

**FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

**Geopolitical Initiatives by China in Nepal**

**Context:** China and Nepal have inked 12 agreements to strengthen bilateral cooperation in areas such as trade, transportation connectivity, and information technology.

**What agreements have Nepal and China signed?**

**The agreements include MoUs for:**

- Cooperation between The National Planning Commission of Nepal and China's National Development and Reform Commission
- Enhancing digital economy corporation,
- Cooperation on green and low-carbon development
- Cooperation in the fields of agriculture, livestock and fisheries,
- Cooperation in the field of science, technology and innovation; and in the field of Human Resources Development.
- Mechanism to review the Nepal-China trade and payment agreement.
- ✓ They also signed a protocol outlining the phytosanitary standards for the export of plant-derived medical items from Nepal to China.
- ✓ Nepal denied China's request to join the Global Security Initiative (GSI), arguing that cooperative security is not in Nepal's best interests in maintaining a strategic balance between India, China, and the United States.

**How Have China-Nepal Relations Been So Far?**

**Geopolitical Relations:**

- ✓ As part of its foreign policy approach, Nepal has endeavored to balance its relations with its two big neighbors, India and China.
- ✓ China's influence in Nepal has expanded dramatically in recent years, thanks to India's nearly six-month economic blockade of the country beginning in September 2015.
- ✓ China interfered forcefully in Nepalese politics, helping to unite the two communist parties, the Maoist Centre and the Unified Marxist-Leninist.
- ✓ China has a long history with Nepal's communist movement, particularly the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre), which was involved in a decade-long military insurgency against the Nepalese state. During this time, China provided ideological, logistical, and even military support to the Maoist cause.

**Economic Cooperation:**

- ✓ Economic cooperation between China and Nepal has intensified, focusing on trade, investment, and infrastructure development.
- ✓ Key projects like cross-Himalayan railways, ports, and hydroelectric power plants are enhancing connectivity and contributing to Nepal's economic growth.
- ✓ Nepal has expressed interest in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), aiming to improve infrastructure connectivity and trade facilitation.

**Security and Defense Cooperation:**

- ✓ China and Nepal have engaged in joint military exercises and increased defense cooperation, focusing on capacity building and military training.
- ✓ China has provided military aid to Nepal, further strengthening their defense ties.

**Issue Between China and Nepal:**

- ✓ In its new map, China refused to recognize a portion of land in Nepal's northwestern region—an area that Nepal had claimed and depicted in its own map in 2020.

**What are India's implications of China's growing presence in Nepal?**

- ✓ Concerns about security: China's increased influence in Nepal may result in strategic encirclement for India, as it enhances its position in a country that shares a long border with India.
- ✓ This raises concerns about India's security.

**Access to Resources:**

- ✓ China's infrastructure initiatives and commercial engagement in Nepal may compete with Indian investments and economic interests, limiting India's access to regional resources and markets.

**Connectivity and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI):**

- ✓ Nepal's participation in China's BRI Initiative may result in a large increase in Chinese-backed infrastructure projects and connectivity, increasing Nepal's reliance on China for commerce and, as a result, harming India's interests.

**Challenges in Regional Coordination:**

- ✓ Nepal's closer ties with China provide strategic depth to China in South Asia, potentially allowing China to project power and influence beyond its borders.
- ✓ China's deepening involvement in Nepal might make it more challenging for India to coordinate regional responses and initiatives effectively.

**Way Forward**

- ✓ To address the difficulties, India must engage Nepal proactively, increase development assistance, deepen economic linkages, and create people-to-people contact.

- ✓ In addition, India must focus on multilateral initiatives and regional collaboration to counteract China's growing influence in Nepal and ensure regional peace and development.
- ✓ Diplomacy, dialogue, and teamwork will be critical in properly managing these difficulties.

**POLITY & GOVERNANCE**

**Delimitation Concerns in Women's Reservation Bill, 2023**

**In Context: The passing of the Women's Reservation Bill, 2023 in the Indian Parliament has been hailed as a watershed moment in the country's political landscape.**

**However, the fate of this major legislation is currently tied with the question of delimitation, which opposition parties have attacked.**

**What is Delimitation?**

**About**

- ✓ Delimitation is the process of redrawing parliamentary or assembly seat borders to guarantee that each constituency has an equal number of voters.
- ✓ It is done every few years after each census to ensure that each constituency in the country has one representative in both the Lok Sabha and the state assemblies.
- ✓ Delimitation connects population growth to the number of elected legislators in a state, ensuring that no delegates are over or underrepresented.

**Constitutional Provisions Related to Delimitation:**

**Article 82:**

- ✓ The Parliament enacts a Delimitation Act after every census. This act allows the Parliament to readjust the allocation of seats in the Lok Sabha and the Legislative Assemblies of States.

**Article 170:**

- ✓ This article deals with the composition of state Legislative Assemblies, specifying a minimum of 60 members and a maximum of 500.
- ✓ The size of the population, as determined by the most recent census, forms the basis for delimitation and seat distribution.

**Delimitation Commission:**

- ✓ The Delimitation Commission Act was enacted in 1952.
- ✓ Once the Act is in force, the Union government sets up a Delimitation Commission.
- ✓ Delimitation Commissions have been set up four times 1952, 1963, 1973 and 2002 under the Acts of 1952, 1962, 1972 and 2002.
- ✓ The Delimitation Commission is appointed by the President of India and works in collaboration with the Election Commission of India.
- ✓ The commission's main task is to redraw the boundaries based on a recent census.
- ✓ The current boundaries of the Lok Sabha and State Assembly constituencies were drawn on the basis of the 2001 Census by the Delimitation Commission of 2002.
- ✓ However, the number of seats allocated to each state in the Lok Sabha and the total number of seats in a Legislative Assembly were frozen on the basis of the 1971 Census by the 42nd Amendment Act of 1976.
- ✓ This freeze was extended until the first census after 2026 by the 84th Amendment Act of 2001.

**What is the relationship between the Women's Reservation Bill, 2023 and delimitation?**

- ✓ The Indian government has stated that the Women's Reservation Bill, 2023, will go into effect only after the census-based delimitation exercise, which has been delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic and several other factors, is completed, which has been pushed back to 2024-25 until further orders are issued.
- ✓ The government has argued that tying reservation to delimitation will ensure a transparent and fair allocation of seats for women while also increasing the total number of seats for both men and women, as the delimitation exercise is expected to increase the strength of the Lok Sabha and state assemblies seats.

**What are the Concerns Regarding the Delimitation?**

**Potential Underrepresentation:**

- ✓ One of the primary concerns is that if delimitation is carried out based on population parameters, southern states like Telangana and others that have successfully implemented population control measures may face underrepresentation in Parliament.
- ✓ This fear arises from the possibility that northern states with higher population growth, such as Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, could gain more seats in Parliament at the expense of the south.
- ✓ Despite having only 18% of the country's population, the southern states contribute 35% to the country's GDP.
- ✓ Leaders argue that their economic strength should be reflected in political representation to ensure that their interests are adequately represented.
- ✓ Southern political leaders worry that a shift in the number of Lok Sabha seats towards northern states could result in a reduced political voice for the South at the national level.

**Linkage with Women's Reservation Bill:**

- ✓ Opposition parties are concerned about the government's intention to link the execution of the Women's Reservation Bill with delimitation.

- ✓ The opposition claims that there is no obvious rationale or obligation to link the two concerns, and that there was no such linkage in earlier deliberations of the women's reservation Bill.
- ✓ They argue that the administration might have decoupled the women's quota from the census and delimitation. A simpler bill may have allowed all parties to ensure 33% reservation for women under the Lok Sabha's current structure.

### PRELIM FACTS

#### **1. Intelligent Grievance Monitoring System (IGMS) 2.0**

**Context: The Intelligent Grievance Monitoring System (IGMS) was recently launched by the Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) Science and Technology, MoS Personnel, Public Grievances, and Pensions. 2.0**

##### **About**

- ✓ It is the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances' (DARPG) public grievance portal and Automated Analysis in Tree Dashboard portal.
- ✓ IIT Kanpur has put it into action.
- ✓ Objectives: The Dashboard provides real-time tabular analysis of Grievances Filed & Disposed, Grievances Filed by State & District, and Grievances Filed by Ministry data.
- ✓ It will also assist officials in determining the root cause of the complaint.
- ✓ This platform will assist the DARPG in creating draft letters for chosen schemes/ministries and would speed up the grievance redressal procedure by the relevant ministry/department.
- ✓ It now has artificial intelligence (AI) capabilities.

##### **What exactly is CPGRAMS?**

- ✓ The Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS) is a 24-hour online platform where citizens can make complaints with public agencies about any aspect of service delivery.
- ✓ It is a single gateway that connects all Ministries/Departments of the Government of India and the States.
- ✓ This system is accessible to all Ministries and States based on their roles.
- ✓ It is also available to residents via a standalone mobile application that can be downloaded from the Google Play store and a mobile application that is integrated with UMANG.
- ✓ The status of a grievance filed in CPGRAMS can be followed using the unique registration ID issued by the complainant at the time of registration.

#### **3. Staghorn coral**

**Context: A genome-wide investigation of critically endangered staghorn coral in the Caribbean discovered ten genetic areas linked to resistance to white band disease.**

##### **About**

- ✓ It is one of the Caribbean's most important corals.
- ✓ Over the previous 5,000 years, it, together with elkhorn coral and star corals, helped to build Caribbean coral reefs.
- ✓ Staghorn coral can form dense clusters known as "thickets" in very shallow water.
- ✓ These provide critical habitat for other reef animals, particularly fish.

##### **Appearance**

- ✓ Staghorn coral colonies are golden tan or pale brown with white tips, and the algae that dwell within their tissue gives them their color.
- ✓ These corals feature antler-like branches that grow out of a central shaft and curve upward.
- ✓ Each staghorn coral colony is composed of numerous individual polyps that develop together.
- ✓ Photosynthetic algae that live inside the coral's cells provide sustenance for these corals. They also eat by catching plankton with the tentacles of their polyps.

##### **Distribution**

- ✓ It is commonly found on coral reefs in clear, shallow water (15-60 feet) in the Bahamas, Florida, and the Caribbean.
- ✓ Palm Beach County, Florida, is the northernmost extent of the range in the Atlantic Ocean, where it is relatively uncommon.
- ✓ They can be found in a variety of coral reef habitats, such as spur and groove, bank reef, patch reef, and transitional reef habitats, as well as limestone ridges, terraces, and hard bottom habitats.

##### **Lifespan & Reproduction**

- ✓ These coral reaches reproductive maturity at about 7 inches tall.
- ✓ Staghorn coral is a simultaneous hermaphrodite, meaning each colony produces both eggs and sperm, but usually does not self-fertilize.
- ✓ This coral sexually reproduces once per year after the full moon in late summer by "broadcast spawning" eggs and sperm into the water column.
- ✓ Fertilized eggs develop into larvae that settle on hard surfaces and form new colonies.

##### **Threats**

- ✓ Climate change
- ✓ Diseases: It is particularly susceptible to white band and white plague
- ✓ Unsustainable Fishing Pressure

**What is White band disease?**

It is a common tissue loss disease.

- ✓ It is a common tissue loss disease.
- ✓ Studies suggest that white band disease is caused by a communicable agent, however, a specific pathogen has not yet been definitively identified.

**4. Sela Tunnel Project**

**Context: According to BRO authorities, over 96 percent of the work on the strategically important Sela Tunnel has been completed, and it is expected to be inaugurated by the end of the year.**

**About**

- ✓ **Location:** It is located in the West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh.
- ✓ Once completed, the Sela tunnel will be the world's longest bi-lane tunnel at an altitude above 13,000 feet.
- ✓ It will ensure all-weather connectivity between Guwahati in Assam and Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh.
- ✓ It is being excavated below the Sela Pass on the NH-13 component of the Trans-Arunachal Highway system.
- ✓ It is being built by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) under Project Vartak and the tunnel's construction commenced on April 1, 2019.
- ✓ Project Details:
- ✓ Tunnel 1: This single-tube tunnel has a length of 980m.
- ✓ Tunnel 2: This bi-lane tunnel has a length of 1555m. It includes one escape tube for emergencies.
- ✓ Roads: Approach to Tunnel 1 is 7100m, the road between the two tunnels is 1340m, and the approach to Tunnel 2 is 340 m long.

**Key Facts about Sela Pass:**

- ✓ It is a high-altitude mountain pass located in the Tawang district of Arunachal Pradesh.
- ✓ Elevation: 4,170 meters above sea level
- ✓ It connects Tawang Valley to the rest of India.
- ✓ Open throughout the year, Sela Pass is managed by the BRO.

**5. Financial Stability Board (FSB)**

**Context: The Financial Stability Board (FSB) is launching a probe into the buildup of debt outside traditional banks, as it seeks to limit hedge funds' borrowing and boost transparency.**

**About**

- ✓ The G20 founded the FSB in the aftermath of the financial crisis in 2009.
- ✓ **Mandate:** It was established specifically to coordinate the work of national financial authorities and international standard-setting bodies at the international level, as well as to develop and promote the implementation of effective regulatory, supervisory, and other financial sector policies in the interest of financial stability.
- ✓ The Financial Stability Board (FSB) brings together national financial stability authorities (central banks, supervisory authorities, and finance ministries), international organizations, and standard-setting groups.
- ✓ The FSB monitors, analyses, and makes recommendations on major areas of the financial system. It evaluates emerging challenges that may have an influence on global financial stability.
- ✓ The decisions of the FSB are not legally binding on its members.
- ✓ Basel, Switzerland is the FSB headquarters.
- ✓ The FSB consists of 68 member institutions. It comprises several central banks, ministries of finance, and supervisory and regulatory authorities from 25 jurisdictions, as well as 10 international organizations and six Regional Consultative Groups (RCGs).
- ✓ The board includes all G20 major economies.
- ✓ **Structure:** The Plenary, which is the only decision-making body.
- ✓ The Steering Committee, which oversees operational matters between plenary sessions.
- ✓ Three Standing Committees, each having distinct but complementary duties.
- ✓ India and FSB: India is an active member of the FSB, having three seats in its Plenary represented by the Secretary (Dept of Economic Affairs), Deputy Governor-RBI, and Chairman-SEBI.

**6. Kalakkad-Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve**

**Context: The Madras High Court's Madurai Bench has issued a notice to the State on a public interest litigation suit seeking a directive restricting the admission of outsiders and vehicles into the Kalakkad-Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve.**

**About**

- ✓ It is located in the Tamil Nadu districts of Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari in the Southern Western Ghats.
- ✓ In 1988, it was designated as a Tiger Reserve.
- ✓ This reserve combines three major sanctuaries: the Kalakad Sanctuary, the Mundanthurai Sanctuary, and a portion of the Kanyakumari Sanctuary.
- ✓ The sanctuary's primary region is the Agastya Malai Hill Range, which is located between Kerala and Tamil Nadu and is part of one of the world's 18 biodiversity hotspots.
- ✓ The reserve is also known as the "River Sanctuary" since it is the source of 14 rivers.
- ✓ Undulating terrain with multiple valleys and porous rocks.

- ✓ Vegetation:
- ✓ It varies from thorny shrub jungles to lush evergreen forests.
- ✓ In addition to forests, savannah woodlands, and grasslands, there are tea and coffee plantations within the reserve.
- ✓ Flora: Important species include Sarcandra, Paphiopedulum, druryi, Hopea parviflora, Hopea utilis, Calophyllum elatum, Cullenia exarillata, etc.
- ✓ Fauna: Tiger, leopard, rusty spotted cat, wild dog, sloth bear, elephant, gaur, sambar, spotted deer, mouse deer, nilgiri langur, slender loris, bonnet macaque, lion tailed macaque, etc.

**ANSWER WRITTING**

**Q.** Discuss the factors contributing to the increasing frequency of landslides in the Himalayan region and their implications. Suggest sustainable mitigation strategies that can be implemented to address this growing concern. (250 Words)

**Introduction**

Landslides are caused by the downward movement of masses of soil, rock, or debris due to gravity. In the Himalayan region, which is geologically young, tectonically active, and climatically variable, they constitute a regular natural danger. There are two types of variables that contribute to the growing frequency of landslides in the Himalayas: natural and manmade.

**Some of the causes of landslides in the Himalayan region include:**

- ✓ **Fragile Ecosystem:** The ecosystem is intrinsically fragile due to tectonic or neo-tectonic activity associated with multiple subsurface processes such as rock deformation, exhumation, and reworking of rocks, as well as surface processes such as erosion, weathering, and rain/snow precipitation.
- ✓ **Earthquakes:** The convergence of the Indian plate with the Eurasian plate in the Himalayan region has caused subsurface pressures that are released as earthquakes, causing fractures and loosening of the litho-structures near the mountain surface. This raises the likelihood of rock movement along the slope. Debris flow and subsurface water weaken a slope, allowing landmasses to slide down it.
- ✓ **Geological Composition:** Some Himalayan rocks are composed of limestone, which is more prone to flooding and landslides than other types of rocks due to its ability to dissolve in weakly acidic precipitation or groundwater. This process produces caves, sinkholes, and other karst characteristics that undermine the slope's stability.
- ✓ **Monsoon & Westerly Disturbance:** The Westerly Disturbance — a low-pressure system that moves eastward across central Asia and northern India from the Mediterranean Sea — and the South West Indian Ocean meet. Summer monsoons bring heavy rains to portions of J&K, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand, causing landslides and flash floods.
- ✓ **Anthropogenic Factors:** Human activities such as road construction, tunneling, mining, quarrying, deforestation, urbanization, agriculture, excessive tourism and hydroelectric projects can also cause or worsen landslides in the Himalayas. These activities can disturb the natural balance of the slopes by removing vegetation cover, altering drainage patterns, increasing soil erosion, creating artificial cuts and fills, blasting rocks, and generating vibrations.
- ✓ These activities can also increase the exposure and risk of human settlements and infrastructure to landslides.
- ✓ The 2013 Kedarnath Tragedy was also influenced by the unplanned development and construction activities in the area that had altered the natural drainage system and increased the soil erosion.

**Some of the mitigation strategies that can be implemented include:**

- ✓ **Building Resilience:** To address these issues, it is critical to build resilience against geo-hazards generated by natural processes, environmental degradation, and human activities. This entails putting in place a network of sensors for real-time monitoring and data collection.
- ✓ **Using Technology to Improve Monitoring:** Rain gauges, piezometers, inclinometers, extensometers, InSAR (Interferometric Synthetic Aperture Radar), and total stations are examples of web-based sensors that might assist in monitoring hazardous areas. In densely populated and built-up areas, monitoring should be priority.
- ✓ **Integrated Early Warning System (EWS):** It is critical to design an integrated Early Warning System (EWS) that uses AI and Machine Learning (ML) methods. A system like this might help predict and warn communities about potential threats, providing them vital time to take precautionary measures.
- ✓ **Formation of Himalayan States Council:** Establishing a collaborative platform that brings together the disaster management authorities from different states in the Himalayan region is a strategic move. This centralized council would enable the sharing of knowledge, experiences, and resources to effectively assess and manage the impacts of various stressors on the region.
- ✓ **Sustainable Socio Economic Development:** Recognizing the valuable natural resources present in the region, such as glaciers, springs, minerals, energy sources, and medicinal plants, offers the potential for sustainable socio economic development. However, it's crucial to strike a balance between resource exploitation and ecological preservation to ensure long-term viability.
- ✓ **Environmental Considerations:** Proper town planning that accounts for the unique characteristics of mountainous terrain is vital. Restricting heavy construction, implementing effective drainage systems, scientifically managing slope cutting, and using retaining walls are important aspects of environmentally

conscious development. Retaining walls are relatively rigid walls used for supporting soil laterally so that it can be retained at different levels on the two sides.

- ✓ **Sustainable Tourism:** Sustainable tourism can reduce landslides by promoting environmental awareness, conservation and protection of natural resources, and respect for biodiversity and ecosystems. It can also provide economic incentives and social benefits for local communities, which can enhance their resilience and adaptive capacity to cope with natural hazards.
- ✓ **Building Sustainable Govt Projects:** To ensure responsible development in the Himalayan region, key measures include conducting environmental assessments, using eco-friendly technologies, involving local communities, increasing stakeholder awareness, and promoting coordination among governmental sectors.

**Conclusion**

The rising frequency of landslides in the Himalayan region is a complex subject with many causes and serious consequences. To protect both the ecosystem and the well-being of the people who live in this sensitive region, sustainable mitigation solutions must include a holistic strategy that integrates geological understanding, climate adaptation, land-use planning, and community engagement.

**MCQs**

1. Which of the following regions include Kalakkad-Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve?
  - a) **The Western Ghats**
  - b) The Eastern Ghats
  - c) Plateau of Chhotanagpur
  - d) Coastal Plains of the East
2. Consider the following comments about the Financial Stability Board (FSB):
  1. The United Nations (UN) formed it in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis.
  2. It brings together national financial stability authorities, international organizations, and standard-setting groups.
  3. Its members are legally bound by its decisions.
 How many of the above statements are correct?
  - a) **Only one**
  - b) Only two
  - c) All three
  - d) None
3. Consider the following statements about the Badis genus:
  1. It is a type of freshwater fish found in Nagaland.
  2. It is known as a Chameleon fish because of its ability to change color quickly during reproducing.
 Which of the above statements is/are correct?
  - a) **1 only**
  - b) 2 only
  - c) **Both 1 and 2**
  - d) Neither 1 nor 2
4. The Sela Tunnel Project, which has recently made headlines, is located in:
  - a) **Arunachal Pradesh**
  - b) Nagaland
  - c) Assam
  - d) Ladakh
5. Consider the following statements regarding Macrophages:
  1. They are a type of white blood cell that is essential to the human immune system.
  2. They may change themselves to develop diverse structures in order to combat various germs and invaders.
 Which of the above assertions is/are correct?
  - a) 1 only
  - b) 2 only
  - c) **Both 1 and 2**
  - d) Neither 1 nor 2
6. With reference to the China-Nepal Relations, consider the following statements:
  1. Nepal has declined China's invitation to join China's Global Security Initiative (GSI).
  2. Nepal has expressed interest in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), aiming to improve infrastructure connectivity and trade facilitation.
 Which of the statements given above is/are not correct?
  - a) 1 only
  - b) 2 only
  - c) Both 1 and 2
  - d) **Neither 1 nor 2**
7. With reference to the Delimitation Commission, consider the following statements:
  1. Delimitation Commissions have been set up four times 1952, 1963, 1973 and 2002 under the Acts of 1952, 1962, 1972 and 2002.
  2. The Delimitation Commission is appointed by the President of India and works in collaboration with the Election Commission of India.
 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
8. With reference to the Surety Bonds, consider the following statements:
  1. Surety bond is provided by the insurance company on behalf of the contractor to the entity that is awarding the project.
  2. A surety bond can be defined in its simplest form as a written agreement to guarantee compliance, payment, or performance of an act.
 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 Intelligent Grievance Monitoring System (IGMS) 2.0:
  1. It is a public complaints portal equipped with Artificial Intelligence (AI).
  2. The Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG) is in charge of it.
 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. With reference to the Staghorn coral, consider the following statements:
  1. It is native to the Indian Ocean.
  2. It can form dense clusters known as "thickets" in relatively shallow water.
  3. It is especially vulnerable to white band illness.
 How many of the statements given above are correct?
  - a) Only one
  - b) **Only two**
  - c) All three
  - d) None