SAIDAI DURAISAMY'S

MANIDHANAEYAM FREE IAS ACADEMY

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"Nothing is better than a life dedicated to people's service"
"To be able to serve without expecting anything in return, is the beauty of humanity"

UPSC CSE - 2025

CURRENT AFFAIRS

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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MANIDHANAEYAM FREE IAS ACADEMY

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
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North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

GS Paper 2 – International Relations | Bilateral & Multilateral Groupings | International Institutions

What is NATO?

The **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)** is a **military alliance** established by the **North Atlantic Treaty (Washington Treaty) on 4 April 1949,** primarily to ensure collective security against the Soviet threat in the post-World War II era.

- **Members: 30 (as of July 2022)**
- **Headquarters: Brussels, Belgium**
- **Allied Command Operations HQ: Mons, Belgium**

Member Expansion Timeline (Highlights):

Founding Members (1949): US, UK, France, Canada, Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Portugal, Italy, Denmark, Norway, Iceland

- **Cold War Additions:** Greece & Turkey (1952), West Germany (1955), Spain (1982)
- **Post-Cold War Expansions:** 1999 onwards: Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Baltic States, Balkans, and more
- **Latest:** North Macedonia (2020)
- **Aspirants:** Finland and Sweden (expressed interest in 2022)

Objectives of NATO:

1. Political:

- Promote democratic values
- Foster consultations and cooperation on defence and security matters
- Conflict prevention through trust-building

2. Military:

- Peaceful resolution of disputes
- Crisis management through collective defense or under UN mandates
- **Article 5** (Collective Defense): Invoked only once—**post-9/11 attacks in 2001**

How NATO Functions?

- **Integrated Military Command:** Few exclusive assets; most military forces remain under national command unless assigned
- **Consensus-Based Decisions:** All 30 members must unanimously agree
- **Core Values:** Democracy, rule of law, and individual liberty
- **Funding:** Primarily by members; the **US contributes ~75%** of NATO's budget
- **Limitations:** No mandate to intervene in civil wars or internal coups of member states

Historical Context & Origin:

- **Post-WWII Vacuum:** Western Europe was militarily weak and economically devastated
- **Marshall Plan (1948):** US economic aid conditioned on regional cooperation
- **Western European Union (Brussels Treaty, 1948):** Initial military pact
- **Trigger:** Communist coup in Czechoslovakia (1948) prompted broader multilateral defense thinking
- **Cold War Rivalry:** NATO was the Western bloc's response to rising Soviet influence
- **Warsaw Pact (1955):** USSR's counter-alliance with Eastern Bloc nations
- **Dissolution:** Warsaw Pact dissolved in 1991 with the end of the Cold War

Alliances & Global Reach of NATO

- **Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC):**
  ➢ 50-nation forum; political and security dialogue
  ➢ Builds on the **Partnership for Peace (PfP)**
- **Mediterranean Dialogue:**
  ➢ Includes Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia
  ➢ Enhances regional cooperation and security
- **Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI):**
  ➢ Engages Middle Eastern countries like Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, UAE
  ➢ Promotes long-term security cooperation

Contemporary Relevance:

- **Russia-Ukraine Conflict (2022):** Reinforced NATO's deterrent role

- **Eastern Flank Reinforcements:** Enhanced presence in Baltic States and Poland
- **China's Rise:** Shift toward broader Indo-Pacific engagement
- **Cybersecurity & Hybrid Warfare:** New age security priorities for NATO

Model UPSC Mains Question

Q "In the changing global security architecture, NATO continues to be a cornerstone of transatlantic and international defense cooperation. Discuss the evolution of NATO, its present strategic relevance, and challenges faced in maintaining unity among its member states." (250 words)

Warsaw Pact: Historical Context and Significance

GS Paper 2 – International Relations | Cold War Politics | International Groupings

Background:

The **Warsaw Pact**, formally known as the *Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance*, was signed on **14 May 1955** in **Warsaw, Poland**, between the **Soviet Union** and seven Eastern Bloc socialist republics of Central and Eastern Europe.

This development followed closely on the heels of **West Germany's admission into NATO** (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), which the Soviet Union perceived as a direct military threat and a breach of previous agreements regarding Germany's neutral status post-World War II.

Purpose of the Pact:

- The Warsaw Pact was a **mutual defense alliance**, wherein member states pledged to defend one another in case of external aggression.
- It served as the **Soviet Union's counterbalance to NATO**, effectively formalizing the division of Europe into two hostile blocs during the **Cold War**.
- The pact provided the USSR with a mechanism to maintain **military control** over Eastern Europe.

Member Countries:

- **Original Signatories (1955):** Soviet Union, Albania (withdrew in 1968), Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria.

Functioning & Military Control:

- While it was nominally based on equal cooperation, in practice, the **Soviet Union dominated the alliance**.
- It was used to **suppress uprisings** and maintain Communist rule, notably:
  - ➤ **Hungarian Revolution (1956)**
  - ➤ **Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia (1968)**

Dissolution:

- The Warsaw Pact lost relevance with the **fall of communist regimes** in Eastern Europe during 1989–1991.
- It was **officially dissolved in July 1991**, months before the collapse of the Soviet Union, **signalling the end of the Cold War bipolar order**.

Significance in Global Politics:

- Represented the **militarization of ideological rivalry** between the Western bloc (led by the US) and the Eastern bloc (led by the USSR).
- Served as a tool for the USSR to enforce the **"Brezhnev Doctrine"**, justifying intervention in allied socialist states to preserve communist rule.
- Its dissolution paved the way for former members to eventually **join NATO and the European Union**, significantly altering the geopolitical landscape of Europe.

Russia–Ukraine Conflict: Unravelling a Post-Cold War Faultline

GS Paper 2 – International Relations | Bilateral & Regional Conflicts | Global Security

Background:

Ukraine and Russia, both part of the erstwhile **Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)**, have long-standing cultural, linguistic, and economic ties. Following the **dissolution of the USSR in 1991**, Ukraine emerged as an independent state, the second-most powerful after Russia in terms of military and industrial strength.

The early decades post-independence saw cooperative relations. However, tensions grew after **Ukraine's westward tilt**, particularly toward the **European Union (EU)** and **NATO**, sparking strategic anxieties in Russia.

What Triggered the Conflict?

- **Euromaidan Protests (2013–14):**
  - ➤ Ukrainians protested against President **Viktor Yanukovych** for abandoning an association agreement with the EU in favor of joining a Russian-led economic bloc. The protests, known as **Euromaidan**, resulted in Yanukovych's ousting.

- **Annexation of Crimea (2014):**
  - ➤ In response, Russia annexed **Crimea**, citing protection of ethnic Russians and historical claims. The annexation violated Ukraine's sovereignty and drew strong international criticism.

- **Donbas Unrest:**
  - ➤ Pro-Russian separatist movements erupted in Eastern Ukraine's **Donetsk and Luhansk** regions, leading to a prolonged armed conflict.

2022 Invasion and Renewed Escalation:

In February 2022, Russia launched a full-scale military invasion of Ukraine under the pretext of:

- **"Demilitarizing and denazifying"** Ukraine.
- Preventing NATO's eastward expansion.
- Protecting Russian-speaking populations in Eastern Ukraine.

The invasion drew **global condemnation**, prompted economic sanctions, and sparked a humanitarian crisis.

Key Causes of the Conflict:

NATO Expansion:

- Russia opposes NATO's inclusion of post-Soviet states like Ukraine and Georgia, fearing encirclement.
- The West insists on NATO's "open-door policy" for all sovereign states.

Geostrategic Buffer:

- Ukraine serves as a **buffer state** between Russia and Western Europe. Its western alignment threatens Russia's traditional sphere of influence.

Energy and Trade Corridors:

- Ukraine is central to pipelines and Black Sea trade routes. Control over Crimea and Donbas enhances Russia's leverage.

Naval Strategy:

- Russia's **naval mobility is limited** by NATO-controlled straits. Crimea's **Sevastopol port** is crucial for Black Sea and Mediterranean access.

Responses from Stakeholders:

Russia's Demands:

- Ban on NATO expansion to Ukraine and Georgia.
- Pullback of NATO forces to pre-1997 levels.
- End to military cooperation between NATO and post-Soviet countries.

Western Response:

- Continued support for Ukraine through **military aid, economic assistance, and intelligence sharing.**
- Economic sanctions on Russia targeting energy exports, financial systems, and defense industries.

Possible Resolution: Minsk Agreements

Signed in 2014 and 2015, the **Minsk Agreements** sought to end hostilities in Eastern Ukraine through:

- Ceasefire, prisoner swaps, and withdrawal of heavy weaponry.
- Granting autonomy to Donbas within Ukraine's constitutional framework. However, **lack of trust and differing interpretations** led to the collapse of implementation.

Conclusion:

The Russia–Ukraine conflict marks a critical rupture in post-Cold War European security architecture. It reflects a clash of sovereign aspirations and strategic insecurities, with global ramifications including:

- **Energy supply disruptions**
- **Inflationary pressures**
- **Food security crisis**, especially in the Global South.

Moving forward, a balanced diplomatic approach, credible international mediation, and reform of global security institutions are essential to de-escalate tensions and ensure peace.

Israel-Palestine Conflict

Introduction:

The Israel-Palestine conflict is one of the most enduring and complex geopolitical disputes in modern history. Rooted in **territorial claims, religious significance, and identity politics**, the conflict has implications not only for the Middle East but also for global diplomacy, security, and human rights.

Historical Background:

- **Rise of Zionism (Late 19th Century):** Zionism emerged as a nationalist movement advocating a Jewish homeland in Palestine, spurred by European anti-Semitism and nationalist ideologies.

- **British Mandate and Balfour Declaration (1917):** The British supported the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine, aggravating tensions between Jews and Arabs.

- **UN Partition Plan (1947):** Proposed division of Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states with Jerusalem under international administration. Accepted by Jews, rejected by Arabs.

- **Creation of Israel (1948):** Led to the **First Arab-Israeli War** and the displacement of over 700,000 Palestinians—termed the **Nakba**.

Major Phases of the Conflict:

Period	Key Events
1948–1973	Wars with Arab states, Israeli occupation of West Bank, Gaza, Golan Heights (Six-Day War, 1967); Yom Kippur War (1973).
1987–1993	First Intifada (Palestinian uprising), formation of Hamas (1987).
1993–2000	**Oslo Accords** – Mutual recognition, limited Palestinian autonomy.
2000–2005	**Second Intifada**, heightened violence and mistrust.
2006–2021	Hamas' takeover of Gaza, repeated Israel-Gaza wars (e.g., 2008, 2012, 2014, 2021).
2023 Onwards	**Hamas attacks**, followed by Israeli military response under **Operation Iron Swords**.

Core Issues:

- **Territorial Dispute:** Competing claims over West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem.

- **Jerusalem's Status**: Sacred to Jews, Christians, and Muslims; both sides claim it as their capital.

- **Refugee Problem**: Over 5 million Palestinian refugees demand the **right of return** to their ancestral homes.

- **Security Concerns**: Israel faces rocket attacks from Gaza; Palestinians suffer from occupation and blockade.

- **Settlement Expansion**: Israeli settlements in the West Bank are seen as illegal by international law but continue to grow.

- **Political Fragmentation**: Deep divisions between **Hamas (Gaza)** and **Fatah (West Bank)** weakens the Palestinian position.

Recent Developments:

- **2023 Hamas Attack**: Thousands of rockets fired into Israel; civilian hostages taken.

- **Israel's Response**: Airstrikes, blockade, and ground invasion under **Operation Iron Swords**.

- **International Impact**: Rising civilian casualties; fears of regional escalation involving Hezbollah and Iran.

India's Position:

Dimension	Explanation
Historic Support for Palestine	Based on Gandhian ideals, non-alignment, and solidarity with Arab countries.
Recognition of Israel (1992)	Full diplomatic relations under PM Narasimha Rao; growing strategic ties in defence, agriculture, and technology.
Balanced Diplomacy	India supports the **two-state solution**, maintains ties with both sides, and continues humanitarian assistance to Palestine.

UN Voting Record	India has supported Palestinian statehood but also voted against unilateral moves on Jerusalem in 2017.

Implications for India:

- **Energy Security**: Regional instability can disrupt oil imports and spike prices.
- **Defence Deals**: Israel is a key supplier of advanced military technologies to India.
- **Diaspora and Diplomacy**: A balanced stance maintains harmony with both West Asian powers and the domestic population.
- **Geopolitical Strategy**: Conflicts threaten India's strategic interests like the **IMEC Corridor** and broader regional connectivity.

Challenges to Peace:

- Historical and religious disputes
- Mutual mistrust and security concerns
- Illegal settlements and refugee crisis
- Political divisions within both societies
- Lack of enforcement mechanisms in peace deals
- External interference by regional and global powers

Possible Solutions:

Model	Explanation
Two-State Solution	Creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel with agreed borders.
One-State Solution	A single state with equal rights for Jews and Palestinians (less popular).
Joint Capital	Jerusalem as a shared or internationally governed capital.
Land Swaps	Based on present realities, with mutual agreement.
Refugee Settlement	Right of return or compensation.
Disarmament and Confidence-Building	Security guarantees for both parties.
International Mediation	Stronger UN or multilateral engagement, with involvement of regional powers.

Conclusion:

The Israel-Palestine conflict is a complex interplay of history, identity, and geopolitics. While the two-state solution remains the most viable long-term resolution, it requires strong political will, mutual trust, and sustained international engagement. For India, maintaining a balanced approach aligns with its core foreign policy values and national interests.

Israel-Iran Conflict

(Topic for GS Paper 2 – International Relations)

Introduction:

The Israel-Iran conflict is a **strategic rivalry** rooted in **ideological differences, regional influence, nuclear ambitions**, and **security concerns**. Though not a declared war, it is often described as a **"shadow war"** involving cyber-attacks, assassinations, proxy conflicts, and covert operations across the Middle East.

Background:

- **Ideological Divide:** Iran is a Shia Islamic theocracy that opposes the legitimacy of Israel, a Jewish state, and supports anti-Israel groups.

- **Iran's Position:** Iran **does not recognize Israel**, frequently calls for its elimination, and backs armed groups like **Hezbollah (Lebanon)** and **Hamas (Gaza)**.

- **Israel's Position:** Israel considers Iran its **biggest existential threat**, mainly due to Iran's **nuclear program** and support for **militant proxies** near its borders.

Major Flashpoints:

- **Nuclear Program:**

  ➢ Iran's uranium enrichment has raised concerns about **nuclear weapons development**.

  ➢ Israel has opposed the **JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action)**, fearing it legitimizes Iran's nuclear capabilities.

  ➢ Israel has conducted **covert operations** like the assassination of Iranian nuclear scientists and cyber-attacks (e.g., **Stuxnet virus**).

- **Proxy Warfare:**

  ➢ **Hezbollah (Lebanon):** Iran's most significant proxy, with thousands of rockets aimed at Israel.

- ➢ **Hamas and Islamic Jihad (Gaza):** Receive Iranian financial and military support.
- ➢ **Syrian Civil War:** Iran's presence in Syria has led to **Israeli airstrikes** on Iranian bases and weapons transfers.
- ● **Shadow War:**
  - ➢ Includes **cyber warfare**, **drone strikes**, **sabotage** of ships and infrastructure, and **espionage**.
  - ➢ Israel targets **Iranian arms convoys** in Syria, while Iran responds through asymmetric means.

Recent Developments (As of 2023–2025):

- ● **Israel's "Octagon" Strategy:**
  - ➢ Aimed at countering Iran's influence in the region through **pre-emptive strikes** and diplomatic isolation.
- ● **April 2024 Attack:**
  - ➢ Iran launched hundreds of drones and missiles at Israel in retaliation for the alleged Israeli strike on Iran's consulate in Damascus.
  - ➢ Israel, with help from the **US, UK, France, and Jordan**, intercepted most of the projectiles.
  - ➢ Escalation risked triggering **open war** in the region.
- ● **Abraham Accords Impact:**
  - ➢ Israel's normalization with Gulf Arab states (UAE, Bahrain, etc.) seen as a counter to **Iranian influence**.

Implications for the Region:

Dimension	Impact
Regional Stability	Risk of full-scale war; destabilization of Lebanon, Syria, Iraq.
Oil Prices	Threats to Strait of Hormuz could spike oil prices globally.
US Involvement	US is committed to Israeli security; risks being drawn into direct conflict.
Arab States	Divided between anti-Iran stance and preventing regional war.

India's Stakes:

- ● **Energy Security** – India imports oil from Gulf countries; any disruption impacts the economy.

- **Diaspora Safety** – Millions of Indians reside in West Asia, especially in the Gulf.
- **Strategic Interests** – Balancing ties with Israel (defence) and Iran (Chabahar port, connectivity to Central Asia).
- **IMEC Corridor Risk** – India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor could be affected by conflict.

Conclusion:

The Israel-Iran conflict is a high-stakes geopolitical rivalry with **global ramifications**. While a **direct war has been avoided so far**, the **risk of escalation remains significant**, especially due to proxy actors and nuclear ambitions. **De-escalation, regional diplomacy**, and **revival of the nuclear deal** may be the only way forward to ensure long-term stability.

India–Canada Issue

Introduction:

India and Canada have traditionally shared cordial relations rooted in Commonwealth ties, democratic values, education exchanges, and economic cooperation. However, recent years have seen a **diplomatic downturn**, particularly over issues of **Khalistani separatism**, interference in internal matters, and **mutual distrust in security and intelligence cooperation**.

Background of India–Canada Relations:

- **Diplomatic Ties**: Established in 1947; both countries are members of the Commonwealth, G20, and support a rules-based international order.
- **Diaspora**: Over 1.8 million Indian-origin people in Canada, one of the largest overseas Indian communities.
- **Trade**: Bilateral trade is approx. USD 9 billion (2022-23); Canada is a source of potash, pulses, and energy.
- **Education**: Canada is among the top destinations for Indian students (over 300,000 Indian students enrolled in 2023).

Recent Flashpoint: Khalistan Issue (2023–2024)

Trigger Event (June 2023):

- **Hardeep Singh Nijjar**, a pro-Khalistan leader and Canadian citizen, was shot dead in British Columbia.

- **Canada's Allegation (September 2023):** Prime Minister Justin Trudeau accused Indian agents of being involved in Nijjar's killing.
- **India's Response**: Strongly rejected the allegation as **absurd and motivated**, calling it interference in its sovereignty.

Key Issues in India–Canada Tensions:

Issue	Explanation
Khalistani Activities	Canada has been accused by India of allowing separatist elements to operate freely under the guise of free speech.
Political Patronage	Canadian politicians are seen as pandering to the Khalistani lobby for electoral gains, especially in regions with large Sikh populations.
Diplomatic Retaliation	Following the allegations, both countries **expelled senior diplomats** and restricted the presence of each other's intelligence officials.
Visa Disruption	India temporarily suspended visa services to Canadian citizens, citing security threats at its missions.
Lack of Mutual Legal Cooperation	Canada has been reluctant to act on India's extradition requests for individuals wanted on terror charges.

India's Stand:

- India asserts that **Khalistan is a threat to national unity and sovereignty**.
- It has demanded **credible action** from Canada against individuals and organisations supporting terrorism under the pretext of political activism.
- India emphasizes **non-interference** in domestic affairs, citing **Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (1961).**

Canada's Position:

- Cites the **right to free speech** and political expression under its domestic law.
- Seeks a transparent investigation into the Nijjar killing.
- Claims it has **credible intelligence** linking Indian officials, reportedly shared with Five Eyes intelligence alliance (US, UK, Australia, NZ).

Geopolitical and Strategic Implications:

- **Strained Diplomatic Channels**: High-level engagements, trade negotiations (like CEPA), and security dialogue are stalled.

- **Diaspora Impact**: Rising tensions may polarize the Indian diaspora and create challenges for community integration.
- **International Image**: Allegations impact India's reputation in the West, though major allies like the US and UK have taken neutral or supportive stances toward India.
- **China's Leverage**: A rift between India and Western democracies could be exploited by China, especially in Indo-Pacific diplomacy.

India's Strategic Approach:

- **Measured Diplomacy**: Strong denial of allegations, but avoiding complete breakdown of relations.
- **Bilateral Isolation**: Treating this as a **bilateral dispute**, not allowing it to spill into multilateral forums.
- **Global Engagement**: Leveraging strong ties with other Western nations (e.g., Quad, G20 presidency) to maintain diplomatic capital.

Way Forward:

Suggestion	Explanation
Intelligence Cooperation	Revive mutual legal assistance mechanisms and frameworks for counterterrorism.
Diaspora Engagement	Promote responsible diaspora behavior and discourage extremism abroad.
Political Restraint	Both governments must prevent the issue from becoming hostage to domestic politics.
Track II Diplomacy	Use academic, business, and civil society dialogue to rebuild trust.

Conclusion:

The India–Canada diplomatic rift underscores the **complexities of diaspora politics, sovereignty, and national security**. A calibrated and principled approach, focusing on **mutual respect, non-interference, and rule of law**, is essential to prevent long-term damage to a historically positive relationship.

India and Its Diaspora

Definition:

The Indian diaspora refers to **people of Indian origin (PIOs)** and **non-resident Indians (NRIs)** living outside India, currently numbering over **32 million**, spread across **200+ countries**.

Importance of the Diaspora for India:

Sector	Contributions
Economic	Large remittances (USD 125 billion in 2023 – highest globally), investments, and business linkages.
Soft Power	Promotes Indian culture, yoga, Ayurveda, cuisine, cinema, and festivals.
Strategic	Can shape public opinion and influence policymaking in host countries (e.g., US, UK, Canada).
Technology and Innovation	Key contributors to Silicon Valley, global academia, and research institutions.

Challenges:

- **Rise in diaspora-driven extremism** (e.g., Khalistani separatism in Canada/UK).

- **Discrimination and xenophobia in host countries.**

- **Consular and legal protection during crises** (e.g., war in Ukraine, COVID evacuations).

- **Dual loyalty and political interference issues.**

Example:

- **India–Canada Conflict**: Highlights the tension between diaspora freedom of expression and Indian concerns about **extremist separatism**.

India's Bilateral Relations:

Definition:

- Bilateral relations refer to **diplomatic, economic, strategic, and cultural engagement between India and another country**.

Key Objectives of India's Bilateral Relations:

- Ensuring **strategic autonomy** and sovereignty.

- Securing **energy, defence, and technology partnerships**.

- Promoting **regional and global peace**.

- Leveraging **economic growth and market access**.
- Strengthening **diaspora welfare and influence**.

Key Features:

- **Multi-alignment**: India engages with multiple global powers (US, Russia, EU, Japan) based on interests, not ideology.
- **Issue-based alliances**: India joins hands where interests align (e.g., Indo-Pacific, climate change).
- **Balancing strategic autonomy and cooperation.**

Challenges in Bilateral Relations:

- Clashes over **human rights, separatism, and interference** in domestic affairs.
- Trade disputes and visa issues.
- Conflicting interests in third-party regions (e.g., Afghanistan, West Asia).

Example:

- **India–Canada Tensions (2023–24)**: Stemmed from Canada's handling of **Khalistani extremism** and public allegations against Indian agencies, leading to a diplomatic freeze.

Issues of Sovereignty and Terrorism:

Sovereignty:

Sovereignty is the **supreme authority** of a state to govern itself without external interference. It's a **core principle of international law** (UN Charter).

Terrorism:

Unlawful violence or threats targeting civilians or governments to achieve political, ideological, or religious goals.

When Sovereignty and Terrorism Collide:

- States may **harbor or ignore extremist elements** threatening another country's sovereignty.
- **Cross-border terrorism** and **non-state actors** challenge state security (e.g., Pakistan-based groups attacking India).
- Using **national security** as a justification for covert operations can lead to international backlash.

India's Challenges:

- **Pakistan-sponsored terrorism** in Jammu & Kashmir.

- **Khalistan separatism abroad** (Canada, UK).
- **Cyberterrorism and radicalisation** from global terror networks.
- Maintaining sovereignty while managing international criticism (e.g., actions in Kashmir, citizenship laws).

Example:

- **India–Canada case**: Trudeau's claim of Indian involvement in the killing of a Canadian citizen challenges India's sovereignty. From India's view, Canada's sheltering of Khalistani elements undermines its national security.

Conclusion:

- The **diaspora** can be both an asset and a **diplomatic challenge**.
- **Bilateral relations** are increasingly shaped by **internal politics and transnational threats.**
- **Sovereignty and counter-terrorism** must be balanced with international law and diplomacy.

President Seeks Supreme Court's Advisory Opinion on Article 142 Powers

Background:

President Droupadi Murmu has invoked **Article 143(1)** of the Indian Constitution to seek the Supreme Court's advisory opinion on whether **timelines can be mandated for the President and Governors to act on Bills passed by state legislatures**.

This move follows a **Supreme Court ruling on April 8, 2025,** where a two-judge bench ruled that the President must act on Bills reserved for her consideration within **three months.** This judgment aimed to prevent delays in the legislative process caused by the President or Governors withholding assent.

Supreme Court's Advisory Jurisdiction (Article 143)

- Article 143 allows the President to seek the Supreme Court's opinion on questions of law or fact of public importance.
- The question may be hypothetical or based on an actual legal issue that has arisen or is likely to arise.
- The Court's opinion under this Article is **advisory and non-binding**.

- This power is an extension of a provision from the **Government of India Act, 1935**.
- Historically, the President has sought the Court's opinion under Article 143 on at least 15 occasions since 1950.

Supreme Court's Discretion in Responding:

- The Supreme Court's response to such references is **discretionary**.
- The word "may" in Article 143(1) implies the Court can **decline to give an opinion**.
- The Court has previously declined references when:
  - The issue was already sub judice (under judicial consideration), as in the **1993 Ram Janmabhoomi–Babri Masjid case**.
  - The matter had already been legislated and challenged in courts, as in the **1982 Jammu & Kashmir Resettlement Law** case.
  - The Court does not act as a substitute for judicial review through advisory opinions.

Limits of Presidential Reference:

- The President cannot use Article 143 as a tool to **overturn or review existing Supreme Court judgments**.
- The **1991 Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal opinion** clarified that once the SC has given a ruling, it cannot be reopened via a presidential reference.
- Advisory jurisdiction is not an appeal mechanism.
- Legal remedies available to the government in case of unfavourable judgments include:
  - Filing a review petition.
  - Filing a **curative petition**, an extraordinary remedy.
- A larger Constitution Bench may eventually reconsider the issue if warranted.

Scope of the Current Presidential Reference:

The current reference includes **14 questions of law**, including:

- The power and limits of the Supreme Court under **Article 142** ("complete justice").

- Whether the Court must determine if a case involves a **"substantial question of law"** or constitutional interpretation before a smaller Bench can decide it (challenging the Bench composition for important cases).
- The **jurisdictional limits of courts in Centre-State disputes** under **Article 131.**
- The advisory opinion extends beyond the April 8 ruling to broader constitutional questions about **judicial powers, timelines, and federal relations**.

Context: Centre-State Relations and Governor's Role:

- The issue stems from power tussles between the **Central government and Opposition-ruled States.**
- Governors, appointed by the Centre, have allegedly delayed assent to Bills passed by state legislatures.
- For example, Tamil Nadu's Governor withheld assent on 10 Bills, referring them to the President.
- The April 8 ruling was seen as an attempt by the SC to **limit such executive stalling** and ensure democratic legislative processes.

Article 142 Powers:

- Article 142 empowers the Supreme Court to pass any decree or order to do "complete justice" in any case before it.
- The presidential reference asks for clarity on the **scope and limits** of this power.
- This is important because the April 8 judgment used Article 142 to set timelines on Presidential action — a novel use of the Court's broad discretionary powers.

Implications for Governance and Constitutional Law:

- The case raises important questions about the balance of power between **the judiciary, the executive (President and Governors), and the legislature.**
- It tests the limits of **judicial activism and judicial restraint**.
- It also touches upon **federalism** — how much interference the Centre and courts should have in State legislative processes.

- The Court's ruling and advisory opinion could redefine the **role of Governors and the President** in the legislative process, especially regarding assent to Bills.

Conclusion:

The President's invocation of the Supreme Court's advisory jurisdiction on this issue highlights the ongoing constitutional debate over **separation of powers, federalism, and judicial authority** in India. The advisory opinion will clarify the legal and constitutional boundaries of the President's and Governor's roles in legislative assent and the Supreme Court's use of Article 142 powers to enforce timelines.

Uniform Civil Code (UCC)

Meaning of Uniform Civil Code (UCC):

A **Uniform Civil Code** refers to a common set of laws governing personal matters such as **marriage, divorce, inheritance, adoption, and custody** that applies equally to all citizens, irrespective of religion, caste, or community. In India, the UCC aims to replace **religion-based personal laws** with a **single secular civil law** for all, promoting equality and justice.

Constitutional Provision:

- Article 44 of the Indian Constitution, part of the **Directive Principles of State Policy**, directs the State to **endeavour to secure a Uniform Civil Code** throughout India.

- However, Article 44 is **non-justiciable** (not enforceable by courts) and left to the discretion of the government.

Background:

- The demand for UCC dates back to **colonial India**, where personal laws were based on religious scriptures.

- The **Constituent Assembly debated** the UCC extensively; Dr. B.R. Ambedkar supported it, but due to strong opposition, it was included as a Directive Principle rather than a Fundamental Right.

- Post-independence, the **Hindu Code Bills (1955-56)** codified Hindu personal laws.

- Judicial interventions in cases like **Shah Bano (1985)** and **Shayara Bano (2017)** reignited calls for a UCC.

Present Status:

- India currently has **multiple personal laws** based on religion:
  - ➤ **Hindu Personal Laws** (also covering Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists)
  - ➤ **Muslim Personal Law** (uncodified but based on religious texts)
  - ➤ **Christian Personal Laws**
  - ➤ **Special Marriage Act, 1954** (secular law applicable across religions for inter-faith marriages)
  - ➤ **Goa and Uttarakhand** are among the few states with a form of UCC.
  - ➤ States like Gujarat and Assam are exploring UCC implementation.

Arguments in Favor of UCC:

- **Constitutional Mandate:** Article 44 directs the State to ensure a UCC, making it a constitutional aspiration.

- **Promotes Equality and Justice:** UCC ensures **equal rights**, especially for women, by removing discriminatory practices in personal laws (e.g., inheritance, divorce).

- **Strengthens National Integration:** A single law for all citizens fosters unity, reducing divisions based on religion.

- **Upholds Secularism:** Separating religion from civil law aligns with the secular vision of the Constitution.

- **Simplifies Legal System:** Uniform laws reduce judicial backlog caused by multiple personal laws.

- **Social Reform:** Helps eliminate outdated patriarchal norms embedded in personal laws.

Arguments Against UCC:

- **Violation of Religious Freedom:** UCC may infringe on the right to religious freedom guaranteed by **Article 25** and **Article 29**, allowing communities to practice their customs.

- **Threat to Cultural Diversity:** India's pluralism and diverse traditions risk being undermined by one uniform law.

- **Potential for Political Misuse:** The UCC debate is often politicized, potentially marginalizing minorities and inciting communal tensions.

- **Legal and Political Challenges:** Enacting UCC requires consensus among diverse states and communities, and the subject falls under the **concurrent list**, raising federal concerns.

Landmark Supreme Court Judgments:

- **Shah Bano (1985):** Emphasized the need for UCC to ensure women's rights.
- **Sarla Mudgal (1995):** Highlighted misuse of personal laws and the need for clarity.
- **John Vallamattom (2003):** Called for equality in personal laws.
- **Shayara Bano (2017):** Declared instant triple talaq unconstitutional.

Way Forward:

- **Gradual Reform:** Instead of abrupt imposition, personal laws should be gradually reformed to eliminate discriminatory provisions.
- **Inclusive Consultation:** Broad-based dialogue with all religious communities to address concerns and ensure acceptance.
- **Focus on Gender Justice:** Prioritize women's rights in any reform or implementation process.
- **State-Level Initiatives:** Encourage states to pilot UCC-like reforms (e.g., Goa, Uttarakhand) before nationwide adoption.
- **Legal Awareness:** Promote constitutional literacy and gender equality awareness to build societal support.

Conclusion:

The **Uniform Civil Code** is a complex yet important issue balancing **constitutional values of equality and secularism** with **India's rich diversity and religious freedoms**. A **balanced, consultative, and phased approach** is essential for its successful adoption, ensuring justice without alienating communities.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Definition:

Artificial Intelligence refers to the simulation of human intelligence in machines that are programmed to think, learn, and perform tasks requiring human-like cognition such as reasoning, problem-solving, learning, perception, and decision-making.

AI systems process inputs with algorithms to produce intelligent outputs that mimic human behaviour.

Key technologies involved include:

- **Machine Learning (ML)** — Systems learn patterns from data without explicit programming.
- **Neural Networks** — Models inspired by the human brain structure.
- **Natural Language Processing (NLP)** — Enables understanding and generation of human language.
- **Computer Vision** — Allows machines to interpret visual data like images and videos.

Brief History of AI:

- **1950s**: Alan Turing proposed the Turing Test; John McCarthy coined the term "Artificial Intelligence."
- **1960s-70s**: Early AI focused on rule-based systems and expert systems.
- **1980s**: Shift to machine learning with algorithms like decision trees and neural networks.
- **1990s-2000s**: Growth in neural networks and deep learning.
- **21st Century**: AI resurgence due to big data, improved computing power, and algorithmic advances.
- **2010s onwards**: Breakthroughs in NLP, computer vision, reinforcement learning (e.g., ChatGPT, AlphaGo).

Types of Artificial Intelligence:

Based on Capabilities:

- **Narrow AI (Weak AI)**: Designed for specific tasks (e.g., Siri, spam filters).
- **General AI (Strong AI)**: Can perform any intellectual task a human can (still theoretical).
- **Super AI**: Surpasses human intelligence (speculative/future).

Based on Functionality:

- **Reactive Machines**: React to current inputs, no memory (e.g., IBM Deep Blue).
- **Limited Memory**: Use past data for decisions (e.g., self-driving cars).

- **Theory of Mind AI**: Understand emotions and thoughts (still in development).
- **Self-Aware AI**: Possesses consciousness (speculative).

How Does AI Work?

- Acquire and preprocess data.
- Extract relevant features.
- Select and train algorithms (ML, deep learning).
- Evaluate and optimize models.
- Deploy for decision-making or predictions.
- Continuously learn from new data.

Applications of AI:

Sector	AI Applications
E-commerce	Personalised recommendations, fraud detection, chatbots
Education	Adaptive learning, intelligent tutoring systems
Healthcare	Diagnosis, drug discovery, patient monitoring
Robotics	Automation, assembly, inspection
Social media	Content moderation, sentiment analysis
Agriculture	Precision farming, crop monitoring, yield prediction
Manufacturing	Quality control, predictive maintenance
Finance	Fraud detection, risk assessment, investment management
Transportation	Self-driving cars, traffic management
Environment	Climate modelling, pollution monitoring

Examples of AI in Daily Life:

- Chatbots (ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot)
- Virtual assistants (Siri, Alexa)
- Recommendation systems (Netflix, Google)
- Face recognition (FaceID, security cameras)
- Navigation apps (Google Maps, Waze)
- Social media algorithms (Instagram, Facebook)
- Ride-sharing apps (Uber, Ola)

Advantages of Artificial Intelligence:

- **Increases productivity:** Automates repetitive tasks.

- **Improves decision-making:** Data-driven insights and predictions.

- **Enhances accuracy and consistency:** Less prone to human error.

- **Enables new innovations:** AI in healthcare, education, and research.

- **Automates complex tasks:** Eases human workload in various sectors.

Disadvantages and Concerns:

- **Job displacement:** Automation may replace human jobs.

- **Ethical issues:** AI can perpetuate biases or be misused.

- **Privacy concerns:** Data dependency risks breaches.

- **Lack of human traits:** AI lacks creativity, empathy.

- **High cost:** Developing AI is expensive.

- **Transparency issues:** Complex AI decisions can be opaque.

AI in India:

- **National Strategy for AI (2018):** Vision for AI-driven growth.

- **Initiatives:** AI for All, RAISE, AI for Agriculture.

- **AI Centers of Excellence:** Promoting research.

- **Skill development:** Programs like FutureSkills PRIME.

- **National AI Portal (INDIAai):** Information and ecosystem building.

Key AI Policies and Initiatives in India:

- **National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence (NSAI) – 2018:**

  ➤ Launched by NITI Aayog, the NSAI outlines a comprehensive framework for leveraging AI to drive economic growth and social transformation. The strategy focuses on five core sectors: healthcare, agriculture, education, smart cities, and mobility. It emphasizes the development of AI technologies that are inclusive and accessible, aiming to benefit all segments of society

- **AI for All – Responsible AI Framework:**

  ➤ Building upon the NSAI, NITI Aayog introduced the "AI for All" initiative, which outlines principles for the responsible design, development, and deployment of AI technologies. This framework emphasizes transparency, accountability, and fairness, ensuring that AI

systems are developed in a manner that aligns with ethical standards and societal values

- **INDIAai Mission – 2024:**

  ➢ In March 2024, the Government of India approved the **INDIAai** Mission with a budget of ₹10,371.92 crore.

  ➢ Setting up a public AI compute infrastructure with over 10,000 GPUs.

  ➢ Developing indigenous foundational AI models.

  ➢ Providing funding for AI startups from ideation to commercialization.

  ➢ Promoting the development of safe, trusted, and ethical AI tools.

- **INDIAai Portal:**

  ➢ Managed by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), the INDIAai portal serves as a central hub for AI-related resources. It offers access to research papers, case studies, policy documents, and information on AI education and startups, fostering collaboration and knowledge-sharing within the AI community.

AI Skilling Initiatives:

Recognizing the importance of AI education, the Government of India has launched several skilling programs:

- **AI for All**: Aims to provide AI education to students and professionals across the country.

- **AI for Youth**: Focuses on training young individuals in AI technologies.

- **AI for Entrepreneurs**: Targets entrepreneurs to help them integrate AI into their businesses.

These initiatives are designed to build a skilled workforce capable of driving AI innovation and adoption across various sectors.

Public-Private Partnerships and Global Engagement:

India actively collaborates with international organizations and participates in global dialogues on AI governance. For instance, at the UN AI for Good Global Summit, India has advocated for inclusive and ethical AI policies that ensure equitable benefits for all nations.

Future Directions and Challenges:

As AI technologies continue to evolve, India faces several challenges:

- **Data Privacy and Security**: Ensuring that AI systems comply with data protection regulations and safeguard user privacy.

- **Bias and Fairness**: Addressing biases in AI algorithms to prevent discrimination and ensure fairness.
- **Infrastructure Development**: Building the necessary infrastructure to support large-scale AI deployments.
- **Ethical Considerations**: Developing frameworks to guide the ethical use of AI in various applications.

Global AI Governance and Ethical Framework:

- **AI Action Summit 2025** emphasized human-centered AI, transparency, and international cooperation.
- **Bletchley Park Declaration and Seoul Summit** focused on ethical AI development and global collaboration.
- Ongoing efforts promote AI that respects human rights, addresses inequality, and fosters trust.

Global Warming

Definition:

Global warming is the long-term rise in Earth's average temperature caused by increased greenhouse gases (GHGs) such as carbon dioxide (CO_2), methane (CH_4), and nitrous oxide (N_2O), mainly from human activities like burning fossil fuels and deforestation.

Mechanism of Global Warming:

- **Solar Radiation Absorption:** Earth's surface absorbs sunlight, warming the planet.
- **Infrared Radiation Emission:** Earth emits heat back into the atmosphere.
- **Greenhouse Gas Trapping:** GHGs trap this heat, preventing it from escaping to space.
- **Enhanced Greenhouse Effect:** Rising GHG levels increase heat retention, causing warming.
- **Feedback Loops:** Melting ice lowers Earth's reflectivity (albedo), absorbing more heat; warming oceans release CO_2, accelerating warming.

2024 Data Highlights:

- **Average global temperature:** 1.55°C above pre-industrial levels (highest ever).

- **Days exceeding 1.5°C threshold:** 173 in 2023; projected 200+ days in 2024.
- Sea levels rising due to melting polar ice caps and glaciers.
- **Emissions gap:** Only 2% reduction globally by 2024 vs. needed 43% by 2030 (IPCC data).

Government & Global Schemes to Combat Global Warming:

Global Initiatives:

- **Paris Agreement (2015):** Aim to keep warming below 2°C with updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).
- **Green Climate Fund:** Supports climate-resilient projects in developing countries.
- **UNFCCC & Kyoto Protocol:** Frameworks for global emissions reduction cooperation.

Indian Initiatives:

- **National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC):** Missions on renewable energy, water conservation, energy efficiency.
- **Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles (FAME):** Promotes electric vehicles.
- **National Green Hydrogen Mission:** Focus on clean energy development.
- **State Action Plans on Climate Change (SAPCCs):** State-level climate actions under NAPCC.
- **Perform, Achieve, and Trade (PAT) Scheme:** Improves energy efficiency in industries.

Consequences of Global Warming:

Human Impact:

- Increased heat stress, respiratory and vector-borne diseases.
- Threats to food security due to droughts and floods.
- Displacement due to rising sea levels and extreme climate events.
- Economic damages from natural disasters and loss of livelihoods.
- Greater burden on marginalized communities.

Environmental Impact:

- Loss of biodiversity and habitat destruction.

- Accelerated polar ice melt raising sea levels and disrupting ecosystems.
- Ocean acidification harming marine life.
- More frequent and intense cyclones, heatwaves, droughts.
- Deforestation and desertification reducing carbon absorption.

Way Ahead:

- **Accelerate emission reductions:** Transition to renewable energy, phase out fossil fuels.
- **Climate adaptation:** Build resilient infrastructure and early warning systems.
- **Technological innovation:** Leverage AI, quantum computing, and carbon capture.
- **Global cooperation:** Meet Paris Agreement commitments, fund vulnerable nations.
- **Local actions:** Encourage sustainable agriculture, urban planning, and reforestation.

Conclusion:

The crossing of the 1.5°C threshold in 2024 marks an urgent call to intensify global mitigation and adaptation efforts. While reversing warming may be difficult, proactive actions can reduce its devastating impacts and safeguard the planet's future.

India-UK Free Trade Agreement (FTA)

GS Paper II – International Relations

Context:

India and the United Kingdom have concluded negotiations on a **Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** after three years of discussions. The agreement will be implemented following the finalisation of legal texts.

Key Features of the India-UK FTA:

Structure and Scope:

- The FTA consists of **27 chapters**, covering areas such as **digital trade**, **environment**, **goods and services**, and **investment**.
- Both sides have also agreed to a **Double Contributions Convention (DCC)**, a **Social Security Agreement** aimed at protecting mobile professionals.
- Under the DCC, employees posted temporarily (up to 3 years) in the other country will contribute to social security in only one nation.

Market Access Commitments:

- **Zero-duty Access** for ~99% of Indian exports to the UK, covering almost 100% of trade value.
- India to gradually **reduce tariffs on 90%** of British goods; within 10 years, **85%** of British goods will become tariff-free.

Mobility Provisions:

- Facilitates movement of **Indian professionals**, including contractual service suppliers, business visitors, intra-corporate transferees, independent professionals (e.g., yoga instructors).
- Family members (partners and dependent children) of transferees will have the **right to work** in the UK.

Services Sector Gains:

- UK has made **ambitious commitments** in services sectors such as **IT/ITeS**, **financial services, education**, and **professional services**.

Government Procurement Access:

- UK businesses allowed to **participate in public procurement** in India, including for central government entities and public sector enterprises.

About Free Trade Agreements (FTAs):

Definition:

FTAs are arrangements between two or more countries to **reduce or eliminate tariffs and non-tariff barriers** on a substantial volume of trade.

Coverage:

- Includes trade in **goods, services, investment, intellectual property**, and sometimes **labour and environment**.
- Often preceded by an **Early Harvest Scheme**, which provides initial tariff concessions.

India's FTA Experience:

- India has signed **13 FTAs in the last 5 years**, including with **Mauritius**, **UAE**, and **Australia**.
- FTAs form an **exception to the Most Favoured Nation (MFN)** principle under WTO rules.

Strategic and Economic Significance:

A. For India:

- **Exports Boost**: Potential for $10 billion+ increase in exports, especially in labour-intensive sectors.
- **Jobs Creation**: Labour-intensive exports will help generate employment.

- **Bilateral Trade Target**: The agreement may help reach the **$100 billion trade target** by 2030.
- **Geopolitical Alignment**: Enhances India's position in the **Indo-Pacific and post-Brexit global trade order**.

B. For UK

- Post-Brexit UK seeks **diversification away from EU**.
- India offers a **large market**, **skilled labour**, and **manufacturing potential**.
- Benefits key UK sectors like **automobiles, alcoholic beverages, financial services**, and **education**.

Challenges in India's FTA Utilisation:

Trade Imbalance:

- Between 2017 and 2022, India's exports to FTA partners grew by 31%, while imports rose by 82%, widening the trade deficit.

Low Utilisation Rates:

- Only ~**25%** of Indian exporters use FTA benefits, compared to **70–80%** for developed countries.

Non-Tariff Barriers:

- Between 2020 and 2024, over **26,000 new trade restrictions** were imposed globally, increasing complexity for Indian exporters.

Unequal Competition:

- Indian manufacturing struggles to compete in sectors like **electronics**, especially against countries like **South Korea** and **ASEAN members**.

Complex Rules:

- Certification and **Rules of Origin** remain cumbersome for many Indian exporters.

Note: Trade balance alone should not be the only metric to evaluate FTAs. **Technology transfer, investment flows, value chain linkages**, and **diversified sourcing** are also significant gains.

Significance of the India-UK FTA for Future Trade Agreements:

Model for Swift Negotiations:

- Contrast with **India-EU FTA talks**, which have been ongoing since **2007** without conclusion.

Protection of Sensitive Sectors:

- Key Indian concerns addressed with **exclusion of dairy and certain plastic products**, protecting local producers.

Phased Tariff Reductions:
- Duties to be reduced **gradually**, giving time for Indian industries to adapt and remain competitive.

Mutual Benefit Focus:
- UK's auto sector to gain from **tariff reduction on premium cars**, potentially boosting trade without harming Indian carmakers.

Model UPSC Mains Question:

GS Paper II – International Relations

Topic: Bilateral Relations | Regional and Global Groupings | Effect of Policies and Politics of Developed Countries

Q The recently concluded India–UK Free Trade Agreement marks a shift in India's trade diplomacy. Critically examine the key features, benefits, and challenges of the agreement. Also, discuss its implications for India's future FTA strategy. (250 words)

France's Nuclear Umbrella Proposal for Europe: A Strategic Shift

GS Paper II – International Relations | Nuclear Security | Global Governance

Why in News?

In a notable departure from its historically independent nuclear doctrine, **French President Emmanuel Macron** has indicated openness to **stationing French nuclear weapons** in other European nations. This development comes amid a shifting security architecture in Europe, exacerbated by the **Russia–Ukraine war** and **uncertainty over the United States' commitment to NATO**.

Strategic Context: Toward European Strategic Autonomy
- France has long championed **"European strategic autonomy"**—a concept that envisions the **European Union (EU)** as a self-reliant geopolitical actor.
- Macron's proposal is intended to **reduce Europe's security dependence on the U.S. nuclear umbrella**, especially in light of:
  - Former U.S. President Donald Trump's **ambiguous NATO commitments**.
  - Rising perceptions of **unpredictability in U.S. foreign policy**.

Understanding Nuclear Sharing:

Concept	Description
Nuclear Sharing	A military arrangement where a nuclear-armed state stations nuclear weapons in allied, non-nuclear countries.

NATO Model	The United States deploys **B61 tactical nuclear bombs** in **Belgium, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, and Turkiye** under NATO's nuclear sharing arrangement.
Control Mechanism	The U.S. retains **peacetime custody** and full decision-making authority over the use of these weapons.

- This arrangement ensures a **layered deterrent** without violating the **letter of the NPT**, though its **spirit remains contested**.

Legal and Normative Issues under NPT:

Provision	Legal Concern
Article I & II of NPT	Prohibit nuclear weapon states from **transferring control** of nuclear arms to non-nuclear states and vice versa.
NATO's Interpretation	Argues that weapons remain under nuclear-state control until a wartime decision is made.
Criticism	Many legal scholars and non-proliferation advocates argue that **nuclear sharing violates NPT norms**, particularly its disarmament spirit.

- If France implements a similar model, it may face **legal scrutiny and diplomatic resistance**, especially from NPT watchdogs and non-aligned countries.

Implications for Europe and India:

For Europe:

- Enhances EU's strategic resilience in the face of Russian aggression.
- Risks **nuclear proliferation debates** and **deepening intra-European divisions**, especially with neutral countries like Austria and Ireland.

For India:

- Raises questions about **NPT's selective enforcement**, as India remains outside the NPT but adheres to nuclear restraint and responsible doctrine.
- Adds momentum to calls for **reforming global nuclear governance** to ensure fairness and transparency.

Model UPSC Mains Question (GS Paper II):

Q **"France's openness to a nuclear umbrella in Europe signals a strategic shift in European defense policy." Discuss the implications of such a move for nuclear non-proliferation and regional security in the context of the evolving transatlantic relationship.**

Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT): Geopolitics, Gaps, and India's Stand

GS Paper II – International Relations | Global Security | Treaties & Agreements

Why in News?

Iran has confirmed that its Parliament is **drafting legislation to withdraw from the NPT**, citing concerns over national security and Western pressure. This move raises serious questions about the future of global nuclear disarmament efforts and the credibility of the NPT regime.

Overview and Objectives of the NPT:

- The **NPT** is the most widely accepted arms control agreement, opened for signature in **1968** and entered into force in **1970**.
- It was **extended indefinitely in 1995**.

Three-Pillar Framework of the NPT:

Pillar	Objective
Non-Proliferation	Nuclear-weapon states (NWS) agree not to transfer nuclear weapons or technology to non-nuclear-weapon states (NNWS). NNWS agree not to develop nuclear weapons.
Disarmament	All parties commit to pursuing negotiations toward complete nuclear disarmament.
Peaceful Use of Energy	States can access nuclear technology for civilian use under IAEA safeguards.

Membership Structure:

Category	Countries Included
Nuclear-Weapon States	US, UK, France, Russia, China – all tested nuclear weapons before Jan 1, 1967
Non-Nuclear-Weapon States	All other signatories, who pledge not to pursue nuclear weapons

Legal Provision for Withdrawal – Article X:

- A state may withdraw if it decides that **"extraordinary events"** have jeopardized its **supreme national interests**.
- It must provide **three months' notice** to all treaty parties and the **UN Security Council**.
- **North Korea** is the only state to withdraw (2003).

Present Status of the Treaty:

- **191 countries** are currently parties to the NPT.

- **India, Pakistan, Israel, and South Sudan** have never signed the treaty.
- **North Korea** joined in 1985 but withdrew in 2003 after clandestinely developing a nuclear program.

Other Key Global Nuclear Treaties:

Treaty	Purpose & Status
START I & II (1991–93)	US-Soviet agreements to reduce strategic nuclear weapons
CTBT (1996)	Bans all nuclear explosions; not in force due to non-ratification by key states including the US, China, India, Pakistan
TPNW (2017)	Legally bans nuclear weapons; entered into force in 2021 but lacks NWS participation
New START (2010)	Limits deployed strategic warheads between US and Russia; extended to 2026

India's Consistent Position on NPT:

- India has **refused to sign the NPT** since its inception, citing the treaty's **inherent discriminatory structure**.

Key Concerns:

1. **Legitimization of Nuclear Inequality**
   - It institutionalizes the division between **nuclear "haves" and "have-nots"**.
2. **Security Concerns**
   - India's volatile neighborhood, especially with **nuclear-armed China and Pakistan**, necessitates strategic autonomy.
3. **Enlightened Self-Interest**
   - Former PM **Indira Gandhi** justified the refusal in Parliament as based on **sovereign national interest**.

India's Alternative Measures:

- Despite staying outside the NPT, India has adopted a **voluntary no first-use policy**, strong **nuclear command and control mechanisms**, and maintains adherence to **IAEA safeguards for civilian nuclear reactors** under the **India-US Civil Nuclear Deal (2008)**.

Implications of Iran's Possible Withdrawal:

1. **Erosion of NPT Credibility**
   - May trigger **regional arms races**, especially in West Asia (e.g., Saudi Arabia).

2. **Setback to Global Non-Proliferation Norms**
   ○ Could embolden other discontented signatories to consider exit or violations.

3. **Increased Tensions in Middle East**
   ○ Heightens risk of nuclear escalation amid existing tensions in the Persian Gulf.

4. **Challenge to Global Nuclear Governance**
   ○ Highlights **ineffectiveness of disarmament provisions** and the lack of reciprocity from nuclear-armed states.

Model UPSC Mains Question (GS Paper II):

Q "The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty has succeeded in limiting the spread of nuclear weapons but failed to promote disarmament or global equity." Critically examine in the light of India's position and the recent developments regarding Iran.

Bulgaria Set to Join Eurozone in 2026: Deepening European Monetary Integration

GS Paper II – International Relations | GS Paper III – International Economy | EU Politics

Why in News?

The **European Commission** has approved **Bulgaria's readiness to adopt the Euro**, setting **January 1, 2026**, as the tentative date for it to become the **21st member of the Eurozone.** The move now awaits **formal ratification** by EU member states and the European Parliament.

About the Euro and the Eurozone:

- The **Euro (€)** is the **common currency** of the **Eurozone**, currently used by **20 of 27 EU countries**.
- Introduced in **1999 (digital form)** and **2002 (notes and coins)**, it is governed by the **European Central Bank (ECB)** and **Eurogroup**.

Bulgaria's Current Status:

- **Currency in use**: Bulgarian Lev (BGN)
- Has been part of the **Exchange Rate Mechanism II (ERM II)** since 2020.
- Recent improvements in **fiscal discipline, inflation control, and economic alignment** paved the way for accession.

Maastricht Convergence Criteria (Euro Adoption Conditions):

Criterion	Requirement
Price Stability	Inflation must not exceed **1.5 percentage points** above the average of the three best-performing EU states.
Sound Public Finances	Fiscal deficit ≤ **3% of GDP**, Government debt ≤ **60% of GDP**.
Exchange Rate Stability	Must participate in **ERM II** for at least **2 years** without severe fluctuation.
Interest Rate Convergence	Long-term interest rates ≤ **2 percentage points** above the three best inflation-performing countries.

Significance of Bulgaria's Eurozone Entry:

For Bulgaria:

- Enhances **investor confidence** and promotes **price and monetary stability**.
- Reduces **transaction costs**, improves **cross-border trade**, and deepens financial integration.

For the European Union:

- Symbolic boost to the **Eurozone's credibility** amid skepticism about EU expansion.
- Reaffirms the EU's commitment to **Eastern European integration**.
- Could influence **other ERM II aspirants** like **Croatia or Romania**.

Potential Challenges:

- **Inflation management** in a common currency regime.
- Risks of **reduced monetary flexibility**, especially in times of asymmetric shocks.
- **Public skepticism** over perceived loss of national monetary sovereignty.

<u>**Model UPSC Mains Question (GS Paper III):**</u>

Q "**Bulgaria's planned accession to the Eurozone highlights the ongoing evolution of the European Union's monetary architecture.**" **Discuss the convergence criteria and analyze the benefits and risks of adopting the Euro.**

G7 Summit 2025 – India's Participation and Global Strategic Outcomes

GS Paper II – International Relations | Global Groupings | GS Paper III – Energy Security, Critical Technologies

Context:

The **2025 G7 Leaders' Summit** was held in **Kananaskis, Alberta, Canada**, marking the **50th anniversary** of the first G7 Summit. Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** attended the **G7 Outreach Session**, reinforcing India's engagement with major global economic powers.

About the G7:

- The **Group of Seven (G7)** comprises **Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK, the US**, and the **European Union**.
- It is an **informal forum** for cooperation on issues of **global economic governance, security, climate change, and emerging technologies**.
- In 2025, G7 countries represented around **29% of global GDP**.
- **Russia remains excluded** following the **2014 annexation of Crimea**.

India's Contribution at the G7 Outreach Session:

- Participated in the thematic discussion on: **"Energy Security: Diversification, Technology, and Infrastructure"**
- Emphasized:
  - Need for diversified and **resilient energy supply chains**
  - Greater **technology transfer** for renewable and clean energy
  - Investment in **energy infrastructure**, especially in the Global South

Key Outcomes of the 2025 G7 Summit:

Theme	Outcome/Commitment
Ukraine Conflict	Canada pledged **CA$4.3 billion** in aid; new sanctions announced against Russia
Critical Minerals Security	Renewed focus on **diversifying mineral sources, promoting local value chains**, and **innovation**
	Supported by India; builds on the **2023 Five-Point Plan for Critical Minerals**
AI and Quantum Innovation	Joint statement to promote **safe, ethical development** of frontier technologies
Foreign Interference	Agreement to **coordinate responses to transnational crime and disinformation** campaigns

Wildfire and Climate Resilience	G7 committed to **nature-based wildfire management**, reversing deforestation by 2030 (Glasgow Declaration)
West Asia Tensions	G7 labeled **Iran as a regional destabilizer**, expressing concern over Israel–Iran conflict

Significance for India:

- Showcases India as a **responsible partner** in global technology, energy, and geopolitical discussions
- Strengthens India's role in discussions on **critical minerals**, vital for clean energy and semiconductor manufacturing
- Reinforces India's narrative on **energy justice**, balancing **access, affordability, and sustainability**
- Provides a diplomatic platform to shape the agenda on **AI governance and climate diplomacy**

Model UPSC Mains Question (GS Paper II):

Q "India's participation in the G7 Summit reflects its growing role in global economic and strategic decision-making." Discuss in light of key outcomes of the 2025 Summit.

India–Croatia Bilateral Relations: Strategic Expansion into Central Europe

GS Paper II – International Relations | Bilateral Ties | Diplomacy and Diaspora

Context:

India and Croatia have deepened their bilateral partnership through the formulation of a **long-term Defence Cooperation Plan** and wide-ranging agreements in areas such as **agriculture, science, education, and culture**. The engagement reflects India's recalibrated European outreach strategy.

Defence and Strategic Cooperation:

- Both countries agreed on a **multi-dimensional Defence Cooperation Plan**, including:
  - **Joint military training and personnel exchange**
  - **Defence production and cyber-security collaboration**
  - Industry-level partnerships to promote **Make in India–Make for the World** models

Broader Bilateral Agreements and Engagements:

Area	Key Initiatives
Science & Technology	New MoUs signed for joint research and innovation
Cultural Exchange	ICCR Chair for Hindi to be established in **Zagreb**, five-year cultural roadmap
Higher Education & Research	Bilateral academic collaborations and joint projects between institutions
Mobility and People-to-People Ties	A proposed **mobility agreement** will facilitate tourism, business, and education

Economic and Trade Potential:
- **Croatia committed** to attract Indian investments in:
  - **Pharmaceuticals, clean technologies, digital industries, agriculture, semiconductors**
- **India–EU FTA**: Croatia strongly supports its **early conclusion**, acting as a **facilitator within the EU framework**

Geostrategic and Diplomatic Importance of Croatia:

1. Part of India's Broader European Strategy
- Signals shift from traditional Western European focus to **engagement with new EU entrants**
- Helps **shape EU consensus**, especially with Croatia's **pro-India stance** on global forums

2. Maritime and Logistic Advantage
- Croatia's Adriatic coastline offers **strategic sea access to Europe**
- Critical amid **Red Sea and Suez disruptions**; aligns with India's **supply chain diversification goals**

3. Role in IMEC (India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor)
- Positioned to serve as a **gateway to Central and Eastern Europe**
- Offers **alternative port connectivity** to bypass congested Western European routes

4. Institutional Access and Soft Power Leverage
- As an **EU and NATO member**, Croatia offers indirect access to:
  - **European regulatory frameworks**
  - **Policy coordination platforms**

- Also **supports India's UNSC permanent membership bid** and **respects India's stance on J&K**

Model UPSC Mains Question (GS Paper II):

Q "Croatia's strategic geography and political alignment make it an ideal partner for India's European outreach and Indo-Pacific connectivity." Examine the scope and significance of the recent bilateral engagements.

INDIA–BHUTAN RELATIONS

GS Paper II – International Relations | Neighbourhood Policy | India's Foreign Policy

Why in News?

The **King and Queen of Bhutan** paid an official visit to India, reaffirming the close ties between the two countries. The visit focused on strategic, economic, hydropower, and cultural cooperation.

Key Highlights of the Visit:

- **Support for Gelephu Mindfulness City Project**: India assured sustained support to Bhutan's flagship **Gelephu project**—a visionary, zero-carbon, cross-border **Special Economic Zone (SEZ)** over 2,500 sq. km, integrating spiritual, ecological, and economic values.
- **Infrastructure Connectivity**:
  - Inauguration of **first Integrated Check Post (ICP)** at **Darrang, Assam**, to facilitate smoother cross-border trade and travel.
- **Hydropower Progress**:
  - **Punatsangchhu-II Hydroelectric Project (1,020 MW)** nearing completion.
  - Reinforces India's energy partnership and commitment to regional **clean energy trade**.

Significance of India–Bhutan Bilateral Relations:

1. Political and Diplomatic Relations:

- Rooted in the **1949 Treaty of Friendship** (revised in 2007) which:
  - Recognizes **mutual sovereignty** and non-interference.
  - Strengthens security and foreign policy consultations.
- Formal diplomatic ties were established in **1968** with India opening its first foreign mission in Bhutan.
- Bhutan is central to India's **Neighbourhood First** and **Act East** policies.

2. Hydropower Cooperation

- **Flagship sector of cooperation** – Bhutan exports surplus electricity to India.

- **Operational Projects** (Total: 2,136 MW):
  - **Chukha (336 MW)**
  - **Kurichhu (60 MW)**
  - **Tala (1,020 MW)**
  - **Mangdechhu (720 MW)** – won **Brunel Medal** for Engineering Excellence.
- **Ongoing Projects**:
  - **Punatsangchhu-I & II** (1,020 MW each)
- **Energy Trade Expansion**:
  - **Basochhu (64 MW)** and **Nikachhu HEP** approved for sale in **Indian Energy Exchange (IEX)**.

3. **Emerging Areas of Cooperation**
- **Space Cooperation**:
  - **India-Bhutan SAT** launched in Nov 2022 by ISRO.
  - **Joint Plan of Action (JPoA) 2024**: Bhutan allocated 16 MHz bandwidth on **South Asia Satellite**.
- **Digital and Fintech**:
  - **RuPay Card** introduced in Bhutan (2019, 2020).
  - **BHIM-UPI** launched in 2021 – facilitating real-time digital payments.
- **Education and E-Learning**:
  - **Druk Research and Education Network** integrated with **India's National Knowledge Network** (5 Gbps bandwidth).
  - **Third Internet Gateway** to Bhutan facilitated by India to improve internet resilience.

4. **Cultural and Religious Ties**
- Bhutan and India share deep **Buddhist cultural heritage**.
- India recently loaned a **16th-century statue** of **Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal** (Bhutan's unifier) to Bhutan, underlining shared spiritual roots.

5. **Environmental and Wildlife Conservation**
- Collaboration on the **Transboundary Manas Conservation Area (TraMCA)**:
  - Connects **Manas National Park** (Assam) with **Royal Manas National Park** (Bhutan).
  - Protects migratory species and critical wildlife corridors.

6. Economic and Development Cooperation

- **Free Trade Agreement**:
    - **India-Bhutan Agreement on Trade, Commerce, and Transit (1972, revised 2016)**.
    - Allows **duty-free transit** and preferential access for Bhutanese exports.
- **Developmental Assistance**:
    - India remains Bhutan's largest development partner.
    - Committed support under **Bhutan's 13th Five-Year Plan (2024– 29)**.
    - Funding of **Economic Stimulus Programmes** for post-COVID recovery.

Strategic Importance of Bhutan for India:

- Acts as a **buffer state** between India and China.
- India seeks to prevent Chinese influence in Bhutan's strategic territories (e.g., **Doklam Plateau**).
- Vital to **India's hydro-energy security**, **river management**, and **Himalayan ecology**.
- Enhances India's regional influence under the **Neighbourhood First Policy**.

Challenges in the Bilateral Relationship:

- **Hydropower project delays** and cost escalations.
- Bhutan's increasing exposure to **China's economic diplomacy**.
- Growing environmental concerns in Bhutan over **mega dam projects**.
- Balancing **Bhutan's sovereignty** with **India's strategic interests**.

Way Forward:

- Ensure **timely completion** of hydro projects and diversification of bilateral cooperation.
- Promote **green infrastructure**, digital transformation, and tourism ties.
- Strengthen **people-to-people** ties through education, culture, and exchanges.
- Sustain India's role as Bhutan's **preferred development and strategic partner**.

Model UPSC Mains Question (GS Paper II):

Q "India-Bhutan relations are a model of good neighbourliness in South Asia. Critically assess the strategic and developmental dimensions of this relationship in the context of emerging regional challenges." (250 words)

India Elected to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC): 2026–28 Term

GS Paper II – International Relations | Global Institutions

Context:

India has been elected as a member of the **Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)** of the United Nations for the term **2026–2028**, reaffirming its role in shaping global development priorities.

About ECOSOC

- **Established**: 1945, under the UN Charter, as one of the six principal organs of the United Nations.
- **Mandate**: Serves as the primary body for:
  - **Coordinating international economic, social, and environmental policies**
  - **Monitoring implementation of the UN's global development goals**, including the SDGs
  - **Overseeing subsidiary and expert bodies** involved in global governance
- **Composition**: 54 member states elected by the **UN General Assembly** for **three-year staggered terms**

Significance of India's Election:

- Reinforces India's position as a **key stakeholder in global sustainable development**
- Offers a platform to influence policy dialogue on issues such as **climate change, poverty alleviation, gender equality, and global health governance**

India Wins Presidency of the International Institute of Administrative Sciences (IIAS): 2025–2028

GS Paper II – Governance | International Cooperation in Public Administration

Context:

India has secured the **Presidency of the International Institute of Administrative Sciences (IIAS)** for the 2025–2028 term, marking a major recognition of its leadership in public administration reform.

About IIAS:

- A **global federation** dedicated to promoting **scientific research and innovation in public administration**
- Composed of:
    - **31 Member Countries**
    - **20 National Sections**
    - **15 Academic Research Centres**
- Prominent member countries include India, Japan, Germany, China, South Korea, Italy, Saudi Arabia, Mexico, South Africa, and others
- India is represented in IIAS by the **Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG)** since 1998

Relationship with the UN:

- Although **not a UN-affiliated body**, IIAS:
    - Collaborates with the **UN Committee of Experts on Public Administration (CEPA)**
    - Participates in the **UN Public Administration Network (UNPAN)**
    - Supports efforts toward **transparent, accountable, and inclusive governance** worldwide

Pakistan's Appointment to UNSC's Counter-Terrorism Committee Raises Concerns

GS Paper II – International Relations | Terrorism and Internal Security

Context:

India has raised objections to **Pakistan's recent appointment** to a significant role within the **UN Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC)**, citing ongoing concerns over state-linked terrorism and recent border incidents.

About the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC):

- **Established**: 2001, through **UNSC Resolution 1373**, in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks

- **Composition**: All **15 members of the UN Security Council**
- **Mandate:**
  - Monitor member states' efforts to:
    - Criminalize terrorism financing
    - Freeze assets of designated terrorists
    - Deny safe havens and logistical support to terrorist entities
    - Facilitate international cooperation in counter-terrorism
- **Expanded Scope:**
  - **UNSC Resolution 1624 (2005)** broadened the Committee's responsibilities to include:
    - **Criminalizing incitement to terrorism**
    - **Promoting intercultural dialogue** as a tool against radicalization

India's Concern:

- Pakistan's inclusion is seen as **problematic** due to its **long-standing history of cross-border terrorism**, including support to proscribed groups.
- Raises questions about the **credibility and neutrality of global counter-terrorism mechanisms**.

WTO's Agreement on Agriculture (AoA): Balancing Trade and Farm Support

GS Paper II – International Relations | WTO Agreements | Agriculture & Food Security

Why in News?

The **United States and Australia** have raised concerns that **India's sugarcane subsidies** exceed the permissible limits under the **WTO's Agreement on Agriculture (AoA)**, potentially violating global trade norms and distorting international agricultural markets.

Understanding the WTO Agreement on Agriculture (AoA):

The **AoA**, a part of the Uruguay Round Agreements, came into force in **1995** and represents the first significant international framework to **discipline agricultural subsidies and trade barriers**.

It aims to **reform global agricultural trade** and **make it fairer** by ensuring a **rules-based system** that reduces trade-distorting subsidies while allowing flexibility for developing nations.

Three Pillars of AoA:

Pillar	Description
1. Domestic Support	Addresses internal subsidies governments provide to farmers. Countries commit to reducing trade-distorting support (measured by **Aggregate Measure of Support or AMS**).
2. Market Access	Seeks to liberalize trade by reducing tariffs and eliminating non-tariff barriers. Introduces **tariffication**, tariff bindings, and scheduled reductions.
3. Export Subsidies	Limits direct export subsidies used to make goods artificially competitive abroad. Developed and developing nations have different reduction targets.

I. Domestic Support: Key Classifications and Limits

Domestic subsidies are categorized into colored **"boxes"** based on their trade-distorting impact:

Box	Characteristics	Limits
Amber Box	Trade-distorting subsidies (e.g. input subsidies, MSP)	Capped: 5% for developed, 10% for developing countries (De Minimis Clause)
Blue Box	Conditional subsidies requiring **production restraint** (e.g. set-aside programs)	No reduction commitments yet
Green Box	Non-trade-distorting aid such as for **research, infrastructure, or environment**	Exempt from reductions
S&D Box (Art 6.2)	Support specific to **developing countries** like investment subsidies, input aid for low-income producers	Allowed outside AMS limits

India's Position:

- Claims most subsidies fall under **Green Box** or **S&D Box**.
- Market Price Support (MSP), however, is often considered **Amber Box**, especially for **wheat, rice, and sugarcane**.
- The dispute arises when calculated support exceeds the **10% de minimis threshold** (especially using international reference prices).

II. Market Access: Tariff Reduction Commitments

Country Category	Average Reduction Target	Period
Developed Countries	36% avg. tariff cut (min 15% per line)	Over 6 years
Developing Countries	24% avg. cut (min 10% per line)	Over 10 years
LDCs	Exempt from reductions but must bind tariffs	—

- AoA encourages **tariffication** of non-tariff barriers and binding tariffs at WTO.
- India's average bound tariffs are much higher than applied rates, providing policy space.

III. Export Subsidies: Curbing Unfair Competition

Country Category	Value Reduction	Volume Reduction	Duration
Developed	36%	21%	Over 6 years
Developing	24%	14%	Over 10 years

- **India does not use direct export subsidies** extensively, but issues like **minimum export prices, transport subsidies, and export restrictions** (e.g. for sugar, wheat) have invited scrutiny.

Challenges for India under AoA:

1. **Measurement Issues**: WTO uses **External Reference Prices from 1986–88**, not accounting for inflation, underestimating support thresholds.
2. **Public Stockholding**: India's **MSP-based procurement** and **buffer stocks** for food security are seen as trade-distorting.
3. **Food Security vs Trade Rules**: India maintains that AoA limits **infringe upon sovereign rights** to ensure food security under **NFSA, PDS, etc.**
4. **Ongoing Disputes**: Developed countries allege **non-compliance** (e.g. sugar and rice), while India defends using the **peace clause** negotiated at the Bali Ministerial (2013).
5. **Lack of Progress in WTO Reforms**: AoA's outdated frameworks have not adequately evolved to address modern agricultural realities in developing economies.

Way Forward for India:

- **Push for Permanent Solution**: Advocate for a **revised formula** for AMS calculation (based on current prices) under the WTO.

- **Leverage the Peace Clause**: Until reforms materialize, utilize protections under the **Bali Peace Clause** for food security programs.
- **Domestic Reforms**: Move towards **direct income support** (like PM-KISAN), and **green box compliant subsidies**.
- **South-South Solidarity**: Build alliances with other **developing and LDC nations** to jointly advocate for WTO reforms.
- **Transparency and Reporting**: Improve **notification discipline** and transparency to counter allegations of underreporting or overuse.

Model UPSC Mains Question (GS Paper II):

Q "The WTO's Agreement on Agriculture, while promoting fair trade, continues to disadvantage developing countries in balancing food security with trade obligations." Critically examine in the context of India's agricultural subsidy programs. (250 words)

India–Iran 10-Year Chabahar Port Agreement: Strategic and Geo-Economic Implications

GS Paper II – International Relations | India and Neighbourhood | Regional Connectivity

Why in News?

India and Iran recently signed a landmark 10-year contract for the operation of the Shahid Beheshti terminal at Chabahar Port by India Ports Global Limited (IPGL). This long-term agreement comes eight years after the initial memorandum of understanding and is expected to significantly deepen bilateral cooperation and enhance India's regional connectivity, particularly with Afghanistan and Central Asia.

Key Features of the Agreement:

The agreement was signed between IPGL and Iran's Port and Maritime Organisation (PMO). As part of the deal, India will invest approximately $120 million in port infrastructure and equipment to modernize operations at the Shahid Beheshti terminal. This is India's first overseas port operation project and represents a major step in asserting its maritime and logistical footprint in the region.

Strategic Importance of Chabahar Port:

Chabahar Port is located in Iran's Sistan-Baluchistan province, near the Strait of Hormuz on the Gulf of Oman. It is the only Iranian port with direct access to the Indian Ocean, providing a unique gateway for India to access Afghanistan, Central Asia, and even Russia, bypassing Pakistan. The port consists of two

terminals—Shahid Beheshti and Shahid Kalantari—and has been operational under IPGL since December 2018.

This project holds strategic value as it allows India an alternate corridor to reach landlocked Afghanistan and Central Asian Republics (CARs), thereby boosting trade and people-to-people ties. It also serves as a counterbalance to Pakistan's Gwadar Port, which is being developed by China under the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Thus, Chabahar enhances India's maritime security and regional presence in the western Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf.

Linkage with the International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC):

Chabahar Port is a key node in the International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC), which aims to connect India with Russia and Europe via Iran and the Caspian Sea. Under this multimodal corridor, goods can move from Mumbai to Bandar Abbas, then by road to Bandar-e-Anzali, and from there by ship to Astrakhan in Russia, eventually reaching Europe via rail. This route significantly reduces shipping time and cost, making it attractive for Indian exporters.

Role of India Ports Global Limited (IPGL):

IPGL was formed in 2015 under the Sagarmala Programme with the mandate to manage India's participation in the development of the Chabahar Port. It is a Special Purpose Vehicle initially created as a joint venture of Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority and Deendayal Port Authority, and later made a wholly owned subsidiary of Sagarmala Development Company Limited. The aim was to provide landlocked countries like Afghanistan and those in Central Asia with an alternate and reliable access route to the sea.

Challenges to the Project:

Despite its strategic value, the Chabahar Port project has faced several challenges. Chief among them is the threat of U.S. sanctions on Iran, which have often delayed funding and logistics operations. Although the U.S. previously granted a waiver for India's involvement in Chabahar due to its role in supporting Afghanistan, the continuation of that waiver remains uncertain.

Security is another concern, as Chabahar lies in a region prone to insurgency and instability. Additionally, China's increasing engagement with Iran—especially following the 25-year strategic cooperation agreement between the two countries—adds another layer of geopolitical complexity for India.

There have also been operational hurdles, such as delays in equipment procurement and lack of adequate port link infrastructure in Iran, which have slowed the project's full realization.

Way Forward:

India must continue diplomatic engagement with the United States to secure exemptions from sanctions that would enable smooth functioning of the project. Simultaneously, there is a need for capacity building within IPGL to expedite the deployment of modern port infrastructure. Efforts must be made to strengthen trilateral cooperation between India, Iran, and Afghanistan, and eventually expand it to include Central Asian nations. The integration of Chabahar with existing regional trade routes like the INSTC, the TIR Convention, and the proposed Eurasian Economic Union logistics network should also be prioritized.

<u>Model UPSC Mains Question (GS Paper II):</u>

Q **"The long-term Chabahar Port agreement between India and Iran enhances India's connectivity with Central Asia and supports its strategic autonomy. Discuss its geopolitical and economic implications along with associated challenges." (250 words)**

<u>Phewa Dialogue: Nepal-China Academic Initiative on Regional Integration</u>

GS Paper II – International Relations | Bilateral and Regional Cooperation | South Asia

Why in News?

Recently, **Nepal and China** launched a new strategic initiative titled the **"Phewa Dialogue"**, aimed at fostering academic and policy-level cooperation focused on **South Asian regional economic integration.**

What is the Phewa Dialogue?

- Named after **Phewa Lake,** a prominent landmark in the **Pokhara Valley** of Nepal, the dialogue symbolizes **cultural and academic collaboration** rooted in local identity.
- It represents **Nepal's first official think-tank-driven platform** for discussing **regional economic cooperation**, particularly within the **South Asian context**.

Institutional Framework

- The dialogue is a **joint initiative** of:
    - **Sichuan University's China Center for South Asian Studies,** and

- ○ **Tribhuvan University's Department of International Relations and Diplomacy** (Nepal's oldest and most reputed academic institution in IR studies).
- It marks an effort to build **Track II diplomacy** through **academic collaboration** and **policy-oriented discussions**.

Objectives and Agenda:

1. **Promote South Asia Regional Economic Integration**:
   - ○ Discuss opportunities for **economic corridors**, **cross-border trade**, and **infrastructure cooperation**.
   - ○ Focus on inclusive development and shared prosperity in the Himalayan region.

2. **Strengthen Nepal-China Cooperation**:
   - ○ Enhance mutual understanding on strategic issues such as:
     - ▪ The **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**
     - ▪ **Himalayan connectivity**
     - ▪ Climate change and disaster resilience in the region

3. **Encourage People-to-People Ties**:
   - ○ Foster academic exchanges and cultural understanding.
   - ○ Encourage **youth engagement**, **student research**, and **joint publications**.

4. **Counterbalance Regional Power Asymmetries**:
   - ○ Enable smaller states like Nepal to **diversify their strategic engagements**.
   - ○ Build intellectual capital to influence regional discourse, especially amidst India-China rivalry in South Asia.

Strategic Significance:

- For **Nepal**:
  - ○ Provides an **independent platform** to assert its **regional leadership aspirations**.
  - ○ Balances Nepal's foreign policy by engaging both **India and China** in multilateral frameworks.
  - ○ Encourages **knowledge diplomacy** as a soft power tool.
- For **China**:
  - ○ Enhances its **academic influence** and **soft diplomacy** in South Asia.
  - ○ Strengthens **BRI narratives** through academic legitimacy.
  - ○ Engages Nepal in long-term strategic alignment.

- For **India**:
  - Highlights the **need for proactive regional diplomacy**.
  - Serves as a reminder for India to reinvigorate SAARC or BIMSTEC as **regional economic platforms**.

Challenges and Considerations:

- Potential for **strategic discomfort for India**, especially if such dialogues are seen as part of broader Chinese strategic outreach.
- Ensuring the dialogue remains **independent, non-partisan**, and **academic in character** to avoid politicization.
- Need for **regional inclusivity** – expanding participation from **other South Asian countries** to promote balanced dialogue.

Conclusion:

The Phewa Dialogue is a timely initiative reflecting **Nepal's desire to engage more deeply in regional economic and intellectual cooperation**. It demonstrates the growing role of **Track II diplomacy** in shaping regional narratives and the increasing use of **academic institutions as diplomatic tools** in a multipolar South Asia.

Model UPSC Mains Question (GS Paper II):

Q "Track II diplomacy through academic forums is becoming a significant component of regional geopolitics in South Asia. Discuss this in the context of the Phewa Dialogue launched by Nepal and China."

UN COMMISSION ON NARCOTIC DRUGS (CND)

GS Paper II – International Relations | Important International Institutions | Global Drug Policy

Why in News?

- India has been elected to chair the **68th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND)** — the first time India has held this position.

About CND: Formation and Mandate:

- **Established**: In **1946** by the **UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)**.
- **Mandate Expansion**: In **1991**, the UN General Assembly assigned CND as the **governing body of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)**.
- **Headquarters**: Vienna, Austria.

Functions and Roles of the CND:

- Acts as the **central policymaking body on drugs** within the UN system.
- Assists ECOSOC in supervising **international drug control treaties**:

- ○ **Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (1961)**
- ○ **Convention on Psychotropic Substances (1971)**
- ○ **UN Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (1988)**
- Determines the **control status of substances** under international conventions.
- Promotes **balanced drug policies** that address both supply and demand.

Structure and Composition:

- **Members**: 53 states elected by ECOSOC, with India being a **founding member**.
- **Bureau**: Headed by a Chairperson and regional group representatives.
- **Subsidiary Bodies**:
  - ○ **Heads of National Drug Law Enforcement Agencies (HONLEA)** in:
    - ▪ Europe
    - ▪ Latin America and the Caribbean
    - ▪ Asia and the Pacific
    - ▪ Africa
  - ○ **Sub-commission** in the Near and Middle East.

Meetings and Agenda:

- **Annual Regular Sessions**: Adopt policies, review trends, pass resolutions.
- **Intersessional Meetings**: Held periodically for discussions.
- **Reconvened Session**: Deals with budgetary and administrative matters.
- **Agenda Split**:
  - ○ **Normative Segment**: Treaty-based oversight.
  - ○ **Operational Segment**: Oversight of UNODC work.

Key Policy Initiatives:

- **2019 Ministerial Declaration**:
  - ○ Reaffirmed the need for **joint commitments** to counter the global drug problem.
  - ○ Called for accelerating the implementation of comprehensive drug strategies and evidence-based interventions.

India's Significance:

- As Chair, India gains a strategic role in shaping **global drug policy frameworks**.

- Enhances India's influence in multilateral platforms on **public health, law enforcement**, and **cross-border drug control**.

<u>Model UPSC Mains Question (GS Paper II):</u>

Q "India's chairmanship of the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs presents an opportunity to influence global drug policies. Examine the role of CND and how India can leverage its leadership position to address international and domestic drug challenges." (250 words)

ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK (ADB) AND OTHER MULTILATERAL DEVELOPMENT BANKS

GS Paper II – International Institutions | Global Governance | Multilateral Relations

Why in News?

The Union Government of India signed a **$98 million loan agreement** with the **Asian Development Bank (ADB)** to enhance **horticulture farmers' access to certified, disease-free planting material**. This reflects the deepening collaboration between India and multilateral development banks in the field of **sustainable agriculture and rural development**.

ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK (ADB)

Background and Establishment:

- **Established**: 19 December 1966
- **Headquarters**: Manila, Philippines
- **Purpose**:
  - To promote **economic and social development** in the **Asia-Pacific region**.
  - Focuses on **poverty eradication**, sustainable infrastructure, inclusive growth, and environmental resilience.

Functions and Instruments:

- Provides a mix of **sovereign and non-sovereign loans**, grants, equity investments, technical assistance, and guarantees.
- Focus areas include **transport, energy, urban infrastructure, climate change**, education, health, and agriculture.

Membership and Governance:

- **Members**: 68 countries (49 from Asia-Pacific, 19 from outside the region)
- **Top Shareholders** (2022):
  - Japan – 15.6%
  - United States – 15.6%
  - China – 6.4%

- ○ India – 6.3%
- ○ Australia – 5.8%
- **Board of Governors**: The highest policy-making body with one representative from each member.
- Voting is proportionate to capital subscriptions.

Funding Sources:

- Contributions from members
- International bond markets
- Loan repayments and retained earnings

ASIAN INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT BANK (AIIB)

Background and Establishment:

- **Established**: 2015
- **Headquarters**: Beijing, China
- **Purpose**:
    - ○ To support **"Infrastructure for Tomorrow"** with sustainable and environmentally sound financing.
    - ○ To fill infrastructure investment gaps in Asia and beyond.

Functions:

- Provides **project loans**, equity investments, and technical assistance in areas such as:
    - ○ Transport and logistics
    - ○ Energy and power
    - ○ Urban development
    - ○ Water supply and sanitation
    - ○ Digital infrastructure
    - ○ Green finance

Membership and Governance:

- **Members**: Over 110 countries, including both Asian and non-Asian nations
- **Top Shareholders**:
    - ○ China – 30.4%
    - ○ India – 8.4%
    - ○ Russia – 6.4%
    - ○ Germany – 4.5%
- **Governance**:
    - ○ Board of Governors and Board of Directors

- Voting power based on capital contributions
- China has the largest voting share and significant influence

Funding Sources:

- Capital contributions from members
- Bond issuance in global financial markets
- Retained earnings

NEW DEVELOPMENT BANK (NDB)

Background and Establishment:

- **Established**: 2015, by BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa)
- **Headquarters**: Shanghai, China
- **Purpose**:
  - To support **infrastructure and sustainable development** in BRICS and other emerging economies
  - To foster **South-South cooperation**

Functions:

- Provides **financial assistance** through:
  - Loans
  - Equity participation
  - Technical support for infrastructure, urban development, renewable energy, water and sanitation, transport, etc.

Membership and Governance:

- **Members**:
  - 5 founding BRICS members
  - **Recently joined:** Bangladesh, UAE, Egypt, Uruguay (prospective member)
- **Governance**:
  - Board of Governors and Board of Directors
  - Unique feature: **Equal voting power** among founding members
- **Top Shareholders**:
  - China – 41.5%
  - India – 19.5%
  - Russia – 18.4%
  - Brazil – 10.5%
  - South Africa – 5.5%

Funding Sources

- Member contributions
- International bond markets
- Retained earnings

India's Engagement with Multilateral Banks:

Strategic Importance:

- India is a **major borrower** and a **significant shareholder** in all three banks.
- Uses multilateral financing for infrastructure projects, health and education reforms, urban modernization, and climate mitigation.

Recent Collaborations:

- ADB funding for urban transport, COVID-19 pandemic response, rural connectivity
- AIIB financing for India's renewable energy and urban water supply
- NDB supporting metro rail, rural roads, and health infrastructure

Comparison of Multilateral Banks

Aspect	ADB	AIIB	NDB
Founded	1966	2015	2015
HQ	Manila	Beijing	Shanghai
India's Stake	6.3%	8.4%	19.5%
Core Focus	Poverty reduction, infrastructure, sustainable development	Infrastructure for Tomorrow, climate finance	Infrastructure, South-South development
Voting Power	Proportional to capital	Proportional to capital	Equal for BRICS members

Challenges:

- Geopolitical competition among shareholders (especially US-China in ADB and AIIB)
- Debt sustainability concerns in borrowing countries
- Ensuring environmental and social safeguards in infrastructure projects

Opportunities for India:

- Leverage leadership roles to shape policies
- Secure concessional financing for green and digital infrastructure
- Promote regional connectivity and South-South cooperation

- Collaborate for resilient supply chains, energy security, and sustainable urbanization

Model UPSC Mains Question (GS Paper II):

Q "Multilateral Development Banks have emerged as crucial partners in India's development journey. Examine the role of ADB, AIIB, and NDB in India's infrastructure and social sector transformation. Highlight the strategic benefits and challenges in engaging with these institutions." (250 words)

Crossroads of Peace Initiative

GS Paper II – International Relations | Regional Cooperation | Diplomacy

Why in News?

During a trilateral consultation between **India, Iran, and Armenia**, Armenia presented its vision for regional connectivity through the **Crossroads of Peace Initiative**.

About the Crossroads of Peace Initiative:

- **Initiated by Armenia**, the Crossroads of Peace aims to transform the country into a **logistics and connectivity hub** in the South Caucasus region.
- **Vision**: Despite geopolitical constraints and closed borders with some neighbors (notably Turkey and Azerbaijan), Armenia aims to foster **regional cooperation, economic interdependence**, and **infrastructure development**.

Key Features:

1. **Geostrategic Connectivity**:
   - Armenia seeks to **bridge East-West and North-South trade corridors**.
   - Offers an **alternative transport route** bypassing politically sensitive areas.
   - Promotes **neutral, inclusive access** for all regional stakeholders.

2. **Sustainable Infrastructure**:
   - Focus on **green construction, renewable energy integration**, and **low-carbon materials**.
   - Aims to align with global sustainability and climate goals.

3. **Efficient Customs Management**:
   - Adoption of **digital platforms** such as **eTIR (Electronic Transit System)**.

- Facilitates **seamless cross-border cargo movement**, reducing delays and costs.
4. **Green Trade and Logistics**:
   - Eco-friendly logistics chain with **low-emission transport systems**.
   - Promotes **sustainable packaging**, reducing environmental footprint.
5. **Investment Incentives**:
   - Establishment of **Special Economic Zones (SEZs)** to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).
   - Focus on **industrial diversification and employment generation**.
6. **Road Safety and Compliance**:
   - Stricter traffic laws, **public awareness campaigns**, and robust enforcement.
   - Aims to reduce accidents and improve logistics reliability.

Strategic Importance for India:
- Enhances **multi-modal regional connectivity**, complementing India's **INSTC (International North-South Transport Corridor)** efforts.
- Counters **China's Belt and Road Initiative** by creating alternate Eurasian corridors.
- Strengthens India's engagement with **West and Central Asia** as part of its **Connect Central Asia policy**.

United Nations Peacebuilding Commission (UN PBC)

GS Paper II – International Institutions | Peace and Conflict Resolution

Why in News?

India has been **re-elected to the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC)** for the 2025–26 term, affirming its global peacebuilding role.

About UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC):
- **Establishment**: Founded in **2005** by the **UN General Assembly** and the **UN Security Council** to coordinate post-conflict recovery efforts.
- **Headquarters**: New York, United Nations Headquarters.

Composition:
- Total of **31 member states** drawn from:
  - **UN General Assembly**
  - **UN Security Council**
  - **Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)**
  - Leading **troop and police contributors**

○ Top **financial contributors** to UN activities

Mandate and Functions:

1. **Advisory Role**:
   ○ Provides **strategic advice** on post-conflict recovery.
   ○ Supports **inclusive peace processes** in fragile states.

2. **Resource Mobilization**:
   ○ Brings together **donors, UN agencies, and international institutions**.
   ○ Coordinates funding and technical support for peacebuilding.

3. **Bridge Between Political and Development Actors**:
   ○ Fosters coherence between **peace, security, development, and human rights**.

4. **Focus Areas**:
   ○ National reconciliation
   ○ Institution building
   ○ Rule of law and governance reform

India's Contribution to UN Peacebuilding:

● **Largest contributor of uniformed personnel** to UN peacekeeping missions historically.

● **Over 6,000 Indian troops** are currently deployed across **UN missions**, including in South Sudan, Congo, and Lebanon.

● India advocates for:
   ○ **Greater say for developing countries** in peacebuilding strategy.
   ○ Enhanced focus on **capacity building**, not just military deployment.
   ○ **Community-led peacebuilding** to ensure long-term stability.

Significance of India's Re-election:

● Reinforces India's position as a **responsible global stakeholder**.

● Enables India to shape peacebuilding strategies in conflict-ridden regions.

● Provides India a platform to promote the **Global South's perspective** on sustainable peace and development.

Model UPSC Mains Question (GS Paper II):

Q "India's growing role in peacebuilding reflects its commitment to a just international order. Examine the relevance of the UN Peacebuilding Commission in today's geopolitical landscape and evaluate India's contribution to it."

India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)

GS Paper II – International Relations | Global and Regional Connectivity

Why in News?

One year after its announcement at the **G20 Summit 2023 in New Delhi**, the **India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)** has gained strategic visibility but also faces geopolitical challenges that could delay its implementation.

What is IMEC?

- The IMEC is a **transnational, multimodal connectivity project** launched through a **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** at the **18th G20 Summit**.
- **Participating countries**: India, Saudi Arabia, UAE, EU, France, Germany, Italy, and the United States.
- It is envisioned as a **strategic and economic corridor** to facilitate seamless **trade, energy transfer, digital connectivity**, and **people-to-people exchanges**.

Objective:

To create a modern, integrated infrastructure corridor that connects:

- **India → Gulf Region (Middle East) → Europe**

Using a **multimodal network** of:

- Railways
- Highways
- Ports
- Pipelines
- Fiber optic cables

Structure of the Corridor:

1. **Eastern Corridor**: Links **India** to the **Gulf region** (UAE, Saudi Arabia)
2. **Northern Corridor**: Connects the **Gulf region to Europe**, primarily through **Jordan and Israel** to **European ports** like **Piraeus (Greece)** or **Genoa (Italy)**

Key Features:

- Part of the **Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII)**, a **G7-led** initiative launched in 2021 to counter China's BRI.
- Aims to boost **supply chain resilience**, **regional integration**, and **green infrastructure investment**.

- Enhances **India's strategic footprint** in **West Asia** and **Europe**, reducing dependency on traditional maritime routes like the **Suez Canal**.

Strategic Significance for India:

- **Energy Security**: Facilitates smoother energy transit from Gulf oil-rich nations.
- **Trade Diversification**: Offers new access to EU markets with shorter timelines.

- **Countering BRI**: Presents a rules-based, transparent alternative to **China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**.
- **Geopolitical Alignment**: Enhances partnerships with like-minded democracies in the **G7, EU**, and **West Asia**.
- **Digital and Green Connectivity**: Includes **fiber optics, renewables**, and **low-carbon transport infrastructure**.

Challenges & Roadblocks:

- **Israel-Hamas Conflict** (Oct 2023 onwards): Has raised concerns about the corridor passing through unstable regions like Israel and Palestine.
- **Iran's exclusion**: May trigger regional tensions, especially since Iran is a critical link in other corridors like **INSTC**.
- **Financial and Regulatory Complexities**: Multiple national laws, customs protocols, and infrastructure gaps.
- **Coordination Mechanisms**: Absence of a robust institutional framework to oversee implementation and conflict resolution.

Comparison with Other Regional Corridors:

1. International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC)

- Proposed in 2000 by India, Iran, and Russia.
- A 7,200 km route connecting India to Europe via **Iran, Central Asia, and Russia**.
- Complements IMEC but offers an alternate route via **Caspian Sea** and **Russia**.

2. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

- Launched in 2013 by China.
- Comprises land (Silk Road Economic Belt) and sea (21st-century Maritime Silk Road) routes.
- India has **opted out** due to sovereignty concerns over **CPEC** (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) passing through **PoK**.

3. **Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR)**
- Also known as the **Middle Corridor**, links **China to Europe** via **Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey**.
- Aims to bypass Russia and Iran.
- India is **not a member**, but it's strategically relevant for **Central Asia connectivity**.

Way Forward:
- **Diplomatic Balancing**: India must ensure regional buy-in without alienating strategic partners like Iran.
- **Security Coordination**: Enhanced maritime and overland security protocols needed in conflict-prone areas.
- **Institutional Mechanism**: A dedicated IMEC Secretariat or trilateral/quadrilateral mechanism for operational planning and monitoring.
- **Complementarity with INSTC**: Integrate IMEC with existing corridors to create a web of trade routes.

Conclusion:

The **India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)** represents a landmark in **strategic connectivity**, offering a **geo-economic alternative** to China's BRI. For India, it reflects growing **global trust and leadership in the Indo-Mediterranean sphere**. Its success, however, will depend on **resolving geopolitical tensions, institutional coordination,** and **sustained political will** among diverse stakeholders.

<u>Model UPSC Mains Question (GS Paper II):</u>

Q "The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) is India's strategic response to evolving global connectivity dynamics." Examine the economic and geopolitical implications of the IMEC, and compare it with similar regional infrastructure initiatives.

<u>First Trilateral Power Transaction: India, Nepal, Bangladesh</u>

GS Paper II – International Relations | Regional Groupings | Energy Security

Why in News?

India, Bangladesh, and Nepal have launched the **first-ever trilateral power trade**, enabling the export of electricity from Nepal to Bangladesh via the **Indian transmission network**—a key step toward a **South Asian Regional Power Market**.

Key Features of the Agreement:

- **Signed in October 2024**, the agreement involves:
  - **NTPC Vidyut Vyapar Nigam (NVVN)** – India
  - **Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA)**
  - **Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB)**
- **Power Flow**:
  - Up to **40 MW of electricity** will be transferred from **Nepal to Bangladesh** using **India's transmission infrastructure**.
- **Significance**:
  - **First trilateral energy exchange** in South Asia.
  - India acts as a **regional electricity transit hub**, reinforcing its central role in subregional energy cooperation.
  - Lays foundation for larger **multi-country power grid integration**.

Strategic Importance:

- **Energy Security**: Addresses power shortages and seasonal mismatches in Bangladesh.
- **Regional Cooperation**: Strengthens trust among South Asian neighbors and supports SAARC's vision for integrated infrastructure.
- **Sustainability**: Nepal's surplus **hydropower** offers clean energy alternatives for the region.
- **Diplomatic Leverage**: Enhances India's soft power and technical leadership in energy diplomacy.

Way Forward:

- Scaling up transmission capacity for larger exchanges.
- Institutionalizing a **South Asian Energy Market Framework**.
- Including Bhutan, Sri Lanka in future cross-border power trade mechanisms.
- Synchronizing regulatory standards and dispute resolution mechanisms.

Model UPSC Mains Questions:

Q "India's growing leadership in digital and energy connectivity marks a shift toward functional regionalism in South Asia." Discuss with reference to recent trilateral and global partnerships.

Digital Infrastructure Growth Initiative for India (DiGi Framework)

GS Paper II – International Relations | Digital Cooperation | Strategic Partnerships

Why in News?

The **United States, Japan, and South Korea** have jointly launched the **DiGi Framework** to collaborate with India's private sector for enhancing the country's **digital infrastructure ecosystem**.

About the DiGi Framework:

- **Full Name**: Digital Infrastructure Growth Initiative for India
- **Partners**:

    - **US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC)**
    - **Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC)**
    - **Korea Eximbank (Export-Import Bank of Korea)**

Objectives:

- Enhance **foreign investment and technical support** in India's digital infrastructure.
- Facilitate deployment of **trusted, secure, and resilient** technologies in critical areas.

Implementation Focus:

Support for projects in:

- **5G and Open RAN (Radio Access Network)**
- **Submarine Cable Networks** and **Optical Fiber Infrastructure**
- **Secure Data Centers** and **Cloud Services**
- **Smart Cities** and E-Governance Platforms
- Emerging Tech: **Artificial Intelligence, Quantum Computing, Cybersecurity Tools**
- Promote **supply chain diversification** and reduce dependency on authoritarian tech models.

Complementarity with India's Digital Initiatives:

- **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)** diplomacy:
    - India leads the **Virtual Global DPI Repository**
    - Promotes **UPI**, **Aadhaar**, and **DigiLocker** as global best practices.
    - **US-India Global Digital Development Partnership** launched to scale DPIs in Africa and Asia.

- **G20 DPI Framework** (2023): A global template for digital transformation via open, inclusive platforms.

Geostrategic Relevance:

- Counters **China's Digital Silk Road** influence in South Asia and Africa.
- Strengthens **Quad+** like cooperation on emerging technologies.
- Attracts **trusted capital** into India's tech ecosystem while boosting innovation and local capacity.

Conclusion:

These two initiatives—the **Trilateral Power Trade** and the **DiGi Framework**—highlight India's evolving role as a **regional connectivity hub** and a **global leader in digital governance**. Both signify India's commitment to **rule-based multilateralism**, **sustainable development**, and **inclusive technological growth**.

Model UPSC Mains Questions (GS Paper II):

Q "The DiGi Framework strengthens India's strategic autonomy in the digital age." Critically examine its potential and challenges.

World Urban Forum (WUF) – Twelfth Edition

GS Paper II – International Institutions | Urbanization | Governance

Why in News?

The **12th edition of the World Urban Forum (WUF)** concluded in **Cairo, Egypt**, with the **adoption of the "Cairo Call to Action"**, emphasizing equitable and sustainable urban futures.

About the World Urban Forum (WUF):

- **Established**: 2001 by the **United Nations**.
- **Organized by**: UN-Habitat – the United Nations Programme for Human Settlements.
- **Nature**: A non-legislative, biennial platform to discuss and promote **sustainable urban development**.

Objectives of the WUF:

1. **Raise Awareness**:
    - Promote broad understanding of **sustainable urbanization** and its global significance.
2. **Share Best Practices**:
    - Enable exchange of knowledge, case studies, and policies among urban planners, governments, and civil society.

3. **Foster Cooperation**:
    ○ Enhance collaboration between stakeholders including national/local governments, NGOs, academic institutions, and private sector.

4. **Contribute to the Implementation of SDG 11**:
    ○ Support the realization of **Sustainable Development Goal 11**: "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable."

Key Outcome: Cairo Call to Action (10-Point Agenda):

Some likely key themes (based on past outcomes):

- Inclusive urban planning
- Climate-resilient infrastructure
- Gender-responsive cities
- Affordable housing and slum upgrading
- Strengthening local governance
- Financing urban sustainability
- Digital innovation and data-driven cities

Significance for India:

- Supports India's **Smart Cities Mission**, **PMAY (Urban)**, and **urban mobility reforms**.
- Opportunity for Indian urban policymakers to align with **global best practices**.
- Showcases Indian urban innovations such as **Indore's waste management**, **Ahmedabad's BRT**, etc.

Model UPSC Mains Questions(GS Paper II):

Q **"Urbanization has both created opportunities and exacerbated inequalities. Examine how platforms like the World Urban Forum can guide India's urban transformation."**

Triton Island and the South China Sea Dispute

GS Paper I – Geography (World Map Locations)|GS Paper II – International Relations | Maritime Security

Why in News?

Satellite imagery has revealed **military construction** by China on **Triton Island**, part of the **Paracel Islands** chain, raising regional tensions.

About Triton Island:

- **Location: Southwest of the Paracel Islands**, in the **South China Sea (SCS)**.

- **Size**: ~1.2 square kilometers.
- **Status**: Historically uninhabited, now militarized by China.
- **Disputed by**:
  - **China** (administers it),
  - **Vietnam** (historical claims),
  - **Taiwan** (Republic of China government).

Strategic Importance:

- Closest Paracel island to **Vietnam's coast**.
- Key point in **China's 'Nine-Dash Line' claim** over the South China Sea.
- Controls access to:
  - Rich **fisheries**,
  - Potential **oil & gas reserves**,
  - Vital **sea lanes** (1/3rd of global maritime trade passes through the SCS).

About the South China Sea:

- **Geographical Features**:
  - Borders **China, Taiwan, Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Vietnam**.
  - Connected to **East China Sea** (via Taiwan Strait) and **Philippine Sea** (via Luzon Strait).
  - Hosts two major disputed archipelagos: **Paracel Islands** and **Spratly Islands**.
- **Geopolitical Hotspot**:
  - Frequent naval standoffs.
  - Presence of **US Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs)**.
  - Competing claims tested under **UNCLOS**, though China dismisses international rulings.

India's Stake in the Region:

- India upholds **freedom of navigation and overflight**.
- Follows **Act East Policy** and **Indo-Pacific strategy**.
- Supports ASEAN centrality and rules-based order.
- India has conducted **joint naval drills** in the region (e.g., with Vietnam, US, Australia, Japan).

<u>Model UPSC Mains Questions (GS Paper II):</u>

Q **"The militarization of islands in the South China Sea has profound implications for maritime security in the Indo-Pacific." Discuss with reference to recent developments.**

Panama Canal Treaty and US-Panama Relations

GS Paper II – International Relations | Bilateral Agreements | Maritime Security

Why in News?

Former US President Donald Trump criticized the 1999 Panama Canal transfer, calling it a "foolish decision," and expressed intent to "take back" control—reigniting geopolitical attention on the historic **Torrijos-Carter Treaties**.

About Panama Canal:

- **Strategic Importance**: A man-made waterway connecting the **Atlantic and Pacific Oceans** through the **Isthmus of Panama**.
- **Length**: ~80 kilometers.
- **Functionality**: Utilizes a series of **locks** to lift/lower ships over the terrain, enabling smooth maritime passage.
- **Maritime Significance**: Reduces ~8,000 nautical miles (15,000 km) for ships compared to sailing around **Cape Horn** in South America.

Historical Timeline:

- **1881**: France began construction, abandoned due to **disease (malaria, yellow fever)** and financial collapse.
- **1904**: The **United States** took over construction; completed on **August 15, 1914**.
- **1903–1999**: The U.S. controlled the Canal Zone under the **Hay–Bunau-Varilla Treaty**.
- **1999**: Full control transferred to Panama following the **Torrijos–Carter Treaties**.

Torrijos–Carter Treaties (1977):

- **Signed on**: September 7, 1977.
- **Signatories**:
    - **General Omar Torrijos** (Leader of Panama)
    - **President Jimmy Carter** (United States)

Key Provisions:

1. **Panama Canal Treaty**
    - Nullified the **1903 treaty**.
    - Guaranteed Panama would gain full control by **December 31, 1999**.
    - Allowed a **transition period** with joint operations and capacity-building for Panama.
2. **Neutrality Treaty**
    - Ensured **permanent neutrality** of the canal.

- ○ The canal would remain **open to vessels from all nations** during peace and war.
- ○ The U.S. retained the **right to defend** the canal against threats to neutrality.

Importance of the Canal for Global Trade:

- **~5% of global maritime trade** passes through the canal.
- Vital route for **U.S., China, and Latin American trade**.
- Plays a key role in **global supply chain efficiency** and **naval mobility**.

Geopolitical and Environmental Challenges:

- **Climate Vulnerability**: Panama Canal faces issues due to **droughts and low water levels**, affecting passage volumes.
- **US Concerns**: Strategic anxiety over growing **Chinese investment in Panamanian infrastructure**.
- **Panama's Sovereignty**: Panama maintains that the **treaty obligations are non-negotiable**, asserting full sovereign control.

India's Relevance:

- As a maritime nation, India supports **freedom of navigation** and **secure sea lanes**.
- The canal's security and neutrality impact India's **West-East trade routes**, particularly for **energy and container transport**.

Conclusion:

The **Panama Canal Treaty** represents a pivotal moment in international diplomacy—balancing superpower influence with national sovereignty. Calls to revisit the treaty reflect shifting geopolitical anxieties in the era of **strategic waterways and global trade dependency**.

Model UPSC Mains Question:

(GS II – International Relations)

Q "The Torrijos–Carter Treaties redefined power dynamics in the Western Hemisphere. Critically examine their impact on U.S.–Panama relations and global maritime governance."

India Joins UN Committee of Experts on Big Data & Data Science for Official Statistics (UN-CEBD)

Why in News?

India has joined the **UN Committee of Experts on Big Data and Data Science for Official Statistics (UN-CEBD)**—a step towards enhancing India's role in global data governance and sustainable development monitoring.

About UN-CEBD:

- **Established in 2014** by the UN Statistics Division under the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA).
- Aimed at supporting the **modernization of official statistics** through Big Data and data science techniques.
- **Current Leadership**: Chaired by **South Africa; Denmark** and the **UK** serve as vice-chairs.
- **Members**: 31 Member States and 16 International Organizations including India.

Mandate and Objectives:

- **Strategic Integration**: Facilitate integration of **Big Data** into the global statistical system.
- **Support for SDGs**: Aid in **monitoring the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** through new data sources.
- **Capacity Building**: Train statisticians in modern analytics, machine learning, and AI tools.
- **Ethical and Legal Framework**: Address data **privacy, security, interoperability**, and **cross-border access**.
- **Promote Trust**: Encourage public confidence in the use of Big Data for public policy.

Significance for India:

- Enhances India's role in **global statistical cooperation and governance**.
- Strengthens domestic capabilities for real-time policy tracking, especially in welfare delivery and disaster response.
- Aligns with India's push for **Data Governance frameworks**, like the **National Data Governance Framework Policy (NDGFP)**.

US Eases Export Controls on Indian Nuclear and Strategic Entities:

Why in News?

The **United States** has announced plans to remove Indian government entities — **BARC**, **IGCAR**, and **IREL** — from its **Entity List**, clearing the way for closer cooperation in **nuclear energy** and **critical mineral supply chains**.

What is the US Entity List?

- Maintained by the **Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS)** under the **US Department of Commerce**.
- Lists individuals, companies, and organizations subject to **export restrictions** due to concerns related to:
  - **WMD proliferation**,
  - **National security**,
  - **Terrorism**, or
  - **Violations of foreign policy goals**.
- Example: **Huawei** was added in 2019 citing national security threats.

Entities Delisted:

1. **BARC** – India's premier nuclear research center.
2. **IGCAR** – Specializes in fast reactor and thorium fuel cycle development.
3. **IREL** – Engaged in mining and processing of rare earth elements, critical for clean energy and defense.

Significance of the Move:

- **Strengthens Strategic Partnership**: Reinforces growing **Indo-US civil nuclear cooperation**, which began with the **123 Agreement (2008)**.
- **Boosts Clean Energy Transition**: Facilitates transfer of **nuclear energy technologies** vital for India's net-zero targets.
- **Secures Critical Mineral Supply Chains**: India gains access to **advanced tech** for refining and utilizing **rare earths**.
- **Removes Strategic Irritants**: Resolves long-standing export control issues that hindered joint R&D and tech exchange.

Conclusion:

These developments showcase India's **increasing global footprint** in two critical areas: **data diplomacy** and **strategic technology cooperation**. Joining UN-CEBD places India at the core of global data policymaking, while removal from the US Entity List reflects the **deepening of Indo-US strategic ties** and trust in **India's non-proliferation credentials**.

Model UPSC Mains Question – GS Paper II:

Q "India's integration into global governance frameworks, such as UN-CEBD, and growing strategic partnerships with countries like the US reflect a maturing foreign policy approach." Critically analyze the impact of these developments on India's global positioning in data governance and nuclear diplomacy.

PM Modi's Visit to the USA – Strategic, Technological, and Economic Outcomes

GS Paper II – International Relations | Bilateral Agreements | Foreign Policy

Why in News:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the United States for a high-level bilateral meeting with U.S. President Donald Trump. The visit marked a significant step forward in deepening India-U.S. strategic convergence, particularly in defense, trade, emerging technologies, and regional security.

Key Strategic Outcomes of the Visit:

1. Strengthening Defense Cooperation:

- **F-35 Stealth Jets**: The U.S. agreed to sell F-35 fighter aircraft to India, enhancing India's deterrent capabilities and strengthening air superiority.
- **P-8I Maritime Aircraft**: India to procure six additional P-8I aircraft for enhancing surveillance in the Indian Ocean Region.
- **Autonomous Systems Industry Alliance (ASIA)**: Both countries agreed to jointly develop autonomous defense technologies under a new institutional framework, promoting indigenization and innovation in military robotics and AI.

2. Expanding Trade and Economic Partnership – 'Mission 500'

- Target to reach **$500 billion in bilateral trade by 2030**.
- Current bilateral trade in FY24 reached **$118.2 billion**, with India enjoying a **trade surplus of $36.8 billion**.
- Focus on **market access**, **tariff reduction**, and resolving **non-tariff barriers** to enhance investment flow and export diversification.

Technology and Innovation Initiatives:

1. TRUST Initiative:

- Framework to **protect sensitive technologies** while enhancing **collaboration** across sectors like:
  - Defense
  - AI & Semiconductors

- ○ Quantum Computing
- ○ Biotechnology
- ○ Clean Energy & Space

2. AI Infrastructure Roadmap

- Joint roadmap to **scale AI development in India**:
  - ○ Identify **financial, regulatory, and hardware barriers**
  - ○ Promote **AI data centers**, cloud infrastructure, and high-performance computing (HPC)

3. INDUS Innovation

- Expansion of the **INDUS-X defense innovation initiative** into **space, energy, and emerging tech**.
- Aimed at bridging **academic and industrial ecosystems** in both countries for mutual R&D leadership.

4. Resilient Supply Chains and Critical Minerals

Strategic Mineral Recovery Initiative:

- Joint effort to extract and process **critical minerals** like:
  - ○ **Lithium, Cobalt, Rare Earth Elements (REEs)**
- Use of byproducts from **coal mining**, **oil & gas**, and **heavy industry** to build **sustainable mineral value chains**.

Focus Areas:

- **Semiconductors**
- **Advanced materials**
- **APIs (Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients)**
- Aimed at reducing dependency on China and ensuring supply security.

5. Space Cooperation – NASA-ISRO Joint Missions

- **Indian astronaut mission to the ISS** scheduled via AXIOM in 2025.
- **NISAR Earth Observation Mission**: A collaborative NASA-ISRO satellite project using **dual-band synthetic aperture radar** to monitor environmental changes and natural disasters.

6. Regional and Geopolitical Alignment: Indo-Pacific Cooperation

- **Indian Ocean Strategic Venture**:
  - ○ A **whole-of-government forum** to advance maritime commerce and connectivity in the Indo-Pacific.
  - ○ Supports the **Free, Open, and Rules-Based Indo-Pacific** vision shared by both nations.

Significance of the Visit:

For India:

- Secures advanced military technology and space assets.
- Boosts AI and semiconductor ecosystems aligned with Digital India and Startup India goals.
- Strengthens India's role as a **tech and defense partner** in the Indo-Pacific.

For the USA:

- Positions India as a **trusted strategic and tech partner** in countering China's rise.
- Expands U.S. markets and investments in India's growing digital economy and infrastructure.

Challenges and Way Forward:

- Trade disputes on digital services tax, labor norms, and IPR need continued engagement.
- Technology transfer concerns and over-dependence on defense imports must be balanced with domestic innovation.
- Implementation of initiatives like ASIA and INDUS Innovation must be institutionalized beyond political transitions.

Conclusion:

PM Modi's visit to the U.S. reflects a **transformational phase in India-U.S. relations**, evolving from transactional defense sales to a **comprehensive strategic technology partnership**. The visit has reinforced India's global standing as a **key partner in shaping rules-based global governance**, especially in the Indo-Pacific and technological domains.

<u>**Model UPSC Mains Question (GS Paper II):**</u>

Q "India's strategic partnership with the United States has evolved beyond defense cooperation to include critical technologies, trade, and regional security. Discuss the key dimensions of this partnership in the context of recent bilateral developments."

<u>**Beggar-thy-Neighbour (BTN) Policies – Economic Protectionism and Global Trade Conflicts**</u>

GS Paper III – Economy | International Trade | Globalization

Why in News?

The resurgence of **Beggar-thy-Neighbour policies** in recent years—especially under **populist and nationalist regimes**—has triggered growing concerns of **trade wars, currency manipulation, and global economic instability**. The **U.S.-**

China trade tensions, currency devaluations, and unilateral tariffs have spotlighted the risks of such economic strategies.

What are Beggar-thy-Neighbour Policies?

- BTN refers to **economic policies adopted by a country to benefit itself at the direct cost of other nations**.
- Such measures aim to **boost domestic economic performance**, often during times of **recession or stagnation**, by shifting **unemployment or low demand** onto trading partners.
- These short-term gains often come at the **expense of global trade cooperation** and risk triggering **retaliatory actions**.
- The concept was first described by **Adam Smith** in The Wealth of Nations (1776), and popularized during the **Great Depression** of the 1930s.

Key Characteristics of BTN Policies:

1. **Nationalistic or inward-looking economic approach**
2. **Disruptive to global trade and economic interdependence**
3. **Trigger retaliatory countermeasures by affected nations**
4. **Ultimately harmful to global economic stability**

Forms of Beggar-thy-Neighbour Policies:

1. Trade Barriers: Tariffs and Import Quotas

- High tariffs or quotas reduce imports to protect domestic industries.
- Encourages local production but hurts exporters in partner countries.
- **Example**:
  - U.S.-China Trade War (2018–2020): U.S. imposed steep tariffs on $360+ billion worth of Chinese goods; China retaliated with duties on U.S. agricultural and industrial products.

2. Currency Devaluation (Competitive Devaluation)

- Countries **intentionally weaken their currency** to make exports cheaper and imports more expensive.
- Can trigger a **currency war** if other nations respond in kind.
- **Example**:
  - China has faced allegations of manipulating the yuan to maintain export competitiveness.
  - Japan (1990s) and Argentina (early 2000s) also used devaluation for short-term trade advantages.

3. **Subsidies and Preferential Policies**

- **Government grants, tax breaks, or subsidies** are provided to domestic industries.
- May lead to unfair competition and distort global pricing.
- **Example**:
  - EU and U.S. agricultural subsidies leading to WTO disputes.
  - India's sugar and rice subsidies have faced criticism under WTO's Agreement on Agriculture (AoA).

Economic Implications of BTN Policies:

Positive (Short-Term)	Negative (Long-Term)
Boost to domestic production & jobs	Retaliatory tariffs and trade wars
Improves trade balance temporarily	Trade diversion and global economic slowdown
Political popularity for protectionist leaders	Violation of international trade norms (WTO)
May stabilize domestic currency/exports	Inflation due to costly imports; loss of investor confidence

Case Studies:

1. **Great Depression (1930s):**
   - U.S. passed **Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act (1930)** increasing tariffs on 20,000+ imports.
   - Resulted in global retaliation, deepening the Great Depression.
2. **US-China Trade War:**
   - Tariffs led to **disrupted global supply chains**, inflation, and loss of market confidence.
   - Highlighted the danger of modern BTN policies even in interdependent economies.

Relevance for India:

- India has often walked a **tightrope between protectionism and free trade**.
- Recent disputes at WTO over **agriculture subsidies** and **domestic content requirements** (e.g., solar panels) have brought scrutiny.
- India's cautious approach toward **Free Trade Agreements (FTAs)** like RCEP shows a **strategic selective openness**.
- **'Atmanirbhar Bharat'**: While aimed at self-reliance, excessive import substitution may risk being perceived as a BTN move.

Way Forward:

1. **Multilateral Engagement**: Re-strengthening the WTO and other trade bodies for fair dispute resolution.
2. **Balancing Domestic and Global Interests**: Policies should focus on competitiveness, not isolation.
3. **Currency Stability**: Managed float system with transparency in forex interventions.
4. **Reform of Subsidy Regimes**: Ensuring alignment with WTO rules while supporting vulnerable sectors.

Conclusion:

While Beggar-thy-Neighbour policies may offer **short-term domestic relief**, they threaten **long-term global economic order** and **multilateral cooperation**. With growing **economic nationalism**, it is critical for countries like India to adopt **strategic trade policies that promote fairness, sustainability, and mutual benefit** in the global trading system.

Model UPSC Mains Question (GS Paper III):

Q "Beggar-thy-neighbour policies are often used by countries to safeguard their economic interests, but they risk undermining global trade stability." Critically examine the relevance of such policies in today's globalized world, with reference to recent examples.

Paris AI Action Summit 2025 – Key Takeaways and Global Implications

GS Paper II & III – Governance | International Relations | Science & Technology | Ethics

Why in News?

The **Paris AI Action Summit 2025** was co-chaired by **Prime Minister Narendra Modi** and **French President Emmanuel Macron**, bringing together global leaders, policymakers, and AI industry experts to establish a responsible and inclusive global governance framework for Artificial Intelligence.

Key Outcomes of the Summit:

1. The AI Declaration

- **Endorsed by 60 countries**, including India, China, and several developing nations.
- **Not signed by the U.S. and U.K.**, citing concerns over overregulation and innovation bottlenecks.

Core Objectives of the Declaration:

- **AI Accessibility:** Promote global reach and equitable distribution of AI tools to avoid technological inequality.
- **Trust and Safety:** Commit to ethical, secure, and transparent AI deployment across sectors.
- **Impact on Economy and Labor Markets:** Ensure AI supports job creation, prevents monopolization, and promotes innovation in the workforce.
- **Support for Developing Nations:** Build AI capacity in the Global South through knowledge transfer and digital infrastructure support.

2. Five Core Themes of the Paris Summit

1. **Public Interest AI:** Align AI innovation with societal needs like healthcare, education, language diversity, and climate action.
2. **Future of Work:** Analyze and mitigate AI's impact on employment. Promote skilling, reskilling, and social safety nets.
3. **Innovation and Culture:** Encourage AI for creative sectors and scientific research. Ensure balanced IP and open innovation ecosystems.
4. **Trust in AI:** Promote accountability, algorithmic transparency, explainability, and data protection in AI systems.
5. **Global AI Governance:** Propose a multilateral and inclusive framework for AI oversight, akin to the Paris Climate Agreement model.

3. Coalition for Environmentally Sustainable AI

- **Launched by France** in collaboration with **UNEP** and **ITU**.
- **Objective:** Promote **eco-friendly AI models** with reduced carbon footprints and energy-efficient practices.

India's Role:

- Joined the coalition to advocate for sustainable computing, especially in climate-vulnerable regions.

Agenda Includes:

- Greener AI model design
- Sustainable data center infrastructure
- Lifecycle assessment and carbon impact measurement tools

4. Launch of 'Current AI' – A Public Interest AI Initiative

- **A $400 million foundation** created to democratize access to AI for public good.
- **Key Focus Areas:**
  - Open-source AI tools and infrastructure

- Healthcare innovation and scientific research
- Preservation of linguistic and cultural diversity
- Systems for **AI auditing**, **bias detection**, and **impact assessment**

Significance for India:

- **Leadership Role:** India positioned itself as a bridge between the Global North and South in AI governance.
- **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) Diplomacy:** Reinforces India's G20 agenda to globalize DPIs like Aadhaar, UPI, and DigiLocker.
- **Ethical Tech Advocacy:** India's push for inclusive and explainable AI aligns with its domestic frameworks (e.g., DPDP Act 2023).

Challenges in Global AI Governance:

- **Lack of Consensus:** Diverging views on regulation and national interest (e.g., U.S., U.K. withdrawal from declaration).
- **AI Monopolies:** Dominance of few tech giants (Big Tech) over data and compute infrastructure.
- **Data Sovereignty:** Tension between cross-border AI data flows and national data protection laws.
- **Environmental Concerns:** High energy demand of large language models (LLMs) and AI training models.

Way Forward

- **Inclusive Global Framework:** Like the IPCC for climate change, establish a **UN-led AI Governance Council**.
- **Open-Source Development:** Promote federated learning, decentralized AI models, and community-led innovation.
- **Capacity Building for Developing Countries:** Support AI infrastructure, datasets, and computing power access.
- **Balance Between Innovation and Regulation:** Develop **adaptive regulation** through regulatory sandboxes and outcome-based policies.

Conclusion:

The Paris AI Action Summit 2025 marks a critical milestone in shaping the **rules of engagement for Artificial Intelligence**, particularly emphasizing **accessibility, sustainability, and ethics**. India's proactive role highlights its emerging leadership in **tech diplomacy and global AI governance**. However, effective implementation will require **multilateral consensus, open innovation ecosystems, and responsible regulation**.

Model UPSC Mains Question (GS Paper II / III):

Q "The Paris AI Action Summit marks a shift toward multilateral governance of emerging technologies." Discuss the significance of such initiatives for global equity, sustainability, and India's digital diplomacy.

Ocean Coordination Mechanism (OCM)

Background:

The Ocean Coordination Mechanism (OCM) is a recently initiated framework by the **Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO (IOC-UNESCO)** aimed at addressing marine environmental challenges specifically in the **Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf region**. The initiative stems from the **CLME+ Strategic Action Programme (SAP)**, a decade-long regional programme endorsed in 2014 to promote sustainable governance of marine resources in the Wider Caribbean and adjacent areas.

Explanation:

The OCM seeks to foster **regional cooperation**, **sustainable ocean governance**, and **marine conservation** in one of the world's ecologically sensitive and economically important ocean regions. It operates under the support of the **Global Environment Facility (GEF)** through the **UNDP/GEF PROCARIBE+ Project**, highlighting the international commitment to preserving ocean health.

The **North Brazil Shelf**—located between the mouths of the Amazon and Orinoco rivers—is ecologically significant due to its vast muddy coastlines and influence by the **North Brazil Current**, which affects ocean temperature, salinity, and nutrient distribution. Coordinated efforts here are crucial for protecting biodiversity, managing fisheries, and mitigating climate impacts like ocean acidification and microplastics pollution.

About IOC-UNESCO:

Established in 1960, the IOC promotes global cooperation in ocean science to improve ocean management and sustainable development. It is headquartered in Paris and includes around 150 member states, including India. The Commission oversees marine research, capacity building, ocean observations, and global initiatives like the **UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030)**.

The OCM, as a new regional governance tool under the IOC framework, will enhance the implementation of Marine Spatial Planning (MSP), enable joint research, and strengthen early warning systems, such as tsunamis, to better protect coastal communities.

Model UPSC Mains Question:

Q **"Discuss the role of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC-UNESCO) and the significance of the newly launched Ocean Coordination Mechanism (OCM) in promoting sustainable ocean governance in the Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf region."**

Geo-Economic Fragmentation (GEF)

Background:

The **Economic Survey 2024–25** highlights a significant global shift from the era of globalization to an emerging trend of **geo-economic fragmentation (GEF)**. This change is driven largely by strategic and geopolitical tensions, replacing purely market-based economic integration with politically motivated alliances and trade realignments.

Explanation:

Geo-Economic Fragmentation refers to the **intentional breakdown** of international economic ties due to political or strategic concerns. Countries are increasingly prioritizing national security, self-reliance, and strategic autonomy over efficiency-driven globalization.

GEF manifests in several ways:

- **Trade barriers and tariffs** based on geopolitical alignment
- **Selective migration policies** influenced by national interests
- **Investment restrictions** on technology or critical infrastructure
- **Supply chain reconfiguration** away from rivals

This has led to **economic "blocs"** or **"camps"**, where economic interactions are preferred among allies or like-minded states, rather than being globally inclusive.

Related Terms:

Term	Description
Friendshoring	Moving production to allied nations to reduce dependency on geopolitical rivals. Ex: U.S. moving semiconductor manufacturing to South Korea or India.
Reshoring	Bringing back offshore production to the home country. Ex: U.K. reviving domestic PPE production post-COVID.
Nearshoring	Relocating production to nearby countries to cut transport time and costs. Ex: U.S. shifting supply chains from China to Mexico.

Model UPSC Mains Questions:

Q What is geo-economic fragmentation? Discuss its implications for India in terms of trade, investment, and strategic autonomy in a multipolar world.

Triangular Cooperation

Background:

The **OECD-Islamic Development Bank report** emphasizes **triangular cooperation** as a vital strategy in navigating a divided and multipolar world. It enables effective South-South and North-South-South partnerships by pooling diverse expertise and resources.

Explanation:

Triangular Cooperation involves **three actors** in a development initiative:

1. **Beneficiary Partner:** The recipient country with a development need.
2. **Pivotal Partner:** A developing country with technical expertise and relevant experience (e.g., India).
3. **Facilitating Partner:** A developed country or international organization that provides funding and coordination (e.g., OECD countries or World Bank).

This model is seen as more **inclusive**, **efficient**, and **context-sensitive**, leveraging **shared experiences** from developing nations while still benefitting from global resources.

India is a significant player in this field and was involved in its first triangular project as early as **1957**, participating in road construction in Nepal alongside the U.S.

Model UPSC Mains Questions:

Q Explain the concept of triangular cooperation in development diplomacy. Evaluate India's role and potential in leveraging this model to enhance its global influence.

Katchatheevu Island Dispute

Background:

Katchatheevu is a small, uninhabited island (1.9 sq. km) located in the **Palk Strait** between India and Sri Lanka. It has long been at the center of diplomatic tensions between the two nations, especially involving Tamil Nadu and Sri Lankan Tamil fishermen. Recently, the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly passed a resolution urging the Union Government to reclaim the island from Sri Lanka, reigniting the debate over sovereignty and fishing rights.

Explanation:

Geographical and Historical Context:

- Lies **northeast of Rameswaram (India)** and **southwest of Jaffna (Sri Lanka)**.
- Formed by a **volcanic eruption in the 14th century**.
- Initially under the **Jaffna Kingdom (Sri Lanka)**, later part of **Ramnad Zamindari** (under Nayak rule in Madurai).
- Post-independence, both India and Sri Lanka claimed ownership due to historical usage and cultural ties.

Cultural Significance:

- Hosts the famous **St. Anthony's Shrine**, where an annual festival draws pilgrims from both India and Sri Lanka.
- Considered part of **Tamil heritage** and is linked to the legacy of **Thiruvalluvar**.

Agreements and Legal Position:

1. 1974 Indo-Sri Lankan Maritime Boundary Agreement:

- India **ceded** Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka to settle maritime boundaries.
- Indian fishermen allowed to **visit** the island (rest, dry nets, attend church), but **not given fishing rights**.
- No formal Parliamentary ratification of the ceding led to controversy in India.

2. 1976 Agreement:

- Prohibited both countries from fishing in each other's **Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs)**.
- Since Katchatheevu lies close to the EEZ boundary, this created a **grey zone** regarding fishing access.

Issues Involved:

- **Fishermen's Livelihood:** Indian fishermen face arrests and harassment by Sri Lankan Navy.
- **Legal and Constitutional Debate:** Critics argue the island was ceded without **Parliamentary approval**, raising questions about legality.
- **Geopolitical Sensitivity:** Reclaiming the island could strain India–Sri Lanka ties, especially amid China's influence in Sri Lanka.

<u>Model UPSC Mains Question:</u>

Q Katchatheevu Island has remained a source of friction between India and Sri Lanka. Discuss the legal, geopolitical, and livelihood-related dimensions of the issue. In your view, what should be India's policy approach going forward?

Europe's AI Convention

Context:

The **Council of Europe (CoE)** has adopted a landmark treaty titled the **Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence, Human Rights, Democracy, and the Rule of Law** — commonly referred to as the "**AI Convention.**" It is the **first international legally binding treaty** on the **governance of artificial intelligence (AI)** systems.

Background:

Amid the rapid proliferation of AI technologies, European nations have sought a **rules-based governance framework** to ensure **ethical and human-centric deployment** of AI. The **AI Convention** reflects growing concerns over **algorithmic bias**, **AI surveillance**, and threats to **democratic institutions**.

This development comes alongside other global AI regulatory efforts like the **EU Artificial Intelligence Act**, the **OECD AI Principles**, and the **G7's Hiroshima Process**.

Explanation:

Key Highlights of the AI Convention:

- **Scope and Nature:**
  - The convention is a **comprehensive legally binding treaty**, focusing on ensuring that **AI systems uphold human rights**, democratic values, and the rule of law.
  - It sets a **normative foundation** for **transparent, accountable**, and **human oversight** in AI usage.

- **Definition of AI:**
  - An AI system is defined as a **machine-based system** that processes input to generate **predictions, recommendations, content, or decisions** influencing virtual or physical environments.
  - This aligns with the definitions adopted by the **EU AI Act** and the **OECD**.

- **Principles Included:**
  - Respect for **human dignity and rights**
  - Prevention of **discrimination and bias**
  - **Transparency** in algorithmic decisions
  - **Accountability** and provision for **human oversight**
  - **Cross-border cooperation** on AI governance

About the Council of Europe (CoE):

- **Established:** 1949, post-World War II, to uphold **human rights, democracy**, and the **rule of law**.
- **Headquarters:** Strasbourg, France.
- **Members:** 46 countries including the **Holy See, Japan**, and the **U.S.** (India is **not a member**).
- **Not the same as the European Union** but works in close coordination with it.
- **Focus Areas:** Human rights, crime prevention, environmental protection, bioethics, migration, and digital ethics.

What is a Framework Convention?

- A **framework convention** is a legally binding agreement that lays down **broad commitments and guiding principles**.
- Further **protocols** and **instruments** under the convention flesh out specific obligations.
  - Example: **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)** and its **Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety**.

Significance:

- Sets a **global precedent** in AI regulation with a **rights-based approach**.
- Establishes **cooperation among signatories** for AI safety, ethics, and transparency.
- Reinforces the role of **international law** in addressing **technology-led disruptions** to democracy and civil liberties.

Model UPSC Mains Question:

Q **In light of recent developments in AI governance, critically evaluate the significance of Europe's AI Convention in shaping global standards on artificial intelligence. How does it compare to existing AI regulatory frameworks like the OECD Principles or the EU AI Act?**

(GS Paper II – Governance / GS Paper III – Science & Technology)

INTERPOL's Blue Corner Notice

Context:

Interpol has issued a **Blue Corner Notice** to locate and identify **Prajwal Revanna**, a Member of Parliament from Karnataka, who has been **accused in a high-profile sexual assault case** and is currently absconding.

Background:

In international policing, **Interpol notices** are a critical tool to enhance coordination among member countries. India, through the **Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)**, has been increasingly using these notices to trace fugitives, especially in cases involving financial fraud, organized crime, or serious allegations such as sexual assault.

Explanation:

What is Interpol?

- **Full Name:** International Criminal Police Organization
- **Established:** 1923
- **Headquarters:** Lyon, France
- **Membership:** 194 countries
- **UN Status:** Not a UN agency, but has **Permanent Observer status** at the UN since 1996.
- **India's Role:** Member since 1956. CBI serves as the nodal liaison agency.

Functions of Interpol:

- Coordinates **international police cooperation**.
- Shares information on **global crimes** such as:
  - Terrorism
  - Cybercrime
  - Drug trafficking
  - Human trafficking
  - Environmental crimes
- Maintains **centralized criminal databases**:
  - Fingerprints

  - DNA profiles
  - Stolen passport and identity documents

What is a Blue Corner Notice?

- A **Blue Notice** is issued to:

- ○ **Locate**, **identify**, or **obtain information** about a person of interest in a criminal investigation.
- It **does not mandate arrest** but requests cooperation from all member states in locating the individual.
- Interpol Notices are **not legally binding**, but most countries treat them with significant weight.

Interpol in India:

- The **CBI** functions as India's **National Central Bureau (NCB)**, coordinating with Interpol.
- India hosted the **90th Interpol General Assembly in 2022**, marking a growing role in global policing.

Types of Interpol Notices (Selected):

Color	Purpose
Red	Request to locate and **arrest** a person pending extradition
Blue	To **locate and identify** a person of interest
Green	For **warnings** about a person's criminal activities
Yellow	To help locate **missing persons**, often minors
Black	Seeks information on **unidentified bodies**
Orange	Warns of a serious and imminent **threat**
Purple	Seeks information on **modus operandi** of criminals

Model UPSC Mains Question:

Q Examine the significance of Interpol's Blue Corner Notice in transnational law enforcement. Discuss the role of Interpol in enhancing India's global policing capacity while highlighting the challenges in executing international warrants. (GS Paper II – Governance / International Relations)

Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ)

Context:

At the **33rd session of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ)** held in Vienna, heads of the **Financial Action Task Force (FATF)**, **Interpol**, and the **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)** called upon nations to scale up global efforts in combating transnational crime and corruption.

Background:

In an era marked by rising cybercrime, organized trafficking, and financial fraud, international cooperation has become vital. The **CCPCJ**, functioning under **ECOSOC**, plays a central role in shaping the **global criminal justice agenda**, emphasizing preventive frameworks, rehabilitation, and legal capacity building.

Explanation:

About CCPCJ:

- **Established:** 1992
- **Parent Body:** United Nations Economic and Social Council (**ECOSOC**)
- **Headquarters:** Vienna, Austria
- **Members:** 40 member states
    - **Elections:** 20 members are elected every three years by ECOSOC.
    - **India's Role:** India served as a member from **2019 to 2021**.

Mandate & Role:

- Principal **policy-making body** of the UN in the fields of:
    - **Crime prevention**
    - **Criminal justice reform**
    - **International cooperation against crime**
- Supports **implementation of UN crime conventions**, including:
    - UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC)
    - UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC)
- Prepares for and conducts the **UN Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice** (held every 5 years).

Global Cooperation:

- **Coordinates with** UNODC and other bodies to strengthen legal frameworks and justice delivery systems.
- Maintains strong links with the **UN Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Programme Network (PNI)** — a group of academic and research institutions focused on crime and justice.

Why is CCPCJ Relevant Today?

- Rising **global criminal networks** (drug trafficking, terrorism financing, cybercrime)
- Strengthening **rule of law**, especially in fragile and post-conflict states
- Promotes **human rights-based criminal justice reforms**
- Encourages adoption of **non-custodial measures**, rehabilitation, and **access to justice**

Model UPSC Mains Question:

Q In the context of rising transnational crimes and cyber threats, critically evaluate the role of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ) in advancing global criminal justice reforms. How can India leverage its engagement with CCPCJ to strengthen its domestic justice system? (GS Paper II – International Institutions / Governance)

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC): Strategic Infrastructure and Regional Implications

Context:

During a recent five-day visit to China, **Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif** and **Chinese President Xi Jinping** agreed to upgrade the **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)**, marking a renewed push for deeper infrastructure and economic collaboration under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Background:

The **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)**, launched in **2015**, is a flagship component of China's **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**. It aims to provide China with direct access to the **Arabian Sea** through Pakistan's **Gwadar Port**, reducing its dependency on the Strait of Malacca and enhancing strategic and economic linkages in the region.

Explanation:

What is CPEC?

- **Route:** A 3,000-kilometre infrastructure corridor linking **Kashgar in Xinjiang (China)** to **Gwadar Port in Balochistan (Pakistan)**.
- **Components:**
  ○ Highways and expressways
  ○ Rail networks
  ○ Energy pipelines
  ○ Industrial zones and SEZs
  ○ Upgradation of Gwadar Port

Strategic Importance for China:

- Enhances **energy security** by diversifying trade routes.
- Secures access to the Arabian Sea and Middle Eastern markets.
- Strengthens geopolitical presence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region.
- Promotes China's **BRI narrative** as a provider of global public goods.

India's Objection:

- CPEC passes through **Gilgit-Baltistan** in **Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK)**, a region claimed by India.
- India has formally protested, stating that the project **violates its sovereignty and territorial integrity**.
- India has **opted out of BRI**, citing CPEC as a key reason.

Challenges Faced by CPEC:

- **Security concerns** in Balochistan, where attacks on Chinese nationals have increased.
- Rising **debt burden** on Pakistan, with growing concerns over unsustainable loans.
- Delays in project execution and power infrastructure issues.
- Local resistance in Pakistan due to lack of inclusive development.

Recent Developments (2024-25):

- Agreement to **upgrade and expand CPEC** into new sectors like **technology, agriculture, and mining**.
- Focus on **second-phase projects** including **industrial cooperation** and **SEZ development**.

Model UPSC Mains Question:

Q Critically examine the strategic and economic implications of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) for the region. How does India's position on CPEC reflect its broader concerns regarding the Belt and Road Initiative? (GS Paper II – International Relations / GS Paper III – Security Issues)

India-Mongolia Mineral Ties: A Strategic Step to Secure Critical Minerals

Context:

In a strategic geopolitical and economic shift, India is actively exploring opportunities to **source critical minerals such as copper, coking coal, and rare earth elements (REEs) from Mongolia**, aiming to **reduce dependence on China** and bolster mineral security.

Background:

- Mongolia is a **resource-rich country** with significant reserves of minerals like **copper, coal, fluorite, uranium, gold, and rare earths**.

- India and Mongolia enjoy a **"Strategic Partnership"** since 2015, symbolized by cultural and diplomatic ties.
- India is currently funding the construction of **Mongolia's first oil refinery**, expected to be operational by **2025**, under its **"Act East" and "Connect Central Asia" policies**.

What are Critical Minerals?

- **Definition:** Minerals that are **economically vital** but have **high supply risk** due to limited global producers or geopolitical vulnerabilities.
- **Key Features:**
  - Crucial for **clean energy technologies**, electronics, defence, and semiconductors.
  - Vulnerable due to **concentration of extraction or processing in select countries**, particularly China.
  - India has identified **30 minerals** as "critical" (e.g., Lithium, Cobalt, Graphite, REEs, Tungsten, Nickel).

Why Mongolia?

- **Geostrategic Location:** Landlocked between **Russia and China**, Mongolia offers a potential **overland route alternative**.
- **Resource Base:** High-grade, underexplored reserves of critical and bulk minerals.
- **Shared Interests:** Mongolia seeks diversification of investment beyond China, aligning with India's strategic goals.

Strategic Significance for India:

Supply Chain Diversification: Reduces overdependence on Chinese-controlled mineral markets.

Clean Energy Transition: Supports India's green energy goals (EVs, solar panels, wind turbines).

Energy & Mineral Security: Strengthens self-reliance in crucial sectors like defence and electronics.

Bilateral Cooperation: Deepens India-Mongolia relations with long-term economic and diplomatic dividends.

Challenges Ahead:

- **Logistics:** Mongolia is **landlocked**, requiring cooperation with Russia or multilateral transport frameworks.
- **Infrastructure:** Requires investment in **roads, railways, and mining capacity**.

- **Geopolitical Sensitivities:** Potential pushback from China and complexities in Central Asian geopolitics.

<u>Model UPSC Mains Question:</u>

Q **Discuss the significance of India's strategy to diversify its critical mineral supply chains through partnerships with countries like Mongolia. How does this align with India's broader strategic autonomy and energy transition goals? (GS Paper II – International Relations / GS Paper III – Economy & Resource Security)**

<u>International Court of Justice (ICJ) and Its Role in International Law</u>

Context:

The **International Court of Justice (ICJ)** recently declared that **Israel's occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem** is a violation of international law, drawing global attention to the court's authority and limitations.

Background:

- The **ICJ** is the **principal judicial organ of the United Nations**, created in **1945** under the **UN Charter,** and began functioning in **1946**.
- It is **headquartered at the Peace Palace in The Hague, Netherlands**, and remains the only UN organ located outside New York.
- The court operates in **two official languages: English and French**.

Composition:

- The court consists of **15 judges**, elected to **nine-year terms** by the **UN General Assembly and the UN Security Council**.
- Judges are elected based on their legal expertise, ensuring representation from major legal systems of the world.
- The **President and Vice-President** are elected for **three-year terms**.

Jurisdiction and Powers:

Contentious Jurisdiction:

- Only **states** (not individuals, corporations, or NGOs) can be parties to cases before the ICJ.
- Jurisdiction is **not automatic**—it requires:
    1. **Special agreement** between parties.
    2. **Reciprocal declarations** accepting compulsory jurisdiction.
    3. **Treaty clauses** that refer disputes to the ICJ.

- Judgments are **final and binding**, but the court has **no enforcement mechanism**—it relies on the **UN Security Council** and the **voluntary compliance** of states.

Advisory Jurisdiction:

- The ICJ can provide **non-binding advisory opinions** at the request of **UN organs** (like the General Assembly) and **specialized agencies**.
- These opinions carry **significant moral and legal weight** in international diplomacy.

Relevance of ICJ in Contemporary Geopolitics:

- The ICJ's role in **conflict resolution, interpretation of international treaties, and upholding humanitarian law** is increasingly relevant.
- However, its **effectiveness is often constrained** by:
  - Lack of compulsory jurisdiction.
  - **Non-cooperation** by powerful states.
  - Limited ability to **enforce judgments** without geopolitical consensus.

Significance of the Israel Ruling:

- Though **advisory in nature**, the ICJ's opinion adds **international legal pressure** on Israel regarding the **Palestinian issue**.
- It serves as a **moral compass** for global governance and encourages adherence to international law.

Model UPSC Mains Question:

Q Critically examine the role of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in resolving international disputes. In light of its recent advisory opinion on the Israel-Palestine issue, assess the challenges ICJ faces in ensuring compliance with international law.

United Nations Water Convention

(Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes)

Context:

Ivory Coast has recently joined the **UN Water Convention**, marking a significant step in cooperative transboundary water governance, especially in West Africa, where it shares river basins with six neighboring countries.

Background:

- **Adopted** in **Helsinki, Finland (1992)** and **entered into force in 1996**.

- Initially designed as a **regional legal framework** for the **Pan-European region** under the **United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)**.
- **Amended in 2016** to allow **accession by all UN member states**, making it a **global instrument**.
- Currently, the Convention has **39 parties**, including the **EU**, **African**, **Middle Eastern**, and **Latin American** nations.
  - Notable new members: **Chad and Senegal (2018)**, **Iraq (2023)**, **Panama (2023)**, **Ivory Coast (2024)**.

Key Provisions:

- Promotes **cooperation, sustainable use**, and **pollution prevention** of **transboundary rivers, lakes, and groundwater**.
- Encourages the **equitable and reasonable utilization** of shared water resources.
- Mandates the establishment of **joint bodies** and exchange of data between riparian states.
- Provides a **legal and institutional framework** for:
  - Preventing disputes.
  - Adapting to climate change.
  - Managing droughts and floods.

Significance:

- Addresses **increasing global water stress**, especially in regions dependent on **shared water bodies**.
- Encourages **water diplomacy** as a tool for peacebuilding.
- Enhances **climate resilience** through integrated and cooperative water management.
- In Africa and Asia, where transboundary water challenges are more acute, the Convention offers a **platform for negotiation** and **conflict mitigation**.

India's Position:

- **India is not a party** to the Convention.
- India manages transboundary water issues **bilaterally** through treaties like:
  - **Indus Waters Treaty (with Pakistan).**
  - **Ganga Water Sharing Treaty (with Bangladesh).**
- India has expressed concerns about **external multilateral frameworks** influencing its **sovereign rights** over water-sharing decisions.

Model UPSC Mains Question:

Q What is the significance of the United Nations Water Convention in fostering transboundary water cooperation? Critically analyze why India has chosen to remain outside its framework.

Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA)

Part of the World Bank Group

Background:

- Established in **1988** as one of the five organizations within the **World Bank Group**.
- Headquarters: **Washington, D.C., USA**.
- Membership: **182 member countries**, including **India** since **January 1994**.
- To join MIGA, a country must be a member of the World Bank's International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD).

Mandate & Function:

- Promote **foreign direct investment (FDI)** into developing countries by **reducing investment risks**.
- Offers **political risk insurance** and **credit enhancement guarantees**.
- Protects investors and lenders from **non-commercial risks** such as:
  - Political instability (war, civil unrest).
  - Expropriation (government seizure of assets).
  - Breach of contract.
  - Currency inconvertibility and transfer restrictions.
- These guarantees make investments in developing countries more attractive by **improving access to finance** with better terms.

Governance:

- Governed by member states who contribute capital and hold voting rights.
- Decisions are made collectively by members through voting mechanisms.

Relevance to India:

- India is a member since 1994 and benefits from MIGA's support in attracting foreign investment.
- MIGA is currently **enhancing its partnership with India** to support:
  - India's **energy transition** (renewables, clean energy projects).
  - Other sustainable development initiatives.

Why is MIGA Important?

- Helps developing countries like India to attract FDI while minimizing risks for foreign investors.

- Supports infrastructure, energy, and industrial projects critical for economic growth.
- Boosts investor confidence in politically or economically volatile regions.

INDIA WANTS REVIEW & MODIFICATION OF INDUS WATERS TREATY (IWT)

Context:

- In 2024, India formally requested Pakistan to **review and modify** the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty (IWT).
- This request was made under **Article XII(3)** of the treaty, which allows for review after 50 years.
- The inclusion of the word **"review"** indicates India's intent to potentially **renegotiate or even revoke** aspects of the treaty.
- This follows an earlier similar request by India in January 2023.

About the Indus Waters Treaty (1960):

- A water-sharing agreement between India and Pakistan, brokered by the **World Bank** after 9 years of negotiation.
- Governs use and management of the **Indus River system**, which includes 6 rivers:
  - **Eastern Rivers:** Sutlej, Beas, Ravi (allocated to India for unrestricted use).
  - **Western Rivers:** Indus, Jhelum, Chenab (allocated to Pakistan; India gets limited use).

Key Provisions:

- **Water Allocation:**
  - **Eastern Rivers (Ravi, Beas, Sutlej):** India has full control.
  - **Western Rivers (Indus, Jhelum, Chenab):** Pakistan has primary rights; India can use for non-consumptive purposes (hydropower, domestic use).
- **Water Sharing Split:** Roughly 80% of waters flow to Pakistan, 20% to India.
- **Permanent Indus Commission:** Established to ensure cooperation; meets at least once a year.
- **Dispute Resolution:**
  - Step 1: Permanent Indus Commission.
  - Step 2: Neutral Expert (appointed by World Bank if unresolved).
  - Step 3: Court of Arbitration for final disputes.

Current Projects under IWT Inspection:

- **Pakal Dul Hydroelectric Project** (Marusudar River, tributary of Chenab, J&K)
- **Lower Kalnai Project** (Chenab River, J&K)
- **Kishanganga Hydroelectric Project** (Kishanganga/Neelum River)
- **Ratle Hydroelectric Project** (Chenab River, J&K)

Why India Wants a Review?

- India has expressed concerns about:
  - Restrictions on using the Western rivers.
  - Pakistan's control over water critical for Indian regions.
  - Need to update treaty provisions reflecting current realities and water needs.
  - Addressing hydropower projects and water security.

Significance:

- The treaty is one of the most enduring water-sharing agreements despite India-Pak tensions.
- Review could impact regional water security and bilateral relations.
- India's move signals a strategic approach to safeguard its water interests.

Model UPSC Mains Questions:

Q "**Water security is critical for national development and regional stability. Examine the challenges faced by India in the management of transboundary rivers and the role of the Indus Waters Treaty in addressing these challenges.**"

India Signs US-led IPEF Bloc's Clean, Fair Economy Agreements

Background and Explanation:

The **Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF)** is a US-led initiative launched in **May 2022** during a meeting in Tokyo to strengthen economic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. It was first proposed by US President Joe Biden in October 2021 at the East Asia Summit to create a framework fostering inclusive growth, stability, and prosperity without focusing on traditional trade agreements involving tariff cuts or market access.

The IPEF is structured around **four pillars**:

1. **Fair and Resilient Trade:** Promotes equitable and durable trade practices.
2. **Supply Chain Resilience:** Enhances the stability and security of supply chains amid global disruptions.

3. **Clean Economy:** Supports sustainable infrastructure development and decarbonization efforts to tackle climate change.

4. **Fair Economy:** Aims at improving tax transparency and enforcing anti-corruption measures to foster a just economic environment.

India's Role in IPEF:

India joined the IPEF in **September 2022**, choosing to participate actively in three pillars:

- **Supply Chain Resilience:** Establishing frameworks like the Supply Chain Council, Crisis Response Network, and Labor Rights Advisory Board with 13 other members to ensure uninterrupted and stable supply chains in the region. This is critical for India's manufacturing and export sectors, especially in light of global disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical tensions.

- **Clean Economy:** Committing to environmental sustainability through clean energy transitions and infrastructure development, aligning with India's climate goals under the Paris Agreement.

- **Fair Economy:** Collaborating on issues of tax transparency and anti-corruption to create a transparent and level playing field for businesses.

India, however, **opted out of the Trade pillar**, concerned about the potential implications on its domestic industries and trade autonomy. Instead, it remains an observer in that module's negotiations.

This selective participation underscores India's cautious but constructive engagement with the IPEF, balancing cooperation with safeguarding national interests.

Model UPSC Mains Questions:

Q **"Discuss the significance of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) for India's strategic and economic interests."**