

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS [GS-II]**Navigating India's Global Rise Amidst Regional Decline**

The article highlights a paradox in contemporary Indian foreign policy. On one hand, India is rising globally, whereas on the other hand its influence in the South Asian region is declining.

Reasons behind India's global rise

1. India's global rise is attributed to growth in absolute power (economic growth, military capabilities, young demography), peer accommodation, and a conducive international situation.
2. India's inclusion in key global institutions like G-20, G-7, Quad, BRICS, and SCO highlight its geopolitical significance and powerful global presence.
3. Increased global focus on the Indo-Pacific, where India plays a central role, has helped boost India's global standing.

factors that have led to decline in India's regional power

Despite its global rise, India's influence in South Asia has declined sharply compared to the Cold War era or China's current influence in the region.

- 1) Indian Influence Decline and Global Prominence-India's rising global prominence is also one of the reasons for its regional declining status. For instance- the American withdrawal from the region and China's increased presence have negatively affected India. However, these factors have led the United States and its allies to back India's global goals in countering China's influence.
- 2) Neighboring Strategies- Smaller South Asian countries are using strategies like balancing, bargaining, hedging, and bandwagoning, perceiving China as a beneficial counterbalance to India.
- 3) The Rise of China and its Impact -China's rise is the main factor behind India's regional decline. This is because, for the first time, India faces stiff geopolitical competition from a rising superpower neighbor. The arrival of China in South Asia, the U.S. withdrawal, and India's tilt towards the Indo-Pacific have shifted the regional balance of power in Beijing's favor.

What are the implications of this paradox for India?

- 1) India's situation of rising globally but weakening regionally has big consequences for its global goals.
- 2) It raises questions about whether a country that is not able to maintain its prominence in its periphery then how it can be a pivotal power in international politics.

Way forward

- 1) India needs to recognize that the region, its neighbors, and the geopolitics have changed significantly in the past fifteen years or so.
- 2) There is a need to revisit traditional conceptions of the region and 'modernize' India's primacy in South Asia.
- 3) India should focus on its strengths rather than trying to match China's might in every aspect. For ex- reclaiming the Buddhist heritage.
- 4) India should leverage its maritime advantages in the Indo-Pacific to address its continental handicaps by engaging smaller South Asian nations in the Indo-Pacific strategy. For ex- India and its partners like the U.S., Japan etc. can find ways of engaging and partnering with Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Bangladesh as part of their larger Indo-Pacific strategy.
- 5) There is a need to view the region through a non-India-centric lens and work with external friendly partners in the Indian Ocean and South Asia.
- 6) India's soft power need to be utilized innovatively to maintain influence in the region, like promoting informal communication among political and civil society figures in countries where India is reluctant to engage directly in conflicts. For ex-dealing with Myanmar crisis.

IMPORTANT INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, AGENCIES AND FORA – THEIR STRUCTURE, MANDATE [GS-II]**Slow Progress in achieving SDGs**

The United Nations summit on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was held in New York recently. It assessed progress towards achieving the 17 SDGs and 169 specific targets set by the agenda-2030, adopted in 2015. The article highlights the slow progress and challenges in achieving SGGs.

SDGs

- Description-SDGs stand for Sustainable Development Goals. They are a set of 17 global objectives established by the United Nations in 2015 as part of the agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.
- Coverage-These goals cover a wide range of social, economic, and environmental issues, aiming to address the world's most pressing challenges, including poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace, and justice.
- Nature-The SDG programme is internationally non-binding. However, all countries have committed to work towards these goals.

Overall progress towards achieving the SDGs

- 1) Slow Progress- Reports indicate that progress has been slow and off track. While there were some improvements between 2015 and 2019, they were largely inadequate to meet the goals.
- 2) Impact of Covid-19-The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and other global crises have significantly impeded progress.

- 3) Lack of adequate attention to environmental goals– Not enough focus has been attached to goals about the environment and protecting biodiversity. This slow progress is worrying because it goes against the idea that all the SDGs are connected and cannot be separated. It also puts the environment at risk of getting worse in a faster manner.

Key areas that require urgent action

The UN SDG Report 2023 identified five key areas for urgent action: –

- 1) Commitment of governments to seven years of accelerated, sustained, and transformative actions to deliver on SDG promises.
- 2) Concrete, integrated, and targeted policies and actions to eradicate poverty, reduce inequality, and end the war on nature, with a focus on advancing women’s and girls’ rights and empowering the vulnerable.
- 3) Strengthening national and subnational capacity, accountability, and public institutions to deliver accelerated progress.
- 4) Recommitment of the international community to deliver and mobilize resources to assist developing nations.
- 5) Continued strengthening of the UN development system.

Impact of this slow progress

1) If the current pattern persists, it will result in a faster decline in environmental quality. This contradicts the aim of moving towards sustainability.

2) The SDGs have not been sufficient in making much political difference at the national or local level, except discussions and some small changes in rules and institutions. It suggests that setting global goals does not directly impact politics on local or national levels.

suggestions given by 2019 report ‘Future is Now’ for accelerating SDG implementation

- 1) Systematic Approach to Achieving the 2030 Agenda –It highlights how the 2030 Agenda can truly change things by using a systematic approach. This implies finding a balance between different results and ensuring that actions help achieve several SDGs at the same time
- 2) Selecting Priority Areas-It recommends choosing the most suitable starting points based on local needs and regional or national priorities. Then, it suggests using four key tools-governance, economy and money, actions by individuals and groups, and science and technology.
- 3) Collaborative Partnership for Global Sustainable Development -People in these sectors must collaborate and build new partnerships to develop and execute sustainable development plans that suit each country’s unique needs and priorities. This will help make big changes globally.

In 2024, many countries around the world will have elections, involving 64 nations and nearly half of the world’s population. It’s important for the new governments to think about sustainability and align their national policies accordingly.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT [GS-III]

INCOIS issues alert to Coastal States on Swell Surges

The Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) has issued a warning to the coastal states about the “complete suspension of operational and recreational activities.

- Potential for Swell Surges: This is due to the potential for swell surges and rough sea conditions caused by the influence of high-period swell waves approaching from the distant southern Indian Ocean.
- Safety Advisory for Fishermen and Coastal Residents: They have been advised to exercise caution regarding potential wave surges, such as intermittent inundation of seawater in the nearshore and beach areas, especially in low-lying areas.
- Origin and Movement of High-Period Swells: The high period swells had started at approximately 10,000 km away from the Indian coast in the southern Atlantic Ocean and slowly moved towards the southern Indian Ocean.
- This had caused the high energy swell propagation towards the Indian coastal regions which is expected to hit the southern tip of India in the early hours of May 4.
- These long-period swells combined with high tide conditions can cause coastal flooding in the low-lying areas on May 4 & 5.

Swell Waves:

- About: These waves are formed by an ocean swell, hence the name swell waves/swell surge. A swell wave is the formation of long wavelength waves on the surface of the seas.
- They propagate along the interface between water and air. Thus, they are often referred to as surface gravity waves.
- Origin: Ocean swells do not occur due to the local winds, but rather due to distant storms like hurricanes, or even long periods of strong winds.
- Usually, states like Kerala witness swell waves as a result of strong winds in the southern part of the Indian Ocean, where an ocean swell is generated, and the waves then travel north to reach the coast in two or three days.
- Influencing Factors: The speed of the wind, the amount of ocean surface area affected by wind blowing in the same direction (also known as fetch), and the amount of time those winds blow over the same part of the ocean.

Features of Swell Waves:

- Narrow range of Frequencies: Swells have a narrower range of frequencies and directions than locally generated wind waves.
- Swells take on a more defined shape and direction and are less random than locally generated wind waves.
- In terms of directionality, they are characterised by the direction from where it emanates instead of where it is headed.
- Wavelength: Swell waves often have a long wavelength but this varies with the size of the water body. Their wavelengths may rarely exceed more than 150 m.
- Swell wavelength, also, varies from event to event. Occasionally, swells which are longer than 700 m occur as a result of the most severe storms.

Earlier Instances of Swell Waves in India: The swell waves in March were generated after a low atmospheric pressure system moved over the region from the South Atlantic Ocean.

Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS):

- Genesis: It was established as an autonomous body in 1999.
- Nodal Ministry: The Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) and is a unit of the Earth System Science Organisation (ESSO).
- Mandate: To provide ocean data, information and advisory services to society, industry, the government and the scientific community.
- INCOIS provides Ocean State Forecast (OSF) Services detailing wave height, direction, period, sea surface currents, temperature, and more.

Swell Surge Forecast System: To forecast swell waves, INCOIS launched it in 2020 which can give forewarning seven days in advance.

- The arrival of the pressure system resulted in strong winds, which led to the formation of swell waves of up to 11 metres in height. These waves hit the Kerala coast and Lakshadweep.

Difference between Swell waves and Tsunamis:

- Distinguishing Characteristic: Unlike swell waves, a tsunami is a series of enormous waves created by an underwater disturbance usually associated with earthquakes occurring below or near the ocean.
- Tsunamis are around 10 times faster than swell waves. Although both swell waves and tsunamis slow down near the coast, the swell waves hit land at 30–50 km/h.

PRELIM FACT

1. World Press Freedom Index 2024

According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF for Reporters sans Frontières), India's position in the World Press Freedom Index declined from 36.62 to 31.28.

World Press Freedom Index:

- About: The index is compiled by RSF annually assessing the ability of journalists to work and report freely and independently.
- India's Ranking: India's rank improved from 161 in 2023 to 159 in 2024. However, this rise was primarily due to other countries slipping in their rankings.
- Scores for India decreased in all categories except for the security indicator in the press freedom questionnaire, which encompasses political context, legal framework, economic context, sociocultural context, and security.
- Ranking of Indian Neighbors: Pakistan ranked 152, Sri Lanka at 15, Nepal at 74 and Maldives at 106.
- Afghanistan is at 178, Bangladesh at 165 and Myanmar at 171.
- Asia-Pacific Region: It is the world's second most difficult region for practicing journalism.
- Five countries are among the world's ten most dangerous countries for journalism. Myanmar (171st), China (172nd), North Korea (177th), Vietnam (174th) and Afghanistan (178th).
- Middle East and North Africa: The situation is "very serious" in nearly half of the countries.
- The United Arab Emirates joins the eight other countries in the red zone on the map: Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Palestine, Iraq, Bahrain, Syria and Egypt.
- Palestine, occupied and under bombardment by the Israeli army, and the deadliest country for journalists, is at the bottom of the Index.
- Countries with Good Press Freedom: The countries where press freedom is "good" are all in Europe, and more specifically within the European Union, which has adopted its first media freedom law (EMFA).
- Norway(1st) is followed by Denmark (2nd) and Sweden (3rd).

Concern Raised by the Index:

- Global Press Freedoms Under Threat: Political authorities, who are supposed to safeguard press freedom, are increasingly becoming threats to it.
- Press freedoms have experienced a decline, with an average decrease of 7.6 points globally.
- Use of AI for Election Manipulation: Increasing use of artificial intelligence(AI) is raising concerns, particularly its application in propagating disinformation for political motives.
- Deep Fakes are now being used to influence the course of elections.

2.RBI revises banks' capital market exposure norms for T+1 settlement

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) revised the guidelines for custodian banks to issue Irrevocable Payment Commitments (IPCs) in light of the T+1 settlement regime for stocks.

- Capital Market Exposure(CME) Limit: The maximum intraday risk to the custodian banks issuing IPCs would be considered as CME at 30 percent of the settlement amount.
- Basis for the 30% Risk Limit: It is based on the assumption of a 20 per cent downward price movement of the equities on T+1, with an additional margin of 10 per cent for further downward movement of price.
- Earlier, the risk mitigation measures were prescribed based on T+2 rolling settlement for equities (T being the trade day).
- Eligibility Criteria for Custodian Banks Issuing IPCs: Only custodian banks, who have an agreement with clients giving them an inalienable right over the securities for receiving a payout in the settlement, are permitted to issue IPCs.
- This clause will not be insisted upon if the transactions are pre-funded.
- Capital Maintenance in T+1 Settlement Cycle: Under the T+1 settlement cycle, the exposure shall normally be intraday.
- However, if exposure remains outstanding at the end of T+1 Indian Standard Time, the bank will have to maintain capital based on the outstanding capital market exposure.
- Regulation of Bank Counterparty Exposures: The underlying exposures of banks to their counterparties, emanating from the intraday capital market exposure (CME), will be subject to limits prescribed under the Large Exposure Framework.

Trade Settlement:

- About: It refers to the transfer of securities and funds between buyers and sellers after a trade is executed.
- A trade settlement is said to be complete once purchased securities of a listed company are delivered to the buyer, and the seller gets the money.
- Trade Settlement Period: It refers to the interval of time between the trade date on which an order is executed in the market and the settlement date on which a trade is deemed final.
- T+1 Trade Settlement: It means trade-related settlements happen within a day, or within 24 hours of the actual transaction.
- Under the T+1 settlement cycle, if an investor sells securities, the money gets credited into her account the following day.
- Status of India: India became the second country to start the T+1 settlement cycle in top listed securities after China, bringing operational efficiency, faster fund remittances, share delivery, and ease for stock market participants.
- T+2 Trade Settlement: In this, Indian stock exchanges are settled in two working days after the transaction is done (T+2).
- T+0 Trade Settlement: This would mean settlements on the same day (within an hour) and instant settlement would ensure trades are settled immediately.

3.Eta Aquariid Meteor Shower

The Eta Aquariid meteor shower which has been active since April 15 is about to reach its peak on May 5 and 6.

- The Eta Aquariid meteor shower is one of two annual showers.
- It is formed when Earth passes through the orbital path of Halley's Comet.
- Completion of one orbit of Halley's orbit: Halley's Comet orbits the Sun approximately every 76 years, and its debris creates the Eta Aquarids when Earth intersects its orbit.
- Discovery of Halley's Comet: The periodic nature of the appearances of Halley's Comet was discovered by astronomer Edmond Halley in 1705.
- Last appearance of Halley's Comet: Halley's Comet last appeared in 1986 and is expected to return to the inner solar system in 2061.
- The Orionids meteor shower: This shower occurs in October and is also caused by debris from Halley's Comet.
- Characteristics
- Glowing trails: The Eta Aquariid meteor shower has fast meteors that leave long glowing trails.
- Speed of movement: It moves at speeds of around 66 km per second (2.37 lakh kmph) into Earth's atmosphere.
- Duration and Peak Period
- Time duration in a year: The Eta Aquariid meteor shower typically runs from around April 21 to May 12 each year.
- The number of visible meteors remains low until the peak around May 5 or 6.
- Best Visibility location: These showers are best visible to countries such as Indonesia and Australia in the Southern Hemisphere.
- shower's radiant location: Southern Hemisphere observers have a clearer view of the meteors higher in the sky due to the shower's radiant location.

- The radiant point of the Eta Aquarid meteors is located within the constellation Aquarius.
- Observers may find it challenging to view due to its proximity to morning twilight.
- In the Northern Hemisphere, Eta Aquarid meteors often appear as “Earthgrazers,” long meteors that seem to skim the Earth’s surface.

Formation of Meteor Showers

- Meteor showers occur when Earth passes through the orbital plane of a comet, encountering the debris left behind by the comet.
- As Earth moves through this debris field, the sky lights up with small and large meteor tails.

4.Red Colobus Monkeys

- Conserving, is crucial for protecting the continent’s tropical forests, according to a recent study. red colobus monkeys, spread across Africa
- It is a member of the Colobine group, primarily feeds on leaves and is native to western, central, and eastern Africa, ranging from Senegal to the Zanzibar Archipelago. Found in habitats like humid forests and coastal thickets, they are listed as one of the world’s 25 most endangered primates by the IUCN. They have distinctive brown and orange coats, lack thumbs, and mainly consume young leaves, flowers, and unripe fruit, with charcoal or clay aiding in digestion.

5.Shaksgam Valley of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir

- India protests Chinese road construction in the Shaksgam Valley of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, claiming it as part of its territory and raising concerns over territorial integrity
- India has never accepted the 1963 China-Pakistan Boundary Agreement and protests against any attempts to alter the situation.

Shaksgam Valley (also called Trans-Karakoram Tract) is an area of about 5,200 km² north of the Karakoram watershed, administered by China, but claimed by India. While under Pakistan’s control since 1947, Pakistan recognized Chinese sovereignty over it in the 1963 Sino-Pakistan Agreement. India disputes this claim, asserting it is part of the Kashmir region. The Shaksgam Valley is strategically important due to its proximity to the Siachen glacier, a critical area amidst India-China tensions.

ANSWER WRITTING

Q. What is FRBM Act? What provisions does it contain regarding fiscal consolidation?

Fiscal discipline and sound fiscal policies are essential for maintaining macroeconomic stability and propelling economic growth. Recognizing this, the Indian government enacted the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act in 2003. The Act aims to ensure fiscal discipline at the center, reduce the fiscal deficit, and bring transparency in fiscal operations. Further emphasizing the gravity of a disciplined fiscal approach, the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Review Committee Report recommended a debt to GDP ratio of 60% for the general (combined) government by 2023, comprising 40% for the Central Government and 20% for the State Governments.

Objectives of the FRBM Act:

- **Limitation of Deficits:** The Act focuses on reducing the fiscal and revenue deficits to manageable levels.
- **Prudent Public Debt Management:** Ensure that government debt remains sustainable in the medium to long term.
- **Transparency:** Enhance transparency in fiscal operations of the Government.

Key Provisions of the Act for Fiscal Consolidation:

- **Fiscal Targets:** The Act mandated the Central government to eliminate revenue deficit and reduce fiscal deficit to an agreed-upon percentage of the GDP by a set timeline.
- **Borrowing Guidelines:** The central government can only borrow from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) for temporary periods, not for financing its deficit.
- **Medium-Term Fiscal Policy Statement:** A rolling three-year fiscal policy strategy statement must be presented, outlining the government’s policies for the coming three years
- **Measures to Enhance Transparency:** The government is required to lay before the parliament several statements like the Medium-Term Fiscal Policy Report, Fiscal Policy Strategy Statement, and Macroeconomic Framework Statement. This has made the government’s fiscal stance and future strategy clearer to stakeholders, aiding in better decision-making for businesses and investors.
- **Escape Clause:** Recognizing that in specific extraordinary circumstances, fiscal targets can be exceeded, the Act provides an escape clause. For instance, during periods of sharp economic downturn, national security concerns, or other exceptional grounds. In the face of the global economic downturn in 2008-09, India had to deviate from the prescribed fiscal consolidation path. The escape clause provided a legitimate framework for this deviation, emphasizing the Act’s flexibility.

The FRBM Act, 2003, marked a pivotal step in India’s journey towards establishing fiscal discipline and sustainability. Though challenges remain in strict adherence to its provisions, the Act has undoubtedly provided a structural framework ensuring transparency, accountability, and a roadmap for fiscal prudence. As with any economic legislation, the Act’s true test lies in its flexible yet disciplined implementation, striking a balance between growth imperatives and fiscal sustainability.

MCQs

1. With reference to Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS), consider the following statements:
 1. It was established as an autonomous body under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change of India.
 2. As per INCOIS, Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Maldives influence the direction and speed of Indian Ocean currents.
 Which of the given statements is/are correct?
 - a) 1 only
 - b) 2 only**
 - c) Both 1 and 2
 - d) Neither 1 nor 2
2. Which of the following statements is incorrect regarding the World Press Freedom Index?
 - a) It is published by Reporters Without Borders that has consultative status at the UNESCO.
 - b) The index considers sociocultural, political, economic context, and safety to determine the territory's score.
 - c) In 2024, Eritrea stands at the bottom, preceded by Syria.
 - d) Both Ireland and Switzerland topped the index table in 2024.**
3. With reference to Participatory notes (P-notes), consider the following statements:
 1. P-notes can only be issued by the Securities and Exchange Board of India.
 2. Holder of P-notes enjoys voting rights in relation to his/her investment in securities/shares.
 3. Investments flowing through P-notes are considered as offshore derivative investments (ODIs).
 How many of the above statements is/ are correct?
 - a) Only one**
 - b) Only two
 - c) All three
 - d) None
4. With reference to T+1 settlement cycle, consider the following statements:
 1. The T+1 settlement cycle means that trade-related settlements must be settled on the same day the trade was entered.
 2. If the stock exchange opts for the T+1 settlement cycle for a scrip, it will have to mandatorily continue with it for a minimum 1 year.
 3. India became the first country to implement the T+1 settlement cycle.
 How many of the above statements is/ are incorrect?
 - a) Only one
 - b) Only two
 - c) All three**
 - d) None
5. Consider the following statements with reference to Meteors:
 1. Meteors are simply grains of dust or rock that burn up creating a brief tail.
 2. Meteorites are frozen leftovers from the formation of our solar system.
 3. Meteor showers are a result of burning of meteorites on the surface of earth's atmosphere.
 How many of the above statements are incorrect?
 - a) Only one**
 - b) Only two
 - c) All three
 - d) None
6. Consider the following statements:
 1. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of interconnected global objectives established by the United Nations in 2015.
 2. The SDGs are binding on all countries and must be met by 2030.
 3. SDG-5 focuses on clean water and sanitation.
 How many of the statements given above are correct?
 - a) Only one**
 - b) Only two
 - c) All three
 - d) None
7. Mount Fuji is a:
 - a) Shield volcano
 - b) Composite volcano**
 - c) Caldera
 - d) Mid-ocean ridge volcano
8. Consider the following statements about Raja Ravi Varma:
 1. He is often referred to as the "Father of Modern Indian Art."
 2. He was born in France and later moved to India.
 3. He created an epic painting "Shakuntala searching for Dushyanta".
 How many of the above statements are correct?
 - a) Only one
 - b) Only two**
 - c) All three
 - d) None
9. Consider the following statements:
 1. The Antarctic Treaty was signed in 1972 to allocate territorial claims among nations surrounding Antarctica.
 2. The Antarctic Treaty prohibits military activities and mineral mining on the continent.
 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
10. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) may choose to repurchase Government Securities (G-Secs) from the open market to:
 - a) Increase liquidity and encourage lending in the economy**
 - b) Reduce inflation by tightening the money supply
 - c) Increase the government borrowing costs
 - d) Reduce the level of government debt