

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS- BILATERAL, GROUPINGS, ORGANISATIONS**Sea Guardians**

The sixth bilateral naval exercise between China and Pakistan, code-named Sea Guardians-2020 was recently held in the northern Arabian Sea, with the purpose of enhancing security cooperation between the two countries.

About:

- This is the sixth joint naval exercise between China and Pakistan, but it is the first time that the exercise was named “sea guardians.”
- Sea guardians is expected to become a series of naval exercises with Pakistan, similar to the ‘warrior’ series of joint land exercises and the shaheen series of joint air exercises.
- The exercise is also the first between China and Pakistan that will feature anti-submarine and submarine rescue training, indicating a high-level of strategic mutual trust.

Significance:

- The North Arabian Sea is regarded strategically significant for China which is now developing Pakistan's deep water Gwadar port there.
- Gwadar is being connected through the over USD 60 billion China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to China's Xinjiang province, providing a key land route to China to access the warm waters of Arabian Sea.
- The Gwadar is also located close to Iran's Chabahar Port being jointly developed by Iran, India and Afghanistan to ensure a trade corridor for Indian exports to Afghanistan.
- The Arabian Sea provides entry to the Indian Ocean where China currently has built a logistics base at Djibouti in the Horn of Africa.

Protection Of Cultural Property In Armed Conflict

President Donald Trump tweeted that if Iran strikes any Americans, or American assets, in retaliation, the US would target 52 sites in Iran which are important to Iranian culture. Such a step, should he follow through on his threat, could be considered a war crime.

About:

- The nations of the world adopted at The Hague in 1954, The Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, the first international treaty focussed exclusively on the protection of cultural heritage during war and armed conflict.
- The Convention defined cultural property as “movable or immovable property of great importance to the cultural heritage of every people, such as monuments of architecture, art or history, whether religious or secular; archaeological sites....”, etc.
- The Rome Statute of 1998, the founding treaty of the International Criminal Court, describes as a “war crime” any intentional attack against a historical monument, or a building dedicated to religion, education, art, or science.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**Voting At The GST Council**

Breaking the tradition of consensus-based decisions in its 37 earlier meetings, the GST Council voted for the first time in its 38th meeting held in December 2019. The proposal to have a higher single rate for lotteries went through by a majority, with 21 votes in favour.

About:

- The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council is a federal body that aims to bring together states and the Centre on a common platform for the nationwide rollout of the indirect tax reform.
- As per The Constitution (One Hundred and First Amendment) Act, 2016, in case of a voting, every decision of the GST Council has to be taken by a majority of not less than three-fourths of the weighted votes of the members present.
- The vote of the central government has a weightage of one-third of the total votes cast, and the votes of all the state governments taken together have a weightage of two-thirds of the total votes cast in that meeting.
- So far, even if states voiced their differences over a proposal in the Council, all decisions had been taken by consensus in the meetings of the GST Council. But the 38th meeting saw voting for the first time.

ENVIRONMENT- CONSERVATION, BIO-DIVERSITY AND ISSUES**Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Rules**

The four illegal apartment complexes in Maradu, Kerala, was razed by controlled implosion on the orders of the Supreme Court for breaching Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) norms. The court had called the illegal constructions a “colossal loss” to the environment.

About:

- In India, the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Rules govern human and industrial activity close to the coastline, in order to protect the fragile ecosystems near the sea.
- They restrict certain kinds of activities — like large constructions, setting up of new industries — within a certain distance from the coastline.
- Under the rules, the regulation zone has been defined as the area up to 500 m from the high-tide line. The restrictions depend on criteria such as the population of the area, the ecological sensitivity, the distance from the shore, and whether the area had been designated as a natural park or wildlife zone.
- The Rules have a no-development zone of 20 m for all islands close to the mainland coast, and for all backwater islands in the mainland.
- For the so-called CRZ-III (Rural) areas, two separate categories have been stipulated.
- In the densely populated rural areas (CRZ-IIIA) with a population density of 2,161 per sq km as per the 2011 Census, the no-development zone is 50 m from the high-tide level, as against the 200 m stipulated earlier.
- CRZ-IIIB category (rural areas with population density below 2,161 per sq km) areas continue to have a no-development zone extending up to 200 m from the high-tide line.
- While the CRZ Rules are made by the Union environment ministry, implementation is to be ensured by state governments through their Coastal Zone Management Authorities. In the current case, the Kerala Coastal Zone Management Authority (KCZMA) identified the CRZ violations.

Statement on Climate of India During 2019

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) released its weather summary titled the ‘Statement on Climate of India during 2019.’

Key findings:

- The average temperature during 2019 rose by 0.36 degrees celsius, making this the seventh warmest year on record. The year 2016 was by far the warmest year recorded.
- The decade 2011-19 was the warmest on record for the country. The report highlighted that India had warmed by 1 degree Celsius since 1901.
- Arabian Sea brewed more cyclonic storms than the Bay of Bengal in 2019. This was only the second time in 117 years that the Arabian Sea saw such intense and frequent cyclones.
- The year 2019 was one of extremes — heat, cold, rain and cyclones — for India, killing a total of 1,562 people. The previous year, total deaths caused due to similar weather vagaries was 1,428.
- Rain and flood alone claimed 849 lives, with Bihar being the worst affected state due to unprecedented weather events experienced during all the seasons last year.
- The causes of deaths due to extreme weather events last year were as follows: heavy rain and floods 849, heatwave 349, thunderstorm 210, lightning 75, snow avalanche 51 and cold wave 28.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY- EVERYDAY SCIENCE, SPACE, NUCLEAR, DEFENCE ETC**NEON**

Samsung’s Star Labs has officially unveiled Neon as its latest artificial intelligence (AI) powered project.

About:

- Neons are Artificial Intelligence virtual beings capable of showing human-like emotions and intelligence.
- Neons look and behave like a real human, with the ability to show emotions and intelligence. Neons can learn new skills and form memories from experiences.
- Neons are capable of human-like interactions and have the ability to communicate with human affect, learn from experiences and even form new memories. They can serve as an individualised teacher, a personal financial advisor, a healthcare provider, or a concierge.

Working:

- Neons are digitally composed next-generation artificial intelligent entities created Star Labs’ CORE R3 and SPECTRA engines.
- The CORE R3 engine has been revealed to bring lifelike reality and realtime responsiveness to Neons.
- The SPECTRA engine is responsible for providing the Neons with intelligence, learning, emotions and memory.

PRELIMS SPECIFIC FACTS- INDICES, DAYS, EVENTS, AWARDS ETC**H9N2**

Indian scientists of the National Institute of Virology (NIV), Pune have detected the country’s first case of infection with avian influenza A(H9N2).

About:

- H9N2 is a subtype of the influenza A virus, which causes human influenza as well as bird flu.
- The H9N2 subtype was isolated for the first time in Wisconsin, US in 1966 from turkey flocks.
- H9N2 viruses are found worldwide in wild birds and are endemic in poultry in many areas.
- H9N2 virus infections in humans are rare, but likely under-reported due to typically mild symptoms of the infections.

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Qns. Discuss the impact of rising US-Iran conflict on India and its international relations.

Ans

With the United States withdrawal from Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCOPA), US Iran relation has taken a downward spiral, getting further aggravated with shooting down of American P8 plane by Iran in its territory (June 2019) and recent assassination of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani. This escalating conflict has high potential to create multifarious impact on India and its international relations:

Impact of rising US-Iran conflict on India

- Shock in oil supplies: India imports 84% of its oil requirements. Conflict in the Middle East is bound to create shocks in oil supplies. However, with surplus in oil supply (as forecasted by IAEA), boom in US Shale production, India diversifying its source, reducing dependency on Iranian crude oil can help India to manage continued flow of oil comfortably.
- Can further trigger inflation: In India, retail inflation has already crossed 5%, and increase in fuel prices can further increase inflation by increasing the transportation costs.
- Can widen Current Account Deficit (CAD): With increasing oil price, it would lead to higher outflow of US dollars; and this higher outflow will lead to depreciation of rupee, thereby, further making import costlier, thus widening CAD.
- Can lower India's GDP growth rate: Any crisis in the Middle East region directly impacts India's exports to this region (as predicted by Federation of Indian Export Organization). In addition to this, due to slowdown in the Middle East Region, remittances received from this region will also be impacted. Moreover, India's economy being 'coupled economy'; slowdown in global growth rate due to conflict can potentially lower India's GDP growth rate as well.
- Safety of Indian Diaspora: Around 11 million Indian diaspora is present in the Middle East region. Safety of Indian diaspora will be a major concern for India if this conflict escalates further.
- Connectivity challenges: Iran's Chabahar port is of huge significance for India because of its strategic location, accessibility to Afghanistan and Central Asia. The shadow of US-Iran conflicts jeopardizes India's strategic connectivity interests.
- Can spread radicalization among Shia population: India has the largest number of the world's Shia population and this conflict can perhaps radicalize some of them.
- Affect India's internal security: Instability in Iran, in addition to the US military withdrawal from Afghanistan, can derail Afghan peace process, thus, affecting the internal security of India by destabilizing Jammu and Kashmir region (as happened in 1990s.)

Impact of US-Iran conflict on India's International relations

- The political aspect of managing relations with the US and Iran can be a formidable challenge.
- India's relation with US: If India continues to buy Iranian oil, refusing US sanctions, it is likely to impact the strategic relationship with the US and can create strains in Indo-US defence deals.
- India's relation with Iran: If India stops sourcing oil from Iran, it will affect bilateral relations. This can draw Iran closer to China.
- Moreover, giving in completely to US pressure and cutting off Iranian oil imports affects India's pursuit of strategic autonomy.

Way forward

- India must make serious efforts to make its economy immune from fuel shocks by diversifying India's energy basket towards renewable energy sources.
- India must also augment its strategic reserves to at least 100 days capacity from present only 10days capacity.
- India can devise a Rupee payment mechanism to overcome the sanctions; or can adopt the INSTEX mechanism to continue bilateral trade.
- India can offer Iran to enhance its investments in the Chabahar Port development project as well as consider initiating other developmental and connectivity projects to strengthen linkages to Afghanistan and Central Asia.
- This will ensure that India's relationship remains favourable. And it can also strengthen India's commitment towards strategic autonomy and will assert India's role as a global power pursuing independent foreign policy.

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS MCQs

1. With reference to the H9N2 virus, consider the following statements:
 1. It is a subtype of the influenza A virus, which causes human influenza as well as bird flu.
 2. H9N2 viruses are found only in Asia. 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
2. With reference to the ‘Statement on Climate of India during 2019’, consider the following statements:
 1. The average temperature during 2019 rose by 0.36 degrees celsius, making this the seventh warmest year on record.
 2. Bay of Bengal brewed more cyclonic storms than the Arabian Sea in 2019. 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
3. With reference to the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, consider the following statements:
 1. The Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict is the first international treaty focussed exclusively on the protection of cultural heritage during war and armed conflict.
 2. The Rome Statute of 1998, the founding treaty of the International Criminal Court, describes as a “war crime” any intentional attack against a historical monument, or a building dedicated to religion, education, art, or science. 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. With reference to the voting at the GST Council, consider the following statements:
 1. As per The Constitution (One Hundred and First Amendment) Act, 2016, in case of a voting, every decision of the GST Council has to be taken by a majority of not less than three-fourths of the weighted votes of the members present.
 2. The vote of the central government has a weightage of two-third of the total votes cast. 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
5. Which of the following company has officially unveiled Neon as its latest artificial intelligence (AI) powered project?
(a) Samsung
(b) Apple
(c) Facebook
(d) Microsoft
6. Sea Guardians-2020, recently seen in news, is a naval exercise between:
(a) China and Pakistan
(b) India and China
(c) India and U.S.A
(d) U.S.A and Japan
7. With reference to the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Rules, consider the following statements:
 1. Under the rules, the regulation zone has been defined as the area up to 1000 m from the high-tide line.
 2. The Rules have a no-development zone of 20 m for all islands close to the mainland coast, and for all backwater islands in the mainland. 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