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ONGOING RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

- The **ongoing Ukraine-Russia conflict** has taken the world politics, economy, and global market systems by storm. The diplomatic efforts by world leaders to resolve the crisis showed little to no sign of progress.
- Russia has amassed more than 100,000 troops on its border with Ukraine over the **past several months, sparking warnings on what people now fear as the beginning of World War 3.**



What is the conflict between Russia and Ukraine?

- **Ukraine became an independent nation with the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991.** It was earlier part of the Russian empire and later became the Soviet Republic and did away with its Russian imperial legacy, thereby forming close ties with the West.
- Since its independence, the country is battling corruption and internal divisions. The country's western side wants integration with the West while the eastern region with Russia.
- The conflict started when **Ukrainian President Victor Yanukovych** rejected an association agreement with the European Union in favour of closer ties with Moscow.
- The protestors ousted him in what is known as the **Revolution of Dignity**. In return, Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula and backed east Ukraine's separatist rebellion.
- Soon after this, **it attacked Donbas, the country's industrial heartland.** Over 14,000 people lost their lives in the armed conflict between the Ukrainian forces and Russia-backed separatists.
- Ukraine and the West accused Russia of deploying troops and sending weapons to the rebellions, **an allegation that Russia denied.**
- However, **Russia strongly criticised the US and NATO for aiding Ukraine** with weapons and joint military drills. President Putin too expressed concerns over plans by some NATO members to establish military training centres in Ukraine as it will facilitate military foothold in the region even without Ukraine joining NATO.
- Russia in its security demands said that it doesn't want Ukraine to be a member state of NATO and further want to cease all **NATO drills near its borders and withdrawal of NATO troops from central and eastern Europe.**
- It is to be noted that Ukraine's admission to NATO would require the unanimous approval of the 30 member states. Also, Russia views Ukraine as part of its "sphere of influence", a territory, rather than an independent state.
- **However, the US and NATO have turned down Russia's demands.** The West is backing Ukraine and promised to hit Russia financially if its troops advance to Ukraine.

Background:

- Ukraine and Russia share hundreds of years of **cultural, linguistic and familial links.**
- For many in Russia and in the ethnically Russian parts of Ukraine, the **shared heritage of the countries** is an emotional issue that has been exploited for electoral and military purposes.

- As part of the Soviet Union, Ukraine was the **second-most powerful Soviet republic after Russia**, and was **crucial strategically, economically and culturally**.

Cause of Conflict:

- **Balance of Power:** Ever since Ukraine split from the Soviet Union, both Russia and the West have vied for greater influence in the country in order to keep the balance of power in the region in their favour.
- **Buffer Zone for Western Countries:** For the US and the **European Union**, Ukraine is a crucial buffer between Russia and the West.
- As tensions with Russia rise, the US and the EU are increasingly determined to keep Ukraine away from Russian control.
- **Russian Interest in Black Sea:** The **unique geography of the Black Sea region** confers several geopolitical advantages to Russia.
- Firstly, it is an **important crossroads and strategic intersection** for the entire region.
- Access to the Black Sea is **vital for all littoral and neighboring states**, and greatly enhances the projection of power into several adjacent regions.
- Secondly, the region is an **important transit corridor for goods and energy**.

Invasion of Crimea:

- Russia seized Crimea from Ukraine in what was the **first time a European country annexed territory from another country since World War-2**.
- The annexation of Crimea from Ukraine followed a **Russian military intervention in Crimea** that took place in the aftermath of the 2014 Ukrainian revolution and was part of wider unrest across southern and eastern Ukraine.
- The invasion and subsequent annexation of Crimea have given Russia a **maritime upperhand in the region**.
- **Ukraine's NATO Membership:** Ukraine has urged the **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)** to speed up his country's membership in the alliance.
- Russia has declared such a move a **"red line"**, and worried about the consequences of the US-led military alliances expanding right up to its doorstep.
- The Black Sea is bordered by Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine. All these countries are NATO countries.
- Due to this faceoff between NATO countries and Russia, the Black sea is a region of strategic importance & a potential maritime flashpoint.

Minsk Agreements:

- **Minsk I:** Ukraine and the Russian-backed separatists agreed a **12-point ceasefire deal in the capital of Belarus** in September 2014.
- Its provisions included prisoner exchanges, deliveries of humanitarian aid and the withdrawal of heavy weapons.
- The agreement quickly broke down, with violations by both sides.
- **Minsk II:** In 2015, an open conflict was averted after the 'Minsk II' peace agreement was signed, under the mediation of France and Germany.
- It was **designed to end the fighting in the rebel regions** and hand over the border to Ukraine's national troops.

- It was signed by Representatives of Russia, Ukraine, the **Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)** and the leaders of two pro-Russian separatist regions.
- OSCE is the world's largest security-oriented intergovernmental organisation. Its mandate includes issues such as arms control, promotion of human rights, freedom of the press, and fair elections.

What does Ukraine want?

- Ukraine is not a member state of NATO but it aspires to be one. It openly said that it will apply for EU membership in 2024. Before being considered for NATO membership, it needs to phase out corruption and internal divisions prevalent in the region.
- The present Ukrainian President was elected on the promises of peace in the Donbas region, anti-corruption and economic renewal.
- In December last year, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg rejected Russian demands to revoke a 2008 commitment to Ukraine that the country would one day become a member. He added that when the time would come, Russia would not be able to veto Ukraine's accession.

Reasons for Ukraine to Join NATO:

- Ukraine is of the opinion that **joining NATO is the only way to end fighting with pro-Russia separatists.**
- There is an increase in clashes and Russian military movements on the border raise fears of an escalation of the **separatist conflict in eastern Ukraine.**
- Ukraine accuses Russia of massing thousands of military personnel on its northern and eastern borders as well as on the **Crimean peninsula** (annexed by Russia in 2014).
- Ukraine's Western allies have rushed to its defence, with a series of statements warning Russia against taking further action.
- **India did not join the Western powers' condemnation** of Russia's intervention in Crimea and kept a low profile on the issue.

About North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO):

- It is a **military alliance established by the North Atlantic Treaty** (also called the **Washington Treaty**) of 4th April, 1949, by the United States, Canada, and several Western European nations to provide collective security against the Soviet Union.
- It is headquartered at **Brussels, Belgium.**
- A key provision of the treaty, the so-called **Article 5**, states that if one member of the alliance is attacked in Europe or North America, it is to be considered an attack on all members. That effectively put Western Europe under the "nuclear umbrella" of the US.
- **NATO has only once invoked Article 5**, on 12th September, 2001, following the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center in the US.
- NATO's protection **does not extend to members' civil wars or internal coups.**
- As of 30th March 2021, there are 30 member states, with the Republic of North Macedonia becoming the latest member to join the alliance in 2020.

#INDIA'S STAND ON THE ISSUE AT UNSC

- Recently, India remained absent from **United Nations Security Council (UNSC) vote on Ukraine.**

- This *move of India is widely read as a play to balance its ties with Moscow and Washington*. It was a procedural vote, on whether to discuss the situation in Eastern Europe.
- In Eastern Europe, Russia accuses NATO of attempting to expand its membership. On the other hand, U.S. and other NATO countries accuse Russia of amassing troops for invading Ukraine.

Russia-Ukraine issue at UNSC

- United States had asked for an open meeting at the UNSC, on Russian military build-up at Ukrainian border. But Russia sought a vote on the decision to go ahead with the open meeting. According to UNSC working methods, 9 votes were required to go ahead for the meeting. **10 countries voted in favour of an open meeting on Ukraine.**
- **Russia lost the vote.** It won support only from China. India, Gabon and Kenya remained absent.
- **India's view:** According to India's Permanent Representative at UNSC, T S Tirumurti, India is interested in finding a solution that can lead to immediate de-escalation of tensions, by taking into account the security interests of all countries. India's stand is aimed at securing long term peace and stability in the region.

#PUTIN RECOGNIZES TWO UKRAINE REGIONS AS INDEPENDENT

- Russian President Vladimir Putin announces the recognition of two separatist republics in eastern Ukraine - **Donetsk and Lugansk** - as independent.
- The Russian President also called **Ukraine a US colony with 'a puppet regime'**.



UNSC Emergency Meeting on Ukraine

- The **UN Security Council** had also held an emergency meeting on Ukraine on February 21, 2022 upon request from the US and its allies. The UNSC meeting on Ukraine was an open meeting.
- The escalation of tension along the border of Ukraine with the Russian Federation is a matter of deep concern. These developments have the potential to undermine peace and security of the region.
- **India's Permanent Representative to United Nations, TS Tirumurti** called for restraint on all sides.

What is Russia's Stand?

- It blamed the **North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)** for the current crisis and called the US-led alliance an existential threat to Russia.
- Charged that **Ukraine had inherited Russia's historic lands** and after the Soviet collapse was used by the West to contain Russia.
- It **wants Western Countries to guarantee that NATO won't allow Ukraine** and other former Soviet countries to join as members.
- It has also **demanding the alliance halt weapons deployments to Ukraine** and roll back its forces from Eastern Europe.
- The **western countries have rejected the demand.**

What is the Stand of Different Nations on the Issue?

- The **United States** has already announced sanctions prohibiting “new investment, trade, and financing by US persons to, from, or in” the two breakaway regions.
- Japan is likely to **join the US-led sanctions** while **French officials have been quoted as saying in reports that the European Union (EU) is also in discussions for punitive actions** against Russia.
- The EU has condemned Russia over “a blatant violation of international law as well as of the Minsk agreements.”

What is India's Stand on the Issue?

- India did not join the Western powers' condemnation of Russia's intervention in Crimea and kept a low profile on the issue.
- In November 2020, India voted against a Ukraine-sponsored resolution in the **United Nations (UN)** that condemned alleged human rights violations in Crimea thereby backing old ally Russia on the issue.
- Recently, India also suggested at the UN Security Council that “**quiet and constructive diplomacy**” is the need of the hour and any step that could escalate the tension should be avoided.
- India's stand has been **welcomed by Russia**.

#QUAD FOREIGN MINISTERS' MEETING AT MELBOURNE

- On 11th February 2022, Union External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar attended the **Fourth Quad Foreign Ministers Meeting held at Melbourne – Australia**.
- The meeting was attended by his counter parts from **US, Australia and Japan**.
- At the **4th Quad Foreign Ministers Meeting**, EAM Jaishankar called for a free and open Indo-Pacific and urged member nations to work towards ensuring a rule-based international order.



Quad Foreign Ministers Meeting

- Australia is hosting the 4th Quad Foreign Ministers Meeting in Melbourne. Foreign Ministers from all 4 members' nations of Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) – i.e., Australia, India, Japan and the United States are meeting to discuss global order and rising geo-political and geo-economic challenges in the global order.
- Australia was being re-presented by Foreign Minister Marise Payne who was joined by Japanese Minister for Foreign Affairs Hayashi Yoshimasa, and **United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken**.

EAM's Jaishankar 1st Official Visit to Australia

- **External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar** is also on his 1st Official Visit to Australia from 10th to 13th February 2022. During his visit, Mr Jaishankar will also co-chair the 12th Foreign Ministers' Framework Dialogue on 12th February 2022.
- On 12th February, Foreign Ministers of India and Australia will also co-chair the inaugural Foreign Ministers' Cyber Framework Dialogue (FMCDF) with **Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne**.
- During the dialogue, ministers will assess the implementation of India-Australia Framework Arrangement on Cyber and Cyber-Enabled Critical Technology Cooperation which was signed in June 2022 by **Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison**.

RELATED: 1ST IN-PERSON QUAD SUMMIT

The first in-person meeting of **Quad** leaders was hosted by the US. Issues like climate change, Covid-19 pandemic and challenges in the Indo Pacific, amidst China's growing military presence in the strategic region, were discussed in the meeting.

Background:

- In **November 2017**, **India, Japan, the US and Australia** gave shape to the long-pending proposal of **setting up the Quad** to develop a new strategy to keep the critical sea routes in the Indo-Pacific free of any influence.
- **China claims nearly all of the disputed South China Sea**, though Taiwan, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia and Vietnam all claim parts of it.
- The South China Sea is an arm of the Western Pacific Ocean.
- In **2020**, the trilateral **India-US-Japan Malabar naval exercises expanded to include Australia**, marking the first official grouping of the Quad since its resurgence in 2017.
- Further, it is the first joint military exercises among the four countries in over a decade.
- In **March 2021**, the **Quad leaders met virtually** and later released a joint statement titled '**The Spirit of the Quad**,' which outlined the group's approach and objectives.
- Further, just before this meeting, the US has announced a new trilateral security partnership for the Indo-Pacific, between **Australia, the UK and the US (AUKUS)**.

Major Highlights of the Quad Summit:

- Discussed **Afghanistan** and agreed to deepen their cooperation in South Asia.
- **Quad Vaccine Initiative**: Under this, the Quad countries have pledged to donate more than 1.2 billion Covid-19 vaccine doses globally, in addition to the doses financed through **Covax**.
- **Building Back Better Health Security**: Supported the call for "global pandemic radar to improve viral genomic surveillance and expand the **WHO Global Influenza Surveillance and Response System (GISRS)**.
- **Quad Infrastructure Coordination Group**: The **G7 grouping** has recently announced the **Build Back Better World (B3W)** initiative.

#DIFFERENCE BETWEEN QUAD & AUKUS?

- **Prime Minister Modi** has arrived in **Washington DC** for his visit to the United States of America. He was invited by US President Joe Biden.
- This is PM's first visit to any country beyond the neighbourhood since Covid-19 pandemic. He would also attend the QUAD summit along with **Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga**.
- However, this is different from the AUKUS (Australia- UK-US) Alliance that was recently announced.

What is QUAD?

- The **Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or QUAD** is a strategic dialogue between four countries.
- These are the **United States, India, Australia and Japan**.
- The dialogue began in 2007 by the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe along with the US Vice President Dick Cheney, Australian PM John Howard and Indian PM Manmohan Singh. **The military exercise**

associated with it was the Malabar exercise.

What is AUKUS?

- AUKUS is a trilateral security alliance between the **United States, United Kingdom and Australia**. It was initiated on September 15, 2021.
- The pact would allow the US and UK to help Australia develop nuclear powered submarines and **deploy them in the Pacific region**.
- This would increase the **presence of Western military in the Pacific**. As of now no other country has been mentioned by the founding countries to be a party in this alliance and it is speculated that it may be a counter to China's increasing presence in the region.

AUKUS	Quad
It is a security pact between three countries	It is a dialogue between 4 countries
The countries under it are Australia, USA and UK	United States, India, Japan and Australia come under it
It was announced on 15th September 2021	It was initiated in 2007
The treaty covers AI, Cyber warfare, underwater capabilities etc	The alliance envisions a shared vision for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific
Australia would be helped to develop nuclear powered submarines	Here military exercises like Malabar are conducted but no nuclear submarines are developed

Nuclear Submarine Alliance: AUKUS

Recently, **Australia, the US and the UK** signed an agreement allowing the exchange of sensitive “**naval nuclear propulsion information**” between their nations.

- It is the first agreement on the technology to be publicly signed since the three countries announced the formation of a **defence alliance, AUKUS**, to confront strategic tensions in the Pacific where China-US rivalry is growing.
- Under the AUKUS deal, Australia would obtain **eight state-of-the-art, nuclear-powered but conventionally armed submarines** capable of stealthy, long-range missions.

Five Eyes Alliance

- The Five Eyes alliance is an intelligence-sharing arrangement between five English-speaking democracies:** the US, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.
- The alliance was created during the Cold War (1946-1991) that was fought between the United States and the Soviet Union, as well as their respective allies.**

- The alliance was needed to share sensitive information regarding their adversaries on all possible fronts available.
- It is often described as the world's most successful intelligence alliance.

#NEW CHINESE APP BANNED IN INDIA

- On February 14, 2022, India banned 54 Chinese apps that pose threat to the India's security. These 54 apps were banned because they allegedly obtain critical permissions and collect sensitive data of users. **Collected real-time data are being misused and are being transmitted to servers located in hostile country.**



What apps have been banned?

- The **list of banned apps includes**, Beauty Camera-Selfie Camera, Sweet Selfie HD, Viva Video Editor, Garena Free Fire – Illuminate, Dual Space Lite, Tencent Xriver, Onmyoji Arena and AppLock.
- **Garena Free Fire:** Garena Free Fire is Singapore-based and its developer is not from China. This game was one of the most downloaded games in India 2021.
- It had **filled up the space created by PUBG Mobile** after its ban in September 2020. The app was already removed from App store and Play Store in India.

Background

- In June 2021, India banned 59 Chinese mobile applications including widely-used social media platforms like **TikTok, WeChat, and Helo**, as they were posing threat to the India's sovereignty and security.
- **India has blocked 321 apps**, since border tensions started with China in May 2020. India announced first round of bans in June 2020, following the killing of 20 Indian soldiers in a clash with Chinese troops at Galwan Valley in eastern Ladakh.
- What is the constitutional basis of the bans?
- The apps were banned in accordance with **Section 69A of the Information Technology Act**.

Border standoff in eastern Ladakh

- The standoff between Indian and Chinese militaries app started in eastern Ladakh border on May 5, 2020, after a violent clash in the Pangong Lake areas.
- Both sides gradually enhanced their deployment by rushing their soldiers and heavy weaponry. Tension escalated after a deadly clash in the Galwan Valley on June 15, 2020.

#RELATED: CHINA'S NEW LAND BORDER LAW

China's new law on land borders came into effect from 1st January, 2022.

- It comes at a time **when border standoff in eastern Ladakh remains unresolved** and **several places in Arunachal Pradesh have been renamed recently** by China as part of its claim on the Indian state.
- **Delimitation and Survey of Land Borders:** The new law lays down that the People's Republic of China (PRC) shall set up **boundary markers on all its land borders** to clearly mark the border.

Management and Defence of Border Areas:

- The People's Liberation Army (PLA) and Chinese People's Armed Police Force are **assigned with the responsibility of maintaining security** along the border.
- This responsibility includes cooperating with local authorities in combating illegal border crossings.
- The law **prohibits any party from indulging in any activity** in the border area which would "endanger national security or affect China's friendly relations with neighbouring countries".
- **Even citizens and local organizations** are mandated to protect and defend the border infrastructure.
- Finally, the law provides for the **border to be sealed in the event of a war**, armed conflict, incidents which threaten the security of border residents such as biological and chemical accidents, natural disasters, and public health incidents.

China's Border Disputes:

- **China has a 22,100-kilometer land border with 14 countries.**
- It has resolved the boundary **disputes with 12 neighbours.**
- India and Bhutan are the two countries with which China is yet to finalise the border agreements.
- China and Bhutan signed an MOU firming up a three-step roadmap for expediting the boundary negotiations.
- India-China border disputes cover 3,488-km along the **Line of Actual Control**, China-Bhutan dispute covers about 400 km.

#CHINA'S NEW BRIDGE NEAR PANGONG TSO LAKE

Recently, it was found that China is building a **new bridge on Pangong Tso** which will provide an additional axis to deploy troops faster between the north and south banks of the lake, and closer to the **LAC (Line of Actual Control)**.

- Earlier, **China's new law on land borders** came into effect from 1st January, 2022, at a time when border standoff in eastern Ladakh remains unresolved and several places in Arunachal Pradesh have been renamed recently by China as part of its claim on the Indian state.
- India too has been **improving its infrastructure in the border areas.** In 2021, the Border Roads Organisation completed more than 100 projects in border areas, the majority of which were close to the border with China.

Background:

- Since the **military standoff began in May 2020**, India and China have not only worked to improve existing infrastructure, but have also built several new roads, bridges, landing strips along the entire frontier. Towards the end of August 2020, India outmanoeuvred China to capture the previously **unoccupied heights of the Kailash Range on the south bank** of Pangong Tso lake.
- **Indian troops positioned themselves on the peaks there, including Magar Hill, Gurung Hill, Rezang La, Rechin La, and this allowed them to dominate the strategic Spanggur Gap** — it can be used for launching an offensive, as China had done in 1962 — and also gave them a view of the PLA garrison at Moldo.
- Indian troops had also positioned themselves **above the Chinese troops in the Fingers area on the north bank.** During this scramble for the heights, shots had been fired by both sides, a first in over four decades.

- Troops from the two countries remained on these heights through the harsh winter months. The **significance of these positions was one of the main factors that compelled China to negotiate a pullback.**
- Both countries agreed to a pullback from the north bank of the lake, and positions on the Kailash Range in the Chushul sub-sector south of Pangong Tso.

About:

- The bridge is being constructed **more than 20 km east of Finger 8 on the lake's north bank** – India says Finger 8 denotes the LAC.
- The Lake is overlooked by the Finger Area - a set of eight cliffs extending out of the Sirijap range (on the northern bank of Lake).
- Pangong Tso, an endorheic lake, **is 135 km long, of which more than two-thirds is under Chinese control.**
- The north and south banks of the lake were among the several friction points that surfaced after the start of the standoff. Before India and China pulled back troops from the north and south banks in February 2021, the area had seen massive mobilisation and the two sides even deployed tanks, barely a few hundred metres apart in some locations.
- The bridge site is just **east of Khurnak Fort** in Rutog county where the PLA (People's Liberation Army) has frontier bases.
- Historically a part of India, **Khurnak Fort has been under Chinese control since 1958.**
- From Khurnak Fort, the LAC is considerably west, **with India claiming it at Finger 8 and China claiming it at Finger 4.**

#PAKISTAN AGREEMENT WITH CHINA FOR CPEC 2ND PHASE

- China recently pledged **closer cooperation with Pakistan** under the **USD 60 billion CPEC investment programme** and called for resolving the Kashmir issue properly and peacefully while opposing any “unilateral actions” that could complicate the situation as Prime Minister Imran Khan held talks with the top Chinese leadership, including President Xi Jinping.
- **Khan called on President Xi** on the last day of his four-day visit to China to discuss a host of issues including the slow pace of the **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)** and increasing concerns of Beijing over recurring attacks on Chinese personnel working in its various projects in Pakistan.
- “Both sides reiterated that a peaceful and prosperous South Asia is in the common interest of all parties,” said a joint statement issued at the end of Khan’s visit to China to attend the **opening ceremony of the Beijing Winter Olympics.**
- Pakistan signed a new agreement with China to begin the **second phase** of the USD 60 billion **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).**
- Earlier, Pakistan had discussed **Taliban-led Afghanistan joining the multibillion-dollar China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)** infrastructure project.
- The second phase **primarily revolves around Special Economic Zones (SEZs) development and industrialisation.**



What is CPEC?

- CPEC is a **3,000-km long route of infrastructure projects connecting China's northwest Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region and the Gwadar Port** in the western province of Balochistan in Pakistan.
- It is a **bilateral project between Pakistan and China**, intended to promote connectivity across Pakistan with a network of highways, railways, and pipelines accompanied by energy, industrial, and other infrastructure development projects.
- **It will pave the way for China to access the Middle East and Africa from Gwadar Port, enabling China to access the Indian Ocean** and in return China will support development projects in Pakistan to overcome the latter's energy crises and stabilising its faltering economy.
- CPEC is a part of the **Belt and Road Initiative**. The BRI, **launched in 2013**, aims to link Southeast Asia, Central Asia, the Gulf region, Africa and Europe with a network of land and sea routes.

What is India's Stand on CPEC?

- India has been severely critical of the CPEC, as it passes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, which is a disputed territory between India and Pakistan.
- India has also **protested to China over the CPEC** as it is being laid through the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).
- India is a member of the **Quad** (India, the US, Australia and Japan) which can provide realistic alternatives for countries looking for infrastructure and be an alternative to China. The member countries of the Quad have come up with some alternatives.
- **For Example: Blue Dot Network (BDN) and Build Back Better World (B3W) initiative'.**

What will be CPEC's Implications for India?

- **India's Sovereignty:** India has continuously opposed the project since it passes through the **Pakistan-occupied Kashmir territory of Gilgit-Baltistan** – a claim opposed by Pakistan.
- The corridor is also perceived to be an **alternative economic road link for the Kashmir Valley lying on the Indian side of the border**.
- Most key players in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, have expressed optimism about the project.
- There have been calls by local business and political leaders to declare Kashmir on both sides of the **Line of Control (LoC)** a '**Special Economic Zone**'.
- **Stronger BRI and Chinese Dominance in Trade Leadership:** China's BRI project that focuses on the trade connectivity between China and the rest of Eurasia through a network of ports, roads and railways has been often seen as China's plan to dominate the region politically. **CPEC is one giant step in the same direction.**
- A China that is more accepted and integrated with the rest of the global economy will have a better say in the **United Nations** and with individual nations, which may prove to be bad news for an India aspiring to acquire a permanent seat at the UN Security Council.

#RELATED: CPEC EXTENDED TO TALIBAN LED AFGHANISTAN

Recently, **Pakistan has discussed Taliban-led Afghanistan joining the multibillion-dollar China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) infrastructure project.**

- China has proposed **construction of the Peshawar-Kabul motorway** as an extension of CPEC in Afghanistan.
- Taliban takeover of Afghanistan and China emerging as a major challenge in the form of the extension of its ambitious CPEC has **raised India's concerns on economic, political and security fronts.**
- **Implications of Afghanistan Joining CPEC on India:**
- **Filling the Void:** In Afghanistan, China is trying to fill the vacuum created after the US forces left Afghanistan economically and gets its Belt and Road (BRI) initiatives going.
- **Undermining Chabahar Port:** The foremost concern with Afghanistan joining CPEC is that India is apprehensive of its investment in **Chabahar port in Iran.**
- India is wary of undermining the **India-Iran-Afghanistan trilateral** that gives Afghanistan access to sea via Chabahar port.

#RELATED: 'BUILD BACK BETTER WORLD' INITIATIVE OF G7

The **G7 (Group of Seven) Countries** proposed a '**Build Back Better World (B3W)** initiative' at the recent **47th G7 summit** to counter **China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).**

Group of Seven

- It is an **intergovernmental organisation** that was formed in **1975.**
- The **bloc meets annually** to discuss **issues of common interest** like global economic governance, international security and energy policy.
- The G7 countries are **the UK, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the US.**
- All the **G7 countries and India** are a part of **G20.**
- The G7 does **not have a formal constitution or a fixed headquarters.** The decisions taken by leaders during annual summits are non-binding.
- **About:** It aims to address the **infrastructure investment deficit in developing and lower income countries** - the space which has been increasingly captured by China through 2,600 BRI projects with trillions of dollars of investment.
- **BRI projects are perceived as corrosive tactics or debt traps** laid by China for its strategic dominance in trade, foreign policy and geopolitics in the world.
- The **overall focus is on developing transportation, logistics and communications, which would reduce trade and transaction cost for China's trade,** give more market access to Chinese markets and ensure stable supply of energy and other resources.
- This infrastructure plan is **being led by the United States.**
- B3W initiative will **provide a transparent infrastructure partnership to help narrow about \$40 trillion** needed by developing nations by 2035. It calls for spending **hundreds of billions of dollars** in collaboration with **the private sector** while **adhering to climate standards and labour practices.**

China's BRI:

- It was **launched in 2013.** It involves **development and investment initiatives** that would **stretch from Asia to Europe and beyond.**
- More than 100 countries **have signed agreements with China** to cooperate in BRI projects like **railways, ports, highways and other infrastructure.**

- **China's Investment through BRI:** Since its inception, **outward investment has been aggressive** as China's **FDI (Foreign Direct Investment)** outflow to inflow ratio increased to 1 from around 0.34 during 2001-10.
- In volume terms, the **FDI outflow increased to an average of \$140 billion in 2016-19 from an annual average \$25 billion** during 2001-10.
- China is **investing in Africa** to lay a comprehensive transportation network. China has **also signed various contacts with the East Asian region**, mostly focusing on transportation, railways, roadways and waterways, for better integration between China and **ASEAN countries**.
- **Important Projects:** China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the Bangladesh-China, the Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM) and the Colombo Port City Project in Sri Lanka, amongst others, are important BRI projects.
- China has a plan to complete 4,000 km of railways and 10,000 km of highways within the Central Asian region as part of BRI.

Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) Corridor

- The **2800 km BCIM corridor** proposes to link **Kunming in China's Yunnan province** with **Kolkata**, passing through nodes such as **Mandalay in Myanmar** and **Dhaka in Bangladesh** before heading to Kolkata.

China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC)

- The **1,700-km corridor** provides China another node to access the Indian Ocean.
- The CMEC will run from **Yunnan Province of China to Mandalay in Central Myanmar**.
- From there it will head towards Yangon, before terminating at the Kyaukpyu Special Economic Zone (SEZ) on the Bay of Bengal.
- The **CMEC will reduce Beijing's trade and energy reliance on the Malacca straits** — the narrow passage that links the Indian Ocean with the Pacific.
- China is worried that US Naval domination over the Malacca straits can threaten one of China's major economic lifeline.

#HISTORIC INDIA-UAE CEPA SIGNED

- **Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a virtual summit with Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi** and Deputy Supreme Commander of UAE Armed Forces, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al Nahyan on February 18, 2022.
- The joint statement issued by the two leaders establishes a clear roadmap for a future-oriented partnership between India and UAE. It also identifies focus areas and outcomes.
- The two leaders **released a Joint Commemorative Stamp** to celebrate 75th anniversary of India's independence and the 50th year of UAE's foundation.



- India and UAE also signed a **historic India-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)**. The CEPA was signed Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal and UAE's Economy Minister Abdulla bin Touq Al Marri.

- India and UAE also signed two other MoUs, one to expand cooperation in **climate action** and another on **education**.

India-UAE CEPA

- India and UAE signed the historic **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)**, which is aimed at boosting the bilateral trade between the two countries to USD 100 billion in the next five years.
- India-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement is a complete and comprehensive economic partnership agreement finalised in the shortest possible time.
- The CEPA is expected to lead to increase in bilateral trade from the **current USD 60 bn to USD 100 bn in the next 5 years**.
- The agreement will provide significant benefits to Indian and UAE businesses, including enhanced market access and reduced tariffs.
- The India-UAE CEPA is the **first bilateral trade accord concluded by the UAE**. It is also India's first bilateral trade agreement in the MENA region.
- The agreement will transform bilateral economic and investment ties between the two nations and could possibly open up emerging **trade routes between Asia and Africa**.

Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement

- It is a **kind of free trade pact** which covers negotiation on the trade in **services and investment**, and other areas of economic partnership. It may even consider negotiation on areas such as trade facilitation and customs cooperation, competition, and **Intellectual Property Rights**.
- Partnership agreements or cooperation agreements are more comprehensive than **Free Trade Agreements**.
- CEPA also looks into the **regulatory aspect of trade** and encompasses an agreement covering the regulatory issues.
- India has signed CEPAs with South Korea and Japan.

Other Types of Trade Agreements

- Free Trade Agreement (FTA)**: It is an agreement in which **two or more countries agree to provide preferential trade terms, tariff concession etc.** to the partner country.
- India has negotiated FTA with many countries e.g. Sri Lanka and various trading blocs as well e.g. **ASEAN**.
- Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA)**: In this type of agreement, two or more partners give **preferential right of entry to certain products**. This is done by reducing duties on an agreed number of tariff lines.
- Tariffs may even be reduced to zero for some products even in a PTA. **India signed a PTA with Afghanistan**.
- Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA)**: CECA generally **covers negotiation on trade tariff and TRQ (Tariff Rate Quotas) rates only**. It is not as comprehensive as CEPA. India has signed CECA with Malaysia.
- Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT)**: It is a bilateral agreement in which **two countries sit together and decide the conditions for private investments** by citizens and firms of the two countries.

India-UAE Bilateral Relations

- India and UAE have strengthened their bilateral ties in all areas in recent years. The two nations had initiated negotiations for the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in September 2021 and they got completed now.
- The **United Arab Emirates is already India's third-largest trade partner.**
- The two nations have shared robust bilateral trade, investment and energy relations and is expected to get a further boost.
- The two nations have also witnessed high-level visits on both sides. While PM Narendra Modi had visited the UAE in 2015, 2018, and 2019, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi visited India in 2016 and 2017.
- Several ministerial visits have also taken place between the two sides including **three visits of External Affairs Minister and a visit of Commerce and Industry Minister to UAE in 2021.**
- The two sides had also signed an **Air Bubble Arrangement during the pandemic in 2020** to ensure seamless movement of people between the two countries despite the challenges posed by Covid-19.
- They are also strengthening their cooperation in new areas including startups, renewable energy and fintech. **India had participated in the Dubai Expo 2020 with one of the largest pavilions.**
- Indian diaspora in UAE**
- UAE is home to a large Indian community that numbers to almost 3.5 million.** The UAE leadership has been extremely appreciative of the Indian community's contribution in the country's development.

Gulf Cooperation Council

- GCC was **established by an agreement** concluded in 1981 among **Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and UAE** in view of their special relations, geographic proximity, similar political systems based on Islamic beliefs, joint destiny and common objectives.
- The **structure** of the GCC consists of the Supreme Council (the highest authority), the Ministerial Council and the Secretariat General. The **Secretariat** is located in **Riyadh**, Saudi Arabia.
- It is a **political, economic, social, and regional organisation** according to its charter.

India's Relations with the GCC

- Political:** The governments of the GCC members are **India-friendly** and **Indian-friendly**.
- The Prime Minister of India has received the '**Order of Zayed**', the highest civilian order of the UAE and the '**King Hamad Order of the Renaissance**', the third-highest civilian order of Bahrain.
- In the recent past, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have **not adopted hostile posture** to India's domestic developments such as **removing the special status for Jammu & Kashmir under Article 370.**

#JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN OF ACTION (JCPOA)

Recently, the **US has restored sanctions waivers to Iran** to allow international nuclear cooperation projects, as **indirect American-Iranian talks on reviving the 2015 international nuclear deal** with Iran enter the final stretch.

- The waiver **allows other countries and companies to participate in Iran's civilian nuclear programme** without triggering US sanctions on them, in the name of promoting safety and non-proliferation.

- The **waivers were revoked by the United States in 2019 and 2020** under former President Donald Trump, who **pulled out of the nuclear agreement**.
- The agreement is formally called the **Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)**.

What is the Timeline & Background of JCPOA?

- The JCPOA was the **result of prolonged negotiations from 2013 and 2015** between Iran and **P5+1** (China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States).



- It happened **due to the backchannel talks between the US (President Barack Obama) and Iran, quietly brokered by Oman**, in an attempt to repair the accumulated mistrust since the 1979 Islamic revolution.
- Islamic Revolution, also called Iranian Revolution, popular uprising in Iran in 1978–79 that resulted in the toppling of the monarchy on 11th February, 1979, and led to the establishment of an Islamic republic.
- The JCPOA **obliged Iran to accept constraints on its uranium enrichment program** verified by an intrusive inspection regime in return for a partial lifting of economic sanctions.
- However, faced with a **hostile Republican Senate, President Obama was unable to get the nuclear deal ratified** but implemented it on the basis of periodic Executive Orders to keep sanction waivers going.
- When **Donald Trump** became president, he **withdrew from the deal** and called it a **“horrible, one-sided deal that should have never, ever been made”**.
- The US decision was **criticized by all other parties to the JCPOA** (including the European allies) because Iran was in compliance with its obligations, as certified by the **International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)**.

What will be the Impacts on India of Restoration of JCPOA?

- Restoration of JCPOA **may ease many restrictions over the Iranian regime**, which may directly or indirectly help India. This can be reflected in the following examples:
- **Boost to Regional Connectivity:** Removing sanctions may revive India's interest in the **Chabahar Project**, Bandar Abbas port, and other plans for regional connectivity.
- This would further help India to neutralize the Chinese presence in Gwadar port, Pakistan.

- Apart from Chabahar, India's interest in the **International North-South Transit Corridor (INSTC)**, this runs through Iran, which will improve connectivity with five Central Asian republics, may also get a boost.

RELATED: NON-PROLIFERATION TREATY & INDIA'S STAND

- **Year 2020 marked the 50th anniversary** of the entry-into-force of the **Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)**, a legal instrument treated as the cornerstone of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime.
- The treaty institutionalised the non-proliferation norm by de-legitimising 'proliferation' (production and transfer) of nuclear weapons, fissile materials and related technology by the **non-nuclear weapon states (NNWS)** while the recognised **five nuclear-weapon states (NWS)** — namely the **US, Russia, the UK, France and China**, can continue to possess nuclear weapons.
- The Treaty can be described to have **three objectives of non-proliferation, disarmament and peaceful uses of nuclear energy**. However, NNWS criticised this treaty of having **structural flaws** and viewed it as an imbalanced instrument.
- Nevertheless, the treaty has attained a near-universal status with just **four hold-outs** — **India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea** and it is widely acknowledged that having a treaty to halt the spread of nuclear weapons was better than having none at all.

India's Stand on NPT

- **India is one of the only five countries that either did not sign the NPT or signed but withdrew**, thus becoming part of a list that includes Pakistan, Israel, North Korea, and South Sudan.
- India always considered the NPT as **discriminatory** and had refused to sign it.
- India has opposed the international treaties aimed at non-proliferation since they were selectively applicable to the non-nuclear powers and legitimised the monopoly of the five nuclear weapons powers.

Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)

- Enacted in 2017, it is a US federal law that **imposed sanctions on Iran, North Korea and Russia**.
- Includes sanctions **against countries that engage in significant transactions with Russia's defence and intelligence sectors**.
- The Act empowers the US President to impose at least five of the 12 listed sanctions on persons engaged in a "significant transaction" with Russian defence and intelligence sectors.
- Its "ultimate goal", "is to prevent **revenue from flowing** to the Russian Government.

International Atomic Energy Agency

- Widely known as the world's "**Atoms for Peace and Development**" organization within the **United Nations** family, the IAEA is the international centre for cooperation in the nuclear field.
- **Establishment:** The IAEA was created in 1957 in response to the deep fears and expectations generated by the discoveries and diverse uses of nuclear technology.
- **Headquarter:** Vienna, Austria.
- **Objective:** The Agency works with its Member States and multiple partners worldwide to promote safe, secure and peaceful use of nuclear technologies.
- In 2005, it was awarded the **Nobel Peace Prize** for their work for a safe and peaceful world.

MAJOR POINTS RELATED TO INDIA – IRAN RELATIONSHIP

Farzad-B Gas Field:

- It is located in **Persian Gulf (Iran)**.
- The contract for exploration of the field was signed in 2002 by Indian **consortium** comprising ONGC Videsh, Indian Oil Corporation and Oil India.
- The contract expired in 2009 after declaration of commerciality of the field, based on the gas discovery.
- It has **gas reserves of more than 19 trillion cubic feet**.
- ONGC has invested approximately **USD 100 million**.
- Since then, the consortium has been trying to secure the contract for development of the field.
- The major dispute between India and Iran was over setting up of two pipelines, and also over money to be quoted on the development plan.
- Around 75% of the deal was finalised by May 2018, when the **USA unilaterally withdrew from the nuclear deal** and announced sanctions on Iran.
- In **January 2020**, India was informed that in the immediate future, **Iran would develop the field on its own** and would like to **involve India appropriately at a later stage**.

Chabahar-Zahedan railway network

- In the '**New Delhi Declaration**' signed in 2003, both countries had decided to jointly develop the Chabahar Port complex.
- The Port development was exempted from the sanctions.
- India's main investment in the Chabahar Port where it has taken over **operations of one terminal**, had progressed well in the last few years, handling 82 ships with 12 lakh tonnes of bulk cargo in 8200 containers since December 2018.
- A contract to **develop the 628-km railway line (Chabahar-Zahedan)** along the Iran-Afghanistan border was signed in **2016**.
- IRCON was appointed by the Government of India to assess the feasibility of the project. It was working with CDTIC, an Iranian company.
- It had completed the site inspection and review of the feasibility report. The Iranian side was to nominate an authorised entity to finalise outstanding technical and financial issues. India waited for the same.
- However, Iran started work on the railway project in July 2020.
- India is **not part of this project** as of now since there is lack of clarity on whether it will attract the USA sanctions. However, it has conveyed to Iran that it is open to joining the project later.

#PM TO ADDRESS WORLD SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SUMMIT

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi** will deliver the inaugural address at The Energy and Resources Institute's (TERI) World Sustainable Development Summit on February 16.
- The three-day summit will begin on February 16th and conclude on February 18th and will see participation from several heads of state, heads of various **intergovernmental organisations, Ministers**



from over dozen countries and delegates from more than 120 countries.

- President of the Dominican Republic **Luis Abinader** is scheduled to attend the summit along with President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana **Dr. Mohamed Irfan Ali** and Deputy Secretary General of United Nations Amina J Mohammed.

World Sustainable Development Summit

- The **World Sustainable Development Summit** is the annual event of the **Energy and Resources Institute (TERI)**.
- The **World Sustainable Development Summit** will include discussion over a wide range of issues including sustainable development, sustainable production, climate change, global commons, energy transitions and resource security.
- The World Sustainable Development Summit 2022 will be held in a **hybrid format in New Delhi, India**.

World Sustainable Development Summit 2022 Theme

- The World Sustainable Development Summit 2022 Theme is **'Towards a Resilient Planet: Ensuring a Sustainable and Equitable Future'**.
- The extreme weather events across the globe have brought to the forefront on how human well-being and the planet's health are inextricably linked and just and equitable implementation of climate and environmental policies need to go along with broader sustainable development objectives.
- The responses should be viewed from the perspective of planetary resilience and the response to the **COVID-19 pandemic must be right for humans as well as Planet Earth**.
- **Objective:** The World Sustainable Development Summit aims to provide long-term solutions to the global community on issues related to sustainable development. It brings various stakeholders on a single platform and initiates a step towards achieving constructive action in combating issues pertinent to the future of humanity.

India's Efforts Towards Sustainable Development:

- In March 2019, **India achieved nearly 100% electrification** through sustainable technologies and innovative models.
- Through the **Ujala Programme**, 367 million LED bulbs were distributed which reduced over 38 million tonnes carbon dioxide per year.
- Through the **PM Ujjwala Yojna**, more than 80 million households below the poverty line have access to clean cooking fuel. India is working to **increase the share of natural gas in India's energy basket from 6% to 15%**.
- The **Jal Jeevan Mission** has connected over 34 million households with tap connections in 18 months.
- Through **conservation efforts**, the population of **lions, tigers, leopards** and **Gangetic river dolphins** has gone up.

Global Initiatives on Sustainable Development

- **The Stockholm Conference, 1972:** It was the **first step** towards putting environmental concerns on the global agenda.
- It resulted in the **Stockholm Declaration** which contained **principles** and an **Action Plan** containing recommendations for environmental policy.

- **UNEP** was set up in 1972 to serve as a catalyst in developing and coordinating an environmental focus in the programmes of other organisations.
- **The Earth Summit, 1992:** This was a direct consequence of the **Brundtland Commission's Report**. It was held in Rio de Janeiro. The results of the Conference were the following documents:
- The Framework Convention on Climate Change (**UNFCCC**)
- The Convention on Biological Diversity

Core Elements of Sustainable Development

- **Three** core elements of sustainable development are economic **growth**, social **inclusion** and environmental **protection**. It is crucial to harmonize them.
- **Sustainable economic growth**, achieving sustainable livelihood, living in harmony with nature and **appropriate technology** are important for sustainable development.

Environmental Sustainability:

- It prevents nature from being used as an inexhaustible source of resources and ensures its **protection and rational use**. Aspects such as **environmental conservation**, **saving water**, supporting **sustainable mobility**, and innovation in **sustainable construction and architecture**, contribute to achieving environmental sustainability on several fronts.

Social Sustainability:

- It can foster **gender equality**, **development of people, communities and cultures** to help achieve a reasonable and **fairly-distributed quality of life**, healthcare and education across the Globe.

Economic Sustainability:

- Focuses on **equal economic growth** that generates **wealth for all**, without harming the environment.
- **Investment** and **equal distribution** of economic resources.
- Eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions.

#SECRETARIAT FOR 2023 G20 SUMMIT

- **Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi**, approved setting up of a G20 Secretariat and its reporting structures.

G20 Secretariat

- The **G20 Secretariat** will be responsible for implementing overall policy decisions and arrangements needed to steer India's forthcoming Presidency of the forum for international economic cooperation.
- It is being established for handling the work related to substantive/content/knowledge media, technical, security and logistical aspects of



India's G20 Presidency.

- It will be manned by staff and officers from Ministry of External Affairs, Ministry of Finance, and **other line Ministries or Departments and domain knowledge experts.**
- The Secretariat will be functional till February 2024.

Who will guide the secretariat?

- The G20 Secretariat will be guided by an apex committee, headed by Prime Minister. It will also comprise of Finance Minister, External Affairs Minister, Home Minister, and **G20 Sherpa (Commerce & Industry Minister)**. It will provide overall guidance to India's G20 Presidency.
- **Coordination Committee:** A coordination committee will also be set up, to oversee G20 preparations and report it to apex committee.
- **India's G20 Presidency:** India will hold G20 Presidency from December 1, 2022 to November 30, 2023. It will culminate with the G20 Summit in India in 2023.

G20 communique on long-term economic recovery

- Recently, G20 second Finance and Central Bank Deputies (FCBD) meeting was to produce a communique draft consisting of long-term economic recovery strategy for better prevention, preparedness and response to potential future pandemics.
- The two-day FCBD meeting marked the first series of '**Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors (FMCBG)**' meetings in Finance Track of Indonesia's G20 Presidency.
- It was held under the theme- "Recover Together, Recover Stronger". The FMCBG meetings will be held on February 17 and 18, 2022.

About G20

- **G20 is an intergovernmental forum**, consisting of 19 countries and the European Union (EU).
- It works for addressing major issues related to global economy, like climate change mitigation, international financial stability, and sustainable development.
- It is composed of most of world's largest economies, including industrialized and developing nations. It accounts for 90% of gross world product (GWP), 75-80% of international trade, half of world's land area and two-thirds of the global population.

When was G20 founded?

- The **G20 was founded in 1999**. Since 2008, it has convened at least once a year.
- The summits involve head of government or state, foreign minister, finance minister, and other high-ranking officials from each member state. EU is represented by European Commission and European Central Bank.
- **G20 troika:** Currently, Italy, Indonesia and India are the **G20 troika countries**.

#CHINA HOSTING WINTER OLYMPICS, INDIA BOYCOTTING

- **Chinese President Xi Jinping** will inaugurate the Winter Olympics opening ceremony at the Bird's Nest National Stadium, which was built for the summer Olympics in 2008. **With this, Beijing will become the first**



city to host both summer and winter Olympics.

- The **Winter Olympics opening ceremony 2022** is expected to see in attendance Russian President Vladimir Putin, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia, President Halimah Yacob of Singapore, President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi of Egypt and five Presidents from Central Asian republics -Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

What is the Significance of the Visit?

- The Russian President will discuss the **ongoing crisis with Ukraine** with the Chinese President.
- China has close relations with Russia but has been largely silent on the crisis in Ukraine amid a build-up of Russian forces along its borders.
- The Pakistan Prime Minister is expected to discuss investments from China and speed up the **China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)** plan.
- China has also declared that it sought to discuss developing communications satellites for Pakistan and to cooperate on the construction of the **Pakistan Space Centre**.
- Due to the alleged **human rights violations in the Xinjiang province of China**, the US, the UK, Canada and Australia have announced a **"diplomatic boycott"** of the games.

What is the Winter Olympics?

- Winter Olympics is the premier competition for sports that are **played on ice or snow**.
- It is held **every four years** and features participants from across the world.
- **Ice skating, ice hockey; skiing and figure skating** are some of the popular sports that are played at the Winter Games.
- The **first Winter Olympics were held in 1924 in Chamonix, France**.
- Winter sports were initially played at the **Summer Olympics**, with the 1908 London Olympics hosting four figure skating events and Antwerp 1920 having figure skating as well as ice hockey.
- However, in 1924, a separate event was created for winter sports, called the **International Winter Sports Week**.
- It was held in Chamonix, France – the host country for the 1924 Summer Olympics.
- Two years later, the International Winter Sports Week in Chamonix was officially recognised as the **first Winter Olympic Games**.
- This years' **edition of the Winter Olympic Games will be held in Beijing, China** from 4th February to 20th February 2022.
- **India** has been participating in the Winter Olympics **since 1964**.

RELATED: INDIA BOYCOTTING BEIJING WINTER OLYMPICS

- India on February 3, 2022 announced **diplomatic boycott of Winter Olympics 2022** in Beijing after China picked Chinese soldier involved in the Galwan clash with India as an Olympic torchbearer.
- India's diplomat will not be attending the opening and closing ceremonies of the Winter Olympics. The boycott will be at diplomatic level. The Indian athlete will be participating in the event.
- **India's sole participant in the Winter Olympics 2022 is skier Arif Khan.**
- The United States applauded India's diplomatic boycott of the Beijing Winter Olympic Games and calling out China for its "heinous human rights abuses and cold-blooded effort to turn Olympics 2022 into a political victory lap."

- **US, UK among dozen countries that announced diplomatic boycott of Beijing Olympics**
- Dozens of countries led by the United States and United Kingdom have announced a “diplomatic boycott” of the Beijing Olympic Games. The other nations include Australia, Japan, Denmark, Sweden, Latvia, the Netherlands and Czech Republic over human rights violations on the Uighur community in Xinjiang.
- The athletes of these countries will, however, participate in the Olympic games but diplomats will not.
- India was one of the few countries that had **expressed support for the Beijing Olympics, despite the boycott by so many countries.**

#MULTINATIONAL AIR EXERCISE 'EX-COBRA WARRIOR 22'

- The **Indian Air Force** will participate in the multi-nation Air Exercise named 'Ex Cobra Warrior 22' at Royal Air Force Base in Waddington, United Kingdom.
- The Cobra Warrior exercise will be held from 6-27 March, 2022. Five indigenous **LCA Tejas fighter aircraft** will participate in the exercise and a C-17 aircraft will provide transport support.
- The IAF jets will participate in the exercise along with the fighter aircraft of UK and other leading Air Forces.



Cobra Warrior Exercise 2022 Objective

- The **Cobra Warrior exercise** is aimed at providing operational exposure and share best practices amongst the participating Air Forces.
- It will **help enhance combat capability and forge bonds** of friendship between the participating Air Forces.
- The exercise will serve as a platform for LCA Tejas to demonstrate its maneuverability and operational capability.

Cobra Warrior Exercise

- The Cobra Warrior Exercise is one of the largest annual Royal Air Force exercises and aims to train both pilots and other air specialists in planning and executing complex airborne missions.
- The **Indian Tejas jets will be stationed at the RAF Waddington airbase.**
- The exercise will involve air-to-air operations such as aircraft interceptions and mock dogfights and simulated ground attacks.
- This will be the first-ever outing of **LCA-Tejas in the International air exercise.**

Background

- The **Indian Air Force Tejas Squadron** just recently completed its first-ever outing in the Singapore air show.
- Three LCA-Tejas jets had flown over 3000km ferry flight with 3 external drop tanks non-stop to Singapore for the air show.
- This demonstrates the long-range ferry capabilities of the tiny jet.

Tejas light combat aircraft (LCA)

- It is India's first domestically designed and produced light fighter aircraft. It is a supersonic, single-seat, single-engine multirole light fighter aircraft.

- **Tejas is a light combat aircraft (LCA)** that uses fourth-generation technology.
- It has a configuration optimised primarily for maneuverability and agility.
- The plane is equipped with a digital fly-by-wire flight control system to ease handling. This helps the pilot do more head down activities (**especially mission-critical activities**) without worrying about the aircraft deviating from its flight path.

Designed by:

- **Aeronautical Development Agency** under the **Department of Defence Research and Development**.
- **Manufactured by:**
- State-owned **Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL)**.

Features:

- The **lightest, smallest and tailless multi-role supersonic fighter** aircraft in its class.
- Designed to **carry a range of air-to-air, air-to-surface, precision-guided**, weapons.
- **Air to air refuelling capability**.
- Maximum **payload capacity of 4000 kg**.
- It can attend the maximum speed of **Mach 1.8**.
- The range of the aircraft is **3,000km**

#INDIA-FRANCE ROADMAP ON BLUE ECONOMY & OCEAN GOVERNANCE

Recently, the **External Affairs Minister of India** held talks with his **French counterpart**.

- The two leaders discussed several regional and global issues including the **India-EU relationship, Afghanistan situation, Indo-Pacific Strategy, Iran nuclear deal** and the **Ukraine crisis**.



What are the Highlights of the Meeting?

- **Indo-Pacific Parks Partnership:** The two Ministers agreed to jointly launch the Indo-French call for an Indo-Pacific Parks Partnership.
- This partnership aims to **build capacities in the Indo-Pacific region**, in terms of sustainable management of protected areas, by gathering and sharing the experiences and expertise that exist in the region among key Indo-Pacific public & private natural park managers.
- **India-France Roadmap on the Blue Economy and Ocean Governance:** Both sides also adopted the "India-France Roadmap on the **Blue Economy** and Ocean Governance".
- The roadmap aims to **enhance partnership in the field of blue economy** by way of institutional, economic, infrastructural and scientific cooperation.
- They also agreed to intensify India-E.U. ties under the French Presidency, and the **need to begin negotiations on the Free Trade and Investment Agreements** and implement the India-E.U. Connectivity Partnership.
- **Strengthening Multilateralism:** They also agreed to coordinate in the **United Nations Security Council** on issues of mutual concern.

- **Deepening Strategic Partnership:** Both Ministers agreed to further deepen the Strategic Partnership, particularly in the areas of trade and investments, defence and security, health, education, research and innovation, energy and **climate change**.
- **Facilitating People-To-People Contact:** Agreed to soon conclude a Joint Declaration of Intent in the Area of Sports, aimed at further facilitating people-to-people contact.
- Strengthening the long-standing cooperation on public administration and administrative reforms between the relevant authorities.

What are the Areas of Cooperation in India-France Relations?

- **Background:** France was one of the first countries with which India signed a “strategic partnership” after the end of the **Cold War**, in January 1998.
- France was one of the very few countries to **support India’s decision to test nuclear weapons in 1998**.
- Today, France has emerged as **India’s most reliable partner** on issues relating to terrorism and Kashmir.
- **Defence Cooperation:** Both countries have a defence dialogue at the Ministerial level.
- The three services have regular defence exercises, viz.
- **Exercise Shakti (Army)**
- **Exercise Varuna (Navy)**
- **Exercise Garuda (Air Force)**
- Recently, the Indian Air Force (IAF) has inducted **French Rafale multi-role combat aircraft**.
- India entered into a contract with a French firm to build **six Scorpene submarines in India’s Malegaon dockyards** through a **technology-transfer arrangement in 2005**.
- The two countries also signed the Agreement regarding the **Provision of Reciprocal Logistics Support**.

What is Blue Economy?

- The concept was introduced by Gunter Pauli in his 2010 book- “The Blue Economy: 10 years, 100 innovations, 100 million jobs”.
- It is the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods and jobs, and ocean ecosystem health.
- It advocates the greening of ocean development strategies for higher productivity and conservation of ocean's health.
- It encompasses–
- **Renewable Energy:** Sustainable marine energy can play a role in social and economic development.
- **Fisheries:** Sustainable fisheries can generate more revenue, more fish and help restore fish stocks.
- **Maritime Transport:** Over 80% of international goods traded are transported by sea.
- **Tourism:** Ocean and coastal tourism can bring jobs and economic growth.
- **Climate Change:** Oceans are an important carbon sink (blue carbon) and help mitigate climate change.
- **Waste Management:** Better waste management on land can help oceans recover.
- The ISA is an **intergovernmental treaty-based organisation** with a global mandate **to catalyse solar growth** by helping to reduce the cost of financing and technology.
- ISA is the **nodal agency for implementing One Sun One World One Grid (OSOWOG)**, which seeks to transfer solar power generated in one region to feed the electricity demands of others.

Launch:

- It is an **Indian initiative** that was launched by the Prime Minister of India and the President of France on **30th November 2015 in Paris**, France on the side-lines of the **UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP-21)**, with 121 solar resource rich countries lying fully or partially between the tropic of Cancer and tropic of Capricorn as prospective members.
- Members:** 101 members, after being joined by the US.
- Headquarters:** The Headquarters is in India with **its Interim Secretariat being set up in Gurugram**.
- Objectives:** To collectively address key common challenges to the scaling up of solar energy in ISA member countries.
- Recently, the **United States of America has become the 101st member country to join the International Solar Alliance (ISA)**.

Rafales Jets

- Introduced in 2001, the Rafale is a **French twin-engine and multirole fighter aircraft designed and built by Dassault Aviation** being produced for both the French Air Force and for carrier-based operations in the French Navy.
- India has inked a Rs 59,000-crore deal in **2016 to procure 36 Rafale jets from French aerospace major Dassault Aviation** after a nearly seven-year exercise to procure 126 Medium Multi-Role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA) for the Indian Air Force did not fructify.
- The MMRCA deal was stalled due to disagreements over production in India.
- In comparison to the earlier deal i.e. MMRCA; Rafale has much technological advancement, lower life cycle cost and specifications according to the warfare needs of India.
- India is the fourth country** to have the strategic platform with Rafale after France, Egypt and Qatar.
- The Indian Air Force is also in the process of procuring a new generation medium-range modular air-to-ground **weapon system Hammer** to integrate with the Rafale jets. The **Hammer (Highly Agile Modular Munition Extended Range)** is a precision-guided missile developed by French defence major Safran.
- Rafales could be a **game-changer for India after all the 36 jets join the Indian Air Force** as no aircraft in possession of any country in the neighbourhood will be able to match their superior kinematic performance and powerful electronic warfare systems.
- The Rafale jet is **often compared with the USA stealth F-35** aircraft and F-22.
- It is much more advanced and lethal than the current fighter aircraft **available with China i.e. jet J-20**. Therefore, it is definitely a boost to **India's defence preparedness especially at the times of border clash with China**.

#INDIA-OMAN EASTERN-BRIDGE VI EXERCISE

Recently, the **Indian Air Force (IAF) and the Royal Air Force of Oman** began a five-day bilateral exercise at the Jodhpur air force station. The exercise is named **Eastern Bridge VI**, as is in its sixth edition.

- The exercise seeks to promote professional interaction, exchange of experiences and enhancement of operational knowledge, besides **strengthening bilateral relations between the two countries**.
- The Exercise **Eastern Bridge V** was held in October 2019 at the Air Force Base Masirah, Oman.

What is Oman's Strategic Significance for India?

- Oman is **India's closest defence partner in the Gulf region** and an important anchor for India's defence and strategic interests.
- Oman is at the gateway of **Strait of Hormuz** through which India imports one-fifth of its oil imports.
- Defence cooperation has emerged as a key pillar for the robust **India-Oman strategic partnership**.



- Defence exchanges are guided by a **Framework MOU which was recently renewed in 2021**.
- Oman is the **only country in the Gulf region** with which all **three services of the Indian armed forces** conduct regular bilateral exercises and staff talks, enabling close cooperation and trust at the professional level.
- **Naseem Al-Bahr** is the naval exercise conducted between both the countries.
- **AL Nagah** is the joint exercise between the armies of two countries.
- **Eastern Bridge** is the joint exercise between the air forces of two countries.
- Oman also provides critical operational support to Indian naval deployments in the Arabian sea for anti-piracy missions.
- Oman also actively participates in the **Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS)**.
- India has supplied rifles to Oman. Also, India is considering setting up a defence production unit in Oman.

Access to Port of Duqm in Oman:

- In a strategic move to expand its footprint in the Indian Ocean region, India has secured access to the key Port of **Duqm** in Oman for military use and logistical support.
- This is part of India's maritime strategy to counter Chinese influence and activities in the region.
- The Port of Duqm is situated on the **southeastern seaboard of Oman**, overlooking the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean.
- It is strategically located, in close proximity to the **Chabahar port** in Iran. With the **Assumption Island** being developed in Seychelles and Agalega in Mauritius, Duqm fits into India's proactive maritime security roadmap.

Chabahar Port

- It is located on the **Gulf of Oman** and is only **72 km away from the Gwadar port in Pakistan** which has been developed by China.

- The port serves as the **only oceanic port of Iran** and consists of **two separate ports** named **Shahid Beheshti and Shahid Kalantari.**

Background:

- In **2016**, India, Iran and Afghanistan signed the **trilateral agreement** which entailed the establishment of **Transit and Transport Corridor** among them using Chabahar port in Iran as one of the regional hubs for sea transportation.
- Construction of a **rail line from Chabahar port to Zahedan**, along the border with Afghanistan as an **alternate trade route to Afghanistan and Central Asia**, was also a part of it.
- The state-owned **Indian Railways Construction Ltd. (IRCON)** signed a **MoU with the Iranian Rail Ministry** to provide all services, superstructure work and financing (around USD 1.6 billion).

#RELATED: EX- COBRA WARRIOR

The Indian Air Force will participate in the **multi-nation Air Exercise named 'Ex Cobra Warrior 22'** at **Royal Air Force Base in Waddington, United Kingdom.**

- Five indigenous **LCA (Light Combat aircraft)** Tejas fighter aircraft will participate in the exercise and a C-17 aircraft will provide transport support.
- **About Ex Cobra Warrior 22:** It is **one of the largest annual Royal Air Force exercises (United Kingdom)** and aims to train both pilots and other air specialists in **planning and executing complex airborne missions.**

Other Joint Exercises between India and the UK:

- **Navy: Konkan**
- **Air Force: Indradhanush**
- **Army: Exercise AJEYA WARRIOR**

#GOVERNMENT OF INDIA LAUNCHED 'OPERATION GANGA'

The **GOI** has launched a '**multi-pronged**' initiative named '**Operation Ganga**'.

- A dedicated Twitter handle '**OpGanga Helpline**' to assist Indian evacuation from Ukraine has also been announced.
- The **tensions between Russia and Ukraine** are currently heightened, with war erupting in Ukraine after the Russian military launched a series of attacks recently.



What is Operation Ganga?

- It is an evacuation mission to **bring back all the Indian nationals who are currently stranded in Ukraine**. There were **around 20,000 Indians** including students stuck in Ukraine.
- Till now, three Air India flights have been able to bring back more than 900 Indians from Ukraine to India.
- The Indian evacuation flights are **operating from neighbouring countries** like **Romania and Hungary**.
- The government is **also facilitating evacuation of stranded Indians from its borders crossing Romania, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia**.

What are the Evacuation Operations carried out by India?

Operation Ganga (2022):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ It is an evacuation mission to bring back all the Indian nationals who are currently stranded in Ukraine. ▪ The tensions between Russia and Ukraine are currently heightened, with war erupting in Ukraine after the Russian military launched a series of attacks recently.
Vande Bharat (2020):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ When the Covid-19 pandemic hit the world, the Centre launched the Vande Bharat Mission to bring back Indian citizens stranded in foreign countries. ▪ In the multiple phases of the operation, about 60 lakh Indians were brought back as on 30th April, 2021
Operation Samudra Setu (2020):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ It was a naval operation as part of the national effort to bring home Indian citizens from overseas during the Covid-19 pandemic. ▪ It successfully brought back 3,992 Indian citizens to their homeland by sea. ▪ Indian Naval ships Jalashwa (Landing Platform Dock), and Airavat, Shardul and Magar (Landing Ship Tanks) participated in this operation which lasted over 55 days and involved traversing more than 23,000 km by sea.
Evacuation from Brussels (2016):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In March 2016, Belgium was hit by terrorist strikes at Brussels Airport in Zaventem, and one at Maalbeek Metro station in central Brussels. ▪ A total of 242 Indians, including 28 crew members, returned to India in a Jet Airways flight.
Operation Raahat (2015):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In 2015, a conflict raged between the Yemeni government and Houthi rebels. ▪ Thousands of Indians were stranded and Yemen was not accessible by air due to a no-fly zone announced by Saudi Arabia. ▪ Under Operation Raahat, India evacuated nearly 5,600 people from Yemen.

Operation Maitri (2015):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is the joint relief and rescue operation by the Indian government and the Indian Armed forces in the aftershock of the 2015 Nepal earthquake. The joint Army-Air Force operation brought over 5,000 Indians back from Nepal by Air Force and civilian planes. The Indian army successfully evacuated 170 foreign nationals from the US, the UK, Russia and Germany.
Operation Safe Homecoming (2011):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> India launched 'Operation Homecoming' to bring back Indian citizens stranded in conflict-torn Libya. Under the operation, India evacuated 15,400 Indian nationals. The air-sea operation was conducted by the Indian Navy and Air India.
Operation Sukoon (2006):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As Israel and Lebanon broke into military conflict in July 2006, India rescued its stranded citizens by launching this operation, which is now famously known as the 'Beirut Sealift'. It was the largest naval rescue mission since the 'Dunkirk' evacuation. The task force evacuated about 2,280 people including some Nepalese and Sri Lankan nationals between 19th July and 1st August 2006.
1990 Kuwait Airlift (1990):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 1990, when 1,00,000 Iraqi soldiers armed with 700 tanks marched into Kuwait, the royals and VIPs had fled to Saudi Arabia. The general public was left behind to fend for themselves. Over 1,70,000 of those stranded in Kuwait were Indians. India kicked off the evacuation process in which over 1,70,000 Indians were airlifted and repatriated to India.

What is the Conflict?

- Contestation about **post-Cold War central European territoriality** and resurrecting a burnished Russian past is at the **core of the Ukraine crisis**.
- Ukraine and Russia share hundreds of years of cultural, linguistic and familial links.
- For many in Russia and in the ethnically Russian parts of Ukraine, the shared heritage of the countries is an emotional issue that has been **exploited for electoral and military purposes**.
- As part of the Soviet Union, Ukraine was the second-most powerful Soviet republic after Russia, and was crucial strategically, economically and culturally.
- The **balance of power in the region, Ukraine being a crucial buffer** between Russia and the West, **Ukraine's bid for NATO membership and Russian interests in the Black Sea** accompanied by the **protests in the Ukraine** are the **major causes of the ongoing conflict**.

What is the History of India-Russia Defence Ties?

- India was reliant, **almost solely on the British**, and other Western nations for its arms imports immediately after Independence.
- However, this dependence weaned, and by the **1970s India was importing several weapons systems from the USSR (now Russia)**, making it the country's largest defence importer for decades.
- Russia has provided some of the **most sensitive and important weapons platforms** that India has required from time to time including **nuclear submarines, aircraft carriers, tanks, guns, fighter jets, and missiles**.
- According to one estimate, the share of Russian-origin weapons and platforms across **Indian armed forces is as high as 85%**.
- Russia is the **second-largest arms exporter in the world, following only the United States**.
- For Russia, **India is the largest importer**, and for India, **Russia is the largest exporter when it comes to arms transfer**.
- Between 2000 and 2020, Russia accounted for **66.5% of India's arms imports**.
- Russia's share in Indian arms imports was down to about **50% between 2016 and 2020, but it still remained the largest single importer**.

Reasons for Ukraine to Join NATO:

- Ukraine is of the opinion that **joining NATO is the only way to end fighting with pro-Russia separatists**.
- There is an increase in clashes and Russian military movements on the border raise fears of an escalation of the **separatist conflict in eastern Ukraine**.
- Ukraine accuses Russia of massing thousands of military personnel on its northern and eastern borders as well as on the **Crimean peninsula** (annexed by Russia in 2014).
- Ukraine's Western allies have rushed to its defence, with a series of statements warning Russia against taking further action.
- **India did not join the Western powers' condemnation** of Russia's intervention in Crimea and kept a low profile on the issue.

About North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO):

- It is a **military alliance established by the North Atlantic Treaty** (also called the **Washington Treaty**) of 4th April, 1949, by the United States, Canada, and several Western European nations to provide collective security against the Soviet Union.
- It is headquartered at **Brussels, Belgium**.
- A key provision of the treaty, the so-called **Article 5**, states that if one member of the alliance is attacked in Europe or North America, it is to be considered an attack on all members. That effectively put Western Europe under the "nuclear umbrella" of the US.
- **NATO has only once invoked Article 5**, on 12th September, 2001, following the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center in the US.
- NATO's protection **does not extend to members' civil wars or internal coups**.
- As of 30th March 2021, there are 30 member states, with the Republic of North Macedonia becoming the latest member to join the alliance in 2020.

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