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of Current Affairs by **SUCCESS MANTRA** (GTB Nagar)

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

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INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

#INDIA-AUS CRITICAL MINERALS INVESTMENT PARTNERSHIP

- Recently, **India and Australia** decided to strengthen their partnership in the field of projects and supply chains for critical minerals.
- Australia confirmed that it would **commit USD 5.8 million** to the three-year **India-Australia Critical Minerals Investment Partnership**.



What are Critical Minerals?

- Critical minerals are **elements that are the building blocks of essential modern-day technologies** and are at risk of supply chain disruptions.
- **Examples:**
 - Based on their individual needs and strategic considerations, **different countries create their own lists**.
 - However, such lists mostly **include graphite, lithium and cobalt**, which are used for making EV batteries; rare earth that is **used for making magnets and silicon** which is a key mineral for making computer chips and solar panels.
 - India's Department of Science and Technology, in collaboration with the Council on Energy, Environment and Water, drafted the Critical Minerals Strategy for India in 2016, with a focus on India's resource requirements till 2030.
 - The Indian Critical Minerals Strategy has **identified 49 minerals that will be vital for India's future economic growth**.

How have been the India- Australia Trade Relations so far?

- **Cordial Relations:** India and Australia enjoy excellent bilateral relations that have undergone transformational evolution in recent years, developing along a positive track, into a friendly partnership. This is a special partnership characterised by shared values of pluralistic, parliamentary democracies, Commonwealth traditions, expanding economic engagement, long-standing people-to-people ties and increasing high-level interaction.
- **India-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership:** It was initiated during the **India-Australia Leaders' Virtual Summit** held in June 2020 and is the cornerstone of India-Australia multi-faceted bilateral relations.
- **Trading Partners:**
 - India-Australia **bilateral trade for both merchandise and services is valued** at USD 27.5 billion in 2021.

What is Countries around the World doing about this Issue?

- **United States:** In 2021, the US **ordered a review of vulnerabilities in its critical minerals supply chains** and found that an over-reliance on foreign sources and adversarial nations for critical minerals and materials posed national and economic security threats.
- Post the supply chain assessment, it has shifted its focus on expanding domestic mining, production, processing, and recycling of critical minerals and materials.
- **India:** It has set up **KABIL or the Khanij Bidesh India Limited**, a joint venture of three public sector companies, to ensure a consistent supply of critical and strategic minerals to the Indian domestic market.
- It **ensures the mineral security of the nation**; it also helps in realising the overall objective of import

substitution.

- Australia's Critical Minerals Facilitation Office (CMFO) and KABIL had **recently signed an MoU (Memorandum of Understanding)** aimed at ensuring a reliable supply of critical minerals to India.
- **United Kingdom:** Recently, the United Kingdom (UK) unveiled its **new Critical Minerals Intelligence Centre** to study the future demand for and supply of these minerals.
- The country's critical mineral strategy will be unveiled later in 2022.
- **Other Countries:** In 2020, the US, Canada and Australia launched an **interactive map of critical mineral deposits** intending to help governments to identify options to diversify the sources of their critical minerals.

#MEKONG LANCANG COOPERATION

- Recently, Myanmar's military government hosted the first high - level regional meeting since the Army took power in 2021.

What Do We Know About the Meeting?

- China's Foreign Minister and counterparts from **Mekong** Delta nations attended the meeting.
- FM of China along with his colleagues from Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam at the **Mekong - Lancang Cooperation** group meeting.
- It was held in the central city of **Bagan**, a UNESCO World Heritage site. The theme of the meeting was **"Solidarity for Peace and Prosperity"**.

What Do We Mean by Mekong - Lancang Cooperation?

- The grouping is a Chinese led initiative that includes the countries of the **Mekong Delta**, a potential source of regional tensions due to an increasing number of hydroelectric projects that are altering the flow and raising concerns of ecological damage.

What is there to Know about Myanmar's Military Coup?

- In the November 2020 parliamentary election, **Suu Kyi's party National League for Democracy (NLD)** secured the majority of the seats.
- In the Myanmar's' Parliament, the military holds 25% of the total seats according to the 2008 military-drafted constitution and several key ministerial positions are also reserved for military appointees.
- When the newly elected Myanmar lawmakers were to hold the 1st session of Parliament in 2021, **the military imposed a state of emergency** for one year citing massive voting fraud in the parliamentary elections.

India and Myanmar's Groupings:

- **ASEAN:** Myanmar became a member of ASEAN in July 1997.
- As the only ASEAN country which shares a land border with India, Myanmar is a bridge between India and ASEAN.
- **BIMSTEC:** The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is a regional organization that was established on 6th June 1997 with the signing of the Bangkok Declaration.
- Representatives of the Governments of Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, and Thailand came together in Bangkok, and signed the 'Declaration on the Establishment of the Bangladesh-India-Sri Lanka-Thailand Economic Cooperation (BIST-EC)'.
- Myanmar became a member of BIMSTEC in December 1997.
- Myanmar is a signatory to the BIMSTEC Free Trade Agreement.
- Myanmar is the lead country for the energy sector. Myanmar trades mostly with Thailand and India in the BIMSTEC region.
- **Mekong Ganga Cooperation:** Myanmar is a member of the Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC) since its inception in November 2000. MGC is an initiative by six countries – India and five ASEAN countries namely, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam – for cooperation in the fields of tourism, education, culture, transport and communication.

- **SAARC:** The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was established with the signing of the SAARC Charter in Dhaka on 8th December 1985.
- SAARC comprises of eight Member States:
- Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
- Myanmar was given the status of observer in SAARC in August 2008.

#GLOBAL PLATFORM FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

- Recently, the **Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2022 (GP DRR 2022)** took place in Indonesia.
- The outcome was summarised in the Bali Agenda for Reilience

What do we need to know about Global Platform 2022?

- **Theme: From Risk to Resilience:** Towards Sustainable Development For All in a Covid-19 Transformed World.
- **About Global Platform:** It was the **first global gathering for disaster risk reduction (DRR)** actors since the Covid pandemic, and fell exactly midway between the **UNFCCC COP26** and **UNFCCC COP27** negotiations.
- It is a biennial multi-stakeholder forum, a critical component of the monitoring and implementation process of the **Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030)**.
- **The UN General Assembly** recognizes the same.



What are the Important Outcomes of the Global Platform for DRR 2022?

- There is a **need for a whole-of-society approach** to Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), ensuring no one is left behind
- DRR must be at the **core** of development and finance policies, legislation and plans to achieve the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)**.
- Current **greenhouse gas emission levels far exceed their mitigation**, resulting in an increase in frequency and intensity of catastrophic events.
- DRR and **climate change** adaptation have the common objective of **reducing vulnerability and enhancing capacity as well as resilience**.

What are the Initiatives for Disaster Risk Reduction?

- **Global:**
- **Sendai Framework:** It was adopted at the **Third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction**, held in 2015 in Sendai, Miyagi, Japan.

- The Sendai Framework is the successor instrument to the **Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA)**
- **The present Framework applies to** the risk of small-scale and large-scale, frequent and infrequent, sudden and slow-onset disasters caused by natural or man-made hazards, as well as related environmental, technological and biological hazards and risks.
- It aims to **guide the multi hazard management of disaster risk** in development at all levels as well as within and across all sectors.
- **The Climate Risk and Early Warning Systems (CREWS):** The specialized Climate Risk and Early Warning Systems (CREWS) an initiative under World Meteorological Organization, saves lives, assets and livelihoods through **increased access to early weather warnings and risk information** for people in Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS).
- **Green Climate Fund's Sectoral Guide on Climate Information & Early Warning Systems:** It provides an **overview of country needs and evidence-based programming experiences** in the relevant sector.
- It also aims to identify opportunities for high impact, change investments in each sector, to guide proposal development for the GCF, in line with its investment criteria during its first replenishment period 2020-2023.

India's Initiatives:

- **Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure Society (CDRIS):** CDRI is a global partnership of national governments, **United Nations** agencies and programmes, multilateral development banks and financing mechanisms, the private sector, and academic and research institutions.
- It aims to **increase the resilience of infrastructure systems** to climate and disaster risks, thereby ensuring sustainable development.
- **National Disaster Management Plan (NDMP):**
- Its primary purpose is to **coordinate response to natural or man-made disasters** and for capacity-building in disaster resiliency and crisis response.
- It lays down policies, plans and guidelines for Disaster Management to ensure timely and effective response to disasters.

#INDIA AFRICA AT CII EXIM BANK CONCLAVE

- Recently, at the **17th Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) Exim Bank Conclave on India-Africa Growth Partnership (New Delhi, India)**, India has emphasized upon the need for a trade and investment agreement between **India and Africa**.
- Earlier, the Indian Vice President visited Senegal and **three MoUs (Memorandums of Understanding)** for cultural exchange, cooperation in youth matters and visa free regime were signed.

What do we know about the CII EBC on India-Africa Growth Partnership?

- It was launched in the year **2005** with the support of the **Ministry of External Affairs and the Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Government of India**.
- It had been rechristened as "**CII EXIM Bank Conclave on India Africa Growth Partnership**" expanding the earlier focuses on "**Project Partnership**".

What is India Emphasizing in relations with Africa?

- India will be able to **offer new technologies** that will help expand **trade, commerce, business, investment & opportunities** for Africa's youth.
- India's development partnership with Africa will be on terms that will be **comfortable to Africa** that will liberate its potential and not constrain its future.
- India's experience with **digital revolution** to support Africa's growth, extend **education, health, spread digital literacy** and quality infrastructure could be harnessed.
- India's **Startups** and digital innovations like **Unified Payments Interface (UPI), Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC)** etc. can benefit Africa immensely.

How has India's relations with Africa been?

- **High Level Visits:** During the last eight years, there has been a stepped up engagement with the continent, recording 36 high level visits from India and more than 100 similar ones from Africa.
- **Loan and Assistance:** India has extended concessional loans of over **USD 12.3 billion to Africa**. In addition, India has granted **USD 700 mn of grant assistance**.

Projects:

- India has completed 197 projects so far, 65 more are currently under execution and 81 at the pre-execution stage.
- In Zambia, India is involved in an important **hydro-power project**, in the erection of **pre-fabricated health posts** and in the **supply of vehicles**.
- In **Mauritius**, recent notable projects include the **metro express, the new Supreme Court and social housing**.
- In **Namibia**, a new **Centre of Excellence in IT** has just become operational.
- Whereas in **South Sudan**, India is focusing on training and education.

#GREEN GRIDS INITIATIVE

- India and UK, jointly announced a declaration on “one sun, one world, one grid” — or OSOWOG at the **Conference of Parties (COP26)**, held in Glasgow, UK.



What do we know about OSOWOG?

- GGI-OSOWOG was conceived in 2018 to develop global interconnected solar energy systems.
- Under the **International Solar Alliance**, India announced the launch of the **Green Grids Initiative — One Sun, One World, One Grid (GGI-OSOWOG)** in partnership with the United Kingdom.
- **Objectives:**
- The vision behind the OSOWOG is ‘**The Sun Never Sets**’ and is a constant at some geographical location, globally, at any given point of time.
- The initiative aims to build a framework for **global cooperation on the effective utilisation of renewable resources** and to help ensure that **clean and efficient energy** is a reliable option for all nations to meet their energy requirements by 2030.
- This project aspires to **harness the sun's energy and build a global interconnected electricity grid** to accelerate the transition to **renewable energy**.
- The initiative is expected to connect **more than 80 countries across a large geographical area**, with varying levels of sunlight. A transitional system will enable countries with low levels of sunlight to obtain energy from areas with an excess of it.

What is the Importance of GGI OSOWOG?

- It will bring more **technical, financial and research cooperation** to help facilitate **cross-border renewable energy transfer projects**, which will give OSOWOG its global infrastructure.
- It will also create a depth of **organizational scale, spanning national governments, international financial and technical organisations, legislators, power system operators and knowledge leaders**, to accelerate the construction of the new infrastructure needed for a world powered by **clean energy**.
- It will provide **momentum, and a pool of investment towards low-carbon**, innovative solar projects, and bring together skilled workers for a **solar-powered economic recovery**. It can also propel investment and create millions of new green jobs.

#AFRICAN UNION CELEBRATES 20TH ANNIVERSARY

- The African Union is celebrating its 20th Anniversary on 9th of July 2022.

What Do We Know About African Union?

- The African Union (AU) is a continental body consisting of the 55 member states that make up the countries of the African Continent.
- Formation:** In 1963, the Organization of African Unity was founded by the independent states of Africa. The organization aimed to promote cooperation between African states.
- The 1980 Lagos Plan of Action was adopted by the Organization of African Unity. The plan suggested that Africa should minimize reliance upon the West by promoting intra-African trade.
- In 2002, the Organization of African Unity was succeeded by the African Union**, which had as one of its goals to accelerate the "economic integration of the continent".



What has the African Union Achieved in 20 Years?

- African Continental Free Trade Area:** It was established in 2018 by the **African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA)**.
- AfCFTA seeks to create a single continental market for goods and services, with free movement of business persons and investments, and thus pave the way for accelerating the establishment of the Continental Customs Union and the African customs union.
- The AfCFTA preliminary work is on steps such as incremental tariff reduction, elimination of non-tariff barriers, supply chains and dispute settlement.
- How has Indian African Relations Been?
- Social Infrastructure:** The India-Africa social infrastructure (education, health, skills) cooperation is multidimensional, comprehensive, and involves national, state, and subnational actors working toward augmenting African institutional and individual capacities.

#I2U2 SUMMIT & FOOD SECURITY

- Recently, first I2U2 (**India, Israel, United States and the United Arab Emirates**) leaders' Summit was held virtually.

What is I2U2?

- I2U2 stands for India, Israel, the UAE, and the US, and was also referred to as the '**West Asian Quad**'.
- I2U2 was initially formed in Oct, 2021 **following the Abraham Accords**, to deal with issues concerning **maritime security, infrastructure and transport**.
- The Abraham Accord is the **first Arab-Israeli peace deal** in 26 years mediated by the USA.



Objectives:

- Its stated aim is to **discuss "common areas of mutual interest, to strengthen the economic partnership in trade and investment in our respective regions and beyond"**. Six areas of cooperation have been identified by the countries mutually, and the aim is to **encourage joint investments in water, energy, transportation, space, health, and food security**.

What are the Key Highlights of the Summit?

- The United Arab Emirates (UAE) announced to invest USD 2 billion in India to develop **Food Parks** across the country.
- India will **provide appropriate land for the project** and will facilitate farmers' integration into the Food Parks.
- The Grouping declared to support a "**hybrid renewable energy project**" in Gujarat, consisting of **300 megawatts (MW) of wind and solar capacity**.
- The project is expected to be another step in India's quest for "500 GW of non-fossil fuel capacity by 2030".
- The **US and Israeli private sectors will be invited to lend their expertise** and offer innovative solutions that contribute to the overall sustainability of the projects under the Grouping.
- **What is Food Park?**
- Food Park is a concept **that aims at establishing the direct linkages from the farm to processing to consumer markets**.
- It comprises Collection Centres (CCs) and Primary Processing Centres (PPCs) linked to a Central Processing Centre.

#BRICS LABOUR & EMPLOYMENT MINISTERS' MEETING

- Recently, the Union Minister for Labour & Employment attended the **BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa)** Labour and Employment Ministers' Meeting held under the Chinese Presidency.

What is BRICS?

- BRICS is an acronym for the grouping of the world's leading emerging economies, namely **Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa**.
- In 2001, the British Economist Jim O'Neill coined the term BRIC to describe the four emerging economies of Brazil, Russia, India, and China.
- The grouping was formalised during the first meeting of BRIC Foreign Ministers in 2006.
- South Africa was invited to join BRIC in December 2010, after which the group adopted the acronym BRICS.

Share of BRICS:

- The **BRICS brings together five of the largest developing countries of the world, representing 41% of the global population, 24% of the global GDP and 16% of the global trade**.
- **Chairmanship:** The chairmanship of the forum is rotated annually among the members, in accordance with the acronym **B-R-I-C-S**.
- China is the chair for 2022.

What are the Other Related Initiatives?

- e-Shram Portal
- Code on Social Security, 2020
- SANKALP programme
- STRIVE project
- Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana
- National Skill Development Corporation

What are 'green jobs'?

- 'Green jobs' refer to a class of jobs that **directly have a positive impact on the planet**, and contribute to the overall environmental welfare.
- Jobs involving renewable energy, conservation of resources, ensuring energy efficient means are categorised under the same.
- In all, they're **aimed at reducing the negative environmental impact** of economic sectors and furthering the process of creating a low-carbon economy.
- The idea behind a **low-carbon economy or decarbonisation** is fairly simple — it is about maintaining a sustainable economy, one that doesn't lead to vast emissions of greenhouse gasses, especially **carbon dioxide**.

#ECONOMIC CRISIS IN SRI-LANKA

- Sri Lanka, a country of 22 million people, is **under the grip of an unprecedented economic turmoil**, the worst in seven decades, leaving millions struggling to buy food, medicine, fuel and other essentials.
- Following the **political and economic instability**, hundreds of anti-government protesters stormed into the Sri Lankan President's residence demanding his resignation.

What led to recent Sri Lanka Crisis?

- **Background:** When Sri Lanka emerged from a 26-year long **civil war** in 2009, its **post-war GDP growth was reasonably high at 8-9% per annum till 2012**.
- However, its average **GDP growth rate almost halved** after 2013 as global commodity prices fell, exports slowed down and imports rose.
- Sri Lanka's **budget deficits** were high during the war and the **global financial crisis of 2008** drained its **forex reserves** which led to the country borrowing a USD2.6 billion loan from the **IMF** in 2009.
- It **again approached the IMF in 2016** for another USD1.5 billion loan, however the conditionalities of the IMF further deteriorated Sri Lanka's economic health.

Economic Factors:

- The Easter blasts of April 2019 in churches in Colombo resulting in **253 casualties**, consequently, **dropped the number of tourists** sharply leading to a decline in foreign exchange reserves. The **newly led government by Gotabaya Rajapaksa** in 2019 promised lower tax rates and wide-ranging SoPs for farmers during their campaign.
- The quick implementation of these ill-advised promises further **exacerbated the problem**.
- The **Covid-19 pandemic** in 2020 made the bad situation worse -
- Exports of **tea, rubber, spices and garments** suffered.
- **Tourism arrivals and revenues** fell further
- Due to a rise in government expenditures, the **fiscal deficit** exceeded 10% in 2020-21, and the debt to GDP ratio rose from 94% in 2019 to 119% in 2021.
- The Crisis in Sri Lanka is triggered due to a **shortage of foreign exchange (forex)** reserves, which have dropped by 70% over the last two years to just USD 2 billion by the end of February 2022.
- Meanwhile, the country has foreign debt obligations of about USD 7 billion for 2022.
- Sri Lanka has been a **strategically important partner for India**. India can make use of this opportunity to **balance its diplomatic ties with Sri Lanka**, which have been distant owing to **Sri Lanka's proximity with China**.
- As the disagreement between Sri Lanka and China intensified on the fertiliser issue, **India's fertiliser delivery to Sri Lanka on the latter's request is seen as a positive development in the bilateral relations**.
- Extending diplomatic ties with Sri Lanka will **ease India's effort to keep the Sri Lankan archipelago out of China's 'string of pearls' game in the Indo-Pacific**.
- To the extent India can extend help to alleviate the hardships of Sri Lankans, it should be done with due care keeping in mind that the optics of its aid matters too.

#UNITED NATIONS OCEAN CONFERENCE 2022

- Recently, the **UN (United Nations) Ocean Conference 2022** was held to ensure global cooperation towards protection and sustenance of the **Ocean ecosystem** of the world.
- The conference was **co-hosted by the Governments of Kenya and Portugal**.
- **Minister of Earth Sciences** led the Indian delegation at UN Ocean Conference. India promised to provide **science and innovation-based solutions for the implementation of Goal 14** through partnerships and environmentally friendly.
- The UN Ocean conference 2022 is aligned to **SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) 14 'life below water'** and stresses on the critical need for scientific knowledge and marine technology to build ocean

resilience.

What are the Initiatives to Ensure Sustainable Ocean Ecosystem?

- **Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development:**
- The UN has proclaimed a Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030) to support efforts to **reverse the cycle of decline in ocean health and gather ocean stakeholders worldwide** behind a common framework.



World Oceans Day:

- 8th June is **World Oceans Day**, the United Nations day **for celebrating the role of the oceans in our everyday life** and inspiring action to protect the ocean and sustainably use marine resources.
- **Marine Protected Areas:**
- In general terms, a Marine Protected Area (MPA) is a marine area that provides protection for all or part of the natural resources it contains.

GloLitter Partnerships Project:

- It is launched by the **International Maritime Organization (IMO)** and the **Food and Agriculture Organization** of the UNs (FAO) and initial funding from the Government of Norway. It is aimed to prevent and reduce marine plastic litter from shipping and fisheries.
- **India- Norway Ocean Dialogue:** In 2019, the Indian and Norwegian governments **agreed to work more closely on oceans by signing a MoU** and establishing the India-Norway Ocean Dialogue.
- **India's Deep Ocean Mission:** It is a mission mode project to support the Blue Economy Initiatives of the Government of India.
- **India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI):** It is an **open, non-treaty based initiative for countries to work together for cooperative and collaborative solutions** to common challenges in the region.

#INDIA & TAJIKISTAN BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP

- India's Minister for Science and Technology and Earth Sciences held a bilateral meeting with the Minister for Energy and Water resources of Republic of Tajikistan.
- Issues like **water resources research** especially **Glacier monitoring, Non-conventional Energy, Peaceful Use of Space Technology and Disaster Management** were discussed to support **global water action and climate resistance on Water for Sustainable Development**.

Cooperation in International Forums:

- In 2020, Tajikistan extended support for India's candidature for a non-permanent seat in United Nation Security Council for the term 2021-22.
- Tajikistan strongly supported (SCO) **Member status for India**.
- India has consistently supported Tajikistan's proposals at the **United Nations on water related issues**.
- India also supported Tajikistan's candidature to United Nations' Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and accession to WTO in March 2013.
- Since the establishment of the Indian embassy in Dushanbe in 1994, Tajikistan has been a beneficiary of the **Indian Technical & Economic Cooperation Programme (ITEC)**.
- In 2019, under India-Central Asia Dialogue Process, some Tajik diplomats were trained at Foreign Service Institute, Delhi.

Recent Development between India and Central Asia Relations:

- India's **USD 1 billion Line of Credit for projects in Central Asia**, connectivity endeavours by using the **Chabahar Port** for enhancing trade between the two sides, and the **Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline**.
- **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)** in conjunction with **Ashgabat Agreement on International Transport and Transit Corridor (ITTC)** is enhancing connectivity between India and the Central Asian countries.
- The **Foreign ministers of the five Central Asian nations visited New Delhi in December 2021 to attend the third India-Central Asia Dialogue**
- Dealing with Covid-19, while the **Central Asian countries appreciated India's assistance in supply of Covid-19 vaccines and essential medicines** during their early stage of the pandemic.
- In January, 2022 the **Prime Minister of India hosted the first India-Central Asia Summit in virtual format**.

India-Central Asia Relations

- India has had relations with Central Asia since the 3rd century B.C as the nations fell on route to the **Legendary Silk Route**.
- **Buddhism** found inroads in several of Central Asian cities such as **Merv, Khalachayan, Tirmiz and Bokhara** etc in the form of **Stupas and Monasteries**.
- Central Asia serves as a **land bridge between Asia and Europe**, making it **geopolitically axial for India**.
- The region is **rich in natural resources** such as petroleum, natural gas, antimony, aluminium, gold, silver, coal and uranium which can be best utilised by Indian energy requirements.
- Central Asian Regions are fast getting linked to the global market for production, supplies of raw materials and services.
- They are also increasingly getting integrated into the **East-West Trans-Eurasian transit economic corridors**.

India-Central Asia Dialogue:

- It is a ministerial-level dialogue between India and the Central Asian countries **namely** Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.
- All five nations became independent states after the collapse of the USSR in 1991, post-Cold war.

#WHAT IS CAATSA SANCTIONS?

- Recently, the United States (US) House of Representatives has approved an amendment to the **National Defence Authorization Act (NDAA)**, proposing India-specific waiver under the **Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)**.
- It will **allow India to freely purchase Russia's S-400 missile system** without the fear of American sanctions.
- The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) is legislation that Congress passes each year to make changes to the policies and organization of United States defense agencies and provide guidance on how military funding can be spent.

What is the Proposed Amendment?

- The amendment urges the US administration to use its authority to provide India with a **Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) waiver to help deter aggressors like China**.
- The legislation says that the United States-India Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (ICET) is a welcome and essential step to developing closer partnerships between governments, academia, and industry in the two countries to address the latest advances in artificial intelligence, quantum computing, biotechnology, semiconductor manufacturing.

What is CAATSA?

- **US Law:** CAATSA is a law that **came into effect in the US in 2017**, and was **meant to punish countries having deep engagements with Russia, North Korea, and Iran** using economic sanctions.
- **Title II of the Act primarily deals with sanctions on Russian interests** such as its oil and gas industry, defence and security sector, and financial institutions, in the backdrop of its **military intervention in Ukraine** and its alleged meddling in the 2016 US Presidential elections.
- Section 231 of the Act **empowers the US President to impose at least five of the 12 listed sanctions** — enumerated in Section 235 of the Act — on persons engaged in a "significant transaction" with Russian defence and intelligence sectors.
- As part of Section 231 of the Act, the US State Department has notified 39 Russian entities, dealings with which could make third parties liable to sanctions.

What is Russia's S-400 Missile System?

- It is a mobile, **Surface-to-Air Missile system (SAM)** designed by Russia.
- It is the **most dangerous operationally deployed Modern Long-Range SAM (MLR SAM)** in the world, considered much ahead of the **US-developed Terminal High Altitude Area Defence system (THAAD)**.
- It integrates multifunction radar, autonomous detection and targeting systems, anti-aircraft missile systems, launchers, and command and control centre.
- It is **capable of firing three types of missiles** to create a layered defence.
- The system can engage all types of aerial targets including aircraft, **unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) and ballistic and cruise missiles** within the range of 400km, at an altitude of up to 30km.
- The system can track 100 airborne targets and engage six of them simultaneously.

What are the implications of CAATSA Waiver on India-US Relations?

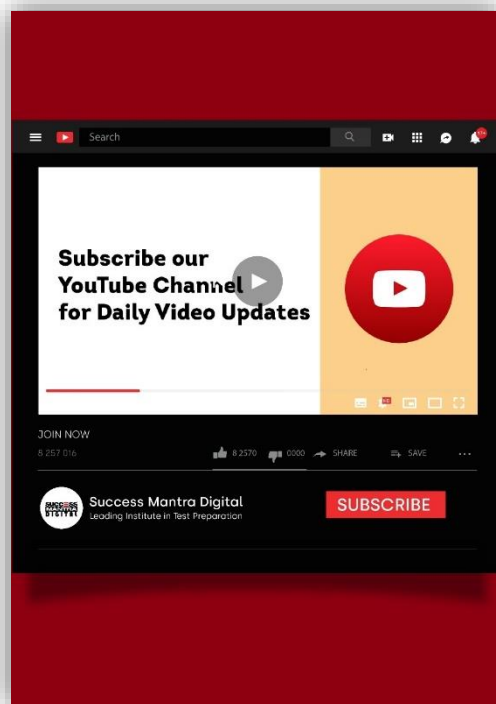
- The NDAA amendment also urged the US to take more steps **to assist India's pivot away from its reliance on Russia-made arms**.
- The amendment is **in sync with the tenor of the recent bilateral strategic relations**.
- The watershed year was 2008 and since then cumulative US defence contracts with India add up to at least USD 20 billion. It was just USD 500 million in the period prior to 2008.
- Furthermore, in 2016, the **US recognised India as a major defence partner**. Strategic ties have also been strengthened through groupings such as **Quad** and now **I2U2**.

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