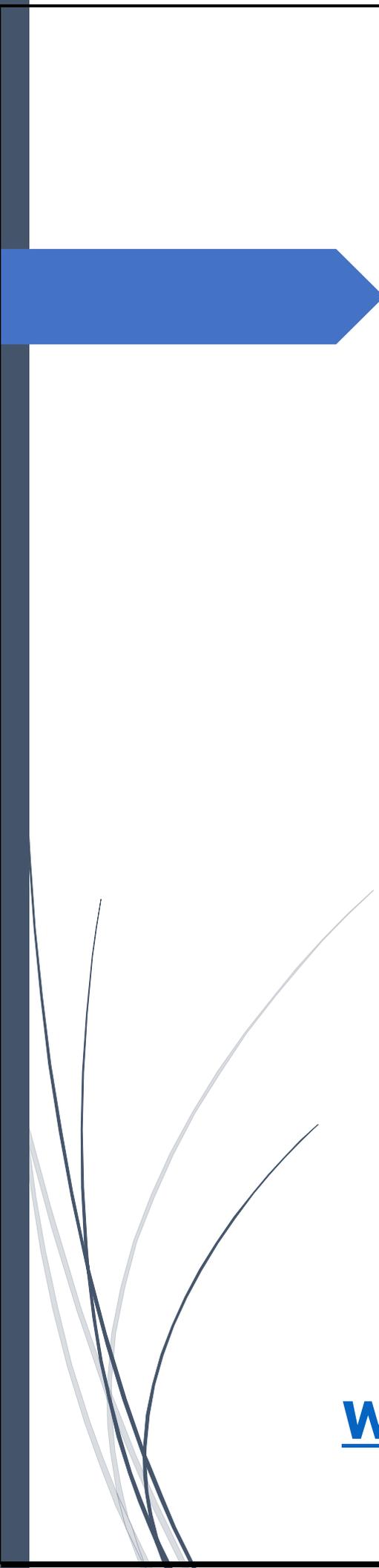




International Issues 2020

For OAS Mains-2019



OBJECTIVE IAS

www.objectiveias.in

Contents

1. UN Court rejects UK's claim of sovereignty over Chagos Islands
2. What are the Geneva Conventions?
3. US Removes Country Cap on Green Card
4. US Officially Recognizes Israel's Sovereignty over the Disputed 'Golan Heights'
5. Hong Kong Crisis
6. Britain Signs Brexit Deal with the EU
7. Re-education camps in China
8. Change in US's West Bank Policy
9. UK Defies Deadline to Return Chagos Island
10. Russia Launches Gas Pipelines to China
11. USA Unveils West-Asia-Peace-Plan
12. Iran Rolls back Nuclear deal commitments
13. Revival of SAARC
14. US to Withdraw US from 'Open Skies' Treaty
15. Iran's Currency to be Renamed and Re-valued
16. 'Travel bubble' to Kick Start Economy
17. SIPRI Report: Continuation of Nuclear Weapon Modernization
18. US to Withdraw from WHO by July 2021
19. Abraham Accords: Israel-UAE Peace Agreement
20. Myanmar's Pushback against China-funded Economic Corridor
21. UN Treaty of Banning Nuclear Weapons to Enter into Force in 2021

UN Court Rejects UK's Claim of Sovereignty over Chagos Islands

Britain has an obligation to end its administration of the Chagos Archipelago and complete the process of decolonisation of Mauritius, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague ruled on February 25.

The Ruling

- **Decolonisation of Mauritius:** ICJ rejected the contention that the issue did not fall within its jurisdiction because it was a bilateral matter for the two countries, and concluded that the decolonisation of Mauritius was not lawfully completed, as a result of Britain's continued administration of the Chagos Islands.
- **Wrongful Act:** ICJ found that the continued administration of the territory by the U.K. amounted to a wrongful act, which was not consistent with the right to the people of self-determination. The judges concluded that any detachment of part of a colony had to be based on the "freely expressed and genuine will" of the people.



The History & the Dispute

- **BIOT:** The Chagos Islands, a group of small islands located in the Indian Ocean, at present form part of what is known as the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT). Historically, Chagos Islands had been an integral part of Mauritius. However, in 1965, three years before 1968 when Mauritius attained complete independence, the Chagos Islands were detached from Mauritius, and made a part of BIOT.
- **Home to a United States Military and Naval Base:** Since 1966, Diego Garcia, the largest of the Chagos Islands, has been home to a United States military and naval base, pursuant to an agreement between the UK and the US in 1966 for making BIOT available to the US for defence purposes.
- **Displacement of People:** Consequently, between 1967 and 1973, the people living in the Chagos Islands (Chagossians) were forcibly removed. The people displaced from the Chagos Islands have been living in different countries including Mauritius, Seychelles and the UK, and have yet not been able to return as British laws prevent them from doing so.
- **Mauritius' Stand:** It does not recognise the BIOT, and maintains that it has sovereignty over the Chagos Islands. It initially sought to take this matter to the ICJ as a contentious case, but the UK declined. Since the 1980s, the African Union has passed several resolutions on the issue, demanding the completion of the decolonisation process for Mauritius.

What are the Geneva Conventions?

Recently, Pakistan released Indian Air Force pilot, Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman, calling it a peace gesture. However, it is likely that the captured wing commander was returned to India as both countries are signatory to the Geneva Convention.

Geneva Conventions

The 1949 Geneva Conventions are a set of international treaties that ensure that warring parties conduct themselves in a humane way with non-combatants such as civilians and medical personnel, as well as with combatants no longer actively engaged in fighting, such as prisoners of war, and wounded or sick soldiers. All countries are signatories to the Geneva Conventions.

The Protocols

1. **Protocol I** expands protection for the civilian population as well as military and civilian medical workers in international armed conflicts.
2. **Protocol II** elaborates on protections for victims caught up in high-intensity internal conflicts such as civil wars. It does not apply to internal disturbances such as riots, demonstrations and isolated acts of violence.
3. In December 2005, a **third Additional Protocol** to the Geneva Conventions was adopted that provides for another distinctive emblem: the red crystal. The red crystal is an optional emblem, equal in status to the red cross and red crescent.

Key Facts

- The Geneva Conventions are a series of treaties on the treatment of civilians, prisoners of war (POWs) and soldiers who are otherwise rendered hors de combat (French, literally 'outside the fight'), or incapable of fighting.
- In total, 196 countries have signed and ratified the 1949 conventions over the years, including many that did not participate or sign until decades later. These include Angola, Bangladesh, and Iran.
- As of 2010, 170 nations have ratified Protocol I and 165 have ratified Protocol II. Any nation that has ratified the Geneva Conventions but not the protocols are still bound by all provisions of the conventions.

The Four Geneva Conventions

1. **Convention I:** This convention protects wounded and infirm soldiers and ensures humane treatment without discrimination founded on race, color, sex, religion or faith, birth or wealth, etc. The convention prohibits torture, assaults

upon personal dignity, and execution without judgment. It also grants the right to proper medical treatment and care.

2. **Convention II:** This agreement extended the protections described in the first convention to shipwrecked soldiers and other naval forces, including special protections afforded to hospital ships.
3. **Convention III:** One of the treaties created during the 1949 convention, this defined 'Prisoner of War,' and accorded such prisoners proper and humane treatment as specified by the first convention. Specifically, it required POWs to give only their names, ranks, and serial numbers to their captors. Nations party to the convention may not use torture to extract information from POWs.
4. **Convention IV:** Under this convention, civilians are afforded the same protections from inhumane treatment and attack afforded to sick and wounded soldiers in the first convention.

Applicability of the Geneva Conventions

- The conventions apply to all cases of declared war between signatory nations.
- The conventions apply to all cases of armed conflict between two or more signatory nations, even in the absence of a declaration of war.
- The conventions apply to a signatory nation even if the opposing nation is not a signatory, but only if the opposing nation 'accepts and applies the provisions' of the conventions.

What is International Humanitarian Law?

- International humanitarian law (IHL) is a set of international laws that establish what can and can't be done in an armed conflict.
- IHL protects all victims of armed conflicts, including civilians, and combatants who are injured, have been captured or have laid down their arms. All parties to an armed conflict - whether states or organised non-state armed groups - are bound by IHL.
- Also known as the laws of war or the law of armed conflict, the best known of these rules are found in the four Geneva Conventions of 1949. The rules of war are universal.

During armed conflict, such rules include:

- Care for the wounded, sick and shipwrecked, regardless of whether they are friends or enemies
- Humane treatment of prisoners
- Protection of civilian persons and property

- Respect for the red cross, red crescent, and red crystal emblems; Attacking only military targets
- Limiting the use of force; No physical or moral coercion shall be exercised against protected persons, in particular, to obtain information from them or from third parties

Did the captured Pilot Count as a Prisoner of War?

Even though India and Pakistan have been careful not to use the 'w' word for the operations each has conducted on the other's territory over two successive days – India has said its airstrikes were a “non-military” intelligence-led operation – both sides are bound by the Geneva Conventions. This means the IAF officer was a prisoner of war, and his treatment had to be in accordance with the provisions for PoWs under the Geneva Conventions.

US Removes Country Cap on Green Card

On 10 July, the US House of Representatives passed the **Fairness of High-Skilled Immigrants Act, 2019 or HR 1044**.

- It has to be passed by the Senate before it can be signed into law by President Donald Trump.
- The law removes the 7% country-cap on green card applicants.
- The Bill will create a **first-come, first-serve system** providing certainty to workers and families.
- The Bill will also enable US companies to compete in a global economy as they hire the brightest people to create products, services, and jobs - regardless of where they were born.

Effect of the Law on India

- Indians looking to immigrate to the US in order to live with their families in the US will benefit from the law. Until now the percentage of such people allowed was only 7% per country but this limit has been increased to 15%.
- The law completely eliminates another bottleneck i.e. the cap of 7% per country on employment-based immigrant visas. Now any number of people who are looking to avail US visa for employment can apply.
- Indian IT professionals, who mostly go to the US on H-1B work visas, are the worst sufferers of the current immigration system as for them the wait for Green Card is more than a decade.
- A Green Card allows a non-US citizen to live and work permanently in America.

US Officially Recognizes Israel's Sovereignty over the Disputed 'Golan Heights'

- US President signed a proclamation on 25 March 2019 that recognizes Israel's sovereignty over the disputed Golan Heights.
- The U.S. is the first country to recognize Israeli sovereignty over the Golan, which the rest of the international community regards as 'disputed' and whose status should be determined by negotiations between Israel and Syria. US in 2018 also officially recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

Reaction of other countries to US' announcement:

- The UN has condemned US' proclamation and declared Israel's annexation of the area "null and void."
- US' announcement has been criticized by Egypt, Turkey and a majority of US allies and Arab neighbours as it violates international resolutions, namely United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 497.'

Impact of USA's Move

- The UN members pledge to a charter, which refrains members from use of force or threat against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state.
- By recognizing Israel's sovereignty over Golan Heights US has ignored the UN international law and has set a bad precedent.
- The move can have following implications:
 - Pakistan would feel motivated to get Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK) recognized by other countries, including the US, as it is also a disputed territory under the control of Pakistan.
 - Alternatively, India could ask US to recognize PoK as Indian territory.
 - China's control of Aksai Chin area and eastern Kashmir by force could see similar fate.
 - Russia's annexation of Crimea and Chinese domination over Taiwan by force could be justified on similar grounds.



Jerusalem

- Jerusalem is a city in the Middle East, located on a plateau in the Judean Mountains between the Mediterranean and the Dead Sea.
- Jerusalem has been fought over for millennia by its inhabitants, and by regional powers and invaders as it is sacred to Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and each religion has sites of great significance there.
- Both Israel and the Palestinian Authority claim Jerusalem as their capital, as Israel maintains its primary governmental institutions there and the State of Palestine ultimately foresees it as its seat of power; however, neither claim is widely recognized internationally.

Palestine

- Palestine is an unofficial sovereign state in Western Asia claiming the West Bank (bordering Israel and Jordan) and Gaza Strip (bordering Israel and Egypt) with Jerusalem as the designated capital, although its administrative center is currently located in Ramallah.
- The entirety of territory claimed by the State of Palestine has been occupied by Israel since the Six-Day War in 1967.

Resolution 242

- Resolution 242 is called the “land for peace” resolution that outlines a peace process post the Six Day war.

Resolution 497

- Resolution 497 prohibits countries from acquiring territory by force.

Golan Heights

- Golan Heights is a disputed territory which is contested by Israel and Syria.
- Israel annexed it in 1981 but the annexation is not recognized internationally.
- Strategic importance:



- Golan Heights is a plateau which is 1000 feet above sea level which makes it strategically important to observe any military movement made by surrounding countries.
- In an otherwise arid region, Golan Heights provides Israel with its one-third freshwater supply.
- Golan is also fertile and among Israel's most important sources of domestic beef, fruit, and wine.

Hong Kong Crisis

- Hundreds of thousands of protesters dressed in white marched in the streets of Hong Kong on 9th June to protest against the government's extradition bill. Protesters included people from the business community, lawyers, students, members of religious groups and even housewives. This is the biggest gathering of protesters in Hong Kong since the Umbrella Revolution of 2014.

Why the protests erupted against extradition bill?

- The amendments to the extradition bill would allow suspects accused of crimes such as murder and rape to be extradited to mainland China to face trial.
- The changed law would also allow Hong Kong to hand over the individuals accused of crimes in Taiwan and Macau to China.
- Protesters are concerned that China's flawed justice system will use the changed law to target political opponents in Hong Kong who would be put to torture in China.
- The change in the law will deal another blow to Hong Kong's already crumbling autonomy and its image as an international finance center.
- Carrie Lam, who became Chief Executive of Hong Kong in 2017, is favoured by Beijing and had been pushing for the amendments to be passed this month.
- The government suspended the extradition bill last month and it is now unlikely to pass, but the protesters want it scrapped completely and are calling on Ms. Lam to step down.
- The UK, Canada and the EU have expressed concern over the potential impact on their citizens in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong government's view

- Hong Kong government believes that the proposed amendments would "plug loopholes" that are used by the criminals in the city.
- The government has also assured that:
 - Hong Kong courts would make the final decision on extradition
 - Only certain categories of suspects would be liable to be extradited

- Individuals accused of political and religious offences would not be extradited.

Hong Kong-China-Taiwan-Macau

- Hong Kong is a former British colony which was returned to Chinese rule in 1997.
- It is a semi-autonomous region working under the “one country, two systems” principle. It has its own laws and courts, and allows its residents a range of civil liberties not allowed in China.
- It does not have an extradition agreement with Beijing.
- Taiwan has a tense relationship with China; Macau, like Hong Kong, is a Chinese special administrative region with significant autonomy.

Umbrella Revolution 2014

- The Umbrella Movement started as a spontaneous social movement for democratic development in Hong Kong in September 2014
- The activists demanded democratic and more open elections in Hong Kong.
- Lakhs of people joined sit-ins and peaceful street demonstrations, using umbrellas to shield themselves when the police used tear gas and pepper spray to disperse the crowds.

Jasmine Revolution 2011

- The **Tunisian revolution** in which President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was forced out of the presidency by popular protests against corruption, poverty, and political repression is known as the “**Jasmine Revolution**”.
- It took place in 2011 and its success inspired a wave of similar protests throughout the Middle East and North Africa.

Britain Signs Brexit Deal with the EU

On 17 October, 2019, Britain clinched the Brexit deal with the European Union (EU) more than three years after Britons voted to leave the bloc. A referendum was held on June 23, 2016, to decide whether Britain should exit or remain in the European Union. 51.9% of the voters favoured exit of Britain from the EU.

About the New Deal

- **Democratic Consent of Northern Ireland:** The new trading arrangements will take effect immediately after the Brexit transition period ends in December 2020 without any vote of consent in Northern Ireland.

- The Northern Irish Assembly will hold a vote at the end of 4 years from now on whether to continue the arrangements or not. If it agrees by a simple majority, the trading rules will apply for a further four years.
- If the rules win larger support, they will apply for a further eight years.
- If the vote on an extension fails even to win a simple majority, the new trading rules will only extend for two years.
- Democratic consent of Ireland was one of the major sticking points in negotiations.
- **Customs Arrangements:** Northern Ireland will officially be part of the UK's customs territory, meaning that it can apply UK tariffs and can participate in future British trade deals, but at the same time the EU-UK customs border is placed in the Irish Sea, meaning that Northern Ireland would follow EU's customs rules. Under this, UK customs authorities will check goods at British ports before they enter Northern Ireland. Those British goods whose final destination is Northern Ireland can pass without paying tariffs; however, for goods at risk of entering EU market, UK authorities will apply the EU's tariffs.
- **Future Relationship:** The UK and the EU aim to establish an ambitious and wide ranging free trade agreement and these talks would form the second stage for EU-UK talks.

What Next in Brexit?

- Now the British Prime Minister must get the deal approved in the UK Parliament in order to set the deal in motion. Ambassadors and Brexit specialists from EU27 national capitals would examine the text of the deal and will advise EU leaders who will discuss the deal and potentially endorse it at the European Council summit in Brussels.
- If the deal is voted down in the UK parliament, British Prime Minister would likely have to seek another extension for negotiations under the terms of the **Benn Act**.
- The EU could refuse to give the UK more time, which would leave MPs with the choice of backing the British PM's deal or leaving without a deal.

Benn Act

- Also known as EU Withdrawal (No. 2) Act, its aim is to require the prime minister to ask the EU for an extension to the Article 50 negotiating period.
- The Act amends the EU Withdrawal Act 2018 to say that ministers "must" amend the date of exit by statutory instrument, rather than "may" amend the date of exit.

Article 50 of Lisbon Treaty

- Article 50 is the only legal mechanism for a member state of the EU to leave. A short paragraph in the Lisbon Treaty agreed by all EU member states in 2009, sets out the steps a country need to go through to withdraw from its treaty obligations.
- Only an EU member (for example, the UK Government) can decide to trigger Article 50; it cannot be forced to do so by the other EU states.
- **Value Added Tax:** How value-added tax (VAT) will be applied in Northern Ireland after Brexit was one of the last outstanding issues in the negotiations for a deal. Now, EU rules on VAT and excise duties will apply in Northern Ireland, with the UK responsible for their collection. However, revenues resulting from transactions taxable in Northern Ireland will be retained by the UK rather than being remitted to the EU.
- **Other Issues:** They also agreed to uphold high standards on environment, climate, worker's rights and other rules.

Re-education camps in China

Recently leaked documents of Chinese government described the nature of crackdown on Uighur Muslims in internment camps in Xinjiang, China.

Re-education Camps

- People showing signs of extremism have been sent to these camps.
- The conditions of extremist behaviour are decided by the government on the basis of arbitrary markers like fasting during Ramzan, Eid Greetings, etc.
- China claims that it's their efforts towards assimilation of the Uighurs.
- However, the underlying cause seems to be the different ethnicity of Uighur Muslims which is closer to the people of Central Asian Republics (CARs) than to China's majority Han Population.
- Over the past few decades, as economic prosperity has come to Xinjiang, it has also brought in large numbers of the Han Chinese, who have cornered the better jobs, and left the Uighurs feeling their livelihoods and identity were under threat.
- This led to sporadic violence. Therefore, in order to contain violence and terrorism, Chinese government has started Re-education Camps.

Analysis

- In the name of rooting out extremism, China is undertaking huge human rights violations. China is also attempting to homogenize the culture instead of letting people adopt multicultural identities.

- Outside countries have a duty to intervene and force Beijing to comply with international human rights.
- Considering Xinjiang to be geographically important to China's BRI, it could provide an avenue for the international community to apply diplomatic pressure in the way of sanctions.
- Another option is suspension of, or withdrawal from, existing BRI.

Xinjiang Autonomous Region

- Xinjiang, an autonomous territory in northwest China, is a vast region of deserts and mountain.
- The region's name suggests the Uighurs have autonomy and self-governance. But similar to Tibet, Xinjiang is a tightly controlled region of China.
- Xinjiang is geographically important to China's Belt and Road initiative (BRI) - a development strategy involving infrastructure and investments in Europe, Asia and Africa.
- It is China's largest region with country's largest gas reserves.
- It has a strategic location as it connects mainland China with Central Asian Republics making it crucial for energy resources and trade.

Change in US's West Bank Policy

Recently, USA has changed its stance over West Bank stating that it no longer thinks Israeli settlement in West Bank violate International law.

Shifting American Policy on West Bank

- **1981:** President Ronald Reagan called such settlements to be illegitimate but not illegal and blocked UN resolutions condemning Israel for them.
- **2016:** President Obama broke this tradition and did not veto for a resolution that called for an end to Israeli settlement.
- **2019:** President Trump changed stance in line with President Reagen.

International Status of such Settlements

- Contrary to USA, international community considers such settlements to be violation of:
- **4th Geneva Conventions:** Under the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949), an occupying power "shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies".
- **Rome Statute:** Under the Rome Statute that established the International Criminal Court in 1998, such transfers constitute war crimes.

Analysis

- The move is seen as one of the gifts to Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu who had mentioned about forceful annexation of West Bank in his election manifesto.
- The step is also seen as pleasing Israel-loving citizens in USA. Both the regimes in Israel and USA tend to benefit from the move.
- Other gifts include recognizing the disputed city of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and accepting its sovereignty over occupied Golan Heights.
- Not only this, USA even left UNESCO for recognizing Palestine as a Nation-state.
- The step will surely have repercussions on peace in West Asia.

West Bank

- West Bank was captured by Jordan after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War.
- Israel snatched it back during the Six Day War of 1967, and has occupied it ever since.
- It has built some 130 formal settlements in the West Bank, and a similar number of smaller, informal settlements have mushroomed over the last 20-25 years.
- Under the **Oslo Accords of 1990s**, both Israel and the Palestine had agreed that the status of settlements would be decided by negotiations. But the negotiation process has been all but dead for several years now.
- The Palestinians want East Jerusalem as the capital of their future state. But for Israel, Jerusalem is non-negotiable.

UK Defies Deadline to Return Chagos Island

Mauritius called the UK an “illegal colonial occupier”, after it ignored a UN mandated deadline to return the Chagos Islands, a small archipelago in the Indian Ocean, to Mauritius. The United Nations had given UK six months to process the transfer, a move the UK and the US have bitterly resisted.

Chagos Islands Dispute

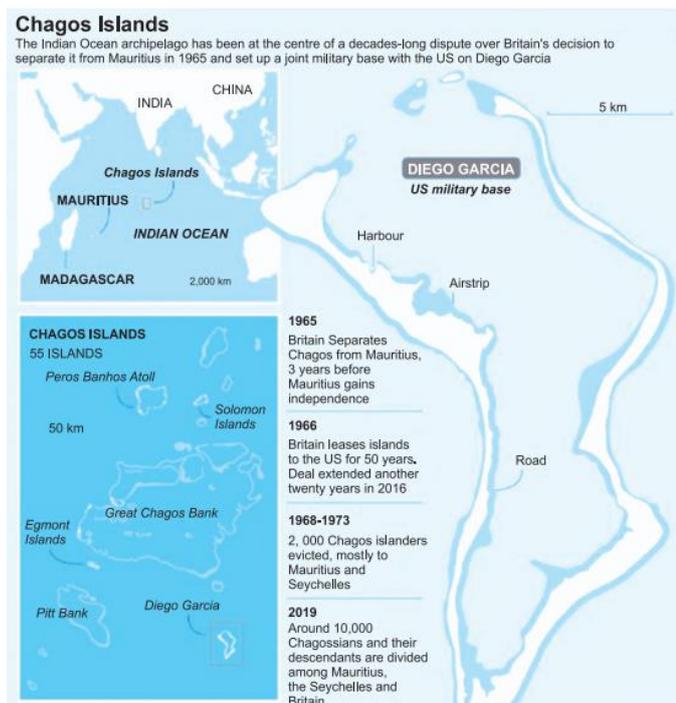
- Chagos Island has been part of Mauritius since 18th Century till the UK broke the archipelago away from its territory in 1965.
- The UK declared these islands as an overseas territory in November 1965.
- After Mauritius gained independence from the UK in 1968, UK refused to return the Chagos Islands to Mauritius claiming in petitions submitted to the Permanent Court of Arbitration that the island was required to “accommodate

the United States' desire to use certain islands in the Indian Ocean for defence purposes".

- The largest island on the Chagos Islands archipelago, Diego Garcia, is where the US and the UK operate a large military base and was also used as a US military base for the US-led attacks against Afghanistan and Iraq in the 2000s.
- After independence, Mauritius had proposed an exchange allowing the UK to let the US use the Chagos Islands for defence purposes till those needs ceased, in exchange for increasing the quota of sugar imports into the US, a move that would contribute to Mauritius' economy.
- To accommodate the military base where UK and US military personnel live and work, native inhabitants of the land were forcefully removed and subsequent denials were issued by the UK claiming that the displaced people did not belong to the Chagos Islands.
- In 2015, Mauritius initiated legal proceedings in these matters against the United Kingdom in the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague in the Netherlands. The UK made several attempts to resist Mauritius' attempts to take the matter to international court by claiming that the issue was a bilateral matter.

Decision at Permanent Court of Arbitration

- The Permanent Court of Arbitration ruled in 2015 that the "United Kingdom failed to give due regard to Mauritius' rights" and declared that "the United Kingdom had breached its obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea."
- The ruling also called out the UK for deliberately creating a marine protected area in the waters surrounding Chagos Islands in 2010.
- The court found that the Marine Protected Area created by the UK in connivance with the US was illegal and that "British and American defence interests were put above Mauritius's rights".
- Also, in June 2017, at the UN General Assembly, 94 countries voted in support of Mauritius' resolution to seek an advisory opinion on the legal status of the Chagos Islands from the International Court of Justice in The Hague.



- In February 2019, the UN's highest court of justice, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), ordered the UK to return the Chagos Islands to Mauritius "as rapidly as possible".

Consequences

- The UN had given the UK six months to return the Chagos Islands to Mauritius. After the UK missed the deadline to do so, Mauritius called the UK an "illegal colonial occupier".
- The African Union also issued its own rebuke against the UK and demanded that the nation put an end to its "continued colonial administration".
- The UK is slowly finding itself more diplomatically isolated after its failures at the UN General Assembly concerning Chagos Islands.
- UK might possibly be searching for reassurance in the fact that the ICJ ruling is not binding and no immediate sanctions or adverse actions will be taken against it.

Russia Launches Gas Pipelines to China

Chinese and Russian Presidents Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin inaugurated the first cross-border pipeline between their countries, called the "Power of Siberia". Gas supply to China via this pipe has started.

Details of the Project

- The central aim of this gas pipeline is to pump natural gas to China from Russia's far-east regions. Under the contract, Russia will deliver 1 trillion cubic meters of natural gas to China over the next 30 years.
- From Siberia to China's Yangtze River delta in Shanghai, the massive pipeline will cover 8,000 km, with 5,111 km inside China, passing through nine provinces and municipalities.
- Gas is being sourced from Chayandinskoye and Kovytko fields in eastern Siberia, and is then piped to Blagoveshchensk – the last town on the Russian side of the border. From there, it is tunneled under the Amur River, before entering Heihe on the Chinese side.

Significance of the Project

- **Energy Security:** For China, the significance of the pipeline project is that it will feed its industries, which are mostly situated in the north. They are trying to move away from coal to cleaner alternatives; the pipeline supply will help secure its demand for energy security.

- **Trade:** China is in talks with Russia over two more pipelines: the Power of Siberia 2 that will supply over 30 billion cubic metres annually to China's western border with Russia. Another pipeline from Sakhalin Island, may become a part of Russia's export route to Japan, South Korea and China.
- **Close Relations:** For Russia, on the other hand, the pipeline project signals the country's pro-China sentiment.



Impact on India

- **Changing Military Ties:** Russia provided India arms to maintain a formidable military profile, but also provided invaluable political support on a variety of regional issues. Transfer of military technology has been an important part of both the old and the new Russian-Chinese relationship.
- **Energy:** Russia has become a new source of LNG for India. This brand new pipeline is an emblem of closer energy integration in Eurasia, with Russia and China as the key partners. Together, China and India can be Russia's formidable customers for its resources getting stable supplies in return.

USA Unveils West-Asia-Peace-Plan

The West Asia peace plan unveiled by U.S.A seeks to give the Israelis what they have long wanted – **an expansive state with Jerusalem as its “undivided capital” and tight security control over a future Palestinian state.** With his plan, USA is actually pushing to **revive the stalled two-state talks between the Israelis and the Palestinians,** but on his own terms.

Issues Involved

- The status of Jerusalem – which includes sites sacred to Judaism, Islam and Christianity.
- Establishing mutually agreed borders.
- Finding security arrangements to satisfy Israel's fears of attacks by Palestinians and hostile neighbours.
- The Palestinian demand for statehood, and an end to Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory.
- Finding a solution to the plight of millions of Palestinian refugees.
- Arrangements to share scarce natural resources, such as water.
- Palestinian demands that Israel remove its settlements in the West Bank and east Jerusalem. More than 400,000 Israelis now live among roughly 3 million Palestinians in the West Bank, with another 200,000 settlers in east Jerusalem.



What is the Plan?

- The solutions USA has proposed to almost all of these issues **favour the Israeli positions**. For example, **Israel would be allowed to annex the Jewish settlements** on the West Bank as well as the Jordan Valley.
- The Palestinian refugees, who were forced out from their homes during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war that followed the declaration of the state of Israel in the historic Palestine, **would not be allowed to return**.

- Jerusalem, perhaps the most contentious issue, would be “**the undivided capital**” of Israel, with Palestine gaining its capital in the east of the city.
- The Palestinian Authority should **dismiss its current complaints at the International Criminal Court against Israel** and refrain itself from taking further actions.
- It should also **crack down on “terrorist” groups such as Hamas** and the Islamic Jihad.
- Palestine would get control over more land than what it currently controls. The plan proposes some **land swap for the Israeli annexation** of the West Bank Jewish settlements.

Will the Plan work?

- There is a reasonable doubt if the plan would work. Palestine, The United Nations and most nations around the world back the two-state solution, and it has underpinned every peace plan for decades. But the USA has **consistently refused to back the two-state solution**.
- Issues like the right of return of the Palestinian refugees are to be settled in final negotiations. But US president has effectively rejected the Palestinian claims outrightly and asked them to make more compromises.
- Palestinian representation was noticeably absent from that announcement and Palestinian leaders have flatly rejected the plan compromises.
- The reaction from other Arab governments has been mixed. None of the United States’ Arab allies have formally endorsed the plan or committed to ushering it into reality.

Iran Rolls back Nuclear deal commitments

On 8th January, Iran said it would abandon limitations on enriching uranium, refusing to adhere to the 2015 nuclear deal it signed with six major powers, but would continue to cooperate with the UN nuclear watchdog.

- Iran’s announcement comes after its top security and intelligence commander, Major General Qassem Soleimani, was killed in a US drone attack in Baghdad, marking a major escalation in the standoff between Washington and Tehran.

Impact of US-Iran Tension on India

- **Slippery Slope:** Even though India stopped importing Iranian crude oil after a US ultimatum, the West Asian region remains India’s largest crude oil supplier, with Iraq, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Kuwait among the largest oil exporters to India. A war will not only damage India’s oil supply lines – it imports 84% of its oil

needs – but will also **raise associated costs, such as the insurance cover for oil tankers.**

- **Safe Harbour:** The development of Chabahar port, a trilateral project involving India, Iran and Afghanistan, is vital for India for purposes of trade and also to counter growing Chinese influence in the Arabian Sea with the development of the Gwadar port in Pakistan, which is less than 100 km from Chabahar. Of the more than \$17 billion bilateral trade in 2018-19 between India and Iran, close to 80% comprised imports from Iran.
- **Supporting Factor:** India has been caught in a bind, trying to keep both the US and Iran in good humour – despite Tehran's criticism of late over India's Kashmir policy and abrogation of Article 370.
- **Economic Growth:** All this is bad news for an economy that is struggling to come out of a slowdown after seeing the lowest growth in over six years. A \$10 increase in crude prices can increase India's monthly import bill by \$1.5 billion and retail inflation by around 0.4%. At a time when the government is planning to push consumption and demand in the economy, high oil prices may force it to cut down spending, further prolonging the slowdown.
- **India's Security:** The US has ordered resumption of military training to Pakistan, which it had suspended in 2018 after accusing it of not doing enough to counter terrorist groups, as part of its wider West Asia strategy in the aftermath of the assassination of the Iranian general.

Revival of SAARC

The killer COVID-19 is prompting the reactivation and revival of the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Indian Prime Minister has taken a bold and positive initiative to engage with his SAARC colleagues for working out a mutually-coordinated strategy to deal with the impact of this pandemic.

Key Features

- A video-conference with SAARC leaders was held amid rising cases of the disease in the region. The video summit is significant because, since 2016, SAARC has been mostly inactive.
- During the meet, India pledged \$10 million toward a **COVID-19 Emergency Fund** and said it was putting together a **rapid response team** of doctors and specialists for SAARC nations as part of an initiative led by Prime Minister of India
- While India's offer was welcomed by all SAARC leaders, Pakistan used the occasion to raise the Kashmir issue, saying the lockdown there should be ended to help fight the coronavirus outbreak. Islamabad also sought to get China involved in the SAARC initiative.

- The Indian PM suggested that nodal experts of all SAARC states meet in a week's time by video-conference to take forward the ideas exchanged at the discussion.
- India has set up an **Integrated Disease Surveillance Portal** to better trace possible virus carriers and the people they contacted.
- The PM offered to share this technology with SAARC partners besides providing training on using it.
- Also, the existing facilities, such as the SAARC Disaster Management Centre, could be used to pool best practices and PM suggested a common platform to coordinate research on controlling epidemics within South Asia.

How India Can Revive SAARC?

- The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation is a regional grouping comprising of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.,
- The grouping has been lying dormant since 2014, when its last summit was held in Kathmandu, Nepal. It was done on account of Pakistan's refusal to cooperate in regional connectivity projects, and India's refusal to engage with Pakistan.
- India's unstated message to its neighbours behind the video-conference initiative was loud and clear – that it will stand by them in coping with the spillover of external disorders, even when such disorders are fatal and come from the north.
- This is a reiteration of India's prompt and decisive support to the neighbours at the time of facing natural disasters. India's message is also for the world that it is willing and prepared, within its resources and capabilities, to undertake responsibilities in preserving and promoting the global common good.
- While the initiative underlines India's commitment to become a credible global player, it also seems to have been prompted by the failure on two other counts, of India's neighbourhood first foreign policy, launched by the PM with considerable enthusiasm and fanfare in 2014.
- And on the count of isolating Pakistan – for its refusal to relent on the strategy of cross-border terrorism against India, which was a key factor in freezing SAARC. However, Pakistan is nowhere near being isolated by the international community. China stands solidly with Pakistan. Saudi Arabia has endorsed the Pakistani proposal to keep Kashmir on the agenda of the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC). And, above all, the United States (US) continues to work with Pakistan on terrorism-related issues, in Afghanistan and elsewhere.
- Thus, Keeping SAARC in deep-freeze because of Pakistan was not serving anybody's interest.

Why Did India Decide to Activate SAARC During the COVID-19 Pandemic?

- It is a good and timely initiative as COVID-19, the disease caused by the SARS-nCoV-2 virus, has created widespread concerns in South Asian countries. These countries are starting to suffer a widespread cessation of economic activity due to fears of this deadly virus.
- India's proposal now is a positive move towards smooth South Asian integration. Such a grouping is a helpful way for regional nations to show solidarity with countries that face disaster or crisis.
- Such integration is more effective when institutions set powerful demonstrations by helping countries in need. But now, such cooperation is under strain: countries in the European Union didn't provide any medical assistance to Italy initially, for instance.
- Similarly, another regional group, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, (ASEAN) also failed to come up with an efficient coordinated response to contain the spread of COVID-19.
- India's move can be seen as a masterstroke to assert India's leadership in the South Asian region. India is also pushing for more clout as the world's largest democracy.

India's Citizenship Amendment Act is also creating unnecessary tensions with its neighbours, which in the long run may help China expand its influence in South Asian countries. The reactivation of SAARC may also have the effect of tamping down the misgivings spawned in South Asian countries over the amendment act.

US to Withdraw US from 'Open Skies' Treaty

President of the United States of America announced recently that he plans to withdraw the United States from the Open Skies Treaty with Russia, the third arms control pact President has abrogated since coming to office. The US leader said Moscow had not stuck to its commitments under the 18-year-old pact, which was designed to improve military transparency and confidence between the superpowers.

Open Skies Treaty

- **First proposed in 1955** by former US President Dwight Eisenhower as a means to **de-escalate tensions during the Cold War**, the landmark treaty was eventually **signed in 1992** between NATO members and former Warsaw Pact countries following the demise of the Soviet Union. It went into effect in 2002 and currently has 35 signatories along with one non-ratifying member (Kyrgyzstan).

- The OST aims at **building confidence among members through mutual openness**, thus reducing the chances of accidental war. Under the treaty, a member state can “spy” on any part of the host nation, with the latter’s consent. A country can undertake aerial imaging over the host state after giving notice 72 hours before, and sharing its exact flight path 24 hours before.
- The **information gathered**, such as on troop movements, military exercises and missile deployments, **has to be shared with all member states**. Only approved imaging equipment is permitted on the surveillance flights, and officials from the host state can also stay on board throughout the planned journey.
- While it was envisaged as a key arms control agreement, **many in US had for over a decade accused Russia of non-compliance with OST protocols**, blaming Moscow of obstructing surveillance flights on its territory, while misusing its own missions for gathering key tactical data.

Significance of the Open Skies Treaty

- The OST was signed in 1992, much before the advent of **advanced satellite imaging technology** which is **currently the preferred mode for intelligence gathering**. The surveillance aircraft provide key information that still cannot be gathered by satellite sensors, such as thermal imaging data.
- Also, since only the US has an extensive military satellite infrastructure, other **NATO members would have to rely on US** to obtain classified satellite data, which would be more difficult to obtain compared to OST surveillance records that have to be shared with all members as a treaty obligation.

Impact of US Departure

- It will be the third important arms control pact that US President has withdrawn from since coming to office in January 2017. He has also dropped the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) agreement to prevent Iran from advancing its nuclear weapons program, and the 1988 Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty with Russia.
- It also adds to the question marks over another pact, the New START which limits the number of nuclear missiles the United States and Russia can deploy, and needs to be renewed by early 2021.
- Experts believe that Russia could also leave the OST using Washington’s exit as a pretext for leaving the treaty itself. Russia’s departure could adversely impact Washington’s European allies, which rely on OST data to track Russian troop movements in the Baltic region.

Iran's Currency to be Renamed and Re-valued

Iran's parliament has passed a bill allowing the government to slash four zeros from the rial, after a sharp fall in the value of the currency as a result of crippling U.S. sanctions. Iran's national currency will be changed from the rial to the Toman, which is equal to 10,000 rials, under the bill.

Cause of this Action

- Iran has seen the **value of its national currency decline steadily** since the Islamic Revolution brought the religious government to power in 1979. That drop has accelerated in recent years as harsh US sanctions battered the country's economy.
- Iran has faced a **litany of financial disasters since 1979**, including international sanctions that have severely limited its ability to sell oil, which in turn have all but dried up its primary source of revenue.

Devaluation of the Rial Marked by Four Key Turning Points

- **The Islamic Revolution of 1979:** When the government of the Western-allied Shah collapsed and an ideological cadre of mullahs took over, many entrepreneurs and business moguls left the country for fear of persecution, and they took their wealth with them.
- **The End of the Iran-Iraq War in 1989:** It took Iran almost eight years to rebuild its shattered economy, during which time the rial lost almost 100% of its value compared to the US dollar due to rampant inflation and the unchecked printing of cash.
- The third and worst devaluation came during the **last years of hard-line President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's tenure**. Before he left power in 2013, Iran was slammed with severe international sanctions that saw the rial hemorrhage almost 400% more of its value on global currency markets.
- The economic crisis forced Iran's leaders to reconsider their stubborn refusal to negotiate limits to their nuclear program. In 2015, under intense pressure, Iran agreed to the now-defunct nuclear pact with the U.S., Europe, China and Russia.
- The last major turning point, which is still playing out, **came when US President pulled the U.S. out of the nuclear deal**. It was like an electric shock that sizzled through every aspect of Iran's already beleaguered economy. The rial's plunge has continued, leaving it almost 600% weaker against the US dollar than it was before the Revolution.

- The **government has also implemented strict rules on access to foreign currency**, leading to a flourishing black market for non-Iranian cash inside the country and further eroding the value of the national currency.
- The **global pandemic has piled even more stress** onto the lives of people already bludgeoned by a White House bent on ramping up maximum pressure on Iran.

Impact of this Step

- While **re-denomination will not actually strengthen the rial or boost public purchasing power** as a stand-alone measure, it could have a positive psychological impact on the people. They are increasingly dissatisfied with the fact that a single U.S. dollar fetches tens of thousands of their national currency.
- But authorities also need to recognize that **the initial positive psychological impact of currency re-denomination will be short-lived**, and could be quickly reversed, if high inflation persists.
- Iran **need to aim for macroeconomic stability** through local reforms on the national scale and weather the sanctions storm by working with foreign partners to keep the nuclear deal alive and buoy trade.

'Travel bubble' to Kick Start Economy

The Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have started what is being referred to as a 'travel bubble' to help put their economies back on track post-Covid lockdowns. With the pandemic throwing both international and domestic trade and travel out of gear since earlier this year, such 'travel bubbles' are now being recommended to keep at least parts of the global economy afloat.

Travel Bubble

- Creating a travel bubble involves reconnecting countries or states that have shown a good level of success in containing the novel coronavirus pandemic domestically. Such a bubble would allow the members of the group to rekindle trade ties with each other, and kickstart sectors such as travel and tourism.
- Potential travel bubbles among better-performing countries around the world would account for around 35 per cent of the global GDP. Such arrangements are especially being favoured by smaller countries, who are likely to benefit after being able to trade again with larger partners.
- In the Estonia-Latvia-Lithuania travel bubble, residents would be able to travel freely by rail, air, and sea without quarantine measures. All three are sparsely

populated (Lithuania- 28 lakh, Latvia- 19.2 lakh, Estonia- 13.3 lakh people) and have been fairly successful at managing the outbreak.

- Those wanting to enter this corridor from countries outside would first have to go into isolation for 14 days.

Other Countries for Travel Bubble

- On May 5, Australia and New Zealand reached an agreement to form a travel bubble between the two countries once it becomes safe to operate flights between them. Both have had success in suppressing the pandemic domestically. Once it opens, the trans-Tasman zone will allow travel without a quarantine period.
- China and South Korea, who have also enjoyed success in containing the outbreak, have launched a fast track channel for business travellers.
- In the US, travel bubbles are being suggested to group states who are faring well against the pandemic, but constitutional challenges are also being cited as a possible roadblock for such plans.

Analysis of these Travel Bubbles

- As economies emerge from lockdown, restoring travel and trade links as fast as it is safe to do so is essential to strengthen the recovery. It is useful for countries at a similar stage in their pandemic recovery to create safe travel zones between them. These could initially be partial – applying to limited regions or types of travel. In time, zones could start to link together.
- There are potential pitfalls. Safe zones might fray if one or more members push to open travel with a third country whose virus risk is higher – especially China, whose vast market exerts a powerful pull.
- Creating “bubbles” of rich countries risks exacerbating inequalities with poorer countries that are excluded.

SIPRI Report: Continuation of Nuclear Weapon Modernization

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), a Swedish think tank that researches international armament and conflict, has updated the number of nuclear warheads in its latest yearbook. It found that despite an overall decrease in the number of nuclear warheads in 2019, all nuclear weapon-possessing states continue to modernize their nuclear arsenals.

key Findings

- **Nuclear Warhead Reductions:** The decrease in the overall number of nuclear weapons in the world in 2019 was largely due to the dismantlement of retired

nuclear weapons by Russia and the USA—which together still possess over 90 per cent of global nuclear weapons. It was mainly due to a 2010 Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (New START) which limit the nuclear warhead in both countries.

- **Increased Nuclear Weapon Modernisation:** Russia and the USA have extensive and expensive programmes under way to replace and modernize their nuclear warheads, missile and aircraft delivery systems, and nuclear weapon production facilities. The nuclear arsenals of other nuclear-armed states are considerably smaller but all these states are either developing or deploying new weapon systems or have announced their intention to do so. China is in the middle of a significant modernization of its nuclear arsenal.
- **Increase of Nuclear Warheads in Asia:** India, along with both its nuclear-armed neighbours Pakistan and China, has increased its nuclear stockpile in the past year. Both China and Pakistan have a larger stockpile of nuclear weapons compared to India. While India had 130-140 nuclear warheads in 2019, it is 150 in 2020. Pakistan had 150-160 last year, and now has 160. China had 290 such warheads in 2019, now is has 320.
- **Low levels of Transparency in Reporting on Nuclear Weapon Capabilities:** The availability of reliable information on the status of the nuclear arsenals and capabilities of the nuclear-armed states varies considerably. The USA has disclosed important information about its stockpile and nuclear capabilities but in 2019 the US administration ended the practice of publicly disclosing the size of the US stockpile. The governments of India and Pakistan make statements about some of their missile tests but provide little information about the status or size of their arsenals. North Korea has acknowledged conducting nuclear weapon and missile tests but provides no information about its nuclear weapon capabilities. Israel has a long-standing policy of not commenting on its nuclear arsenal.

Challenges

- New START will lapse in February 2021 unless the USA and Russia agree to prolong it. However, discussions to extend New START or to negotiate a new treaty made no progress in 2019. This was due in part to the US administration's insistence that China must join any future nuclear arms reduction talks—something that China has categorically ruled out.
- The report reveals a continuing deterioration in the conditions for international stability. This trend is reflected in, among other things, an unfolding crisis of nuclear arms control that suffered further setbacks in 2019.

Conclusion

In today's times of ever-increasing geopolitical tensions, the absence of adequate measures to monitor nuclear arsenals and to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons and materials is a particularly worrying development. Therefore, it is imperative for global nuclear powers to usher in a treaty for global nuclear arms reduction and its non-proliferation, which in long term will lead to a comprehensive policy of nuclear disarmament.

US to Withdraw from WHO by July 2021

The United Nations on 7th July 2020 announced that USA will leave the World Health Organisation (WHO) on July 6, 2021. UN decides the same after receiving notification of the decision by President of USA, who has accused the agency of becoming a puppet for China during the coronavirus pandemic.

In April, the US stopped funding to WHO as the Trump administration reviewed the ties. A month later, the US President announced the USA is terminating the relationship. The US is leaving the Geneva-based body after more than 70 years of membership.

Accusations from USA

- The US has accused the WHO of siding with China on the outbreak of the virus, which originated in the Chinese city of Wuhan late last year in 2019, alleging the health body misled the world resulting in deaths of over half a million people globally.
- The US government said that WHO has failed to make the requested and greatly needed reforms.

USA's Contribution in WHO

- The US has been a party to the WHO Constitution since June 21, 1948. Its participation was accepted by the World Health Assembly with certain conditions set out by the US for its eventual withdrawal from this world body.
- The US is the largest funder to the world health, contributing more than USD450 million per annum, while China's contribution to the health body is about one-tenth of that of the US.
- USA has given one-year notice for its withdrawal and is paying Washington's dues under a 1948 joint resolution of the US Congress. The United States currently owes the WHO more than \$200 million in assessed contributions.

Analysis

- The step for withdrawal from WHO is being criticized as not only will this withdrawal hurt global efforts to develop and deploy critical vaccines of this global pandemic Corona virus, but it will also remove our ability to have a say in the operations and future of that organisation, yielding much influence to China.
- Also, it is said that this step won't protect American lives or interests – it leaves Americans sick and America alone for the future problems.
- Remaining in the WHO and exerting American leadership would boost international efforts to develop a vaccine and strengthen other countries' health systems to better address future outbreaks.
- It is to be noted that, since taking office, Trump administration has also quit the UN Human Rights Council, the UN cultural agency, a global accord to tackle climate change and the Iran nuclear deal. He has also cut funding for the UN Population Fund and the UN agency that aids Palestinian refugees.

Abraham Accords: Israel-UAE Peace Agreement

- Israel and the United Arab Emirates have announced an agreement that will lead to full normalization of diplomatic relations between the two states, a move that reshapes the order of West Asia politics from the Palestinian issue to Iran.
- It is a landmark agreement, given that the UAE is only the third Arab country and the first in the Gulf, recognizing Israel.
- The agreement will be known as the **Abraham Accords**.

Trilateral Agreement

- The agreement is the product of lengthy discussions between Israel, the UAE and the USA.
- A joint statement from the USA, the UAE and Israel has been issued which says that delegations would meet to sign deals on direct flights, security, telecommunications, energy, tourism and health care.
- The joint statement mentioned that Israel and the UAE would also be “forging closer people-to-people relations”.
- Both the nations will also partner on fighting the Covid-19 pandemic together.

Dispute Settlements in Middle East

- The West Bank was captured by Jordan after the **Arab-Israeli War of 1948**. Israel snatched it back during the Six Day War of 1967, and has occupied it ever since. During this war, the country defeated the combined forces of Egypt, Syria,

and Jordan. Egypt made a **peace deal with Israel** in 1979, followed by Jordan in 1994.

- When Israel took control of the land in 1967 it allowed Jewish people to move in, but Palestinians consider the West Bank illegally occupied Palestinian land.
- The territory is still a point of contention due to a large number of Palestinians who live there and hope to see the land become a part of their future state.

Impact of the Agreement

- The deal marks a historic day and a significant step forward for peace in the Middle East.
- Such direct understandings between two of the Middle East's most powerful societies and advanced economics will change the region by prodding monetary development, improving technological innovations.
- The trilateral agreement will boost the international cooperation in the Saudi bloc (consisting of Egypt, the UAE, Bahrain and others) as they can have a preferential treatment from USA.
- But this accord is also likely to deepen a fault line in West Asia, between Sunni Muslim states (led by Saudi Arabia and UAE and backed by the United States in collaboration with Israel) and Iran.

Way Forward

- India's geopolitical interests are in close alignment with those in the Arab Centre including Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Oman. Thus, India needs to make strong ties with the region.
- The West Asian countries have enormous energy resources and trade route links, therefore the stabilised West Asia is in the interest of Indian foreign policy.

Myanmar's Pushback against China-funded Economic Corridor

- Myanmar has decided to involve international partners in the Chinese funded mega **Yangon City Project**, a key pillar of the **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)** in the Southeast Asian country, marking another pushback against China.
- Myanmar's pushback against China, which is trying to widen its influence through China Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), among other issues has been influenced by Pakistan's experience in China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Sri Lanka's Hambantota Port that have pushed these countries to debt trap.

Source of Controversy

- The project has been a source of controversy due to its flood-prone location as well as the **China Communications Construction Company (CCCC)** involvement. Therefore, the Myanmar government has decided to open up the project for other foreign firms besides, as it is not keen that one single company dominates the mega project.
- The Hong Kong-listed, Chinese state-owned company has been accused of corruption relating to development deals in at least 10 countries in Africa and Asia. The CCCC has been accused of being party to a major corruption scandal in Malaysia involving a former Prime Minister.

Strategic importance for China

- From a strategic perspective, China's domestic and foreign policy interests tied to Myanmar indicate that China has both the wherewithal and intention to invest the significant energy and policy efforts necessary to ensure CMEC follows the path of Pakistan's CPEC. China cannot easily allow CMEC to completely stall in the manner of some other BRI projects, as CMEC's strategic significance is simply too important.
- By developing ports such as the Gwadar and Kyaukpyu, China aims to lower its strategic dependence on the Malacca straits – the vital trade link between the Indian and the Pacific oceans, which is the Indo-Pacific Command of the U.S.

China Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC)

- China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) is a number of infrastructure projects supporting connectivity between Myanmar and China. It is an economic corridor of the Belt and Road Initiative.
- The CMEC to the Bay of Bengal is the **replica of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)** that connects Beijing's western province of Xinjiang to Karachi and Gwadar on the Arabian Sea.
- The CMEC will connect Yunnan province in China to Mandalay in central Myanmar, Yangon New City in the south and the Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone in the west.
- China has proposed 38 projects under CMEC but Myanmar so far has approved only nine. Since 2019, Myanmar has decided that it will only implement the projects that will be mutually beneficial.

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

- China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a massive bilateral project to improve infrastructure within Pakistan for better trade with China and to further integrate the countries of the region.
- The project was launched on **April 20, 2015** when Chinese President Xi Jinping and Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif signed 51 agreements and Memorandums of Understanding valued at \$46 billion.
- The goal of CPEC is both to transform Pakistan's economy—by modernizing its road, rail, air, and energy transportation systems—and to connect the deep-sea Pakistani ports of Gwadar and Karachi to China's Xinjiang province and beyond by overland routes.
- This project would reduce the time and cost of transporting goods and energy such as natural gas to China by circumventing the **Straits of Malacca and the South China Sea**.
- According to official statistics, 20% of CPEC is debt-based finance, while 80% of CPEC are investments in Joint Ventures (JV) enterprise between Pakistan and China, with the project contributing to 40,000 jobs for local Pakistanis and 80,000 jobs for Chinese.
- The total CPEC loan is 6% of Pakistan's GDP, however the Indian Government has claimed the project a **debt-trap**.

UN Treaty of Banning Nuclear Weapons to Enter into Force in 2021

The United Nations announced recently that 50 countries have ratified an **international Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)** to ban nuclear weapons. The historic text would enter into force in January 2021.

- The 50th ratification by Honduras came on the 75th anniversary of the ratification of the UN Charter which officially established the United Nations and is celebrated as UN Day (October 24, 2020).
- Major nuclear powers have opposed the treaty, as they either did not sign the treaty like the United States, Britain, France, China and Russia etc. or abstained from voting like India and Japan.

Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

- The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), or the **Nuclear Weapon Ban Treaty**, is the **first legally binding international agreement** to comprehensively prohibit nuclear weapons, with the goal of leading towards their total elimination.

- It was adopted on July 7, 2017, and the treaty will enter into force on 22 January 2021, 90 days after the 50th ratification, by Honduras, on 24 October 2020.
- The treaty was approved by the 193-member UN General Assembly on July 7, 2017 by a vote of 122 in favour, the Netherlands opposed, and Singapore abstaining. Among countries voting in favor was Iran.
- The five nuclear powers and four other countries known or believed to possess nuclear weapons – India, Pakistan, North Korea and Israel – boycotted negotiations and the vote on the treaty, along with many of their allies.

Impact of the Treaty on the Ratifying Nations

- Once it enters into force all countries that have ratified it will be bound by its requirements.
- For those nations that are party to it, the treaty prohibits the development, testing, production, stockpiling, stationing, transfer, use and threat of use of nuclear weapons, as well as assistance and encouragement to the prohibited activities.
- For nuclear armed states joining the treaty, it provides for a time-bound framework for negotiations leading to the verified and irreversible elimination of its nuclear weapons programme.
- It also bans any transfer or use of nuclear weapons or nuclear explosive devices – and the threat to use such weapons – and requires parties to promote the treaty to other countries.
- The NPT sought to prevent the spread of nuclear arms beyond the five original weapons powers. It requires non-nuclear signatory nations to not pursue atomic weapons in exchange for a commitment by the five powers to move toward nuclear disarmament and to guarantee non-nuclear states' access to peaceful nuclear technology for producing energy.

India's Action

- India abstained itself from voting for the treaty. India states that it recognises only the Geneva based Conference on Disarmament as the powerful multilateral disarmament forum for negotiation.
- India has opposed the international treaties aimed at non-proliferation since they were selectively applicable to the non-nuclear powers and legitimised the monopoly of the five nuclear weapons powers.

Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)

- The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, commonly known as the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) was adopted on June 12, 1968 at UN, New York and came into force on March 5th 1970.

- The NPT aims to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, to foster the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, and to further the goal of disarmament.
- The Treaty establishes a safeguards system under the responsibility of the IAEA, which also plays a central role under the Treaty in areas of technology transfer for peaceful purposes.
- As of August 2016, 191 states have adhered to the treaty, though North Korea, which acceded in 1985 but never came into compliance, announced its withdrawal from the NPT in 2003, following detonation of nuclear devices in violation of core obligations.
- Four UN member states have never accepted the NPT, three of which are thought to possess nuclear weapons: India, Israel, and Pakistan. In addition, South Sudan, founded in 2011, has not joined.

Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty

- The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) is the Treaty banning all nuclear explosions – everywhere, by everyone. The Treaty was negotiated at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva and adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. It opened for signature on 24 September 1996.
- It curbs the development of new nuclear weapons and the improvement of existing nuclear weapon designs. When the Treaty enters into force it will provide a legally binding norm against nuclear testing. The Treaty also helps prevent human suffering and environmental damages caused by nuclear testing.

OBJECTIVE IAS

www.objectiveias.in