

INDIAN HERITAGE AND CULTURE, HISTORY**Brahmaputra Pushkaram Festival**

The Assam government is celebrating Brahmaputra Pushkaram- a 12-day mega river festival from November 5 to November 16 this year. Earlier, the Brahmaputra Pushkaram festival was held in 2007.

- In 2018, the Pushkaram festival was celebrated on the banks of the Tamiraparani in Tirunelveli district, Tamil Nadu.
- It will be the second biggest river festival ever to be celebrated in the state of Assam after Namami Brahmaputra.
- Pushkaram festival is a festival of rivers that pertains to the 12 important rivers in India. It occurs once in 12 years for each river.

Namami Brahmaputra

- Namami Brahmaputra is a festival that celebrates the beauty of the Brahmaputra river.
- It is organized by Assam Government. The first edition was celebrated in 2017.
- It is a five-day programme that showcases Assam's art, heritage, and culture. The event was held in 21 districts across the state touched by the Brahmaputra.

CONSTITUTION AND POLITY**Sabarimala Verdict**

Supreme Court (SC), in a 3:2 ruling has deferred its decision on review of 2018 Sabarimala verdict until a larger Bench examines broader issues such as essentiality of religious practices and constitutional morality.

About:

- The Sabarimala temple is a temple complex located at Sabarimala inside the Periyar Tiger Reserve in Pathanamthitta district, Kerala
- The temple is dedicated to the Hindu celibate deity Ayyappan also known as Dharma Sastha, who according to belief is the son of Shiva and Mohini, the feminine incarnation of Vishnu.
- The apex court, by a majority verdict of 4:1, in September 2018, had lifted the ban that prevented women and girls between the age of 10 and 50 from entering the famous Ayyappa shrine in Kerala. It had also held that this centuries-old Hindu religious practice was illegal and unconstitutional.

Recent Supreme Court Ruling:

- Supreme Court said that restrictions on women in religious places was not limited to Sabarimala alone and was prevalent in other religions as well.
- Supreme Court, by a majority of 3:2, has referred the review petitions to a larger seven judge bench. The Apex Court said, the larger bench will decide all such religious issues relating to Sabarimala, entry of women in mosques and practice of female genital mutilation in the Dawoodi Bohra community.

Supreme Court's Doctrine Of Essentiality

The Supreme Court's decision to refer the Sabarimala temple case to a larger 7-judge Bench will also re-evaluate the "essential religious practice test", a contentious doctrine evolved by the court to protect only such religious practices which were essential and integral to the religion.

About:

- The doctrine of "essentiality" was invented by a seven-judge Bench of the Supreme Court in the 'Shirur Mutt' case in 1954.
- The court held that the term "religion" will cover all rituals and practices "integral" to a religion, and took upon itself the responsibility of determining the essential and non-essential practices of a religion.

Criticism:

- This doctrine has been criticised by several constitutional experts who argue that the doctrine has tended to lead the court into an area that is beyond its competence, and given judges the power to decide purely religious questions.

- The essentiality test impinges on this autonomy. The apex court has itself emphasised autonomy and choice in its Privacy (2017), 377 (2018), and Adultery (2018) judgments.
- As a result, over the years, courts have been inconsistent on this question — in some cases they have relied on religious texts to determine essentiality, in others on the empirical behaviour of followers, and in yet others, based on whether the practice existed at the time the religion originated.

GOVERNANCE- WELFARE SCHEMES, E-GOVERNANCE, SERVICES ETC.

Liberhan Commission

The Supreme Court in its judgement in Ayodhya land dispute case affirmed the conclusion of the Liberhan Commission (1992) that demolition of the Babri Masjid was planned. However, the Supreme Court has cleared the way for the construction of a Ram Temple at the disputed site at Ayodhya, and directed the Centre to allot a 5-acre plot to the Sunni Waqf Board for building a mosque.

Liberhan Commission

- Liberhan Commission of Inquiry was appointed on 16th December, 1992, 10 days after the demolition of the Babri Masjid.
- It was a one man commission headed by Justice Manmohan Singh Liberhan.
- It was assigned the task of probing the sequence of events that led to the occurrences at the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid complex on 6th December, 1992.
- Initially, the Commission had to submit the report within 3 months. However, with 48 extensions, it became the longest Commission of Inquiry in the history of Independent India.
- The report recommended a law providing for exemplary punishment for misusing religion to acquire political power.
- It also said that the demolition of the Babri Masjid was planned, systematic, and was the intended outcome of a climate of communal intolerance deliberately created by religious extremists.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS- BILATERAL, GROUPINGS, ORGANISATIONS

Acqua Alta

Italy has declared a state of emergency in Venice after the Italian city was engulfed by 1.87m (6ft) high water levels, flooding its historic basilica and cutting power to homes. More than 80% of the city, a Unesco world heritage site, was under water when tides were at their highest.

Venice:

- Venice is a city in northeastern Italy and the capital of the Veneto region.
- It is situated on a group of 118 small islands that are separated by canals and linked by over 400 bridges. The islands are located in the shallow Venetian Lagoon, an enclosed bay that lies between the mouths of the Po and the Piave rivers.
- Venice has been known as "La Dominante", "La Serenissima", "Queen of the Adriatic", "City of Water", "City of Masks", "City of Bridges", "The Floating City", and "City of Canals". The lagoon and a part of the city are listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Acqua alta:

- Acqua alta is the term used in Veneto for the exceptional tide peaks that occur periodically in the northern Adriatic Sea.
- The peaks reach their maximum in the Venetian Lagoon, where they cause partial flooding of Venice and Chioggia.
- The phenomenon occurs mainly between autumn and spring, when the astronomical tides are reinforced by the prevailing seasonal winds that hamper the usual reflux. The main winds involved are the sirocco, which blows northbound along the Adriatic Sea, and bora, which has a specific local effect due to the shape and location of the Venetian lagoon.

International Criminal Court (ICC)

International Criminal Court (ICC) Judges have approved a request from prosecutors to open an investigation into crimes committed against Myanmar's Rohingya Muslim minority.

About:

- **Mandate:** it is an intergovernmental international tribunal for Criminal prosecution of individuals for four main crimes namely –
 - Genocide,
 - War crimes,
 - Crimes against humanity and
 - Crime of aggression.
- **Established in:** 2002 by Rome statue.
- **HQ:** Hague, Netherlands. The Court's official seat is in The Hague, Netherlands, but its proceedings may take place anywhere.
- **Jurisdiction:** It can exercise its jurisdiction only when national courts are unwilling or unable to investigate or prosecute such crimes. The Court can generally exercise jurisdiction only in three cases, viz.
 - if the accused is a national of a state party,
 - if the alleged crime took place on the territory of a state party or
 - if a situation is referred to the Court by the United Nations Security Council.
- **Judges:** 18; Elected for 9-year term.
- **Members:** 122 countries. Israel, United States, Russia, china and India are not its member.
- **United States and ICC:** The United States has not signed up to the court and in 2002, its Congress passed a law enabling Washington to invade the Netherlands to liberate any U.S. citizen held by the court.

Relation with UN:

- While not a United Nations organization, the Court has a cooperation agreement with the United Nations.
- When a situation is not within the Court's jurisdiction, the United Nations Security Council can refer the situation to the ICC granting it jurisdiction.

Recent development:

- ICC said that it has jurisdiction over crimes partially committed in Bangladesh, which is a member state of the court.
- Myanmar is not a member of the global court. It has been accused of committing widespread abuses in a campaign against the Rohingya. Myanmar's military began a counterinsurgency campaign against the Rohingya in August 2017 in response to an insurgent attack.

11th BRICS Summit

The 11th BRICS Summit took place from 13th-14th November 2019 in Brasilia, Brazil. The theme of the 2019 BRICS summit is "Economic Growth for an Innovative Future." BRICS countries adopted the Brasilia Declaration.

Brasilia Declaration

- It advocates and supports multilateralism, the central role of the U.N. in international affairs and respect for international law.
- **Reforming Multilateral Systems:** There is an urgent need to strengthen and reform the United Nations and other multilateral organisations, including the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), to address the significant challenges being faced by the developing countries.
- **Support to Multilateralism:** The trade war between China and the U.S. and rising protectionism is hurting the global economy. Multilateralism is crucial for emerging countries to protect their own interests.

India's Stand at the Summit

- Intra-BRICS trade accounts for just 15% of world trade, it needs to be increased. India invited business leaders of the member nations for investment, particularly in infrastructure development.
- India proposed to hold the first meeting of BRICS Water Ministers in India.

- India highlighted the menace of terrorism which has resulted in the loss of \$1 trillion to the world economy.

Meetings on the sidelines of the Summit

India - Brazil

- India invited the President of Brazil as the Chief Guest at the Republic Day 2020.
- Brazil has decided to grant visa-free travel to Indian citizens.

India - China

- The Chinese President invited the Indian Prime Minister for the 3rd informal summit in China in 2020. The first informal summit took place at Wuhan (China-2018) and second at Mamallapuram (India-2019).
- Both the leaders reviewed preparations for celebrating the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 2020.

India - Russia

- 1st Bilateral Regional Forum at the level of Russian Provinces and the Indian States will be held in 2020.
- India has been invited for investment in the Arctic region. The US \$ 25 billion target of bilateral trade by 2025 has already been achieved.

BRICS

- BRICS is an acronym for the grouping of the world's leading emerging economies, namely Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.
- In 2001, the British Economist Jim O'Neill coined the term BRIC to describe the four emerging economies of Brazil, Russia, India, and China.
- The grouping was formalised during the first meeting of BRIC Foreign Ministers in 2006.
- South Africa was invited to join BRIC in December 2010, after which the group adopted the acronym BRICS.
- It comprises 42% of the world's population, has 23% of the global GDP and around 17% of the world trade.
- The chairmanship of the forum is rotated annually among the members, in accordance with the acronym B-R-I-C-S. Brazil is the current chair of the grouping.
- The BRICS Leaders' Summit is convened annually.
- During the Sixth BRICS Summit in Fortaleza (2014) the leaders signed the Agreement establishing the New Development Bank (NDB). They also signed the BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement.

PRELIMS SPECIFIC- DAYS, AWARDS, EVENTS, PERSONS

Vashishtha Narayan Singh

The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi has condoled the passing away of renowned Mathematician Dr. Vashishtha Narayan Singh.

About:

- The 74-year-old is said to have challenged Einstein's theory of relativity. Born in 1942, Vashishtha Narayan Singh had been suffering from schizophrenia for 40 years.
- Vashishtha Narayan Singh did his schooling from Netarhat school in undivided Bihar. He studied at Patna Science College after which he went to University of California in 1965 and completed his PhD on cycle vector space theory in 1969.
- Vashishtha Narayan Singh had taught at the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, and the Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata. He was also a visiting professor at BN Mandal University, Madhepura.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Give up the thought of Giving up

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Qns: How effective has the BRICS grouping been in achieving it's objectives so far? What challenges does BRICS face in meeting it objectives? What role can BRICS play in creation of a more equitable, multi polar world order?

Ans:

BRICS is a pan continental informal grouping of newly industrialized emerging economies- Brazil, Russia, India, China & South Africa. Set up to address the greater need for flexibility mechanisms to achieve larger geo-economic goals.

Objectives of BRICS:

- Initially: it was found to enhance the representation of emerging economies in global financial institutions.
- Later: it expanded its activities for coordination in meetings and international organization; and the development of an agenda for multisectorial cooperation among its members.

Effectiveness of BRICS:

- BRICS helps create new instruments for global relevance and influence for each of its members.

Successful developments:

- Setting up of BRICS development bank or New Development Bank (NDB) – aimed at the financing of infrastructure projects and sustainable development in emerging economies and developing countries
- Contingent Reserves Arrangement (CRA) –for promoting mutual support amongst the BRICS members in situations of instability in the balance of payment
- Political coordination too hasn't seen a element of coordination
- It has collectively raised voices against human rights violations in war ridden Libya, Syria.
- CRITICS: Just “anti-Western” sentiment is not enough to hold together an organization when the BRICS countries do not share a deeper common interest.

India & BRICS:

- BRICS is an integral part of India's grand strategy, and a vehicle in India's journey from being a norm taker to a norm shaper.
- It offers greater bargaining space as India seeks to gain more prominence in institutions of global governance, and shape them in the liberal international tradition with a southern ethos.

Challenges to BRICS:

- Russia and Brazil have both fallen into recession, while China, has seen a sharp contraction in overall economic activity as well as institutional weakness and politico-economic crisis in Brazil and South Africa
- Diverse political system of the member nations.
- Territorial dispute between India and China creates mutual suspicion.

Role of BRICS in multi-polar world:

- BRICS needs to acquire weight in the international space so as to respond to contemporary realities. It needs the engagement of all the stakeholders
- The economic-financial sphere stands out as one of the most promising areas of activity for the BRICS.
- High growth rate, economic potential and demographic development are putting the BRICS increasingly in a leading position in setting the global agenda and having a greater say in the global governance.
- Also, BRICS as a group are expected to step up their role and extend to pressing peace and security challenges, from terrorism, piracy and nuclear non-proliferation to regional security in North Africa and the Middle East.
- In areas of Climate change BRICS as a grouping works on common agreed principles.
- Hearing voices of 40% of world is a step towards equality.

Conclusion: To make rightful place in the 21st century, the BRICS countries must create more open, accountable, and trustworthy systems of governance. In order to promote multipolarity, it should go beyond economic cooperation and have common goals.

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS MCQs

1. Recently in the news, Liberhan Commission is related to:
 - (a) Tax Reforms
 - (b) Ayodhya Land Dispute**
 - (c) Digital Payments
 - (d) Inter-State River Dispute
2. What is 'Acqua alta', recently seen in news?
 - (a) It is the term used in Veneto for the exceptional tide peaks that occur periodically in the northern Adriatic Sea.**
 - (b) It is the term used for the high tides in Planet Mars.
 - (c) It is a spinning column of air and mist that forms on lakes, rivers, and at sea.
 - (d) None of the above
3. With reference to the International Criminal Court (ICC), consider the following statements:
 1. It can exercise its jurisdiction only when national courts are unwilling or unable to investigate or prosecute such crimes.
 2. The Court's official seat is in New York, but its proceedings may take place anywhere.
 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
4. The Sabarimala temple is a temple complex located at Sabarimala inside which of the following Tiger Reserve?
 - (a) Parambikulam Tiger Reserve
 - (b) Periyar Tiger Reserve**
 - (c) Anamalai Tiger Reserve
 - (d) Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve
5. With reference to the doctrine of "essentiality", consider the following statements:
 1. It was invented by a seven-judge Bench of the Supreme Court in the 'Golaknath' case in 1954.
 2. The court held that the term "religion" will cover all rituals and practices "integral" to a religion, and took upon itself the responsibility of determining the essential and non-essential practices of a religion.
 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
6. Dr. Vashishtha Narayan Singh, often mentioned in news, was a/an
 - (a) Mathematician**
 - (b) Nuclear scientist
 - (c) Athlete
 - (d) Indian classical vocalist