

GS Paper - 2

International Relations – Aug'18

Postal Highway

Syllabus: India and its neighbourhood- relations.

In News

- The Indian Government has released additional NPR 470 million (Nepali Rupees) for the Postal Highway being constructed in Southern Plains of Nepal.
- The amount has been released to maintain fund liquidity for the ongoing construction of 14 road packages under Postal Highway Project.
- With this payment, a total of NPR 2.35 billion stands released to the Government of Nepal out of the total grant assistance of NPR 8.00 billion committed by the Government of India for implementing 14 packages under Packages 2-6 of Phase I of the Postal Highway Project.

About The Project

- Postal Highway is also called **Hulaki Rajmarg** which runs across the Terai region of Nepal, from Bhadrapur in the east to Dodhara in the west, cutting across the entire width of the country.
- It is oldest highway in Nepal constructed by Juddha Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana & Padma Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana to aid transportation and facilitate postal services throughout the nation.

China Detains One Million Ethnic Uighurs

Syllabus: India and its neighbourhood- relations.

In News

- A UN human rights committee has heard there were credible reports that China is holding a million ethnic Uighurs in counter-extremism centres.
- A member of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, raised the claims at a two-day UN meeting on China.

Key Highlights

- There are reports that Beijing had turned the Uighur autonomous region into something that resembles a massive internment camp.
- Human rights groups including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have submitted reports to the UN committee documenting claims of mass imprisonment, in camps where inmates are forced to swear loyalty to China's President Xi Jinping.
- The reports claim that detainees are held indefinitely without charge, and forced to shout Communist Party slogans.
- These detentions are being carried out under the guise of combating religious extremism.
- However, Chinese government denies the existence of these camps.

Who are the Uighurs

- The Uighurs are a Muslim ethnic minority mostly based in China's Xinjiang province. They make up around 45% of the population there.
- Xinjiang is officially designated as an autonomous region within China, like Tibet to its south.

Committee On The Elimination Of Racial Discrimination

- The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) is the body of independent experts that monitors implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination by its State parties.
- All States parties are obliged to submit regular reports to the Committee on how the rights are being implemented.
- States must report initially one year after acceding to the Convention and then every two years. The Committee examines each report and addresses its concerns and recommendations to the State party in the form of “concluding observations”.
- In addition to the reporting procedure, the Convention establishes *three other mechanisms* through which the Committee performs its monitoring functions: **the early-warning procedure, the examination of inter-state complaints and the examination of individual complaints.**
- The Committee also publishes its interpretation of the content of human rights provisions, known as *general recommendations (or general comments), on thematic issues and organizes thematic discussions.*
- The Committee meets in Geneva and normally hold three sessions per year consisting of three-four-three weeks per year.

International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)

- It is a United Nations convention, which its members to the elimination of racial discrimination and the promotion of understanding among all races.
- The Convention also requires its parties to outlaw hate speech and criminalize membership in racist organizations.
- It was adopted and opened for signature by the United Nations General Assembly on 21 December 1965, and entered into force on 4 January 1969.

What are the ICERD's limitations?

- The CERD has encountered persistent difficulties with getting some countries to submit reports. The CERD still reviews countries that do not submit reports, but this lack of reporting is seen by some as a substantial failure of the ICERD.
- Further, whilst the number of States signed up to the ICERD is impressive, many countries have only agreed to be bound with certain reservations, for example the United States of America does not accept any part of the Convention that would oblige the USA to criminalise hate speech.

Accord With Russia Signed for Training of Pakistani Troops

Syllabus: India and its neighbourhood- relations.

In News

- Pakistan and Russia has signed an agreement that allows for training of Pakistani troops at Russian military training institutes.
- The agreement was signed at the conclusion of the first meeting of Russia-Pakistan Joint Military Consultative Committee (JMCC), which is described as the highest forum of defence collaboration between Pakistan and the Russian Federation.

Pakistan – Russia Defence Ties

- Pakistan's defence ties with Russia have moved past the bitter Cold War hostilities in recent years and the chill in the relations between Pakistan and the US has further pushed the country towards Russia and China.
 - Russia is also looking for a market to sell weapons.
 - In 2014, both side signed defense cooperation agreement which lifted a long-running Russian embargo on arms sales to Pakistan.
 - Russia has over the past three years provided four Mi-35M combat and cargo helicopters to Pakistan and the militaries of the two countries also held joint drills codenamed 'Friendship'.
- Days after Islamabad and Moscow signed this agreement, Trump administration has suspended more than a decade-long military training programme of Pakistani personnel at the US institutions.

Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy**In News**

- On 23 August, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden Margot Wallström presented a handbook on Sweden's feminist foreign policy.
- The policy has been released as a prerequisite for reaching Sweden's broader foreign policy goals on peace, and security and sustainable development and to ensure that women and girls can enjoy their fundamental human rights is both an obligation within the framework of our international commitments.

Key Highlights

- Released in the form of handbook, the manual showcases lessons from the nation's flagship approach to promote women's rights globally.
- It was published on the Swedish government's website and is derived from four years of work to place gender equality at the heart of the country's international agenda.
- Sweden is the first country in the world to pursue a feminist foreign policy. The aim is to contribute to gender equality and the full enjoyment of human rights by all women and girls.
- Key Goals of the Policy include:
 - the promotion of economic emancipation, fighting sexual violence and improving women's political participation
 - an action plan for five war-torn and post-conflict nations – Afghanistan, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia and the Palestinian Territories – building in targets for women's rights and empowerment for the first time.

- The handbook highlighted Sweden's work in Congo to promote "positive masculinity" in the country, where it has run initiatives such as promoting social media debate on men's role in society.
- The term feminist has been used in the manual so as to demonstrate that women and men should enjoy the same rights, the same duties and the same opportunities in society.

Analysis

- Sweden began its feminist foreign policy "in response to the discrimination and systematic subordination that still mark the daily lives of countless women and girls around the world".
- In this context, the strategy has not faced any "backlashes" but rather inspired other countries such as Canada and France to follow suit.
- However, it is too early to draw any conclusions about whether the feminist approach leads to significant change. For example, it is impossible to say if this policy has reduced the number of women dying in childbirth in Africa or benefitted other populations.
- But it had garnered widespread attention and enhanced Sweden's image.
- On the other hand, critics say a feminist strategy cannot escape the constraints of global politics. While Sweden defines itself as a "humanitarian superpower", it is also a major exporter of fighter jets and missile batteries.
- They further claim that the Nordic nation did not vote no -- it abstained -- when Saudi Arabia was elected into the UN women's rights commission last year.

Fact:

There has been a growing influence of women in Sweden's own foreign service with the nation seeing a rapid increase in the number of women ambassadors, from just 10 per cent in 1996 to 40 per cent in 2016.

Caspian Sea Oil And Gas Agreement

Syllabus: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests

In News

- The leaders of Russia, Iran, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan - all bordering the Caspian Sea - have signed the *Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea* in the Kazakh city of Aktau.
- The agreement establishes a formula for dividing up its resources and prevents other powers from setting up a military presence there.



Caspian Sea: A Resource Rich Region

- It is the world's largest inland body of water, which bridges Asia and Europe.
- It is estimated there are 50 billion barrels of oil and nearly 300 trillion cubic feet (8.4 trillion cubic metres) of natural gas beneath Caspian sea.
- The Caspian Sea has a number of different species of sturgeon, the fish that yields the highly prized delicacy caviar.

- Between 80-90% of the world's caviar is sourced from the Caspian, but the numbers have been falling over the past few decades.

Key Highlights

- The signed convention gives the body of water a "special legal status" which means it is not defined as a sea or a lake.
- The surface water will be in common usage, meaning freedom of access for all littoral states beyond territorial waters. But the seabed - which is rich in natural resources - will be divided up.
- The delimitation of the seabed – which has caused most disputes – will require additional agreements between the nations bordering the sea.
- The agreement has established 15-mile-wide (24km) territorial waters whose borders become state borders and adjacent to the territorial waters are 10 miles of fishing water where each state has exclusive fishing rights.
- The convention explicitly barred any armed presence on the Caspian Sea other than that of the littoral states.

What Was The Dispute

- It would be reasonable to assume that the Caspian Sea is, well, a sea. But at the heart of this long-running dispute is whether or not the 370,000 sq km (143,000 sq mile) body of landlocked water should be considered a lake.
- Until the dissolution of the Soviet Union (USSR) in 1991, the resources of this region used to be shared between the USSR and Iran.
- But the arrival on the scene of new countries complicated this issue, with ensuing claim and counterclaim. Iran had argued it was a lake and not a sea, but none of four other countries agreed.
- If it was treated as a sea, then it would be covered by international maritime law, namely the United Nations Law of the Sea.
- This binding document sets rules on how countries can use the world's oceans. It covers areas such as the management of natural resources, territorial rights, and the environment. And it is not limited to littoral states, meaning others can seek access to its resources.
- But if it is defined as a lake, then it would have to be divided equally between all five countries.
- In negotiations with post-Soviet nations, Tehran has insisted on either splitting the sea into five equal parts or jointly developing all of its resources. None of its neighbours have agreed to those proposals and three of them – Russia, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan – effectively split the northern Caspian between each other using median lines.

Analysis

- The agreement, although in principle, will decide how to divide up the potentially huge oil and gas resources of the Caspian Sea, paving way for more energy exploration and pipeline projects.
- In the past, some countries have pressed ahead with large offshore projects such as the Kashagan oil field off Kazakhstan's coast. However, disagreement over the sea's legal status

has prevented some other ideas from being implemented. Hence, it would pave the way for the implementation of major projects in this region.

- Pipeline project across the Caspian which could ship natural gas from Turkmenistan to Azerbaijan and then further to Europe will get a boost after this agreement.
- The document is no final solution and border delimitation would require further work and separate agreements, although the convention would serve as a basis for that.
- It also remained unclear whether the convention adopted would definitely clear a way for the pipeline. Kazakh president Nursultan Nazarbayev said the document allowed pipelines to be laid as long as certain environmental standards were met.
- Since the final text of the deal is yet to be published, it would not be possible to analyse which country has gained the most. But because the deal does not define the Caspian as a lake, Iran - which has the smallest coastline - is viewed as a potential loser.
- However, Iran - which is currently under growing political and economic pressure from the West - might see some political benefits in securing the clause that bars any armed presence on the Caspian other than that of the five littoral states.

Venezuela's Crisis

Syllabus: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests

Context

- Venezuela's economy is in freefall. Hyperinflation, power cuts, and food and medicine shortages are driving millions of Venezuelans out of the country.
- Since 2014, the UN's International Organization for Migration estimates that 2.3 million Venezuelans have fled their country, desperate to escape economic and political turmoil, hunger and violence.

What Is Wrong With Venezuela

- Arguably the biggest problem facing Venezuelans in their day-to-day lives is hyperinflation. The annual inflation rate reached 83,000% in July 2018.
- Prices have been doubling every 26 days on average. This has resulted in many Venezuelans struggling to afford basic items such as food and toiletries.
- Maduro's government blames the problems on an "economic war" waged by business owners, Colombia and the U.S. It blames "hoarding" by speculators for food shortages and has urged the population to rally to the defence of the state.

How Did Hyperinflation Come About

- Venezuela is rich in oil, and has the largest proven reserves in the world. But arguably it's this exact wealth that underpins many of its economic problems.
- Because it has so much oil, Venezuela has never bothered to produce much else. It sells oil to other countries, and with the dollars it earns, imports the goods Venezuelans want and need from abroad.
- Its oil revenues account for about 95% of its export earnings. But when the oil price plummeted in 2014, Venezuela was faced with a shortfall of foreign currency.

- This in turn made it difficult to import goods at the same level as before, and imported items became scarcer. The result: businesses increased prices and inflation rose.
- Adding to that was the government's willingness to print extra money and regularly hike the minimum wage in an effort to regain popularity with Venezuela's poor.

US Gives India Strategic Trade Authorisation-1 Status

Syllabus: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests

In News

- The Trump administration has placed India in the Strategic Trade Authorisation-1 (STA-1) list.
- This will ease the export of high-tech items to India as this move will grant it the same access as NATO allies — Australia, Japan and South Korea.

What Is Strategic Trade Authorisation (STA)

- STA allows for license exception with regards to exports from the US. This type of US government authorisation allows a certain item to be exported under defined conditions without a transaction-specific license.
- The STA exception is relevant to exports, re-exports and transfers for which a licence is required under the Export Administration Regulations – one of the two important US export control laws that affect the manufacturing, sales and distribution of technology.

Benefits Of STA-1 Status To India

- STA Tier 1 treatment, comparable with NATO allies, will expand the scope of exports subject to the EAR that can be made to India without individual licences.
- This regulatory change will enhance the bilateral defence trade relationship and result in a greater volume of US exports to India.
- This will help India getting critical and latest technology from the US in the defence as well as certain other key areas.
- This reflects a sign of trust not only in the relationship but also on India's capabilities as an economic and a security partner, because it also presupposes that India has the multilateral export control regime in place, which would allow the transfer of more sensitive defence technologies and dual use technologies to India and without the risk of any proliferation.

Visit of Indian External Affairs Minister to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan

Syllabus: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests

In News

- External Affairs Minister Smt. Sushma Swaraj visited three countries in Central Asian region from 2-5 August 2018.
- She was in the Republic of Kazakhstan on 2 & 3 August, in the Kyrgyz Republic on 3 & 4 August and in the Republic of Uzbekistan on 4 & 5 August 2018.
- This visit was in pursuit of India's objective of enhanced engagement with this region which is India's extended neighbourhood. It will provide an opportunity to hold in-depth discussions

with the political leadership on a wide range of global, regional and bilateral issues and will advance India's growing engagement with the Central Asian Region.

Key Highlights

- During her visit to Astana, EAM held a bilateral meeting with Mr. Kairat Abdrakhmanov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan.
- India and Kazakhstan have a close strategic partnership and multi-faceted relations. The bilateral relations between India and Kazakhstan have been strengthened by the visit of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi to Kazakhstan in 2015 and by his visit for SCO Summit in June 2017 when he had a productive meeting with the President of Kazakhstan.
- During next leg of visit, EAM went to Kyrgyzstan where she met Mr. Erlan Abdyldaev, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic.
- India and Kyrgyzstan share multi-dimensional relations including political, parliamentary, defence, science and technology and health.
- The bilateral visit of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi to the Kyrgyz Republic in July 2015 and of the then President of the Kyrgyz Republic to India in December 2016, as also interactions on the margins of SCO Summits, have consolidated the traditionally cordial and close ties between the two countries, providing impetus to further strengthening of bilateral ties.
- In the last segment of her three nation Central Asian tour, EAM arrived Tashkent. She held in-depth discussions with Mr. Abdulaziz Kamilov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan.
- India and Uzbekistan enjoy a close strategic partnership. Bilateral relations between India and Uzbekistan have been strengthened by regular high level interactions. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi visited Uzbekistan in July 2015 and for SCO Summit in June 2016.

Significance Of Central Asia For India**Energy Security**

- Central Asia contains vast hydrocarbon fields both on-shore and off-shore in the Caspian Sea. These are home to an estimated 4 per cent of the world's natural gas reserves, and approximately 3 per cent of oil reserves.
- Most of these resources are found in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, although Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan also have potential for generating hydro-electric power.
- Central Asia has reserves of uranium ore plus the potential for its enrichment; so the region could be tapped as a source of uranium for India's civilian nuclear programme, which would in the long term help diversify its energy base.
- Over the past decade, India's state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) has sought to invest in Kazakhstan, which has three of the world's richest oilfields. ONGC acquired sizeable stakes in the Alibekmola and Kurmangazy oilfields in Kazakh owned areas of the Caspian Sea.
- More recently ONGC attempted to buy a share of US company ConocoPhillip's holding in the Kashagan oilfield. However, although the Indian Government has begun investing in oil fields in Central Asia, its policy on how to transport this oil to the Indian market or work out oil swap deals is still evolving.

- Also, the Indian government has been engaged in the 1680 km-long Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline.

Geostrategic Importance

- The geostrategic location of the Central Asian states has made this region extremely pivotal. CARs lie at the crossroads of Russia, the Middle East, South Asia and the Far East. Any geopolitical changes in the region inevitably have its significance and impact on several states in the neighbourhood.
- Central Asia lies at the strategic junction between two nuclear powers, Russia and China, and at the interface between Russia and the Islamic world. It shares borders with Afghanistan, which is a major source of spreading religious extremism in the region.
- Central Asia is of great strategic importance to India .Being placed in the middle of the Eurasian Continent, Central Asia is one of the most convenient routes of transit.
- Also, given the Kashmir angle, India cannot be walled off from the political developments which take place in the Central Asian region. Any advance by Islamic extremist groups in the CARs could invigorate similar elements active in Kashmir.

National Security and Stability in the Region

- The focus of relationship between the Central Asian Republics (CARs) and India can be defined by the importance of Central Asia for peace and stability in the region.
- India sees this region as a source of religious extremism and is concerned to check the rise of radical Islamist groups which may present a terrorist threat.
- These security concerns are compounded by the proliferation of drug-trafficking in Central Asia. Weak border management and high levels of corruption, coupled with the failure to stem opium production in Afghanistan, have made drug-trafficking an extremely lucrative industry.
- Central Asian region also remains highly vulnerable to the smuggling of fissile material for WMD. For example, the border and customs checkpoints in Kazakhstan have no special detection equipment for intercepting nuclear material. This region lies between two nuclear superpowers—Russia and China and also its neighbours, the two new nuclear powers, India and Pakistan.
- Over the past decade, New Delhi has sought to enhance its security assets in the region, notably through the acquisition of a first foreign military outpost in Tajikistan. Tajikistan is of particular concern for India since only a narrow 20 km stretch of Afghan territory separates it from Pakistan-administered Kashmir.
- India began to refurbish the airbase at Ayni in 2004.
- In July 2011, the Indian Defence Minister visited Kyrgyzstan and announced plans to open a joint military research centre there, as well as an initiative to train Kyrgyz soldiers to serve in UN peacekeeping missions.
- When India's Vice-President visited Tajikistan in April 2013, both governments stressed the importance of cooperation in dealing with anticipated security threats from Afghanistan, and India has established Joint Working Groups on Terrorism with Tajikistan and Kazakhstan.

- In 2017, India became a full member of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). The SCO is one of the most prominent multilateral bodies with regard to Central Asia, and the issue of counter-terrorism regularly features on the agenda of SCO summits.

Commercial Interest

- Both India and Central Asia have economic complementarity in terms of resources, manpower and markets. These diverse resources can be pooled for a broader regional cooperation in Asia and to realise the potential of both the regions fully.
- Central Asia offers a relatively untapped market for Indian consumer goods as consumers in the region have little to choose from highly priced, imported Western products or cheap but lower-quality Chinese manufactured goods that have flooded the region.
- Indian tea and pharmaceutical industries have already acquired a foothold in the Central Asian market. Potential for Indian investment and expertise in the areas of IT, banking, construction, and food processing is still untapped.
- On his April 2013 visit to Tajikistan, India's Vice President signed deals to expand bilateral cooperation in IT, energy, health, education, trade, commerce, mining, and agriculture, while there are also plans to collaborate with Tajikistan in establishing an IT centre of excellence and a Central Asia e-network.

SCO Peace Mission 2018

Syllabus: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements.

In News

- Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Peace Mission 2018 exercise was started on 24 August 2018 at Chebarkul, Russia.
- All eight members of SCO ((China, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, India and Pakistan) participated in this exercise.
- This exercise was aimed at enhancing cooperation between member states to deal with growing threat of terrorism and extremism.

Key Highlights

- This was the fifth edition of SCO Peace Mission Exercise where India and Pakistan participated for the first time.
- The exercise provided an opportunity to armies of all nations for greater cultural understanding, sharing experiences and strengthening mutual trust and cooperation.

India And SCO**About SCO**

- The SCO is a permanent intergovernmental international organisation, the creation of which was announced in June 2001 in Shanghai (China) by the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People's Republic of China, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Tajikistan, and the Republic of Uzbekistan.
- SCO comprises eight member states, namely the Republic of India, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People's Republic of China, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Islamic Republic

of Pakistan, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Tajikistan, and the Republic of Uzbekistan;

- SCO counts four observer states, namely the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Republic of Belarus, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Mongolia;
- It has six dialogue partners, namely the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Republic of Armenia, the Kingdom of Cambodia, the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, the Republic of Turkey, and the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.
- The SCO's main goals are as follows: strengthening mutual trust and neighbourliness among the member states; promoting their effective cooperation in politics, trade, the economy, research, technology and culture, as well as in education, energy, transport, tourism, environmental protection, and other areas; making joint efforts to maintain and ensure peace, security and stability in the region; and moving towards the establishment of a democratic, fair and rational new international political and economic order.

Analysis

- India got the permanent membership of Shanghai Corporation Organisation along with Pakistan in the Shanghai corporation summit, which took place in June 2017.
- India became an **observer** to the organization at the fifth SCO summit in **Astana, Kazakhstan in 2005**.

Significance of SCO for India

- India's security, geopolitical, strategic and economic interests are closely intertwined with developments in the region.
- The ever present and expanding challenges of terrorism, radicalism and instability pose a grave threat to the sovereignty and integrity not only of India but also of countries in its broader neighborhood. India feels as an SCO member it will be able to play a major role in addressing these threats.
- New Delhi is also keen on deepening its security-related cooperation with the SCO and its Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS) which specifically deals with issues relating to security and defence.
- In addition, the Central Asian region is richly endowed with natural resources and vital minerals. With the Central Asian states landlocked and Uzbekistan even doubly landlocked, accessing these resources becomes arduous and prohibitive.
- To get around the lack of direct land connectivity with Central Asia and Pakistan's refusal to provide access through its territory, India is actively collaborating to develop the Iranian seaport of Chabahar with possible financial and technical support from Japan. India has also prioritized the construction of the International North-South Transport Corridor. Joining the SCO will be a welcome diplomatic boost to India's efforts to connect with Central Asia.
- India's membership in the SCO will provide a welcome opportunity for India's leadership to meet with their counterparts from Central Asia, Russia, China, Afghanistan and others regularly and frequently. India's potential participation in the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) will be an added advantage to make this partnership more fruitful.

Importance of India for SCO

- India's membership in the SCO adds further strength and muscle to the organization, particularly against the backdrop of continuing weakness in the international economy and anemic global demand.
- India today is the fastest expanding global economy. It represents the third largest economy (\$8 trillion) in PPP (Purchasing Power Parity) terms and seventh largest (\$2.3 trillion) in nominal dollar terms. It also inspires confidence on other indicators such as FDI, inward remittances, savings rate and pace of economic reforms.
- SCO members also are well aware that India is an energy deficient country. Central Asia and Russia are extremely well endowed with fossil fuels including oil, gas and coal as well as uranium and hydropower potential. India's rapidly expanding energy needs will provide a stable and assured market for these countries.
- India's vast experience in dealing with the terrorism can help Central Asian countries to counter the menace of global terrorism. India is playing active role in Afghanistan and Iran.
- India could bring to the SCO table its techno-economic expertise, market and multi-cultural settings for the benefit of the region.

Challenges Faced by India at SCO

- India will have to tread cautiously as there might be a possibility that SCO might be used as a counterweight against USA.
- Building greater convergence with China and Russia
- Fragile nature of SCO as Central Asian countries keep changing their position regularly in line with their interests.
- Differences between India and Pakistan on the issue of connecting south Asia with central Asia might hamper the functioning of the SCO as it has halted the growth of south Asia's own regional organisation -- the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation or SAARC.
- China's approach towards Pakistani terrorists like Masood Azhar & Lakhwi
- All members of SCO have supported OBOR except India. It might lead to isolation of India on this platform.
- It would be difficult for India to overcome the burden of geography and make tangible gains in terms of trans-regional connectivity.

Indo-Pacific Business Forum

Syllabus: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements

In News

- US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has launched the Indo-Pacific Business Forum in Washington DC as the economic pillar for US' Indo-Pacific Strategy.
- The forum will serve as an instrument to expand the US's economic role in the region.

Key Highlights

- The Indo-Pacific Business Forum will bring together key U.S. Cabinet Secretaries and senior leaders from government and business to discuss how government tools and policies can facilitate private sector partnerships to unleash the full potential of the Indo-Pacific region.
- The Forum will also include the announcement of several initiatives in sectors such as energy, infrastructure, and the digital economy.

Need For Such Forum

- The Indo-Pacific has emerged as a critical engine for growth, with Asian economies projected to create 50% of global GDP in the coming decades.
- To realize that potential, the countries of the Indo-Pacific will need to attract nearly \$26 trillion in capital to fund their energy and infrastructure needs.
- The United States will be a critical player in both investing the capital, and building the technology and infrastructure that the region requires.
- The Indo-Pacific also represents one of the most important and fastest-growing markets for U.S. goods and services.

Analysis

- The move comes nine months after the Trump administration openly spoke against the “predatory economic policies of Asian giant” that threatens to eat into sovereignty of countries in Indo-Pacific, which has now emerged as a critical engine for growth.
- Washington's latest moves appear to be aimed at a potential Chinese vulnerability – its reliance on trade surpluses and strong foreign exchange reserves to help finance Beijing's overseas power projection.

Analysis Of India's Position

- India has reportedly decided not to join the US-led counter to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
- The US initiative, which is a trilateral one involving Japan and Australia, was launched at the first Indo-Pacific Business Forum meeting and seeks to fund infrastructure projects in the region for which about USD 113 billion has been earmarked. India has opted to stay out of this initiative and thus maintain a fine balance between the US and China.
- Many analysts have criticized this step of India since it is a confusing strategy that involves sitting on the fence and, at times, even appeasing the Chinese. Arguably, India could take advantage of the vulnerabilities in the Chinese system and gain an upper hand in the asymmetric power equation that has developed vis-a-vis China.
- Geopolitically, President Trump's outreach to North Korea and advocacy of an Indo-Pacific strategy are eroding China's geopolitical manoeuvrability.
- Economically, the ongoing trade war between the US and China is expected to hurt China's growth, and that could very well mean the erosion of the Communist Party's credibility given that it draws its legitimacy from continued good economic performance.
- Many analysts believe that in dealing with China, India should thus be aware of the former's deep insecurities and vulnerabilities.

- It should shape its China policy from such 'knowing' and not from a superficial analysis of the immediate global circumstances.
- India should reconsider joining the US-led counter to the BRI, albeit after scrupulous negotiations that both uphold its foreign policy interests and shield it from the dragon's wrath.

BIMSTEC Summit 2018

Syllabus: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements

In News

- The fourth BIMSTEC Summit that was held in Kathmandu on 30-31 August.
- It concluded with the leaders reaffirming their strong commitment to make BIMSTEC a dynamic, effective and result-oriented regional organization.
- The Kathmandu Declaration underlined the importance of multidimensional connectivity as a key enabler for economic integration and shared prosperity of the region.

Key Highlights

- Kathmandu declaration reiterated strong commitment to combat terrorism.
- In this context, the leaders called upon all countries to devise a comprehensive approach to prevent financing of terrorists and terrorist actions from territories under their control, blocking recruitment and cross-border movement of terrorists, countering radicalization, countering misuse of internet for purposes of terrorism and dismantling terrorist safe havens.
- The leaders also committed themselves for promoting a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable Bay of Bengal Region through meaningful cooperation and deeper integration.
- The leaders of all seven member states including Prime Minister Narendra Modi underscored the importance of robust institutional arrangements to effectively steer the process of regional cooperation under BIMSTEC.
- During the Summit, foreign ministers of BIMSTEC member countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the Establishment of BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection.
- The Declaration also stresses on ending poverty from the region by 2030 in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

About BIMSTEC

- BIMSTEC stands for Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation. It is a regional grouping of seven countries, five countries for South Asia and two countries from South East Asia. It comprises of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Thailand and Sri Lanka.
- BIMSTEC received a big boost during the BIMSTEC Outreach Summit and the Leader's Retreat that was held in Goa in 2016 when Indian Prime Minister had hosted BRICS Summit as well.
- Significant progress has been made within BIMSTEC as well since that particular summit in diverse areas of cooperation including in Security, Counter-terrorism, Transport and Connectivity, Tourism, Environment & Disaster Management, Energy and People to People contacts.

- BIMSTEC, as a regional grouping, the importance of it is growing both in economic and strategic terms. It is home to 1.6 billion people, so nearly 22 % of the world's population, it has a combined GDP of \$2.8 trillion.

Importance of BIMSTEC for India

- It brings together like minded countries with a common commitment to peace, prosperity and development of its people. With a shared heritage, shared values and shared ways of life it is a natural platform to build common future.
- India regard BIMSTEC as a gateway to the seas of the literal state as well as access to the landlocked member countries i.e. Bhutan and Nepal.
- For India BIMSTEC is a natural choice to fulfil our foreign policy priorities which is our Neighborhood First and Act East policy. Regional cooperation under BIMSTEC also extends to developments of the North Eastern states of India forming a bridge between South and South East Asia.
- It also links the unique ecology of the Himalayas to the Bay of Bengal.

Inauguration of Nepal Bharat Maitri Dharmashala at the Pashupatinath Temple Complex

- PM Modi and Nepal's Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli jointly inaugurated the Nepal Bharat Maitri Dharmashala at the Pashupatinath temple complex.
- The foundation stone to build the hospice in the Pashupatinath Temple premises was laid in 2001.
- It can host about 398 pilgrims at a time, which has 82 rooms in total.

SAARC Agri Cooperative Business Forum

Syllabus: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements

In News

- The First South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Agri Cooperative Business Forum was held in Kathmandu, Nepal.
- The theme of three-day Forum was the '**Organizing and Strengthening Family Farmers' Cooperatives to attain the Sustainable-Development-Goals-1 and 2 in South Asia**'.
- It is being co-organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and Asian Farmers' Association with the support from the International Fund for Agricultural Development.
- The forum aims to share and learn from experiences of various organizations (from government, FOs and international development partners) in organizing and strengthening family farmers' agricultural cooperatives towards promoting sustainable incomes, livelihoods and rural development.
- The sharing will have a gender and youth focus, as most presentations will describe how the initiatives helped and benefited women and young farmers as well.

Asia-Pacific Institute of Broadcasting Development

Syllabus: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements

In News

- The Asia-Pacific Institute of Broadcasting Development (AIBD) has elected Fayyaz Sheheryar, Director-General of All India Radio, as its new President.
- This is the first time India has been elected for the position of president of AIBD. India's presidency is for two years and will help it in leveraging itself as the broadcasting and media hub in Asia Pacific region.
- India got the presidency of the organisation, servicing countries of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN-ESCAP) in the field of electronic media development by defeating Iran in the election that took place in Sri Lanka
- AIBD was established in 1977 under the auspices of UNESCO. It is hosted by Malaysia and its secretariat is located in Kuala Lumpur.
- It is mandated to achieve a vibrant and cohesive electronic media environment in the Asia-Pacific region through policy and resource development. The Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU) is a founding organization of the institute and is a non-voting member of the general conference.
- The International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) are founding organisations of the Institute and they are non-voting members of the General Conference.
- AIBD currently has 26 member countries, represented by 34 organisations and 67 affiliate member organizations with a total membership of 101 representing 48 countries and regions and over 50 partners.

About ESCAP

- The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) is the regional development arm of the United Nations for the Asia-Pacific region.
- Made up of 53 Member States and 9 Associate Members, with a geographical scope that stretches from Turkey in the west to the Pacific island nation of Kiribati in the east, and from the Russian Federation in the north to New Zealand in the south, the region is home to 4.1 billion people, or two thirds of the world's population.
- Established in 1947 with its headquarters in Bangkok, Thailand, ESCAP works to overcome some of the region's greatest challenges by providing results oriented projects, technical assistance and capacity building to member States in the following areas:
 - Macroeconomic Policy, Poverty Reduction and Financing for Development
 - Trade, Investment and Innovation
 - Transport
 - Environment and Development
 - Information and Communications Technology and Disaster Risk Reduction
 - Social Development
 - Statistics

- Subregional activities for development
- Energy

G20 Digital Economy Ministerial Meeting

Syllabus: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements

In News

- G20 Digital Economy Ministerial Meeting was held in Salta, in the north-west of Argentina from 23 to 24 August 2018.
- The theme of this meeting was **‘Building consensus for fair and sustainable development’**.

Key Highlights

- The joint declaration issued after the G20 Digital Economy Ministerial Meeting in Salta includes proposals to reduce the digital gender divide, transform the government, measure the digital economy and accelerate digital infrastructure.
- The declaration document acknowledges that digitalization is a powerful enabler of inclusive economic growth. It encourages G20 countries to better understand new business models to accelerate the digital economy in an inclusive, transparent and competitive manner.
- It also lists requirements for a thriving digital economy. These include an effective and high-quality infrastructure system, an environment that supports innovation and enabling legal frameworks, and promoting the free flow of information, knowledge and ideas.
- The recommendations in the document seek to help reduce the digital gender divide, accelerate digital infrastructure, transform the government and measure the new economy.
- In terms of infrastructure, the document alludes to “the G20 common goal of promoting universal and affordable access to the internet by all people by 2025” and describes universal connectivity as “a powerful enabler of inclusive growth and sustainable development.”
- The document also addresses emerging digital technologies and the challenge of capturing the benefits of digitalization to improve productivity.
- It also highlights “the importance of supporting entrepreneurs and MSMEs.”

About G-20

- The Group of Twenty (G20) is a leading forum of the world's major economies that seeks to develop global policies to address today's most pressing challenges.
- The G20 is made up of 19 countries and the European Union. The 19 countries are Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Germany, France, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States.
- The G20 was born out of a meeting of G7 finance ministers and central bank governors in 1999 who saw a need for a more inclusive body with broader representation to have a stronger impact on addressing the world's financial challenges.
- In 2008, amidst the global financial crisis, the world saw a need for new consensus-building at the highest political level. Since then, the G20 summits have been attended

by heads of state or government, and the G20 was instrumental in stabilizing the world economy.

- Since then, its agenda has expanded to include additional issues affecting financial markets, trade, and development.
- Collectively, G20 members represent all inhabited continents, 85 percent of global economic output, two-thirds of the world's population, and 75 percent of international trade.

Indian Ocean Conference

Syllabus: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements

In News

- The third edition of Indian Ocean Conference was held at Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam.
- It was inaugurated by External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj and her Vietnamese counterpart Pham Binh Min Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam.
- The theme of the two- day conference was '**Building Regional Architectures**', particularly with regards to trade and commerce, security and governance.
- The conference emphasised on better cooperation, strategic collaboration and governance architectures.
- This conference also served as a platform to the countries to come closer and exchange better views on the economic and strategic importance of the region and neighbourhood.

About The Conference

- The Indian Ocean Conference initiated by India Foundation along with its partners from Singapore, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh is an annual effort to bring together Heads of States/Governments, Ministers, Thought Leaders, scholars, diplomats, bureaucrats and practitioners from across the region.
- Two successful editions of the Conference have been hosted so far in 2016 and 2017 in Singapore and Sri Lanka respectively. Both the Conferences were supported by the Ministry of External Affairs of India and had participation from over 35 countries with a global media coverage.
- The third edition of the Conference was hosted by India Foundation in association with the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam, S Rajaratnam School of International Studies and Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies on 27-28 August 2018 in Hanoi, Vietnam.

World Congress of Philosophy

Syllabus: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements

In News

- The World Congress of Philosophy is organized every five years by the International Federation of Philosophical Societies (FISP) in collaboration with one of its member societies. It was first organized in 1900 in Paris, France...

- The 24th World Congress was held in Beijing, China, from August 13 to August 20, 2018.
- The complementary aims of the 2018 Congress include an emphasis on exploring dimensions of the human and inquiring into the challenges facing humanity.
- It also aims to:
 - Globalize philosophical investigations to encompass the diverse forms of philosophizing by past and present thinkers across cultures, with special attention to critical reflections on philosophy itself and the tasks and functions of philosophy in the contemporary world.
 - Open the philosophical area to enable philosophers to address emerging global issues through fruitful interactions with other disciplines in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences, with other activities in economic, social, political, and religious spheres, as well as with diverse cultures and traditions.
 - Encourage philosophical reflections to become public discourses on recurrent human concerns, such as ecology, justice, and peace.