

ECONOMICS

❖ **Oil reserves in salt caverns: The potential in India**

- **Context:** Government-owned engineering consultancy firm Engineers India (EIL) is studying the prospects and feasibility of developing **salt cavern-based strategic oil reserves** in Rajasthan, in line with the government's objective of increasing the country's strategic oil storage capacity. If the idea comes to fruition, India could get its first salt cavern-based oil storage facility.
- The country's three existing strategic oil storage facilities at Mangaluru and Padur in Karnataka, and Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh are made up of **excavated rock caverns**.
- Countries build strategic crude oil reserves to mitigate major supply disruptions in the global supply chain.
- **India, the world's third-largest consumer of crude, depends on imports for more than 85% of its requirement** and **strategic petroleum reserves (SPR)** could help ensure energy security and availability during global supply shocks and other emergencies.
- **India currently has an SPR capacity of 5.33 million tonnes**, or around 39 million barrels of crude, that **can meet around 9.5 days of demand**. The country is in the process of expanding its SPR capacity by a cumulative 6.5 million tonnes at two locations **Chandikhol in Odisha (4 million tonnes) and Padur (2.5 million tonnes)**.
- India's strategic oil reserves come under the **Petroleum Ministry's** special purpose vehicle Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserve (ISPRL). EIL was instrumental in setting up the country's existing SPR as the project management consultant.
- Salt cavern-based storage, which is considered cheaper and less labour- and cost-intensive than rock caverns, could add a new, much needed chapter to India's SPR story.
- **Salt cavern-based reserves vs. rock cavern-based reserves:**
 - Unlike underground **rock caverns, which are developed through excavation, salt caverns are developed by the process of solution mining**, which involves pumping water into geological formations with large salt deposits to dissolve the salt. After the brine (water with dissolved salt) is pumped out of the formation, the space can be used to store crude oil. The process is simpler, faster, and less cost-intensive than developing excavated rock caverns.
 - **Salt cavern-based oil storage** facilities are also naturally well-sealed, and engineered for rapid injection and extraction of oil. This makes them a more attractive option than storing oil in other geological formations, according to a report by the Environmental Solutions Initiative at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).
 - The salt that lines the inside of these caverns has extremely low oil absorbency, which creates a natural impermeable barrier against liquid and gaseous hydrocarbons, making the caverns apt for storage. Also, unlike rock caverns, salt cavern-based storages can be created and operated almost entirely from the surface.
 - The entire SPR programme of the United States has so far been based on salt cavern-based storage facilities. The US Strategic Petroleum Reserve, the world's largest emergency oil storage, consists of four sites with deep underground storage caverns created in salt domes along the Gulf of Mexico coast in Texas and Louisiana. The US strategic oil reserves have a cumulative capacity of around 727 million barrels.
 - Salt caverns are also used to store liquid fuels and natural gas in various parts of the world. They are also considered suitable for storing compressed air and hydrogen.
- **Potential in India for storing crude, petroleum products**
 - Rajasthan, which has the bulk of requisite salt formations in India, is seen as the most conducive for developing salt cavern-based strategic storage facilities. Plans over the past decade to build a strategic oil reserve in Bikaner did not take off and EIL's Chairman said the exploration of the possibility of salt cavern-based strategic storage in Rajasthan can be seen as a renewal of that proposal.
 - A refinery is coming up in Barmer, and Rajasthan has crude pipelines as well; such infrastructure is conducive for building strategic oil reserves. However, no Indian company, including EIL, had the requisite technical know-how to build salt cavern-based strategic hydrocarbon storage. This gap in access to technology has been bridged by EIL's recent partnership with Germany's DEEP.KBB GmbH — a company that specialises in cavern storage and solution mining technology .
- **Strategic petroleum reserves programme:**
 - India's strategic oil reserves **are part of the effort to build sufficient emergency stockpiles** on the lines of the reserves that the US and its Western allies set up after the first oil crisis of the 1970s. The three existing rock cavern-based facilities were built during the first phase of the programme.

- Crude oil from the reserves are to be released by an empowered committee set up by the government, in the event of supply disruptions due to a natural calamity or an unforeseen global event leading to an abnormal increase in prices.
- The **International Energy Agency (IEA)**, a Paris-based autonomous intergovernmental organisation in which India is an 'Association' country, recommends that **all countries should hold an emergency oil stockpile sufficient to provide 90 days of import protection.**
- In India, apart from the SPR that are **sufficient to meet 9.5 days of oil requirement**, the oil marketing companies (OMCs) have storage facilities for crude oil and petroleum products for 64.5 days — which means there is **sufficient storage to meet around 74 days of the country's petroleum demand.**
- India has also decided to commercialise its strategic petroleum reserves, as part of which the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) stored about 0.8 million tonnes of crude oil in the Mangaluru strategic reserve. In the second phase of the programme, the government wants to develop strategic reserves through public-private partnerships so as to reduce government spending and exploit the commercial potential of the reserves.
- Taking advantage of low crude oil prices in April-May 2020, the government completely filled these reserves, leading to estimated savings of around Rs 5,000 crore. In late 2021, India released 5 million barrels from its strategic reserves as part of a coordinated US-led action by major oil consuming countries against the joint decision of major oil producing nations to curb output.

GLOBAL AFFAIRS

❖ **What is the Iran-Taliban water conflict?**

- **Context:** Iran and Afghanistan are locked in a long-standing dispute over the sharing of water from the Helmand River. Clashes broke out recently along the border.
- Iran and the Taliban exchanged heavy gunfire last week on the Islamic Republic's border with Afghanistan, killing and wounding troops while sharply intensifying rising tensions between the countries. Both sides accused each other of shooting first.
- The clash came amid an escalating **dispute between Kabul and Tehran over the Helmand River**, which is a vital source of water for both sides, supporting agriculture, livelihoods and ecosystems in the region. Afghanistan and Iran have been at **loggerheads over the sharing of river water for over a century.**
- **The Helmand is Afghanistan's longest river.** It originates near Kabul in the **western Hindu Kush mountain range** and flows in a southwesterly direction through desert areas for a total of about 1,150 kilometers (715 miles) before emptying into Lake Hamun, which straddles the Afghanistan-Iran border.
- **Lake Hamun is the largest freshwater lake in Iran.** It used to be **one of the world's largest wetlands**, straddling 4,000 square kilometers (1,600 square miles) between Iran and Afghanistan, fed by the Helmand. But it has since dried up, a trend experts blame on drought and the impact of dams and water controls. The lake is of great importance for the regional environment and economy.

➤ **What do Tehran and Kabul accuse each other of?**

- Afghanistan and Iran signed an agreement **the Helmand River Treaty in 1973** to regulate the allocation of river water. But the accord was neither ratified nor fully implemented, causing disagreements and tensions to persist.
- Iran has accused Afghanistan of violating its water rights for years, arguing that far less water than the amount agreed to in the 1973 treaty flows into Iran.
- Afghanistan has rejected Iran's accusations, underlining that climatic factors like a shortage of rainfall, resulting in reduced river water volumes, are to blame for the situation.
- A major source of concern for Iran is Afghanistan's construction of dams, reservoirs and irrigation systems along the Helmand River. Tehran fears that these projects reduce water flow into Iran.
- But Kabul argues that it is within its rights to expand water storage and irrigation capacities within Afghanistan.

➤ **What's the state of Tehran-Taliban ties?**

- Iran and Afghanistan share a 950-kilometer land border. Both countries have no major territorial disputes.
- Tehran had cultivated good ties with the Taliban before the Islamic fundamentalist group captured Kabul in August 2021 as US and NATO troops were in the final weeks of their pullout from Afghanistan. Both sides were united in their opposition to the US's presence in the region.
- Even though Iran has so far refrained from formally recognizing the Taliban government, it has been pragmatic and maintained relations with Afghanistan's current rulers.
- A close relationship with Kabul is essential for Tehran to achieve goals such as the preservation of Lake Hamun. But, since the Taliban seized power, there have been repeated incidents at the border.

- Six months before the Taliban seized power, Tehran received a Taliban delegation, in part to reach agreements on water rights. The Taliban now seem unwilling to honour those agreements.
- **Both sides are looking for short-term solutions:**
 - Both Tehran and the Taliban were showing no interest in addressing the mismanagement of water resources and tackling the environmental problems in the region.
 - Both sides are looking for short-term solutions and want to solve their own internal problems. The Taliban want to promote agriculture and the government in Tehran is acting as if it suddenly cares about the disadvantaged province of Sistan-Baluchistan after the nationwide protests last year.
 - The expert was referring to the widespread demonstrations and political unrest following the death of 21-year-old Jina Mahsa Amini in police custody.
 - Despite a brutal clampdown, demonstrators in Sistan-Baluchistan continue to gather in the streets to protest the political system. Water resources from Lake Hamun are critical to the drought-stricken province, one of the poorest areas in the country.
 - According to Iran's parliament, 25% to 30% of the population has left the region over the past two decades because of the water shortages and moved to the suburbs of cities in other regions.
- **What's the current situation?**
 - Public anger in the eastern Iranian region has already been mounting amid water shortages and other economic and social problems. And the latest clash between Iranian and Taliban troops increased the tensions.
 - On May 28, the commander of the Iranian army's ground forces and the deputy chief of the Iranian police traveled to Sistan-Baluchistan, and said the situation was under control.
 - Tehran and Kabul have also agreed to set up a commission of inquiry to find out what happened in the border shootout. In Iran, many people are angry, given that three Iranian soldiers have lost their lives.

POLITY

- ❖ **Telangana statehood day: A history of the state's formation**
- **Context:** Telangana celebrated its 9th anniversary of statehood Day on 2nd May.
 - At the forefront of the celebrations has been K Chandrashekar Rao, popularly known as KCR, Telangana's sitting chief minister and foremost leader of its movement for statehood.
 - Telangana, the newest state of India, has a complex history. Pre-Independence, it was a part of the princely state of Hyderabad. While there were talks of statehood in the 1950s, the region was eventually merged with the adjoining Andhra State to form Andhra Pradesh. Finally, in 2014, after decades of struggle, Telangana was carved out of the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh.
- **Telangana's path to statehood.**
- **PART I: Princely State of Hyderabad, post-independence Hyderabad State**
 - Present-day Telangana comprised the south and south-east Telugu-speaking regions of the Princely State of Hyderabad. The city of Hyderabad itself lay at the heart of the region, but unlike the areas around it, was dominated by the Urdu-speaking Muslim elite. Ruled by Nizam Osman Ali Khan, Hyderabad was among the largest and most prosperous princely states in the country.
 - In 1945, a communist-supported rebellion broke out in Telangana against the prevailing jagirdari (land-revenue) system. The Nizam's response was brutal, unleashing a local militia, **known as the Razakars**, on the protesting peasants. Over the next few years, the Razakars committed numerous atrocities on Telangana's population, and grew increasingly dominant in the state's politics.
 - After Independence and the Partition in 1947, the Nizam of Hyderabad was unwilling to accede to India, like most other princely states had done, even after multiple rounds of discussion with Sardar Patel's States Ministry. In the meantime, the Razakars under Kasim Razvi, terrorised the population, lest any attempts to overthrow the Nizam be made.
 - In order to usher in a modicum of stability in the state, India signed the Standstill Agreement with Hyderabad in November 1947, which stated that all administrative agreements that were in place between the Nizam and the British Crown would continue between the Nizam and India.
 - However, almost instantly, the terms of the agreement were violated by the Nizam. Not only did he let the Razakars run amok, he also restricted exports of precious metals to India, began negotiating with Pakistan, and stopped accepting the Indian rupee as legal tender. The Razakars even began carrying out "border raids" in neighbouring states.
 - As the state started falling into anarchy, India intervened militarily, launching "Operation Polo" in September 1948. Within a week, India had taken control of Hyderabad's administration.
 - On January 26, 1951, when India became a republic, Hyderabad was accorded the status of a Part-B state, with the Nizam as the Rajpramukh and an elected chief minister. As history would have it, this state lasted less than six years.

➤ **PART II: Linguistic reorganisation and the creation of Andhra Pradesh**

- The erstwhile Madras state was huge, covering areas which spoke all the major languages of South India. **In 1952, Potti Sriramalu went on a fast-unto-death demanding a separate Telugu state.** He died after 56 days, triggering unrest across the region and eventually leading to the formation of the Andhra State out of the north and north eastern regions of the Madras state in 1953.
- Moreover, Sriramalu's death made the government seriously reconsider its position on linguistic states. The **States Reorganisation Committee came into existence in 1953** and submitted its report two years later. Notably, it recommended that Hyderabad be reorganised linguistically – the Marathi-dominant Marathwada would be integrated into the bilingual Bombay state and south western Kannada-dominant districts would be integrated into the Mysore state.
- What was contentious, however, was the status of the Telugu-dominant Telangana region. While Andhra wanted to merge with Telangana to create a united Vishalandhra, the SRC itself did not favour this, instead recommending Telangana be a separate state till at least 1961, when it would be given the opportunity to voluntarily merge with Andhra, if it so wished.
- But the States Reorganisation Act passed in 1956 ignored this recommendation, merging Andhra State and Telangana into a single state called Andhra Pradesh, with Hyderabad as the capital. For some, like KCR, this was the point where a struggle for a separate Telangana state began.

➤ **PART III: The struggle for Telangana and the creation Telangana State**

- However, the sense of Telangana as a separate entity predated even Independence. Under the rule of the Nizam, the Telangana region had in-force **Mulki Rules – domicile rules which ensured that only native residents were able to get government jobs in the region.**
- Since Independence, protests regularly broke out in Telangana demanding the strict adherence to these rules, the first one being in 1952. However, it was in January 1969, after the creation of Andhra Pradesh, that the region witnessed its most widespread protests yet. While the government sprung to action, promising to “transfer all non-Telangana employees holding posts reserved for Telangana domiciles”, the issue refused to die down. The protests gave birth to the Telangana Praja Samiti, which called for a separate Telangana state. Over the next few years, Mulki Rules were at the centre of protests as well as legal cases.
- Finally, in September of 1973, Indira Gandhi initiated the 32nd Amendment to the Constitution, which declared that Andhra Pradesh would be divided into 6 zones, with reservation for jobs being decided on the basis of zones. As a result, the original Mulki Rules Act was repealed, and the movement for Telangana lost some steam.
- It would finally be revived by KCR in 2001. A member of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), he resigned and established his own political party – the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) with the singular aim of creating a new state of Telangana with Hyderabad as its capital.
- While his performances in polls were underwhelming, the sudden death of Andhra Pradesh's Chief Minister Y S Rajsekhar Reddy of the Congress in 2009, presented an opportunity to KCR. Reddy was the tallest leader of Andhra Pradesh at the time and post his death, political turmoil ensued. On November 29, 2009, KCR began a fast-unto-death demanding statehood. The Congress, which at the time was also under pressure nationally, relented within 10 days – promising the creation of the state of Telangana.
- After extensive discussion on the specifics of the state boundary and the choice of capital (for the new Andhra State), Telangana came into existence around four and a half years later, in 2014. KCR was the first chief minister and Hyderabad was chosen the joint capital of both Andhra and Telangana for a period of ten years, after which Andhra would have to shift its capital elsewhere.

PRELIMS

1. **Yakshagana**

➤ **In News:** The beginning of the monsoon is no longer the end of Yakshagana performances in Karnataka's coastal districts. With an abundance of venues opening up over the last decade, Yakshagana Theatre is thriving throughout the year.

➤ **About** Yakshagana:

- Yakshagana is a traditional theatre form of Karnataka.
- It is performed with massive headgear, elaborate facial makeup, and vibrant costumes and ornaments.
- Usually recited in Kannada, it is also performed in Malayalam as well as Tulu (the dialect of south Karnataka).
- It is performed with percussion instruments like chenda, maddalam, jagatta or chengila (cymbals) and chakratala or elathalam (small cymbals).

➤ **Features:**

- It was performed by a special community known as Jakkula Varu in the royal courts of the Vijayanagar dynasty.
- The word Yakshagana is derived from the names Aata Bayalaata, Kelike, and Dashavatara.
- The dance form of Yakshagana has been divided into two groups by intellectuals and researchers.
- The first category is Moodalopaya, which encompasses the eastern sides of Karnataka.
- Paduvlopaya is the second category of Yakshagana, which includes the western parts of the state of Karnataka, as well as Udupi, Kasaragod, and Uttara Kannada.

2. **National Startup Awards 2023**

- **In News:** Recently, The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) said it has extended the deadline for submission of applications for the National Startup Awards 2023 to June 15, 2023.

- **About National Startup Awards 2023:**

- The National Startup Awards 2023 awards will focus on celebrating innovation from across the country, in line with Vision India @2047.
- DPIIT has invited applications across 20 different categories including aerospace, retail and emerging technologies etc.
- Aim: To reward and recognise outstanding startups and enablers in the ecosystem building innovative products and demonstrating measurable social impact.
- Award: Cash prize of Rs 10 lakh to one winning startup in each category.
- The Winners and finalists will also be given exclusive government support, including investor and government connect, mentorship, international market access, and corporate and unicorn connect.
- It was launched in 2020.

3. **Phukot Karnali Hydro Electric Project**

- **In News:** Recently, NHPC Limited and Vidhyut Utpadan Company Limited (VUCL), Nepal signed an MoU for development of Phukot Karnali Hydro Electric Project (480MW) in Nepal.

- **About Phukot Karnali Hydro Electric Project:**

- It is located in Kalikot district, Karnali Province of Nepal.
- The project will use the flow from the Karnali River for power generation and the generated power will be fed into integrated power system of Nepal.
- **Key features of the project:**
 - ✓ The installed capacity of the project shall be 480 MW with average annual generation of about 2448 GWh.
 - ✓ 109 metre high RCC dam and an underground power house where the 06 turbines of 79 MW each shall be housed.
 - ✓ To utilize minimum environmental release one Surface Power House of 6 MW capacity is also planned.
 - ✓ This project is conceived as a Peaking Run-of-River (PRoR) type scheme.

- **Other Hydropower project between India and Nepal:**

- Pancheshwar Multipurpose Project: on Mahakali River.
- Lower Arun Hydroelectric Project : on Arun River (tributary of Koshi River)

- **About National Hydro Electric Power Corporation Private Limited (NHPC):**

- NHPC Limited, a Schedule 'A' Enterprise of the Government of India with 'MINI RATNA' status, is a premier PSU in India for development of hydropower.
- It was incorporated in 1975 under Companies Act, 1956.
- The company is mandated to plan, promote and organize an integrated and efficient development of power in all its aspects through Conventional and Non-Conventional Sources in India and abroad.

4. **GOBARDhan Scheme**

- **In News:** Recently, Union Minister for Jal Shakti has launched the Unified Registration Portal for GOBARDhan.

- **About Unified Registration Portal:**

- This portal will serve as a centralized repository for assessing investment and participation in the Biogas/CBG (Compressed Biogas) sector at a pan India level.
- Primary objective: To streamline the process of setting up CBG/Biogas plants in the country.
- The Unified Registration Portal allows any government, cooperative or private entity operating or intending to set up a Biogas/CBG/Bio-CNG plant in India to obtain a registration number by enrolling in the portal.
- This registration number will enable them to avail a multitude of benefits and support from the Ministries and Departments of the Government of India.

➤ **About GOBARdhan Scheme:**

- **Galvanizing Organic Bio-Agro Resources Dhan**, is a crucial umbrella initiative of the Government of India.
- The government launched the Gobardhan scheme in 2018 as a national priority project under the Swachh Bharat Mission Grameen-Phase II program.
- Its aim is to generate wealth and energy by converting cattle dung, agricultural residue, and other organic waste into Biogas, CBG and bio-fertilizers.
- It adopts a whole-of-government approach and aims to convert waste into wealth, thereby promoting a circular economy.
- **Nodal Ministry:** The Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Ministry of Jal Shakti.

5. **Mettur Dam**

➤ **In News:** As Cauvery water is scheduled to be released from the Mettur dam soon, farmers in the district are undertaking preparatory measures to commence kuruvai cultivation as soon as the river water reaches their fields.

➤ **About Mettur Dam:**

- It is one of the largest dams in India, built in 1934.
- Location:
 - ✓ Mettur, Salem District, Tamil Nadu.
 - ✓ It was constructed in a gorge where the Kaveri River enters the plains.
- It provides irrigation facilities to parts of Salem, the length of Erode, Namakkal, Karur, Tiruchirappali and Thanjavur districts for 271,000 acres (110,000 ha) of farmland.
- Features:
 - ✓ The total length of the dam is 1700 m with a maximum level of 120 feet and a capacity of 93.4 tmc ft.
 - ✓ The dam creates Stanley Reservoir.
 - ✓ Set at the foot of the dam in 1937 is the Mettur hydroelectric and thermal power plant, with a hydro-power generation of 32 MW.
 - ✓ There is a park adjoining the Dam on the opposite side with lawns and fountains, and also has the Muniappan/Aiyanar statue in the vicinity.

➤ **Key Facts about Kaveri River:**

- Kaveri, also spelled Cauvery, is a sacred river of southern India. It is known as the Ganga of South India.
- Origin: It rises on **Brahmagiri Hill of the Western Ghats** in southwestern Karnataka state.
- It flows in a southeasterly direction for 765 km through the states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu and descends the Eastern Ghats in a series of great falls.
- The Cauvery basin extends over the states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala and the Union Territory of Puducherry.
- The river drains into the Bay of Bengal at Poompuhar in the Mayiladuthurai district of Tamil Nadu.
- Major left bank tributaries: Harangi, the Hemavati, the Shimsha and the Arkavati.
- Major right bank tributaries: Lakshmantirtha, the Kabbani, the Suvarnavati, the Bhavani, the Noyil and the Amaravati

ANSWER WRITING

Que: Elaborating on India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC) summit held recently, discuss the significance of Pacific Island countries for India.

Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC) is a multinational grouping developed in 2014 for cooperation between India and 14 Pacific Islands nations. Recently, the third FIPIC summit was held in Papua New Guinea where the Prime Minister unveiled a comprehensive 12-step initiative aimed at advancing India's collaborations with the countries in the Pacific region. India's involvement with these 14 nations aligns with its Act East Policy and south-south cooperation.

Areas of cooperation between India and Pacific Island countries discussed during the FIPIC summit are as follows:

- India's development partnership with Pacific Island Countries (PICs) encompasses various areas, such as infrastructure development, with a particular emphasis on education, health, and culture.
- India also announced the establishment of a super-speciality cardiology hospital in Fiji and the Indian government will bear the full cost of this mega greenfield project.
- Sea ambulances will also be provided to all 14 Pacific Island countries.
- Discussions were also held on various issues facing the world today, such as supply chains of food, fuel fertilizer and pharma sector challenges.

- India has also assured support to FIPIC nations in the field of sustainable development, science and technology and space application.
- India also pledged to provide desalination units for the people of every Pacific Island country.

Significance of Pacific Island Countries (PICs) for India:

- The strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific region: The sea lanes of the Indo-Pacific region are critical to international commerce and the Pacific Islands lie right at the centre of it. Therefore, the rising significance of the Indo-Pacific, regionally and internationally, has brought the PICs to the centre of global attention.
- Geographical importance of PIC countries: The PICs with their resource-rich Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) can be attractive sources of natural and mineral resources like LNG and hydrocarbons to fuel India's growing economy and can also provide new markets for its products. They are also known for their significant biodiversity, rich ocean life, and mangroves.
- Sustainable Utilisation of Oceans: India in recent years has been vocal about ocean-led growth on various international platforms. Similarly, the Pacific Island Forum Leaders also endorsed the 'Blue Pacific' identity as the core driver of collective action. This provides a common ground where India can engage with these countries given its own emphasis on the idea of the 'Blue Economy'.
- The changing approach of India towards PICs: In recent years, India's approach towards the Pacific Island Countries (PICs) has been on a gradual positive shift. This change can be attributed to various geopolitical, economic and strategic factors as India looks beyond its immediate region, with its growing economic, maritime military capacities and strategic ambitions in the wider Indo-Pacific region.
- Countering China: The region is one of the most aid-dependent in the world. China is making inroads in the form of investments under its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and increasing its naval presence in the region. India's engagement with the PICs is important to counter the Chinese presence in the Indo-Pacific.
- Development Partnership: India can deepen its engagement with PICs on climate issues, disaster management, human resource development, economic cooperation and people-to-people contact. India's engagement with the region can provide it with greater access to the markets far away from its shores. It could be an important tool to strengthen its own presence in the Pacific region.

The Pacific Island countries, while geographically small yet have considerable economic, strategic and political significance in international affairs. The recent efforts to engage with the region have brought India much closer to these countries. Further, the formation of FIPIC has given a much-needed push to India's relations with the PICs and has provided a platform to facilitate multilateral and multidimensional cooperation between India and the PICs.

MCQs

1. Which one of the following is the best description of 'MH-60 Romeo', that was in the news recently?
 - a) **It is a maritime helicopter.**
 - b) It is genetically modified rice variety.
 - c) It is an asteroid.
 - d) It is a diesel-electric submarine.
2. Which of the following statements are correct with reference to Agni-1 Missile?
 1. It is a solid fuel medium-Range Ballistic Missile.
 2. It is developed under the Integrated Guided Missile Development Program (IGMDP).
 Select the correct answer using the code given below:
 - a) 1 only
 - b) 2 only
 - c) **Both 1 and 2**
 - d) Neither 1 nor 2
3. Consider the following statements:

Statement-I: The Geological Survey of India (GSI) has found reserves of the Lithium in Degana in Rajasthan's Nagaur district.

Statement-II: Bolivia, Chile and Argentina, which form the Lithium Triangle in South America.

 Which one of the following is correct in respect of the above statements?
 - a) Both Statement-I and Statement-II are correct and Statement-II is the correct explanation for Statement-I
 - b) **Both Statement-I and Statement-II are correct and Statement-II is not the correct explanation for Statement-I**
 - c) Statement-I is correct but Statement-II is incorrect
 - d) Statement-I is incorrect but Statement-II is correct
4. Which one of the following has launched the GOBARdhan Scheme?
 - a) **Ministry of Jal Shakti**
 - b) Ministry of Finance
 - c) Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare

- d) Ministry of Food Processing Industries
5. Recently NIPCCD organized a Refresher Training Programme on Mission Vatsalya from 29- 31 May, 2023 at NIPCCD Regional Centre, Mohali. Consider the following statements with reference to Mission Vatsalya:
1. It aims to achieve development and child protection priorities aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
 2. It is implemented by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- a) **1 only**
 - b) 2 only
 - c) Both 1 and 2
 - d) Neither 1 nor 2
6. Which of the following statements are correct with reference to National Startup Awards 2023?
1. It is implemented by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT).
 2. It rewards outstanding startups and enablers in the ecosystem building innovative products.
- Select the correct answer using the code given below:
- a) 1 only
 - b) 2 only
 - c) **Both 1 and 2**
 - d) Neither 1 nor 2
7. India has launched the Phukot Karnali Hydro Electric Project with which one of the following?
- a) Bangladesh
 - b) **Nepal**
 - c) Myanmar.
 - d) Bhutan
8. Celebrations marking the 350th anniversary of the coronation of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj recently began at the Raigad fort in Maharashtra. Consider the following statements regarding Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj:
1. He was the founder of the Maratha Empire in western India.
 2. He was a secular ruler who was very accommodating of all religions.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- a) 1 only
 - b) 2 only
 - c) **Both 1 and 2**
 - d) Neither 1 nor 2
9. Consider the following statements regarding Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS):
1. It brings together the efforts and resources of UN system organizations to unite the world against AIDS.
 2. It is coordinated by the UNAIDS Secretariat, headquartered in New York, United States.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- a) **1 only**
 - b) 2 only
 - c) Both 1 and 2
 - d) Neither 1 nor 2
10. Mettur Dam, one of the largest dams in India, is located across which one of the following rivers?
- a) Narmada
 - b) Godavari
 - c) **Kaveri**
 - d) Krishna