

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**India-Egypt Relations: Latest Developments**

In News-India has invited Egypt as a special guest for the G-20 summit which shows our age-old relationship. The President of Egypt, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, was the chief guest at the 74th Republic Day parade.

India-Egypt relations

- ❖ **Historical:** India and Egypt, two of the world's oldest civilizations, have enjoyed a history of close contact from ancient times. Even prior to the Common Era, Ashoka's edicts refer to his relations with Egypt under Ptolemy II.
- ❖ In modern times, Mahatma Gandhi and the Egyptian revolutionary Saad Zaghloul shared a common goal on independence from British colonial rule, and the two nations made a joint announcement of the establishment of diplomatic relations at the ambassadorial level three days after India became free.
- ❖ The two countries are celebrating the 75th anniversary of establishing diplomatic ties. A Friendship Treaty was signed between Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and President Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1955. The Non-Aligned Movement was a natural concomitant of this relationship.
- ❖ **Relationship since 2014:** The year 2015 has seen more intense political cooperation between the two countries with regular interactions at the leadership and Ministerial levels. PM Shri Narendra Modi met President Sisi on the sidelines of UNGA, New York in September 2015. Their talks focused on counter-terrorism, deepening economic engagement, and regional issues.
- ❖ The ties have been on an upswing in the recent past and both delegations supported reform of the UN Security Council, where Egypt was a non-permanent member during 2016-17 and India had a similar stint during 2021-22.

Latest Developments

- ❖ India and Egypt signed five MoUs covering culture, cooperation on youth matters, cyber security, information and technology (IT) and public broadcasting.
- ❖ They reaffirmed their commitment to multilateralism, the principles of the United Nations Charter, international law, the founding values of the Non-Aligned Movement, and respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states.
- ❖ They agreed to "initiate new engagements to intensify military-to-military engagements" and planned more joint exercises between the armed forces of the two countries. They agreed to fight terrorism in all forms, "including cross-border terrorism" and intensify consultation between their respective National Security Councils.
- ❖ They have expressed exploring the possibility of land allocation to Indian Industries at the Suez Canal Economic Zone. The Suez Canal connects the Mediterranean Sea with the Red Sea. It is one of the world's biggest trade routes. As of now, the trade route is essential to keep alive around 12 percent of the global trade that passes through it each day.

Significance

- ❖ Egypt, the most populous country in West Asia, occupies a crucial geo-strategic location — 12% of global trade passes through the Suez Canal — and is a key player in the region. It is a major market for India and can act as a gateway to both Europe and Africa. It also has bilateral trade pacts with important West Asian and African nations.
- ❖ Egypt's relationship with India was also helped by its display of pragmatism especially in the backdrop of the Nupur Sharma controversy of 2022 when Cairo maintained silence while certain Gulf countries were vocal in India's criticism.
- ❖ The joint cooperation will help eliminate violence because the spread of violence, terrorism, and extremist ideology represents a serious threat not only to the two countries but also to all countries around the world.

Concerns

- ❖ India and Egypt are "worried about the spread of terrorism happening around the world" and they are "unanimous" that terrorism is the "most serious security threat" to humanity. Misuse of cyberspace to spread extremist ideologies and radicalisation is a growing menace.
- ❖ Egypt's economy has been in shambles over the past few years. It was battered by the collapse of tourism during the pandemic, and the Russia-Ukraine war has impacted its supply of food — almost 80% of Egypt's grain came from these two countries — and hit its foreign exchange reserves.
- ❖ Despite restrictions on the export of wheat, India had last year allowed shipments of 61,500 metric tonnes to Egypt. But the country needs more.
- ❖ China's bilateral trade with Egypt is currently at \$15 billion, double that of India's \$7.26 billion in 2021-22. Sisi has been wooing Chinese investments, and has travelled to China as many as seven times in the last eight years

Conclusion and Way Forward

- ❖ Concerted action is necessary to end cross-border terrorism" and they will have to together alert the international community.

- ❖ More than six decades ago, the two countries founded the NAM. They now have an opportunity to forge a new path ahead, not just for their strategic and economic interests, but as the voice of the Global South.

INDIAN POLITY

Autonomy at Panchayat Level

Context- Sarpanch in Telangana's Jayashankar Bhupalpally district died by suicide due to indebtedness.

What are the Challenges of PRI?

- ❖ **Problem of Autonomy at the Panchayati Level:** More than three decades after the 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts, which gave constitutional status to local governments, state governments, through the local bureaucracy, continue to exercise considerable discretionary authority and influence over panchayats.
- ❖ In India, the powers of local elected officials (such as sarpanchas in Telangana) remain seriously circumscribed, thereby diluting the spirit of the constitutional amendments seeking to empower locally elected officials.
- ❖ **Issues of Funding:** Broadly, panchayats have three main sources of funds — their own sources of revenue (local taxes, revenue from common property resources, etc.), grants in aid from the Centre and State governments, and discretionary or scheme-based funds.
- ❖ Their own sources of revenue (both tax and non-tax) constitute a tiny proportion of overall panchayat funds. Gram panchayats remain fiscally dependent on grants from the State and the Centre for everyday activities.
- ❖ Access to discretionary grants for panchayats remains contingent on political and bureaucratic connections. When higher levels of government allocate funds to local governments, sarpanches need help accessing them.
- ❖ **Delays in the disbursement of funds:** By the local bureaucracy have led to pressure on sarpanches leading some to end their life. Sarpanchs are forced to use private funds for panchayat activities.
- ❖ **Double Authorisation for Spending:** The sarpanch and the panchayat secretary, who reports to the Block Development Officer (BDO), must co-sign cheques issued for payments from panchayat funds.
- ❖ **State Control and Political Supervision:** Gram Panchayat Acts in many States have empowered district-level bureaucrats, mostly District Collectors, to act against sarpanches for official misconduct. Unlike elected officials at other levels, sarpanches have been dismissed while in office. For Example, Section 37 of the Telangana Gram Panchayat Act allows District Collectors to suspend and dismiss incumbent sarpanches.
- ❖ **Less Discretionary power with Sarpanches:** The ability of sarpanches to exercise administrative control over local employees is limited.
- ❖ Sarpanches need to be in the good books of politicians and local bureaucrats if they want access to discretionary resources, timely disbursement of funds and be able to successfully execute any project or program in their village.
- ❖ **No Conceptual Clarity of Power distribution:** while establishing Panchayati Raj bodies, a uniform pattern is adopted for creating units and identifying the units of planning and development.

The distribution of functions and powers:

- ✓ among the Panchayati Raj Institutions,
- ✓ between the Panchayati Raj Institutions and State government
- ✓ between the Panchayati Raj Institutions and the Central Government have not been made on the basis of any sound principle.

There is a great deal of confusion, overlapping, and sometimes duplication in the function.

- ❖ **Structural Challenges:** The expertise available to the Panchayati Raj Institutions is very limited, particularly in the field of planning, implementation, or monitoring of various developmental schemes. Planning at the grassroots level remains on paper while there is a strong tendency towards centralization in the country.
- ❖ **Socio-Economic and Political Condition:** The elected members at all the levels of Panchayati Raj Institutions and the Office bearers are normally from the rich and dominant sections of the rural society.
- ❖ They have vested interests in preserving the existing system and would not do anything that would strengthen the position of the downtrodden in their areas.
- ❖ Sometimes leadership of the Panchayati Raj Institutions acts as a gatekeeper to prevent the flow of benefits to the weaker sections of the rural community.
- ❖ **Absence of Statutory Provisions:** States may or may not constitute the Panchayati Raj Institutions. For Example, in Nagaland, Meghalaya, and Mizoram Panchayati Raj Institutions are not established.
- ❖ Similarly, in a number of states, elections have not been held regularly. The superseded bodies have not been revived and they are kept under the charge of special officers drawn from the civil service.
- ❖ The Panchayati Raj Institutions have been undermined by several constraints, particularly, the constitutional constraint which is a very serious matter.

Way Forward

- ❖ The 6th report of the 2nd Administrative Reform Commission (ARC) can be implemented for better and effective functioning of the Panchayati Raj Institutions.
- ❖ Clear-cut demarcation of functions of each tier of the government in the case of each subject matter law. In the case of new laws, it will be advisable to add a 'local government memorandum' to state their role.
- ❖ Fiscal autonomy accompanied by fiscal accountability (Genuine Fiscal Federalism) can provide a long-term solution.
- ❖ Capacity Building for Self Governance: In rural areas, local self-governing institutions must attend to both the organization-building requirements as also the professional and skills up gradation of individuals associated with these bodies, whether elected or appointed.
- ❖ Access to debt capital markets can provide them with the scope for planned infrastructure development. Local bodies need to substantially improve their overall administrative and technical capacities to access debt, particularly long-term bonds.
- ❖ Training should be imparted to the Members of Panchayats which require expertise and resources from various subject matter-specific training institutes.
- ❖ Setting reasonable tax and fee rates, improving collection efficiencies, and expanding financing mechanisms to ensure the buoyancy of revenues over time.
- ❖ Members of Parliament Local Area Development Schemes (MPLADS) fund can be utilized in an effective manner.
- ❖ **The State Finance Commission (SFC):** States have to set up State Finance Commissions to synchronize with the Central Finance Commission. The Action Taken Report on the recommendations of the SFC must compulsorily be placed in the concerned State Legislature within six months of submission and followed with an annual statement on the devolution made and grants given to individual local bodies.

PRELIMS

1. Bharat Parv

In News-The six-day mega event "Bharat Parv" event is going to be organized by the Government of India in front of Red Fort, Delhi from 26th to 31st January 2023, as part of the Republic Day Celebrations.

About Bharat Parv

- ❖ Ministry of Tourism has been designated as the nodal Ministry for the event, the highlights of which will include showcasing of the best Republic Day Parade tableaux at the venue, cultural performances by the Zonal Cultural Centres as well as cultural troupes from States/ UTs, a pan – India Food Court and a pan – India Crafts Bazaar with 65 handicraft stalls.
- ❖ Bharat Parv was previously held 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020 (and virtual in the year 2021).
- ❖ **Major components:** The event would have a Food Festival, Handicraft mela, folk and tribal dance performances, Performances by cultural troupes, a Display of Republic Day Tableaux, illumination of Red Fort, etc.
- ❖ Branding and promotion of Dekho Apna Desh, Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat, G20 and Mission LIFE would be undertaken during the event.

2. Halwa Ceremony

In news-The Halwa ceremony, marking the final stage of the Budget preparation process for Union Budget 2023-24, was held recently. The Union Budget 2023-24 is to be presented on 1st February, 2023.

About

- ❖ It is a customary ceremony in which traditional dessert 'halwa' is prepared and served to officials and staff members of the finance ministry who were involved in the preparation of the Budget. It is performed every year before the "lock-in" process of Budget preparation begins.
- ❖ The custom has been part of the Budget tradition for decades.
- ❖ **Lock in Period:** All the officials involved in the Budget preparations will stay at the North Block. This is done to make sure that the secrecy of the Union Budget is maintained. The moment the Finance Minister tables the Union Budget in Parliament, the lock-in period will conclude.

Union Budget of India

- ❖ The Union Budget of India, referred to as the annual Financial Statement in Article 112 of the Constitution of India, is the annual budget of the Republic of India, presented each year by the Finance Minister.
- ❖ The budget has to be passed by the House before it can come into effect on April 1, the start of India's financial year.
- ❖ Until 1999, the Union Budget was presented at 5 pm on the last working day of February as per British era traditions. Starting 2017, it was presented on February 1.
- ❖ In 2019, Nirmala Sitharaman became the second woman to have presented the budget after Indira Gandhi, who had presented the budget for the financial year 1970-71.
- ❖ Till 2017, the Budget for the Railways and Union Budget were presented separately. After being presented separately for 92 years, the Railway budget was merged in the Union Budget in 2017 and presented together.

3. Aditya-L1 Mission

Context: The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is planning to launch the Aditya-L1 mission by June or July this year.

About Aditya-L1 Mission:

- ❖ Aditya-L1 is the first Indian space mission to observe the Sun and the solar corona.
- ❖ It will be placed in a halo orbit around the first Lagrange point, L1, of the Sun-Earth system which allows it to look at the Sun continuously.
- ❖ It contains seven payloads on board to observe the photosphere, chromospheres and the outermost layers of the Sun (the corona).
- ❖ It will provide greater advantage of observing the solar activities and its effect on space weather.

Objectives:

- ❖ The study of the dynamic nature of the sun's outermost layers, the corona, and the chromosphere and gather information about coronal mass ejection (CME).
- ❖ Study on origin of solar flares and their direction via the interplanetary space from the sun to the earth.
- ❖ The examinations will also include the collection of data for space weather prediction.



2. Etikoppaka Toy:

Context : The Union conferred Padma Shri to Mr. Raju in the art category as an honour to the Etikoppaka wooden toy craft.

- ❖ These are traditional toys of Andhra Pradesh
 - These traditional toys are made by artisans in Etikoppaka village located on banks of river Varaha in Visakhapatnam district of the state.
 - They are provided GI Tag.
 - The art of making traditional wooden Etikoppaka toys is more than 400 years old and it has been traditionally handed over to them by their ancestors through generations.
 - The art of this toy making is also known as turned wood Lacquer craft.



Why are they called lacquer toys?

- ❖ While making the Etikoppaka toys, lac, a colourless resinous secretion of numerous insects, is used.
- ❖ The already prepared vegetable dyes are further mixed to the lac, during the process of oxidation.
- ❖ After this process, the end product obtained is rich and colored lacquer.
- ❖ The lac dye is used for decorating the Etikoppaka toys, which are exported all over the world.
- ❖ Thus, the toys are also called lacquer toys because of the application of lacquer coating.
- ❖ The wood used is from 'Ankudi Karra' (Wrightia tinctoria) tree that is soft in nature. The natural dyes are prepared from seeds, lacquer, bark, roots and leave.

ANSWER WRITING

Q. Assess the role of UNESCO's World Heritage status in safeguarding the Indian art & heritage.

Introduction:

- ✓ The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) seek to encourage the identification, protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity. This is embodied in an international treaty called the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, adopted by UNESCO in 1972. Dholavira in Gujarat and Ramappa Temple in Telangana are the latest Indian sites to be added to the UNESCO World Heritage List. Now, there are 40 (7 Natural + 32 Cultural + 1Mixed) Indian sites on the World Heritage List.

Role of UNESCO's World Heritage status in safeguarding the Indian art heritage:

- Encourage India to establish management plans and set up reporting systems on the state of conservation of their World Heritage sites.
- Helps the country to safeguard World Heritage properties by providing technical assistance and professional training.
- Provide emergency assistance for World Heritage sites in immediate danger.
- Support public awareness-building activities for World Heritage conservation.

- Encourage participation of the local population in the preservation of their cultural and natural heritage.
- Encourage international cooperation in the conservation of our world's cultural and natural heritage. Encourage international cooperation in the conservation of our world's cultural and natural heritage.
- There are many benefits to a property being inscribed on the World Heritage List, including increased tourist visitation, increases in employment opportunities and income for local communities, and better management and protection of the place.
- Listing is often accompanied by greater scrutiny of a place, given its internationally acknowledged importance. E.g: Ajanta caves.
- A listed site gains international recognition and legal protection, and can obtain funds from among others the World Heritage Fund to facilitate its conservation under certain conditions. Despite the successes of World Heritage listing in promoting conservation, the UNESCO-administered project has attracted criticism.
- This was caused by perceived under-representation of heritage sites outside Europe.
- Disputed decisions on site selection and adverse impact of mass tourism on sites unable to manage rapid growth in visitor numbers.
- A large lobbying industry has grown around the awards because World Heritage listing can significantly increase tourism returns. In 2016, the Australian government was reported to have successfully lobbied for Great Barrier Reef conservation efforts to be removed from a UNESCO report titled "World Heritage and Tourism in a Changing Climate".

Conclusion:

- Being designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site can catapult an obscure ruin or geological oddity into international prominence. NITI Aayog has initiated a nationwide effort to understand the current challenges for heritage management in India and to provide a future roadmap along with an appropriate branding of India's invaluable archaeological and built heritage.

MCQs

1. Consider the following statements about the United Nations-Water Summit on Ground water 2022:
 1. It was organized by UN-Water, UNESCO and the International Groundwater Resources Assessment Centre.
 2. This year theme was - "Groundwater: Making the invisible visible".
 3. Groundwater management is imperative to meet the UN-mandated SDG 6.
 Which of the above statement is correct?
 - a) only 1
 - b) only 2
 - c) 1 and 3
 - d) 1, 2 and 3**
2. Holocaust, often seen in news, was an event pertaining to the historical conflict between—
 - a) Israelis and Palestinians
 - b) German Nazis and Jews**
 - c) Russians and Ukrainians
 - d) European colonisers and African Americans
3. Consider the following statements, with respect to Indus Water Treaty (IWT)
 1. It is signed between India and Pakistan with the mediation of World Bank
 2. Under the treaty, India got control over western rivers, Indus, Chenab and Jhelum
 3. The treaty asked for to set up Permanent Indus Commission by the United Nations for resolving any disputes that may arise in water sharing.
 Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
 - a) 2 and 3 only
 - b) 3 only
 - c) 1 and 2 only**
 - d) 1, 2 and 3
4. Consider the following statements about Cheetah:
 1. Chettah are declared extinct in India from 1950s.
 2. African Cheetahs are listed as 'Endangered' by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species
 3. Recently, Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary, Madhya Pradesh is selecting as first site for reintroduction of Cheetah in India.
 Which of the above statements is/are correct?
 - a) 1 and 2 only

- b) **1 only**
c) 2 and 3 only
d) 1, 2 and 3 only.
5. Consider the following statement
1. Inflation target is fixed by the Reserve Bank of India under the RBI act, 1934
 2. Wholesale price index (WPI) is adopted as key measure of Inflation by Reserve Bank of India.
 3. India has adopted the flexible inflation target.
- Select the correct answer using the code given below.
- a) 1 & 2 only
b) 2 & 3 only
c) **3 only**
d) 1, 2 & 3
6. The book 'Ramcharitmanas' was written by whom?
- a) Tulsidas
b) Valmiki
c) Surdas
d) Ved Vyas
7. Consider the following statements:
1. The Asian Water bird Census (AWC) 2023 has recorded a 65% increase in water birds in Thiruvananthapuram district, albeit with a slight dip in the count of species.
 2. The annual census that was jointly conducted by WWF-India and the social forestry wing of the Forest department.
- Which of the above statement is correct?
- a. only 1
b. only 2
c. **Both 1 and 2**
d. None of the above.
8. Consider the following statements about Lake Nasser:
1. Lake Nasser is named after the Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser, who is largely responsible for the lake's creation.
 2. It is a reservoir lake located between southern Egypt and northern Sudan.
 3. It is one of the largest man-made lakes in the world.
- Select the correct answer using the code given below.
- a) 1 & 2 only
b) 2 & 3 only
c) 3 only
d) **1, 2 & 3**
9. Consider the following statements regarding Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB)
1. It is India's apex drug law enforcement agency with a mandate to coordinate actions of various central and state agencies in the matters related with drug law in the country.
 2. Administrative Control of NCB is under the Union Ministry of Home Affairs.
 3. NCB also prepares National Drug Enforcement Statistics.
- Which of the above statements are correct?
- a) 1 & 2 only
b) 1 & 2 only
c) 1 & 3 only
d) **1, 2 & 3**
10. The principle of "Leaving No One Behind" – is associated with which of the following?
- a) **Sustainable Development Goals**
b) Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs)
c) National Policy for Older Persons, 1999
d) Military doctrine of India