

International Relations – Dec'18

State Visit of Prime Minister of Bhutan to India

Syllabus: India and its neighbourhood- relations

In News

- Prime Minister of Bhutan, Dr. Lotay Tshering paid a State visit to India from 27-29 December, 2018.
- The State visit took place during the Golden Jubilee year of the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between India and Bhutan.

Key Highlights

- This was Prime Minister Dr. Lotay Tshering's first overseas visit after assuming the office in November 2018.
- During the visit, the two sides discussed the Government of India's development assistance package for **Bhutan's 12th Five Year Plan** for the period 1 November 2018 to 31 October 2023.
- Indian PM conveyed that India will provide **grant assistance of INR 4500 Crore** towards Bhutan's 12th Five Year Plan, and a **transitional Trade Support Facility** of INR 400 Crore over a period of five years to strengthen bilateral trade and economic linkages.
- Both sides reiterated their commitment to jointly develop **10,000 MWs of hydropower generating capacity in Bhutan** and in this regard discussed the **Sankosh Hydropower Project**.
- The two Prime Ministers expressed satisfaction at the progress of the 720 MW **Mangdechhu hydro-power project** in Bhutan.
- They welcomed the mutually beneficial understanding reached between the two sides on the **tariff for the export of surplus power** from Mangdechhu project in Bhutan to India.
- Both sides also expressed satisfaction that **Ground-Station being built by ISRO in Bhutan** to reap the benefits of the South Asian Satellite is soon going to be completed.

India – Bhutan Relation

- **Diplomatic relations** between India and Bhutan were **established in 1968** with the appointment of a resident representative of India in Thimphu.
- The basic framework of India- Bhutan bilateral relations was the **Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation** signed in 1949 between the two countries, which was revised in February 2007.
- The India-Bhutan Friendship Treaty not only reflects the contemporary nature of our relationship but also lays the foundation for their future development in the 21st century.
- The treaty commits both countries to cooperate closely with each other on issues relating to their national interests and not allow the use of their territories for activities harmful to the national security and interest of the other.
- There are a number of institutional mechanisms between India and Bhutan in areas such as *security, border management, trade, transit, economic, hydro-power, development cooperation, water resources*. There have been regular exchanges at the Ministerial and official's level, exchanges of parliamentarian delegations to strengthen partnership in diverse areas of cooperation.

Hydropower Cooperation

- Hydropower projects in Bhutan are an example of win-win cooperation providing a reliable source of inexpensive and clean electricity to India and generating export revenue for Bhutan thus cementing economic integration.
- So far Government of India has constructed three Hydroelectric Projects (HEPs) in Bhutan totalling 1416 MW (336 MW **Chukha** HEP, 60 MW **Kurichhu** HEP and 1020 MW **Tala** HEP) which are operational and exporting surplus power to India (about three-fourth of the power generated is exported and rest is used for domestic consumption).
- Hydropower exports provide more than 40% of Bhutan's domestic revenues and constitute 25% of its GDP.
- The ongoing cooperation between India and Bhutan in the Hydropower sector is covered under the 2006 Agreement on Cooperation in Hydropower and the Protocol to the 2006 agreement signed in March 2009.
- Under this Protocol, Government of India has agreed to assist Royal Government of Bhutan in developing a minimum of 10,000 MW of hydropower and import the surplus electricity by the year 2020.
- Currently, there are three Inter-Governmental (IG) model HEPs viz. 1200 MW **Punatsangchhu-I**, 1020 MW **Punatsangchhu-II** and 720 MW **Mangdechhu** under construction.
- In April 2014, an Inter-Governmental Agreement was signed between India and Bhutan for development of four more HEP's of capacity 2120 MW (600 MW **Kholongchhu**, 180 MW **Bunakha**, 570 MW **Wangchu** and 770 MW **Chamkarchu**) under the Joint Venture Model.

Bilateral Trade

- The India-Bhutan Trade and Transit Agreement 1972 established a free-trade regime between the two countries. The Agreement also provides for duty-free transit of Bhutanese exports to third countries.
- In 2015, bilateral trade reached Rs 8,550 cr. Imports from India accounts for 79% of Bhutan's total imports and Bhutan's exports to India constitutes 90% of its total exports.
- More than one-third of Bhutan's exports to India is electricity. Other items of export include minerals such as ferro-silica (the Bhutanese have been complaining that these exports have been declining) cement and dolomite.
- Recently there has been growing exports of cardamom and Bhutan is also keen to sell off-season vegetables in neighbouring Indian markets.
- Planning is underway to build a **mini dry port in the border town of Phuentsholing** to promote exports that are plagued by logistical difficulties due to the difficult terrain and poor connectivity.
- Bhutan sources the majority of its import requirements from India. **Bilateral trade is conducted in Indian Rupees**, which is **fully convertible** to Ngultrum at par.

Border Management

- There is a Secretary-level mechanism on border management and security related matters. There is also a **Border District Coordination Meeting Mechanism** between the bordering States and the Royal Government of Bhutan to facilitate coordination on border management and other related matters.
- Bhutan is concerned of the Chinese intrusions at the border and tri junctions as was the case in Doklam. India as per the friendship treaty between the two countries has assured of full cooperation

and both sides after the Doklam issue have agreed to a greater border management and defense cooperation.

- China sees border with Bhutan as the vulnerable outlet that can be used to potentially threaten India. Bhutan knows Chinese intentions and is worried about its sovereignty hence have sought for special vigil at the border through India's help.

Assessment

- Bhutan has been India's longstanding and a special ally. From cultural ties to security both the countries share deep indivisible ties.
- Bhutan's support is a key for India to counter Chinese influence in the region. Although both India and China had agreed to maintain status quo in the region but recent reports of Chinese military build-up near the strategic Doklam area is a cause of concern for India and also for Bhutan.
- One of the goals of Chinese through Doklam was to create a rift between the long standing relationship of India and Bhutan. Therefore Indo-Bhutan friendship is important in view of the changing geopolitical situation of the region.

India-Bhutan Treaty Of Friendship

- The India-Bhutan treaty of friendship was signed in Darjeeling August 8, 1949.
- The treaty commits both countries to cooperate closely with each other on issues relating to their national interests and not allow the use of their territories for activities harmful to the national security and interest of the other.
- According to the treaty the Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the Kingdom of Bhutan agreed on:
 - Reaffirming their respect for each other's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity.
 - Recalling the historical relations that have existed between our two countries.
 - Recognizing with deep satisfaction the manner in which these relations have evolved and matured over the years into a model of good neighbourly relations.
 - Being fully committed to further strengthening this enduring and mutually beneficial relationship based on genuine goodwill and friendship, shared interests, and close understanding and cooperation.
 - Desiring to clearly reflect this exemplary relationship as it stands today.
 - And having decided, through mutual consent, to update the 1949 Treaty relating to the promotion of and fostering the relations of friendship and neighborliness between India and Bhutan.
- The treaty has been revised in 2007 and gives Thimphu more freedom to pursue its foreign policy and in the purchase of non-lethal military equipment as long as such decisions do not damage India's vital strategic interests.

State Visit of President of the Republic of Maldives to India

Syllabus: India and its neighbourhood- relations.

In News

- The President of the Republic of Maldives, **Mr Ibrahim Mohamed Solih**, paid a State Visit to India from 16-18 December 2018.
- This was President Solih's first visit abroad after assuming the office of President of the Republic of Maldives on 17 November 2018.

Key Highlights

- In an important gesture, President Solih **stayed in the Rashtrapati Bhawan** as a special guest of Indian President. This demonstrates the close ties between India and the Maldives, and the warmth and mutual respect between the two governments.
- The two sides signed the following Agreements/MoUs/Joint Declaration of Intent during the visit:
 - Agreement on the Facilitation of Visa Arrangements
 - Memorandum of Understanding on Cultural Cooperation
 - Memorandum of Understanding for Establishing Mutual Cooperation to Improve the Ecosystem for Agribusiness;
 - Joint Declaration of Intent on Cooperation in the field of Information & Communications Technology and Electronics.
- The two sides also agreed to work together to create institutional linkages and to establish a framework of cooperation in areas such as - *Health cooperation issues particularly cancer treatment, Mutual Legal Assistance on Criminal Matters, Investment promotion, Human Resource Development, Tourism*
- The Indian Prime Minister also announced **provision of financial assistance up to US\$ 1.4 billion** in the form of *budgetary support, currency swap and concessional lines of credit to fulfil the socio-economic development programmes of the Maldives*.
- Government of India decided to **provide 1000 additional slots** over next 5 years for training and capacity building in diverse fields including judicial, policing and law-enforcement, audit and financial management, local governance, community development, IT, e-governance, sports, media, youth and women empowerment, leadership, innovation & entrepreneurship, art & culture.

Analysis

- During the visit, India announced a US\$1.4 billion (S\$1.7 billion) loan to the Maldives. This was **mainly to help the Solih government pay Maldives' Chinese debt** of around US\$1.5 billion (S\$1.8 billion). Most such loans were taken during Abdulla Yameen's tenure (2013-2018) as the President of the Maldives.
- During his term, Maldives became a **part of the One Belt One Road project** and also signed a **free trade agreement with China**. Both of these initiatives attracted China to make large-scale investments, through high interest-bearing loans to the Maldives pushing the island nation into a debt.
- The Maldivian President's visit was very **successful in terms of re-establishing the India-Maldives relationship**, which was strained during Yameen's tenure.
- India's economic assistance to Maldives is a sign of closer friendship and strategic acumen. Obviously, this visit would be closely watched and the agreements and the MoUs must have been carefully read by China, which does not want to lose its strategic footprint in the Maldives.

State Visit of President to Myanmar

In News

- The President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind, paid a State Visit to Myanmar from 10-14 December 2018.
- Through this visit, the President reaffirmed India's commitment to developing its important partnership with Myanmar.
- This is a country where *India's "Act East" and "Neighbourhood First" policies intersect*; it is also the only ASEAN member state that is both a land and maritime neighbour of India.

Key Highlights

- President U Win Myint and President Kovind witnessed the signing of **MoUs between the two sides in the areas of judicial and educational cooperation**.
- The Indian side also **handed over the first 50 units of prefabricated houses** built in Rakhine State under the Rakhine State Development Programme funded by the Government of India.
- Furthermore, both sides agreed to sign at the earliest the MoU for Cooperation on Combating Timber Trafficking and Conservation of Tigers and Other Wildlife and the MoU on Bilateral Cooperation for Prevention of Trafficking in Persons; Rescue, Recovery, Repatriation and Re-integration of Victims of Trafficking, on which negotiations are nearing completion.
- President Kovind formally dedicated the **Advanced Centre for Agricultural Research and Education** and the **Rice Bio Park** - that have been set up with the assistance of Indian Government in the precincts of Yezin Agricultural University - to the people of Myanmar.
- The Government of India appreciated the **Government of Myanmar's announcement to grant Tourist Visa on Arrival**, starting from 1 December 2018, to Indian citizens who intend to visit Myanmar.
- With regard to the **Kaladan Multi Modal Transit Transport Project**, both sides welcomed the signature of the **MoU on appointing a port operator**, which would enable the Sittwe Port and Paletwa IWT infrastructure to be used commercially for the development of the surrounding areas.
- Both sides expressed their willingness to operate a **coordinated bus service between Mandalay and Imphal (Transit at Tamu/ Moreh Border)** in order to enhance and facilitate the contact of the people between Myanmar and India across the border.
- It was agreed that negotiations on **Operation of Coordinated Passenger Bus Service** between the two countries would further be undertaken by relevant authorities of both sides.
- The Myanmar side expressed appreciation to the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) for completing projects to preserve and restore **stone inscriptions and temples of King Mindon and King Bagyidaw of Myanmar in Bodh Gaya**.
- The two leaders also welcomed the plans for ASI to start work in the near future to restore and **conserve up to 92 pagodas in the historic city of Bagan**.
- The Indian side informed that, as a preparatory step to relocation of its Embassy to the capital, India intended to set up an **Interim Liaison Office in Nay Pyi Taw** as soon as discussions on the formalities of opening the office and leasing property were completed with the Myanmar authorities.

India – Myanmar Relation: Importance and Challenges**Importance:**

- Being a nascent multicultural democracy, Myanmar naturally wants to learn from India's experience of institution building and national consolidation. A close coordination to **ensure security in the areas along our border**, and sensitivity to each other's strategic interests, will serve the interests of both our countries. Cross border insurgent groups are common security threat and thus require greater collaboration.
- Myanmar is also India's bridge to the larger ASEAN market and an integral part of Prime Minister Modi's "Act East Policy". **The Kaladan Multi Modal Transit Transport Project**, which will open the waterways for transport of goods in the region, forms an important part of Delhi's connectivity aims. It would invigorate the economic development of India's underdeveloped North Eastern region by transforming it into an economic hub.
- India's commitment for investment in transnational highway connectivity projects would give a boost to infrastructure development in Northern and Western Myanmar. India is concerned about China's strategic forays into Myanmar and the Indian Ocean. A democratic Myanmar under Suu Kyi too wants to curtail the pervasive Chinese presence fostered during the junta regime. Thus it signifies a meeting of minds.
- The two governments have also been on the same page in regard to forging **regional and sub regional cooperation**. They favour a strong United Nations as a key factor in tackling global challenges and advocate **UN reform**, including expansion of the Security Council in order to make it more representative, credible and effective. India greatly appreciates Myanmar's consistent support for the former's bid for permanent membership of Security Council.
- Myanmar has been consistently appreciative of India's deepening engagement with ASEAN, particularly its assistance to CLMV countries. Further, convergence in developmental domain has driven both countries towards strengthening sub regional cooperation through BIMSTEC and MGC.

Challenges

- **Insurgency and volatility** in north and west Myanmar may derail India's infrastructure push for regional connectivity which may prove to be a drag on the still unfolding Act East policy. Over decades of closer ties with the military junta, **China has emerged as the single largest investor in Myanmar**. Although the situation appears to reverse under the new regime, still China will remain the most significant player for the time being.
- The rising **Buddhist Nationalism** in Myanmar is a threat to the already fragile inter-community relations. The persecution and resultant migration of ethnic **Rohingyas** threaten the stability of Rakhine state, the home to Sittwe and Kaladan projects. It also threatens to compromise the efficacy of BIMSTEC as Bangladesh is bearing the brunt of Rohingya influx. Despite successful elections the military still controls key government positions which signify that the democratic transition is still a work in progress. The **inordinate delay in project execution** by Indian agencies undercuts Myanmar's confidence in Indian capabilities making them susceptible to further Chinese inroads.

Nepal Bans Use of Indian Currency Notes Above Rs 100

Syllabus: India and its neighbourhood- relations.

In News

- The Nepal government has banned the use of Indian currency notes of Rs 2,000, Rs 500 and Rs 200 denominations.

- The government has asked the people to refrain from keeping or carrying Indian bank notes higher than Rs 100 denomination as it has not legalised them.
- The Indian government had introduced new banknotes of Rs 2,000, Rs 500 and Rs 200 denominations after the demonetisation of old notes worth Rs 500 and 1,000 in 2016.

Reasons

- According to the government officials of Nepal, India has, so far, **not issued a Fema notification** as per the Foreign Exchange Management Act. Only when India issues such notification, these notes will be legal in Nepal.
- However, many analysts are contending that Nepal has taken this step to register its frustration with Indian government over **failure to facilitate the collection and deposit of Indian bank old series notes** of Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 denominations that are already in stock of the Central Banks, other banks/ financial institutions and general public in Nepal.

Possible Impact Of This Move

- The decision will adversely affect **Nepalese labourers working in India** as well as **Indian tourists visiting Nepal**. India is Nepal's largest trade partner and supplies the majority of its consumer goods.
- Indian currency is extensively used by Nepalese people and businesses for their savings and transactions. Hence, this could also affect the **trade ties between these two countries**.

2018 Bangladesh Election

Syllabus: India and its neighbourhood- relations.

In News

- Single-phase general election was held in Bangladesh on December 30 to elect a new parliament.
- Bangladesh's Ruling coalition led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina (Awami League) is set for an unprecedented, third consecutive term after securing a landslide victory.

Electoral System of Bangladesh

- Bangladesh has a **unicameral Parliament**, also known as the **Jatiya Sangsad**, comprises of 350 seats.
- 300 of these MPs are elected from single-member constituencies for a five-year term through a first-past-the-post system.
- The **50** remaining seats, **reserved for women**, are populated by allocating to each party the number of seats in proportion to the number of MPs they managed to elect.
- Premiership is awarded to the party or alliance holding the majority in Parliament.
- The **prime minister acts as the head of the government**; Bangladesh's presidency is only a ceremonial one, elected by the Jatiya Sangsad.
- While Bangladesh is a **Muslim-majority country**, **secularism** is one of the four fundamental principles of its Constitution.
- Minorities form around 10 percent of Bangladesh's 16.47 crore population. Hindus make up about 8-9 percent, Christians about 0.5 percent, while the remaining are Buddhists.

Key Highlights

- This was the country's **11th National Parliamentary Election** in which the Hasina-led ruling coalition won **288 seats of the country's 300 seats**, while opposition alliance got seven seats. Other parties won 3 seats.
- The ruling coalition also bagged more than 80% of votes, **making it the strongest government in South Asia.**

Why Was This Election Important

- Bangladesh is a Muslim-majority nation of more than 160 million people and faces issues ranging from possibly devastating **climate change, Islamist militancy, endemic poverty and corruption.**
- The country has recently been in the international spotlight as **hundreds of thousands of Rohingya Muslims have fled there from neighbouring Myanmar.**
- Bangladesh has emerged as the world's second-largest garment exporter, after China.
- Although, many critics claim that Hasina has **grown intolerant of dissent** and shows no willingness to relinquish power, but she has **presided over a buoyant economy** and **made significant progress in reducing poverty.** She won praise for opening the country's doors to Rohingya refugees fleeing persecution in Myanmar.
- Hasina is also viewed by some — **including in neighboring India** — as an ally against the potential spread of Islamist extremism in Bangladesh.

Analysis

- Hasina's Awami League fared even better than it did in the last national poll in 2014, when the opposition boycotted the elections and many seats were contested by a single candidate.
- As a result, many analysts as well as the opposition alliance of Bangladesh have **condemned the vote** as "farcical", marred by violence, intimidation and vote rigging claims.
- **At least 47 candidates** from the main **opposition alliance withdrew** before polling closed, alleging vote rigging and intimidation.
- The Bangladesh National Party (BNP) led by Khaleda Zia, which did not take part in the 2014 election, had to participate in this election with the knowledge that there will be no level playing field. *Non-participation meant that the party would lose its registration.* It really did not have an alternate option.
- Experts contend that there was sporadic violence in the run-up to the elections, which was a tactic aimed at **forewarning opposition supporters to stay away from the vote.**
- Overall they claim that, in Bangladesh, **"the development story is an upward curve, and the democracy story is a downward curve.**

Impact on India

- Bangladesh and India share a 4,000-km long border that has been marred by ethnic conflicts.
- Its location is strategically important for India, and China has time and again tried to woo Dhaka. Overall, Bangladesh is a key component of India's "Look East" policy.
- **Under Hasina's regime**, New Delhi has seen improved bilateral ties and boundary disputes have been settled amicably, while strong security cooperation has been established and significant progress has been made in settling differences over the Teesta River water sharing.
- On the other hand, **Zia had a strained relationship with India** during her two tenures as prime minister. Her party has been called anti-India by critics and her government was accused of harbouring anti-India elements on Bangladeshi soil.

- Hence, it can be assumed that India-Bangladesh relationship would attain a new dimension under the newly elected government, which is so far the strongest government in the country as far as people's mandate is concerned.

Britain's 'Golden Visa'

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

In News

- There has been confusion among the investors regarding the golden visa scheme of Britain.
- Earlier the Britain's government had announced the suspension of the scheme due to money laundering fears, and then changed its mind.

Key Highlights

- On December 6, government announced that the **tier 1 investor visa** would be suspended until new rules were put in place in 2019.
- But just a few days later, on December 12, the UK's Home Office announced it was not going to suspend the visas.

What Are Golden Visas

- Also known as Tier 1 visas, they provide a **faster route for wealthy investors** coming from outside the European Union and Switzerland to settle in Britain.
- To qualify, foreign nationals must put down a minimum of 2 million pounds (around \$2.5 million) as an investment in Britain. Such an investment in United Kingdom bonds, share capital or companies allows investors to apply for permanent residency within five years.
- For a £5 million investment, they can apply for permanent residency after three years.
- An investment of £10 million can open the door to permanent residency after two years.
- This scheme was introduced in 2008 **to attract wealthy foreign nationals willing to invest large amounts of capital in Britain.**
- The visa program has been especially popular among Russian oligarchs and wealthy people from China and the United Arab Emirates.

Criticism Of This Scheme

- The scheme has long been **criticised by anti-corruption groups** like Transparency International and Global Witness as it provides a safe passage for Russian oligarchs, money launderers and organised crime groups.
- Earlier, in 2014, the government's Migration Advisory Committee filed a report that said the scheme **brought limited economic benefits** because most of the investors had bought fixed-interest loan securities known as gilts, meaning that they were effectively loaning the government money instead of investing in the country.
- The National Crime Agency estimated that **£100 billion in "dirty money"** was being funneled into Britain each year, mainly from Russian, Nigeria, Pakistan and the Far East.

Way Ahead

- The Home Office of Britain is poised conduct an investigation before reintroducing it with stricter regulations.

- Under the new rules, visa applicants will have to provide audits of all their financial and business interests using firms registered in the United Kingdom, and show that they have had control of their funds for at least two years.
- Changes will also be introduced to increase the benefits of the investment to British companies.

US Proposes Changes to H1B Visas

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

In News

- The Trump administration has proposed major changes to the H-1B application process with the aim of awarding the visa to the most skilled and highest paid foreign workers.
- This step is in line with the aim of current government to reform a popular American work visa program.

Key Highlights

- Under a new proposed merit-based rule companies employing foreign workers on the H-1B visa — under the Congressional mandated annual caps -- would have to electronically register with the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) during a designated registration period.
- Under the new rule, the USCIS would also reverse the order by which it selects H-1B petitions under the H-1B cap and the advanced degree exemption.
- This proposed change would increase the chances that beneficiaries with a master's or higher degree from a US institution of higher education would be selected under the H-1B cap and that H-1B visas would be awarded to the most-skilled and highest-paid beneficiaries.
- Also, electronic registration would reduce overall costs for petitioners and create a more efficient and cost-effective H-1B cap petition process for the agency.
- The proposed rule would help alleviate massive administrative burdens on the USCIS since the agency would no longer need to physically receive and handle hundreds of thousands of H-1B petitions and supporting documentation before conducting the cap selection process.

This Article is to be read with May 2018 CA Magazine (US Tightens Visa Rules To Curb Overstay By Students)

New Peace Agreement on Yemen

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

Context

- The ceasefire between **Yemen's Houthi rebels** and **forces loyal to President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi** in the port city of Hodeida came into existence on December 18.
- The agreement was reached in UN-mediated talks held in Stockholm.

Key Highlights

- The agreement includes **three provisions**: *a ceasefire along the Hodeidah front and the redeployment of armed forces out of the city and its port; an agreement on prisoner exchange; and a statement of understanding on the Yemeni city of Taiz.*
- According to the agreement, all combatants should withdraw from Hodeida in 21 days.

- UN observers will set up a monitoring team of government and rebel representatives to oversee the truce.

What Triggered The Truce

- UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths managed to bring the two sides together for a week of talks in Rimbo, Sweden, which resulted in the announcement of a break-through agreement.
- At the time of the negotiations, the city was almost in the hands of the Saudi-led coalition. The coalition had blockaded the port, the main conduit for humanitarian aid to enter Yemen, for months, and the fighters, mostly UAE soldiers, were battling the rebels.
- But **Saudi Arabia came under increased global pressure** to stop fighting in Yemen after the **murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi** inside its consulate in Istanbul triggered a global outcry.
- In the meantime, **humanitarian situation in Yemen also worsened**. The widespread damage caused to infrastructure by the coalition airstrikes and lack of supplies of food and medicines due to the blockade have pushed Yemen into a humanitarian catastrophe.
- About 12 million people are at the risk of starvation if aid does not reach them fast. The country has also seen a massive cholera outbreak.
- With the UN also pushing for talks, the Yemeni government backed by Saudi Arabia gave the green light for talks.

Analysis

- The ceasefire is a highly significant development given that **Hodeidah's port is the entry point** for most of Yemen's food imports, commercial goods and humanitarian aid; currently the country relies on imports for some 90 percent of its food and basic commodity needs.
- This also marks the **first time that Houthi forces have agreed to withdraw** from one of the conflict's most significant front lines.
- However, various points in the agreement are **vaguely worded and open to different interpretations** by the warring parties.
- For example, it talks of "the mutual redeployment of forces from the city of Hodeidah and the ports of Hodeidah."
- Houthis interpret this as removing military presence but not withdrawing, while the other side think that the Houthis should withdraw fully. This will be a key point of contention in the coming months.
- Furthermore, the **timeline of implementation** is unreasonably tight and it might not be enough for the Houthis to withdraw. It is also unclear to what authority they are supposed to handover the city.
- Another challenge is the fact that Houthi forces and their affiliates have become **highly entrenched in Hodeidah**.
- Local security forces - such as the police - are full of **Houthi partisans and sympathisers**. **Dismantling these unofficial networks to re-balance civilian power** will be difficult and will need to be approached carefully.
- Also, the agreement failed to reach an agreement on two other key issues: the **reopening of Sanaa International Airport and the reunification of Central Bank of Yemen**.
- To ensure and sustain peace in Yemen, peace agreements must serve the interests of the Yemenis and reflect their local dynamics and structures.
- In this sense, the Stockholm Agreement should be seen as a good start, but the hard work of securing peace in Yemen is only beginning.

About Yemen Crisis

- The conflict has its roots in the failure of a political transition supposed to bring stability to Yemen following an Arab Spring uprising that forced its longtime authoritarian president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, to hand over power to his deputy, Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi, in 2011.
- As president, Mr Hadi struggled to deal with a variety of problems, including attacks by jihadists, a separatist movement in the south, the continuing loyalty of security personnel to Saleh, as well as corruption, unemployment and food insecurity.
- The Houthi movement, which champions Yemen's Zaidi Shia Muslim minority, took advantage of the new president's weakness by taking control of their northern heartland of Saada province and neighbouring areas.
- Alarmed by the rise of a group they believed to be backed militarily by regional Shia power Iran, Saudi Arabia and eight other mostly Sunni Arab states began an air campaign aimed at restoring Mr Hadi's government.

Australia Recognises West Jerusalem as Israeli Capital

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

In News

- Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison has confirmed that his government will recognise West Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.
- However, Australia's embassy **would not move from Tel Aviv**, until a peace settlement was achieved.
- In 2017, US President Donald Trump **reversed decades of American foreign policy** by recognising the ancient city as Israel's capital. The US embassy was relocated from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in May 2018.

Importance of Jerusalem

- The city is sacred to all three of the great monotheistic religions. Christians, Jews, and Muslims all revere the city and see religious significance there.
- The city has been at the center of conquerors for centuries. The Romans, Crusaders, Ottomans, and the British Empire all once sought for control of the city.
- Since the creation of the modern state of Israel, both the Israeli leadership and their Arab neighbours have laid claim to the historic city.
- In the centre of the Old City is a hill with great significance to both Jews and Muslims. The hill is known to Jews as Har ha-Bayit or Temple Mount. To Muslims around the world, the hill is known as al-Haram al-Sharif or The Noble Sanctuary. Muslims revere two holy sites on the hill - the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Asqa Mosque.
- Christians revere the city for its connection to Jesus Christ who they believe preached, died and was later resurrected there.

Visit of the Foreign Minister of Denmark to India

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

In News

- The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Denmark, Mr. Anders Samuelsen, visited India on 17- 18 December 2018 for the 2nd Joint Commission Meeting (JCM) between India and Denmark.
- This commission was established pursuant to the agreement signed on 6 February 2008.

Key Highlights

- External Affairs Minister Smt. Sushma Swaraj and the Danish Foreign Minister co-chaired the 2nd JCM.
- The Ministers reviewed the current state of bilateral relations and expressed satisfaction with the enhanced bilateral ties in areas such as renewable energy, environment, agriculture and food processing, urban development, science and technology and shipping.
- All the sectoral Joint Working Groups that had been set up since the 1st JCM have met during this year. Both sides also agreed to setting up of a **JWG on digitization for mutually beneficial cooperation**.
- A **Protocol on Consultations between the Foreign Ministers of India and Denmark** was signed and an **MoU between National Institute of Wind Energy and Denmark Technical University** was also exchanged.

39th GCC Summit

Syllabus: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements.

In News

- 39th Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) summit was held in Saudi Arabia's capital Riyadh. It was inaugurated by King Salman Bin Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia.
- The 40th Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) summit will be held in the United Arab Emirates.

Key Highlights

- The Qatari Emir Tamim Bin Hamad al-Thani didn't attend the summit despite having been officially invited by the Saudi King.
- In June 2017, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the UAE and Bahrain collectively severed ties with Doha, accusing it of supporting terrorism, and imposed an air/land/sea embargo on Qatar, which vociferously denies the allegations.
- The summit ended with 'Riyadh Declaration', which included 72 items covering matters related to the Gulf countries, the region and the world.
- Through the declaration, the members sought to remove obstacles ahead of the **common Gulf market** to ensure the **economic unity till 2025** and quickly complete the procedures to implement Joint Gulf military command.
- It was noted that GCC would combat radicalism, be loyal to the superiority of law and operate together with the international partners to fight terrorism.
- GCC declaration also emphasized that it would continue to support fellow states, the Palestinian cause, and Yemen.

About GCC

- The GCC, established in 1981 in Abu Dhabi, comprises **Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE**.

- It is basically a political and economic alliance of six countries in the Arabian Peninsula which promotes economic, security, cultural and social cooperation among member countries.
- The presidency shifts among the six members based on the Arabic alphabet.
- Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain have constitutional monarchies while Saudi Arabia and Oman have absolute monarchies, and the United Arab Emirates has federal monarchy.

India-GCC Relations

- The Gulf constitutes the “**immediate**” **neighbourhood** of India separated only by the Arabian Sea. India, therefore, has a vital stake in the stability, security and economic well being of the Gulf.
- The GCC has emerged as a major trading partner of India. It has vast potential as India’s investment partner for the future. The GCC’s substantial oil and gas reserves are of utmost importance for India’s energy needs. The GCC countries are collectively host to a large Indian expatriate community.
- India’s **economic linkage** with the GCC have increased steadily, especially due to growth in oil imports. The bilateral two-way trade during 2015-16 was US\$ 97.46 billion, registering a decline of about 27% over the previous year.
- From the **strategic point of view**, India and GCC share the desire for political stability and security in the region. The GCC States are going through important changes and transformation; the process of understanding and integration is coming of age.
- India and GCC signed a **Framework Agreement for enhancing and developing economic cooperation** between the two sides in New Delhi in August 2004. Two rounds of talks for finalizing aspects like tariff rules, rules of origin, etc have been held. The **India-GCC FTA is under negotiation**.

Factors Hindering the Relationship:

- First, in recent times, **India’s relationship with Iran** has made the GCC countries apprehensive.
- Second, **Pakistan** has taken advantage of its religious affinity and close relationship with the Gulf countries for depicting India as an anti-Muslim country.
- Third, **excessive dependence on the US** on political and security matters has dwarfed the engagement of Gulf States with other powers.
- Fourth, **India’s close ties with Israel**, particularly the Indo-Israeli defence cooperation, have been resented by the GCC countries.

Global Compact for Migration

Syllabus: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements.

In News

164 countries has adopted the historic **Global Compact for Migration**. It is considered as a blueprint for helping millions of migrants worldwide achieve a life of safety and dignity.

Key Highlights

- The **Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM)** was agreed upon at an intergovernmental conference in Marrakech, Morocco.

- It is a **non-binding agreement**, which aims to better manage migration at local, national, regional and global levels, including reducing the risks and vulnerabilities the migrants or refugees face at different stages of their journey.
- The compact is comprised of 23 objectives. These include : collecting adequate data; ensuring all migrants have legal proof of identity; saving lives and establishing coordinated international efforts on missing migrants; strengthening the transnational response to smuggling and trafficking; managing borders in an integrated manner; and giving migrants access to basic services.
- The compact also includes a follow-up and review mechanism.
- While acknowledging states' shared responsibilities, the compact reaffirms their sovereign right to determine their national migration policies and to govern migration within their jurisdictions.
- It also stresses that the compact's implementation will account for different national realities, capacities and levels of development; and will respect national policies and priorities.

Need for Global Pact

- Cross-border migration is, by its very nature, an international phenomenon and that effective management of this global reality requires international cooperation to enhance its positive impact for all.
- According to the UN, there were **258 million international migrants** in the world in 2017, increasing almost 50 percent since 2000.
- The number of migrants, representing **3.4 percent of the world's population**, is increasing faster than the global population, driven by economic prosperity, inequality, violence, conflict and climate change.
- According to UN data, around 80 percent of the world's migrants move between countries in a safe and orderly fashion. But more than 60,000 people have died on the move since year 2000.

Analysis

- Emerging in the wake of Europe's 2015 refugee crisis, it draws on a range of existing international instruments, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which the vast majority of member states are signatories.
- However, the adoption of the United Nations' global migration compact **has sparked turmoil**, particularly among members of the European Union. Many U.N. member states have declared that they do not intend to sign it. The United States became the first to withdraw.
- These countries have termed this pact as an effort by the United Nations to advance **global governance at the expense of the sovereign right of states**.
- They also contend that the compact **does not sufficiently distinguish between legal and illegal migration**, that **it mixes up the rights of asylum seekers with those of economic migrants**, or even stipulates the number of migrants that each member state will need to accept.
- According to analysts, the compact have **some inherent weaknesses**, such as not sufficiently demonstrating that it will be relevant and actionable in member states with such contrasting migration features and policy approaches.
- Doubts also persist on the **levels of financial resources** that will be allocated to implement such a nonbinding and largely aspirational policy framework.

Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)

In News

- States-parties to the Fourth Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to **Review the Operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention** (RevCon) have failed to adopt the report by consensus.
- It was due to disagreements over language around Syrian chemical weapons use, the joint-investigative mechanism and attribution for chemical weapons attacks.

About OPCW

- The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) is the implementing body for the **Chemical Weapons Convention**, which entered into force on 29 April 1997.
- It has 193 member states which share a goal of preventing chemistry from ever again being used for warfare, thereby strengthening international security.
- To this end, the Convention contains four key provisions:
 - Destroying all existing chemical weapons under international verification by the OPCW.
 - Monitoring chemical industry to prevent chemical weapons from re-emerging.
 - Providing assistance and protection to States Parties against chemical threats.
 - Fostering international cooperation to strengthen implementation of the Convention and promote the peaceful use of chemistry.
- In 2013, the organisation was awarded the **Nobel Peace Prize** “for its extensive efforts to eliminate chemical weapons”.

International Whaling Commission (IWC)

Syllabus: Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate.

In News

- Japan is considering a withdrawal from the International Whaling Commission in order to resume commercial whaling.
- Its possible withdrawal highlights domestic political frustration with the IWC’s moratorium on commercial whaling, which has been in place since 1986.

Reasons For Withdrawal

- Japan was infuriated in September when anti-whaling nations, including Australia and the US, along with the EU, **rejected its proposal** for reform of the IWC.
- Japan claims that its plan would have created a **new committee to set catch limits** for “sustainable” whaling.
- Japan also argues that the IWC has **departed from its original purpose** as a body to manage whale stocks and become **solely dedicated to conservation**.
- Japan insists whale stocks have now recovered sufficiently to allow commercial hunting to resume.

Analysis

- Many countries have termed this step against the fight for the welfare of these majestic mammals.

- After the withdrawal, Japan would no longer be part of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW). Hence, it **cannot pursue scientific whaling** and there will be no more whales killed in the Southern Ocean Sanctuary by Japan.
- Currently, Japan uses a *clause in the IWC moratorium* allowing it to conduct so-called “**research hunts**” in the Southern Ocean and then sell the resulting whale meat.
- However, the problem is that for whaling in the Japanese Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), the scientific evidence suggests that stock levels are low, and do not show the levels of robust recovery seen elsewhere.
- So, while there is a gain for whales in the Southern Ocean, the **threat to northern Pacific populations increases**.
- **Environmental governance would also take a hit**. By remaining in the ICW until now, Japan has faithfully followed international protocol, including the decision by the International Court of Justice in 2014 following the challenge by Australia to Japan's "scientific whaling".
- **Norway and Iceland** both catch whales **in defiance of the IWC moratorium**. They are founders of the **North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission**, an alternative management body for whaling.
- Japan is a leading voice among pro-whaling countries, its withdrawal may inspire **other countries, such as South Korea and Russia, to follow suit**.

About IWC

- The IWC was set up under the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW) which was signed in Washington DC in December 1946.
- its purpose is to provide for the proper conservation of whale stocks and thus make possible the orderly development of the whaling industry.
- It introduced a moratorium on commercial whaling in 1986 after some species had been fished to near extinction.
- The commission, with 89 member governments, banned commercial whaling in 1986.