

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
Scale up the India-South Korea bilateral partnership

CONTEXT: There is much potential for South Korea to become the fourth pillar in New Delhi's Indo-Pacific strategy

India - South Korea Relations

- **Political:**
 - In May 2015, the bilateral relationship was upgraded to 'special strategic partnership'.
 - India has a major role to play in South Korea's Southern Policy under which Korea is looking at expanding relations beyond its immediate region.
 - Similarly, South Korea is a major player in India's Act East Policy under which India aims to promote economic cooperation, cultural ties and develop strategic relationships with countries in the Asia-Pacific..
- **Economic:**
 - **Bilateral trade** in the first half (January-June) of 2021 was recorded at \$10.97 billion, an increase of 38 per cent compared to the same period of the previous year.
 - South Korea's exports to India increased 38.5 per cent (\$7.4 billion), imports increased **37.4 per cent (\$3.6 billion)**, and the trade balance recorded a surplus of \$3.8 billion.
 - India and South Korea set a bilateral trade target of \$50 billion before 2030,
 - India and South Korea have signed the **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)**, 2010 which has **facilitated the growth of trade relations**.
 - To facilitate investment from Korea, India has launched a "**Korea Plus**" facilitation cell under '**Invest India**' to guide, assist and handhold investors.
- **Cultural:**
 - Korean Buddhist Monk Hyecho or Hong Jiao visited India from 723 to 729 AD and wrote the travelogue "**Pilgrimage to the five kingdoms of India**" which gives a vivid account of Indian culture, politics & society.
 - Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore had composed a short but evocative poem – '**Lamp of the East**' - in 1929 about **Korea's glorious past** and its promising bright future.

Shift in South Korean foreign and security policies.

- The newly elected Korean President, Yoon Suk Yeol, has brought about a paradigm shift in **South Korean foreign and security policies**.
 - South Korea's new willingness to become a **global pivotal state** and play an active role in regional affairs is bound to create **multiple opportunities for a multi-dimensional India- Korea partnership**.
 - Both nations will now be in a **better position to understand and accommodate the other's trade investments and supply chain needs**.
 - The emerging strategic alignment is creating a **new convergence of capabilities and closer synergy** in new areas of **economic cooperation** such as **public health, green growth, digital connectivity, and trade**, among others.
- With the strategic shift in South Korea's defence orientation, new doors of cooperation for **defence and security have emerged**.
 - Advanced **defence technologies and modern combat systems** are the new domains for the **next level of defence cooperation** between the two countries.

Significance for India

- **South Korea's participation in additional maritime security activities** in the Indian Ocean, such as the **annual Malabar and other exercises with Quad countries**, will further **strengthen India's naval footprint in the Indo-Pacific region**.
- The shift in South Korean policies will enable a strong **India, South Korea and Japan defence policy coordination** that could **effectively forge new joint regional security policies**.

Challenges /Issues

- During the past five years, **India and South Korea** have experienced **considerable divergence in their respective national objectives**.
- There was a **clear drift by South Korea** away from multilateral security initiatives led by the **United States, such as the Quad** (the U.S., Australia, India and Japan); meanwhile, India has been **actively participating in them**.
- In the last few years, **India and South Korea** have faced serious blockades to their economic ties.
 - Trade between the two **countries was sluggish** and **there was no major inflow of South Korean investment into India**.
- **India and South Korea** were also trying to upgrade their **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)** agreement, but to no avail.
- **South Korea's peace process with North Korea has completely collapsed**.

- In the coming days, as North Korea conducts more missile and nuclear tests, it may lead to **regional tension**.
 - Any breakout of hostilities on the Korean Peninsula can derail South Korea's Indo-Pacific project.
- **Agreements with china**
 - During the Moon presidency, South Korea was forced to sign the **"three no's" agreement with China**.
 - Under this agreement, Korea agreed to:
 - no additional **Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD)** deployment;
 - no participation in the U.S. 's **missile defence network**, and
 - no establishment of a **trilateral military alliance with the U.S. and Japan**.

Real challenge for South Korea is to withstand the **inevitable Chinese pressure and stick to its new alignment**.

In 2020, India and South Korea signed a Roadmap for Defence Industries Cooperation between the Republic of India and the Republic of Korea (ROK) deal.

However, due to the **lack of political and strategic alignment, nothing came of it**.

The current emerging alignment between **India and South Korea**, which has the potential to bring the two countries closer together, may prove short-lived if proper attention is not paid to the multi-dimensional challenges it faces.

Way Forward

- South Korea could be the fourth pillar in India's **Indo-Pacific strategy along with Japan, Australia, and Vietnam**.
 - This can bring about a **paradigm shift in India's position and influence in the region**.
- The time has come for the Indian and South Korean bilateral partnership to be **strategically scaled up at the political, diplomatic and security domain levels**.
- With **South Korea's emergence** as a leader in critical technologies, cybersecurity and cyber-capacity building, outer space and space situational awareness capabilities, South Korea can contribute **immensely to enhance India's foundational strengths in the Indo-Pacific**.
- India can help **South Korea withstand Chinese pressure and North Korean threats**.
- An independent, strong, and democratic South Korea can be a long-term partner with India, that will add significant value to India's Indo-Pacific strategy.

PRELIMS

1. Global Gender Gap Index

CONTEXT: Recently, the **2022 Global Gender Gap Index** was released by the **World Economic Forum (WEF)**.

Global Gender Gap Index

- According to the WEF, it is the **longest-standing index**, which tracks progress towards closing gender gaps over time since its inception in 2006.
- The Global Gender Gap Index benchmarks the **current state and evolution of gender parity across four key dimensions**:
 - Economic Participation and Opportunity,
 - Educational Attainment,
 - Health and Survival, and
 - Political Empowerment.
- On each of the four sub-indices as well as on the overall index the GGG index provides **scores between 0 and 1**.
 - 1 shows full gender parity and 0 is complete imparity.
- The cross-country comparisons aim to support the identification of the most effective policies to close gender gaps.

2022 Index highlights

- The 2022 Global Gender Gap Index ranks India at **135 out of 146 countries**.
 - In 2021, India was ranked 140 out of 156 countries.
- **Overall performance:**
 - India has approximately **662 million (or 66.2 crore) women**.
 - In 2022, **India's overall score has improved from 0.625 (in 2021) to 0.629**.
 - India's (135th) global gender gap score has oscillated between 0.593 and 0.683 since the index was first compiled. In 2022, India scored 0.629, which is its **seventh-highest score in the last 16 years**.
- **Dimension-specific performance:**
 - **Political Empowerment:**

- This includes **metrics such as:** The percentage of women in Parliament, the percentage of women in ministerial positions etc.
 - Of all the sub-indices, this is where India ranks the highest (**48th out of 146**).
- However, notwithstanding its rank, its **score is quite low at 0.267**.
- Moreover, India's score on this metric has worsened since last year – from 0.276 to 0.267.
- The silver lining is that despite the reduction, India's score is above the global average in this category.
- **Other countries:**
 - Some of the best ranking countries in this category score much better.
 - For instance, Iceland is ranked 1 with a score of 0.874 and Bangladesh is ranked 9 with a score of 0.546.
- **Economic Participation and Opportunity:**
 - This includes **metrics such as:** The percentage of women who are part of the labour force, wage equality for similar work, earned income etc.
 - Here, too, India ranks a **lowly 143 out of the 146 countries** in contention even though its score has improved over 2021 from 0.326 to 0.350.
 - Last year, India was pegged at 151 out of the 156 countries ranked.
 - **Other countries:**
 - India's score is much lower than the global average, and only Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan are behind India on this metric.
- **Educational Attainment:**
 - This sub-index includes **metrics such as:** Literacy rate and the enrolment rates in primary, secondary and tertiary education.
 - Here India ranks 107th out of 146, and its score has marginally worsened since last year.
 - In 2021, India was ranked 114 out of 156.
- **Health and Survival:**
 - This includes **two metrics:** The sex ratio at birth (in %) and healthy life expectancy (in years).
 - In this metric, India is ranked the last (146) among all the countries.
 - Its score hasn't changed from 2021 when it was ranked 155th out of 156 countries.

2. G20 Foreign Ministers Meeting

CONTEXT: G20 Foreign Ministers Meeting was recently concluded in Bali, Indonesia.

About

- It was hosted by **Indonesia** as it is the chair of G20 for 2022.
 - The meet was Guided by the **theme 'Recover Together, Recover Stronger'**.
 - After Indonesia, India will assume the presidency of G20 from December 2022.
- **Ukraine Russia conflict:**
 - The conversation on **Russia's invasion of Ukraine** and its **impact on food security and energy dominated this meeting**.
 - Russia's top diplomat walked out of a meeting and denounced the West for "frenzied criticism" and squandering a chance to tackle global economic problems.
 - The forum was the first face-to-face meeting between Russia and the fiercest critics of its war.
- **India China:**
 - The External Affairs Minister of India met the **State Councilor and Foreign Minister of China**.
 - India called for an early resolution of all the **outstanding issues along the LAC in Eastern Ladakh**.
 - Recalling the **disengagement** achieved in some friction areas, India reiterated the need to sustain the momentum to complete disengagement from all the remaining areas to restore peace and tranquility in the border areas.

G20

- **Origin:**
 - The G20 was formed in 1999 in the backdrop of the financial crisis of the late 1990s that hit East Asia and Southeast Asia in particular.
 - Its aim was to secure global financial stability by involving middle-income countries.
 - **As stated by the official G20 Website:**
 - "On the advice of the G7 Finance Ministers, the **G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors** began holding meetings to discuss the response to the global financial crisis that occurred."
- **Objectives:**
 - Policy coordination between its members in order to achieve global economic stability, sustainable growth;

- To promote financial regulations that reduce risks and prevent future financial crises; and
- To create a new international financial architecture.

3. **Dark Matter**

CONTEXT: Recently, **LUX-ZEPLIN (LZ)** in South Dakota in the U.S. is being considered as the most sensitive dark matter detector in the world.

Universe and Dark matter

- Many physicists strongly believe that the **entire visible part of the universe forms only 5%** of all matter in it. They believe the rest is made up of dark matter and dark energy.
- Once this was convincingly demonstrated through **various indirect observations and calculations**, experiments started being set up to hunt for these elusive particles.

About Dark Matter

- Dark matter is made up of **particles that do not have a charge**. They do not interact through electromagnetic interactions.
- These are particles that are **dark**, namely because they **do not emit light**, which is an electromagnetic phenomenon, and **matter** because they **possess mass like normal matter** and hence interact through gravity.
- **Detecting dark matter:**
 - It is difficult to measure the evidence of dark matter.
 - **Gravitational force** is extremely weak. A particle that interacts so weakly becomes rather elusive to detect.
 - This is because interactions from **other known particles could drown out signals** of dark matter particles.
 - The **chamber of the LZ detector** can contain only one gram of dust if it is to detect a dark matter particle.
 - This is the extent to which researchers have to go to rule out unwanted signals coming from other entities.

4. **Green Grids Initiative**

CONTEXT: Recently, India, in partnership with the United Kingdom, announced the Green Grids Initiative — One Sun, One World, One Grid (GGI-OSOWOG).

More about the initiative

- **Declaration and recognition:**
 - The "Green Grids Initiative" was announced at the COP26 climate talks in Glasgow, Scotland.
 - i. More than 80 countries backed it.
 - The announcement was accompanied by the "**One Sun Declaration**", which stated that, "realising the vision of 'One Sun One World One Grid' through interconnected green grids can be transformational.
- **Origin:**
 - The concept of a **single global grid for solar** was first outlined at the First Assembly of the ISA in late 2018.
- **Aim:**
 - It envisions building and scaling inter-regional energy grids to share solar energy across the globe, leveraging the differences of time zones, seasons, resources, and prices between countries and regions.

5. **Clean Energy**

CONTEXT: Recently, the Power Minister at the **Sydney Energy Forum in Australia** said that India has achieved clean energy targets nine years ahead of schedule.

About the Sydney Energy Forum

- **Participation:** Ministers from the United States, Japan, India, Indonesia, and the Pacific Island nation of Samoa are attending the forum along with leaders of major companies that are committed to low emissions technologies.
- **Aim:** To foster connections between investors, business and government with a focus on innovations in key clean energy technologies such as solar, hydrogen, critical minerals and batteries.
- **India's achievements Highlighted:**
 - India achieved its nationally determined contribution (NDC) commitment of 40 per cent non-fossil-based installed power capacity nine years ahead of the target year.
 - In 2015, India committed to ensuring that 40% of its energy would be from renewable sources by 2030 as part of its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC).
 - The country is now heading towards achieving 500 GW energy from non-fossil fuel sources by 2030.

- India has installed 162 GW of renewable energy capacity which is 41% of the 402 GW of electricity installed.
 - 1 GW is 1000 MW.
- India is set to add 27,000 circuit kilometres of inter-state power transmission networks by 2024, as it has already added 6,500 circuit kilometres lines so far.
 - The power transmission network expansion has been planned, keeping in mind the goal of having 500 GW of non-fossil fuel-based electricity generation capacity in the country.
- In 2015: India committed to ensuring that 40% of its energy would be from renewable sources by 2030 as part of its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC).

ANSWER WRITING

Q. “The CIC (Central Information Commission) is the highest appellate body under the RTI Act, however it has its own limitations.” In this context, discuss the powers and functions of the CIC. (150 words)

Introduction

The Central Information Commission (CIC) is a statutory body which was established by the Central Government in 2005 through an Official Gazette Notification under the provisions of the Right to Information Act (2005). The CIC is a high-powered independent body which inter alia looks into the complaints made to it and decides the appeals. It entertains complaints and appeals pertaining to offices, financial institutions, public sector undertakings, etc., under the Central Government and the Union Territories.

Body

The Commission acts as the highest appellate body under the RTI Act and has the following powers and functions:

- It is the duty of the Commission to receive and inquire into a complaint from any person, who has not been able to submit an information request because of non-appointment of a Public Information Officer (PIO) or refused information that was requested; who has not received a response to his information request or who thinks the fees charged are unreasonable or information given is incomplete, misleading or false; and any other matter relating to obtaining information.
- The Commission can order inquiry into any matter if there are reasonable grounds for it (suo-moto power).
- While inquiring, the Commission has the powers of a civil court in respect of such matters like summoning and enforcing the attendance of persons and compelling them to give oral or written evidence on oath and to produce documents or things, etc.
- During the inquiry of a complaint, all public records must be given to the Commission.
- The Commission also has the power to secure compliance of its decisions from the public authority. This includes: directing the public authority to appoint a Public Information Officer where none exists; enhancing training provisions for officials on the Right to Information; seeking an annual report from the public authority on compliance with this Act; imposing penalties under RTI Act etc.
- When a public authority does not conform to the provisions of RTI Act, the Commission may recommend (to the authority) steps which ought to be taken for promoting such conformity.

However, CIC suffers from certain limitations such as:

- Central Government controlling its terms of office, salaries and allowances and other terms and conditions of service
- Non-compliance of CIC orders;
- No centralized database of RTI applicants at the Centre/State level
- Personnel and infrastructural constraints;
- High pendency of cases etc.

Conclusion

Any changes as brought through RTI Amendment Bill 2019 should not defeat the very purpose of installing this autonomous body that judges the correctness of governmental action in denying access to information.

MCQs

- 1) Consider the following statements regarding Global Gender Gap Index:
 1. It is released by World Economic Forum.
 2. There are four sub-indices to measure the index.
 3. The 2022 Global Gender Gap Index ranks India at 129 out of 146 countries.
 Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?
 - a. 1 only
 - b. 1 and 2 only
 - c. 1 and 3 only
 - d. 1,2 and 3
- 2) Consider the following statements regarding G20:
 1. The G20 summit of 2022 was hosted by Indonesia.
 2. It was formed in 1999 in the backdrop of the financial crisis of the late 1990s.
 Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?
 - a. 1 only
 - b. 2 only
 - c. Both 1 and 2
 - d. Neither 1 nor 2
- 3) Consider the following statements regarding Dark Matter:
 1. Dark matter is made up of particles that do not have a charge.
 2. These are particles that are dark, namely because they do not emit light.
 3. The evidence of dark matter can be easily traced.
 Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?

- a. **1 and 2 only** b. 2 and 3 only c. 1 and 3 only d. 1, 2 and 3
- 4) Consider the following statements about Red Pandas?
1. Red Pandas are largely vegetarian, eating chiefly young leaves and shoots of bamboo.
 2. The red panda is slightly smaller than a domestic cat with a bear-like body and thick russet fur.
 3. Red pandas live in high-altitude forests of Nepal, India, Bhutan, Myanmar and China.
- Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?
- a. 1 and 2 only b. **1 and 3 only** c. 3 only d. All are correct.
- 5) Consider the following statements about Drug Controller General of India (DGCI):
1. The DCGI regulates medical and pharmaceutical devices.
 2. He is responsible for the training of Drug Analysts deputed by State Drug Control Laboratories and other Institutions.
- Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?
- a. 1 only b. 2 only c. **Both 1 and 2** d. Neither 1 nor 2
- 6) Consider the following statements:
1. A floating solar plant will have a pontoon, a mooring structure to prevent panels from moving freely in the water.
 2. The first floating photovoltaic system was built in South Korea and the World's largest floating solar farm is in China.
 3. India's only and largest floating solar power project is fully operational at Ramagundam reservoir in Telangana state.
- Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?
- a. **1 only** b. 2 and 3 only c. 1 and 2 only d. 3 only
- 7) Consider the following statements:
1. Internet and Mobile Association of India (IMAI) is the country's only organization representing the digital services industry.
 2. The Blockchain and Crypto Assets Council (BACC) serves as an umbrella organization for various blockchain firms to engage with the government.
 3. The IMAI works under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology and the BACC functions under the Ministry of Finance.
- Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?
- a. **1 and 2 only** b. 1 and 3 only c. 2 and 3 only d. 1, 2 and 3
- 8) Consider the following statements:
1. For forest land beyond two hectares, approval for diverting land must be given by the Central government through the Forest Advisory Committee (FAC).
 2. The FAC approval means the users of the land should provide compensatory land for afforestation as well as pay the net present value.
- Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?
- a. 1 only b. **2 only** c. Both 1 and 2 d. Neither 1 nor 2
- 9) Consider the following statements:
1. National flags made of polyester or machine-made National flags are not allowed for use.
 2. Hoisting of the National flag by individuals at their private premises is prohibited under the flag code.
- Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?
- a. 1 only b. 2 only c. Both 1 and 2 d. **Neither 1 nor 2**
- 10) Consider the following statements:
1. Under Article 101 of the Constitution, MPs do not enjoy the freedom to say whatever they want inside the house.
 2. Article 105 of the Constitution, the Speaker has the authority to expunge the words spoken by the MPs from the proceedings of the House.
- Which of the above statement(s) is/are **incorrect**?
- a. 1 only b. 2 only c. **Both 1 and 2** d. Neither 1 nor 2