

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS**CONTROVERSY OVER THE CHINA-SOLOMON ISLANDS DEAL**

Recently leaked document has revealed that the Solomon Islands in the South Pacific has reached a deal with China which outlines an unprecedented level of security cooperation.

- This is the first deal of its kind for Beijing in the region.

What are the contents of the proposed deal and why are they controversial?**About the deal**

- The document titled 'Framework Agreement between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of Solomon Islands on Security Cooperation' was leaked through social media.
- It created a huge controversy domestically as well as internationally because it has the potential to disturb the established security mechanisms in the South Pacific region.
- The document explicitly enables Beijing to send its "police, armed police, military personnel and other law enforcement and armed forces" to the islands on the latter government's request, or if the former sees that the safety of its projects and personnel in the islands are at risk.
- The document also provides for China's naval vessels to utilise the islands for logistics support.
- There have been speculations in the wake of this revelation that China might be building its next overseas naval base in Solomon Islands after Djibouti, which was also incidentally referred to as a logistics support base.

Reasons for the Solomon Islands' increasing proximity to China

- Solomon Islands' inability to manage domestic ethnic conflicts led to close security relations with Australia, which is the traditional first responder to any crisis in the South Pacific.
- The Solomon Islands had cultivated strong ties with Taiwan, which ended with the emergence of the current government in Honiara.
- In 2019, the new government headed by Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare switched Taiwan for China.
 - This was supposedly after Beijing offered half a billion U.S. dollars in financial aid, roughly five times what Taiwan spent on the islands in the past two decades.
- The switching of diplomatic relations along with the general dissatisfaction with the government, led to widespread Opposition protests and riots in Honiara in November 2021.
 - The government has also notably mentioned that the move is aimed at diversification of its security partnerships, taking aim at its longstanding security dependence on Australia.

Why is China interested in the Solomon Islands?**Competition**

- The Pacific islands are among the few regions in the world where China has competition from Taiwan for diplomatic recognition.
- China considers Taiwan to be a renegade territory awaiting reunification, and opposes its recognition as an independent state on the international stage.
- Hence, any country which has to officially establish relations with China will have to break diplomatic ties with Taiwan.
 - The Solomon Islands was one among the six Pacific island states which had official bilateral relations with Taiwan.
- However, in 2019, the Solomon Islands, along with Kiribati, switched allegiance to China.
- This has left only four regional countries backing Taiwan, mostly belonging to the Micronesian group of islands which are under the control of the U.S..

Vote banks

- The small Pacific island states act as potential vote banks for mobilising support for the great powers in international fora like the United Nations.

Large maritime Exclusive Economic Zones

- These states have disproportionately large maritime Exclusive Economic Zones when compared to their small sizes, the reason why these 'small island states' are also seen as 'big ocean states'.

Reserves

- Solomon Islands, in particular, have significant reserves of timber and mineral resources, along with fisheries.

Strategically

- But more importantly, they are strategically located for China to insert itself between America's military bases in the Pacific islands and Australia.

- This is especially significant in the current scenario, given the emergence of the AUKUS (Australia, the U.K. and the U.S.) which seeks to elevate Australia's strategic capabilities vis-à-vis China through Anglo-American cooperation.

What does this mean for the established geopolitical configuration in the region?

- The Pacific islands, in the post-World War II scenario, were exclusively under the spheres of influence of the Western powers, in particular the U.S., U.K., France and the regional heavyweights, Australia and New Zealand.
 - All of them have territorial possessions in the region, with the three nuclear powers among them having used the region as a nuclear weapons testing ground.
- The smaller island nations of the region are heavily dependent on them, especially Australia as it is a resident power.
- This established power structure in the region is being increasingly challenged by China through the steady displacement of Taiwan and the cultivation of economic and political clout.
- Its proposed deal with the Solomon Islands has added a security dimension to its fast-growing profile in the region.
 - Australia has reacted with boosted finances, and by extending its current security mission till 2023 when the islands will host the Pacific Games.
 - The U.S. has responded by considering reopening its embassy in Honiara after a long 29-year gap.
 - New Zealand has shed its typical restraint about China and has criticised it for attempting to militarise the Pacific islands.
- However, it is to be noted that China's rise in the South Pacific is not without opposition.
- AUKUS is a recent example of how the established powers are reacting; although, to what extent they can mobilise individual governments against China is questionable.
- Significant discontent has been brewing within and among the Pacific island states against China's economic inroads and its adverse impact on their vulnerable economic and political systems.
- The geopolitics of the region is undergoing an unprecedented flux in tandem with the larger shifts in the Indo-Pacific, suggesting an intensification of regional great power rivalry and domestic volatility for the Pacific island states in the coming years.

Conclusion

- Dismissing the prospects for any foreign military base, the government of Solomon Islands affirmed the finalisation of the draft of such a deal.
- The deal is not yet signed and it is not fully known whether the provisions mentioned in the leaked document are present in the final draft.

About Solomon Islands

- It is a country in the southwestern Pacific Ocean. It consists of a double chain of volcanic islands and coral atolls in Melanesia.
- The Solomon Islands is part of the ethnically Melanesian group of islands in the Pacific and lies between Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu.
- The islands, which were initially controlled by the British Empire during the colonial era, went through the hands of Germany and Japan and then back to the U.K., after the Americans took over the islands from the Japanese during World War II.
- The islands became independent in 1978 to become a constitutional monarchy under the British Crown, with a parliamentary system of government.
- English is the official language, but Solomon Islands pijin is the lingua franca. There are over 80 different local languages plus dialects.

IMPORTANT FACTS FOR PRELIM

1. Sovereign Debt

The Sri Lankan government decided to default on all its sovereign debt worth \$51 billion as it awaits financial assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

What is Sovereign Debt?

- Sovereign debt refers to the debt issued or accumulated by any government.
- Governments borrow money to finance the various expenses that they cannot meet through their regular tax revenues.
 - They usually need to pay interest on such debt along with the principal amount over time although many governments simply choose to borrow fresh debt to repay existing debt.
- Historically, governments have tended to borrow more money than they could actually repay in order to fund populist spending.

Features

- Governments can borrow either in their local currency or in foreign currency like the U.S. dollar.
 - Governments usually find it easier to borrow and repay in their local currency.
 - This is because governments with the help of their central banks can easily create fresh local currency to repay debt denominated in the local currency.
 - This is known as debt monetisation and it can lead to increased money supply which in turn causes prices to rise.
- Debt denominated in foreign currency, say the U.S dollar, is difficult to repay as one depends on consistent flow of U.S. dollars into the economy.

2. Grammy Awards

The 64th Annual Grammy Awards were held at the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas, Nevada.

- This was the first time a Grammy Awards ceremony was held in Sin City.

About

- A Grammy Award is any of a series of awards presented each year in the United States by either the National Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences or the Latin Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences.
 - Each year, record companies and academy members submit entries for consideration. NARAS voting members select five nominees for each award, with each voter casting a ballot only in their field of expertise.
- The first Grammy Awards ceremony was held in Los Angeles in 1959, and 28 awards were presented.
- They are meant to recognize spectacular work in the music industry.
 - The name Grammy is an homage to the gramophone and its revolutionary impact on the music industry.

3. Puthandu

- People from the Tamil community celebrated Puthandu on April 14 2022
- Interestingly, along with Tamilians across the world, many other Indian communities also celebrate their traditional new year around the same time — Vishu in Kerala, Bihu for those in Assam, Baisakhi in Punjab, and Pohela Boishakh in West Bengal.

About Puthandu

- It is celebrated on the first day of Chithirai (Tamil month) and it also marks the beginning of the Tamil New Year.
- It is also commonly known as Varsha Pirappu.
- It is also celebrated by the members of the Tamil community in Sri Lanka and those located elsewhere in the world.
- It marks the arrival of the spring season.
- It falls on the same day almost every year according to the Gregorian Calendar.

History & Significance of Puthandu:

- Mythology says that Lord Brahma created the universe on the day of Puthandu.
- Tamil people believe that the beginning of the new year brings new hopes and dreams.
- They celebrate the day with family and friends and enjoy a great feast with high pomp and excitement.
- They visit temples wearing new clothes and offer prayers to God to receive blessings for their family.

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Q1. The relaxation of AFSPA is welcome, but gradual efforts should be made towards its repeal by ensuring that law and order is maintained by normal means in disturbed areas. Examine. (250 words)

Introduction

The Armed Forces Special Powers Act commonly (AFSPA) came in to force decades ago in the context of increasing violence in the North Eastern states. Passed in 1958 for North East and in 1990 for Jammu and Kashmir, the law gives armed forces necessary powers to control disturbed areas which are designated by the govt.

AFSPA, which gives sweeping powers to the armed forces, has been fully or partially withdrawn from parts of three Northeast states — Assam, Nagaland and Manipur. Still, AFSPA remains in force in parts of these three states as well as in parts of Arunachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir.

Body

AFSPA – a draconian act

- It has been dubbed as a license to kill. The main criticism of the Act is directed against the provisions of Section 4, which gives the armed forces the power to open fire and even cause death, if prohibitory orders are violated.
- Human rights activists object on the grounds that these provisions give the security forces unbridled powers to arrest, search, seize and even shoot to kill.
- Activists accuse the security forces of having destroyed homes and entire villages merely on the suspicion that insurgents were hiding there. They point out that Section 4 empowers the armed forces to arrest citizens without warrant and keep them in custody for several days.
- They also object to Section 6, which protects security forces personnel from prosecution except with the prior sanction of the central government. Critics say this provision has on many occasions led to even non-commissioned officers brazenly opening fire on crowds without having to justify their action.
- Critics say the act has failed to contain terrorism and restore normalcy in disturbed areas, as the number of armed groups has gone up after the act was established. Many even hold it responsible for the spiralling violence in areas it is in force.
- The decision of the government to declare a particular area ‘disturbed’ cannot be challenged in a court of law. Hence, several cases of human rights violations go unnoticed.

Should AFSPA be repealed?

- The Army clearly sees AFSPA as a capstone enabling Act that gives it the powers necessary to conduct counter-insurgency operations efficiently.
- If AFSPA is repealed or diluted, it is the army leadership’s considered view that the performance of battalions in counter-insurgency operations will be adversely affected and the terrorists or insurgents will seize the initiative.
- Many argue that removal of the act will lead to demoralising the armed forces and see militants motivating locals to file lawsuits against the army.
- Also, the forces are aware that they cannot afford to fail when called upon to safeguard the country’s integrity. Hence, they require the minimum legislation that is essential to ensure efficient utilization of combat capability.
- AFSPA is necessary to maintain law and order in disturbed areas, otherwise things will go haywire. The law also dissuades advancement of terrorist activities in these areas.
- Also, extraordinary situations require special handling.

Way forward

- Security forces should be very careful while operating in the Northeast and must not give any chance to the militants to exploit the situation.
- Indiscriminate arrests and harassment of people out of frustration for not being able to locate the real culprits should be avoided. All good actions of the force get nullified with one wrong action.
- Any person, including the supervisory staff, found guilty of violating law should be severely dealt with.
- The law is not defective, but it is its implementation that has to be managed properly.
- The local people have to be convinced with proper planning and strategy.

Conclusion

- The practical problems encountered in ensuring transparency in counter-insurgency operations must be overcome by innovative measures. The army must be completely transparent in investigating allegations of violations of human rights and bringing the violators to speedy justice. Exemplary punishment must be meted out where the charges are proved.

Value addition

Key features of act

- In simple terms, AFSPA gives armed forces the power to maintain public order in “disturbed areas”.
- They have the authority to prohibit a gathering of five or more persons in an area, can use force or even open fire after giving due warning if they feel a person is in contravention of the law.
- If reasonable suspicion exists, the army can also arrest a person without a warrant; enter or search premises without a warrant; and ban the possession of firearms.
- Under the provisions of the AFSPA armed forces are empowered with immunity from being prosecuted to open fire, enter and search without warrant and arrest any person who has committed a cognizable offence.
- As of now this act is in force in Jammu and Kashmir, Assam, Nagaland and parts of Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur.

Expert recommendations

- A committee headed by Justice Jeevan Reddy was appointed in 2004 to review AFSPA. Though the committee found that the powers conferred under the Act are not absolute, it nevertheless concluded that the Act should be repealed.
- However, it recommended that essential provisions of the Act be inserted into the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act of 1967.
- The Second Administrative Reforms Commission headed by then Union law minister M Veerappa Moily also recommended that AFSPA should be repealed and its essential provisions should be incorporated in the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).

DAILY QUIZ

Q1. Grammy Awards recently seen in the news, it is related to

- (a) Sports (b) **Music**
(c) Acting (d) Literature

Q2. With reference to Vaquita porpoise, consider the following statements:

1. It is the world's smallest cetacean and the most endangered marine mammal.
2. It only lives in Mexico's upper Gulf of California.
3. It has been listed under the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List as Vulnerable

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) 1, 2 and 3 only (b) 3 and 2 only
(c) **1 and 2 only** (d) only 1 and 3

Q3. Consider the following pairs:

Festival **State**

1. Bihu Assam
2. Pohela Boishakh West Bengal
3. Puthandu Tamil Nadu

Which of the pairs given above is/are correctly matched?

- (a) **1, 2 and 3** (b) 3 and 2 only
(c) 1 and 2 only (d) only 1 and 3

Q4. With reference to Solomon Islands, consider the following statements:

1. It is part of the ethnically Melanesian group of islands in the Indian Ocean.
2. It lies between Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu.
3. It became independent in 1978 to become a constitutional monarchy under the British Crown, with a parliamentary system of government.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) 1, 2 and 3 (b) **3 and 2 only**
(c) 1 and 2 only (d) only 1 and 3

Q5. Which of the following are Literary Works of B. R. Ambedkar?

1. Pakistan or the Partition of India
2. The Buddha and His Dhamma
3. Administration and Finance of the East India Company
4. Discovery of India

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) **1, 2 and 3 only** (b) 2 and 4 only
(c) 1, 4 and 2 only (d) 1, 2, 3, 4

Q6. Examine the following statements with reference to special address of president to parliament

1. The provision for Address by the Head of State to Parliament for the first time provided under the Government of India Act, 1919.
2. When a session of Lok Sabha is not prorogued after being adjourned sine-die and subsequently reconvened to meet in the next calendar year, the President, in such cases, is required to address both Houses of Parliament assembled together.

Select the correct statement/s

- a) **1 only** b) 2 only
c) Both d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q7. Consider the following statements with regards to Index of Industrial production

1. It is compiled and published by NSO.
2. Recently the base year for IIP calculation changed to 2017-18.
3. Items included in IIP refinery products hold a highest weightage among others.

Choose the correct statement /s

- a) 1 only (b) **1 and 3 only**
c) 1 and 2 only (d) 2 and 3 only

