is a significant step in this direction.

Prelims Practice Questions

1. Consider the following statements:

1. Seabuckthorn is a shrub found in the cold desert of India.
2. The cold desert of India stretches from Ladakh to Sikkim in the Himalayas.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A 1 only
B 2 only
C Both 1 and 2
D Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : A

Explanation

- **Seabuckthorn** is a **shrub** which produces an orange-yellow coloured edible berry.
 - In India, it is found above the tree line in the Himalayan region, generally in dry areas such as the **cold deserts** of Ladakh and Spiti. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
 - A major part is covered by this plant in Himachal Pradesh, Ladakh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh.
- **The cold desert of India** is situated in the Himalayas and **stretches from Ladakh** in the north to **Kinnaur** (in the state of **Himachal Pradesh**) in the south. **Hence, statement 2 is not correct.**
 - The region has harsh climatic conditions such as very low rainfall and very high elevation (ranging from 3000–5000m Above Sea Level)] that adds to the coldness in its environment.
 - The soil is not very fertile and the climatic conditions allow very short growing seasons making it a bare landscape

2. "Dustlik", recently seen in the news, is a town in which country?

- a. Kazakhstan
- b. Iran
- c. Uzbekistan
- d. Afghanistan

Answer: c

Explanation:

- India-Uzbek joint exercise Dustlik-II commenced at Ranikhet (Uttarakhand).
- It is named after Dustlik, a town in the Jizzakh region of Uzbekistan.
- This is the Second Edition of the annual bilateral joint exercise of both armies.
- The first edition was held in Uzbekistan in 2019.

3. With reference to Bhadar River, consider the following statements:

1. Bhadar river originates from Malwa Plateau region.
2. It flows through the Aravali and finally meets the Arabian sea.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct ?

- A 1 only
- B 2 only
- C Both 1 and 2
- D Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : D

Explanation

- The Bhadar is one of the major rivers of Kathiawar (Saurashtra) peninsula in Gujarat.
 - It **originates near Vaddi in Rajkot** district at an elevation of 261 m above mean sea level. **Hence, statement 1 is not correct.**
- It **flows through the Saurashtra region (does not cross the Aravali Range)** and finally confluence with Arabian sea at Naviobandar (Porbandar). **Hence, statement 2 is not correct.**
 - The total length of this river is 198 km. It drains about 1/7th of the area of Saurashtra

4. With respect to the National Population Register (NPR):

1. It is a Register of all the citizens of India only.
2. The NPR was earlier collated in 2010 and 2015.
3. It is mandatory for every usual resident of India to register in the NPR.

Which of the given statement/s is/are INCORRECT?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 and 3 only

- c. 1 and 3 only
- d. 2 only

Answer: a

Explanation:

- National Population Register is a register of usual residents of the country.
- NPR is different from both the decennial census and the National Register of Citizens (NRC).
- The objective of the NPR is to create a comprehensive identity database of every usual resident in the country.
- It is mandatory for every usual resident of India to register in the NPR.
- For the purpose of the NPR, a usual resident is defined as a person who has resided in a local area for six months or more or a person who intends to reside in that area for the next six months or more.
- The NPR earlier collated in 2010 and 2015 has an electronic database of more than 119 crore residents.

5. SIG-716 assault rifles are acquired by India from which country?

- a. Russia
- b. Israel
- c. France
- d. United States of America

Answer: d

Explanation:

- SIG-716 assault rifles are American LMG.
- Light Machine Guns (LMGs) are designed to be employed by an individual soldier, with or without an assistant, as an infantry support weapon.

6. Consider the following statements with respect to Singhori Wildlife Sanctuary:

1. It is located in Uttarakhand.
2. Project Tiger was launched in Singhori Wildlife Sanctuary.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- a. 1 only

- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Singhori Wildlife Sanctuary is located in Madhya Pradesh.
- Project Tiger was launched in Jim Corbett National Park of Uttarakhand in 1973.



Mains Practice Questions

1Q. India needs to harvest quantum computing for strategic and economic development. Discuss.

Approach

- Start the answer by briefly explaining what quantum computing is.
- Discuss the applications of Quantum Computing in India's context.
- Conclude Suitably.

2Q. Examine the scope of Fundamental Rights in the light of the K.S. Puttaswamy vs. Union of India judgement. (250 words)

Approach

- Examine the provisions laid out by K.S. Puttaswamy judgement on privacy
- Discuss how these provisions would impact other related issues related to fundamental right