INTERNATIONAL RELATIONSHIP

New Delhi, new Tel Aviv

Context:

The recent, heinous Hamas attack on Israel has swiftly taken on a domestic political significance in India. And India's recent administration condemned the heinous act while expressing support with Israel. This, in turn, added a new aspect to the political fighting between the two parties during the election season over the resolve to fight terror.

The changing dynamics of India-Middle East relations

- The geopolitics of the Middle East in the twentieth century naturally intertwined with South Asian foreign relations, which became increasingly intense after Partition.a
- However, the nature of that contact has shifted in the twenty-first century. As the Middle East has evolved in recent decades, changes in Indian policy toward the region have become more significant during the current government.

The broad changes that are emerged out India-Israel relation

Establishing the full diplomatic relation with Israel

- The first decision was to bring India's relationship with Israel out of the closet and signal full political ownership.
- To be sure, it was Congress Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi who ended the policy of keeping a distance from Israel. P V Narasimha Rao followed through by establishing full diplomatic relations with Israel.
- Atal Bihari Vajpayee built on the foundation and ended Delhi's reluctance to host the Israeli Prime Minister. But the UPA government, under pressure from the left and Congress's confusion over the Middle East, went back to pious posturing and drawing the veil over deepening security ties with Israel.
- But current government, discarded Delhi's traditional inhibitions on acknowledging the growing convergence of interests between India and Israel. PM Modi also became the first Indian PM to visit Israel.

Adopting a policy that is more in line with the reality on the ground.

- Second, the NDA government has attempted to match India's posture with ground realities.
- While the previous government still believes that Delhi must wear (or at least pretend to bear) the cross of the "Palestinian cause," the NDA government has accepted that some Arab countries have begun to make peace with Israel without preconditions.
- Hamas and other parties' violent religious extremism endangers not only Israel but also moderate Arab governments in West Asia.
- These shared concerns have opened much space for cooperation between Israel and several Arab states.
- However, The NDA continues to support a two-state solution to the crisis in Israel-Palestine relations.

Balancing the ties with the Arab countries

- Third, the political focus on India's current solidarity with Israel masks the extraordinary transformation of Delhi's ties with the Arab world in the last decade.
- For all its rhetoric on supporting Arab causes, the UPA government struggled to modernise the relationship with Arab countries.
- Under the NDA, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt have emerged as important strategic partners. If India was hobbled by its mercantilist approach to the oil-rich Gulf in the past, the gulf nations promise to contribute massively to economic growth.

Recognising the role of west in west

- Fourth, the NDA government ended India's traditional anti-Western stance in the Middle East. Limiting the Anglo-American role in the Middle East was among the main objectives of Indian diplomacy in the Nehru years.
- Today, India is in a quite different place; it partners with the US, Israel, and the UAE in the I2U2 grouping.
- Delhi has teamed up with the US, Europe, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE to build a corridor between the Subcontinent and Europe through the Arabian Peninsula.
- India's unambiguous critique of Hamas terror puts it on the same side as the West, even as Russia, China and much of the Global South offer a wishy-washy "two-handed" reaction to the terror attack. The clarity of India's response underlines its interest-driven foreign policy.

1

Conclusion:
- As the current tragedy forces Middle Eastern politics into a new and perilous phase, one thing is certain: the area requires a stronger Indian commitment to its peace and prosperity.
- In turn, the Indian political class must abandon its self-referential discourse that ignores structural shifts in the Middle East and forge a new national consensus on addressing the region.

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban

Context: As a prelude to Swachh Bharat Diwas, the annual Swachhata Hi Seva (SHS) fortnight was also organized by Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban and Gramin between 15th Sept to 2nd Oct 2023.

The fortnight aims to mobilize the participation of crores of citizens across the country via various activities such as Indian Swachhata League 2.0, SafaiMitra Suraksha Shivir and mass cleanliness drives.

About:
- Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban (SBM-U) was launched on 2nd October, 2014, by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs as a national campaign to promote cleanliness, sanitation, and proper waste management in urban areas.
- It aimed to make cities and towns across India clean and free from open defecation.

Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban 1.0:
- The first phase of SBM-U focused on achieving the target of making urban India ODF by providing access to toilets and promoting behavioral change.
- SBM-U 1.0 was successful in achieving the target and 100% of urban India was declared ODF.

Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban 2.0 (2021-2026):
- SBM-U 2.0, announced in Budget 2021-22, is the continuation of SBM-U first phase.
- The second phase of SBM-U aimed to go beyond ODF to ODF+, and ODF++, and focus on making urban India garbage-free.
- It emphasized sustainable sanitation practices, waste management, and the promotion of a circular economy.

What are the Achievements of Swachh Bharat Mission?
- 12 crore toilets have been built in the last nine years, liberating the country from the scourge of open defecation and 75% of the total villages have achieved the Open Defecation Free (ODF) Plus status.
- Urban India has become Open Defecation Free (ODF), with all 4,715 Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) completely ODF.
- 3,547 ULBs are ODF+ with functional and hygienic community and public toilets, and 1,191 ULBs are ODF++ with complete faecal sludge management.
- 14 cities are certified Water+, which entails treatment of wastewater and its optimum reuse.

Shortcomings of SBM

Decline in Regular Toilet Use:
- Despite the initial success in increasing toilet access, the paper highlights a decline in regular toilet usage in rural India from 2018-19 onwards, raising concerns about the sustainability of the program.

Disproportionate Impact on Marginalized Groups:
- The largest drop in toilet usage was observed among Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) socio-economic groups, indicating that the program's benefits have not been equally sustained across all segments of society.

Concerns about Sustainability:
- The decline in toilet usage in recent years raises questions about the sustainability of the program's achievements, casting doubt on the long-term impact and behavioral change intended by SBM.

Spatial Variation in Toilet Use:
- At the national level, regular use of any toilet (improved or unimproved) increased from 46% to 75% on average in rural areas during 2015-16 and 2019-21.
- This increase was across all population and socio-economic sub-groups, and especially pronounced for the poor and socially disadvantaged groups
- But even as the regular use of any toilet for SC and ST people saw a jump of 51 and 58% points respectively between 2015-16 and 2018-19 - reaching almost the same levels as those in the General Category, gains were reversing since then.

2

Challenges in Richer States:

- Despite progress, wealthier states showed mixed performance and smaller gains in toilet use compared to economically poorer states, highlighting the need for tailored strategies in different socio-economic contexts.
- States like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Gujarat showed smaller progress in regular toilet use compared to economically disadvantaged states, indicating that the program did not have the same impact across all states.

Way Forward

- Intensify efforts to promote behavioral change through targeted and community-specific campaigns, emphasizing the importance of regular toilet usage, hygiene, and safe sanitation practices.
- Engage communities to take ownership of sanitation facilities and practices, fostering a sense of responsibility and pride in maintaining clean and functional toilets.
- Ensure equitable distribution of benefits by targeting vulnerable and marginalized groups, providing them with access to sanitation facilities and emphasizing sustained usage through awareness and education.

PRELIM FACTS

1. Shri Ramalinga Swamy

Context: India celebrated the 200th birth anniversary of Shri Ramalinga Swamy, also known as Vallalar, on 5th October, 2023.

About

- Shri Ramalinga Swamy was a prominent Tamil poet in the 19th century and a member of the "gnana siddhars" lineage.
- He was born in the village of Marudhur in Tamil Nadu.

Vision of Social Reforms:

- Vallalar's vision transcends religious, caste, and creed barriers, recognizing divinity in every atom of the universe.
- Vallalar was strongly against the caste system and initiated the 'Samarasa Vedha Sanmarga Sangam' in 1865, later renamed 'Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga Sathya Sangam.'
- He established 'The Sathya Dharma Salai,' a free food facility in Vadalur, Tamil Nadu in 1867, serving all people without caste distinctions.
- In January, 1872, Vallalar opened the 'Sathya Gnana Sabha' (Hall of True Knowledge) in Vadalur.

Philosophical Beliefs and Teachings:

- One of Vallalar's main teachings was that "service to Living Beings is the path to Liberation/Moksha."
- Suddha Sanmarga believes that the primary parts of human life should be love, generosity, and divine practice, which leads to pure knowledge.
- Vallalar believed that human intelligence is illusory (Maya) intelligence that is neither exact nor final.
- He highlighted "Jeeva Karunyam" (Compassion for living beings) as the ultimate intellect path.
- He supported feeding the impoverished as the best form of religion, instead than killing animals for food.
- He also felt that God, in the form of Grace, represents Mercy and Knowledge.
- Mercy is also a way to God.

2. Third Intifada

Context: The recent escalation in the Hamas-Israel conflict has raised concerns about a Third Intifada.

About

- Hamas is a militant Palestinian nationalist group that has controlled Gaza since 2006.
- Intifada means 'shake off' in Arabic and was used to describe the Palestinian uprising against Israeli presence in the West Bank and Gaza.
- The First Intifada lasted from 1987 to 1993, and the Second Intifada from 2000-2005.
- The uprisings were spearheaded by Palestinian youth who were fed up with the treatment they faced from Israeli settlers.
- Tensions between Israel and Palestine have not subsided since the end of the Second Intifada.

3. Universe's Earliest Galaxies

Context: A recent study published in Astrophysical Journal Letters offered insights into the early universe's star formation and brightness.

3

About

- The James Webb Space Telescope, operational since 2022, has provided a remarkable glimpse into the universe's early history, revealing a collection of galaxies from cosmic dawn.
- Researchers' findings indicated that star formation in these galaxies occurred in bursts rather than steadily, distinguishing them from modern, larger galaxies like the Milky Way.
- In these early galaxies, star formation bursts caused significant variations in brightness, making them appear larger and more massive than they may have actually been. Astronomers usually gauge a galaxy's size based on its brightness, but this phenomenon challenges that assumption.
- The study suggests that the bursts of star formation led to intense flashes of light, making these early galaxies appear brighter.
- In smaller galaxies, bursty star formation may occur due to the formation and rapid explosion of very large stars, which eject gas into space, fueling subsequent bursts of star formation.
- Larger galaxies, with stronger gravitational effects, tend to have more stable, continuous star formation.

4. Operation Kachchhap

Context: In a recent operation named "Kachchhap," the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) has successfully rescued nearly a thousand live baby Gangetic turtles, shedding light on the ongoing battle against illegal wildlife trade and the protection of these unique creatures.

About

- The Ganga river system in India is home to 13 species of turtles, they face various threats from habitat loss, overexploitation, and pollution.
- The operation resulted in the recovery of live baby turtles of different species, such as the Indian Tent Turtle, Indian Flapshell Turtle, Black Spotted/Pond Turtle, and Brown Roofed Turtle., some of which are considered vulnerable or near-threatened species according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List and are protected under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
- DRI serves as India's premier anti-smuggling agency, operating under the Central Board of Indirect Taxes & Customs, Ministry of Finance. It is responsible for detecting and preventing various forms of smuggling, including illicit wildlife trade.

5. Annual Joint HADR Exercise 2023 (Chakravat 2023)

Context: The 2023 edition of the Annual Joint HADR Exercise (AJHE) is being hosted by the Indian Navy at Goa from 09th October 2023 to 11th Oct 2023.

About

- Initiated in 2015 , this exercise marks a significant step towards enhancing collective response mechanisms to humanitarian crises and natural disasters in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
- With climate change intensifying the region's vulnerability, India's inclusive vision for the oceans, known as SAGAR, underscores the importance of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations.

6. Phonotaxis

Context: Phonotaxis is observed during the evening or in the monsoon season might sound random or even annoying.

About

- Scientists call phonotaxis as the movement by an animal in response to a sound.
- It has mostly been observed among crickets, moths, frogs, and toads, among a few other creatures.
- There are two types of phonotaxis
- Positive phonotaxis: The purpose of positive phonotaxis is attraction. It usually happens when the females of a particular species – including those of crickets and frogs – are attracted to the sounds made by the males.
- Negative phonotaxis: It serves to repel or warn, such as when the sound of a predator nearby signals to an animal that it needs to move away. Crickets in particular have been found to steer themselves away from low-intensity ultrasound typically associated with bats (which use it for echolocation).
- In 1984, scientists found that Mediterranean house geckos (Hemidactylus turcicus) use positive phonotaxis to their advantage.
- The fields that these geckos inhabited were also home to male decorated crickets (Gryllodes supplicans), which used species-specific sounds to attract the females from their burrows.

4

- The geckos recognised and followed this call until they reached the burrow, where they consumed the female crickets.

ANSWER WRITTING

Q. The state is facing a severe water crisis due to the prolonged drought. The groundwater level has dropped drastically and many wells and borewells have dried up. The farmers are struggling to irrigate their crops and the people are suffering from acute water scarcity. The situation has led to widespread protests and unrest in the affected areas. The Chief Minister is worried that this will hamper the party's chances in the upcoming elections. However, the state has no funds to implement any long-term solutions, such as building dams, canals, or pipelines. The only option is to provide temporary relief by supplying water through tankers and trains. But this requires a lot of coordination and logistics, as well as a huge amount of money. The state can only afford this by diverting funds from other development schemes or by borrowing from the central government or external agencies. In this situation, the Chief Minister has asked the Chief Secretary, Ramesh Kumar, to find a way out of this crisis. Imagine yourself as the Chief Secretary and discuss the different options available and how will you respond in this case?

Answer:

Introduction:

- As the Chief Secretary of a state facing a severe water crisis due to prolonged drought, my primary responsibility would be to assess the available options and develop a comprehensive plan to address the crisis effectively.

Body:

Here are the different options available and how I would respond to this situation:

Diverting funds from other development schemes:

- This option would provide immediate relief to the affected areas, but it would also compromise the quality and progress of other important projects, such as education, health, infrastructure, etc.
- This could also create resentment and dissatisfaction among the beneficiaries of those schemes, and affect the overall development.
- Moreover, this option would not address the root cause of the problem, which is the lack of sustainable water management and conservation practices.

I would not recommend this option, unless there is no other alternative.

Borrowing from the central government or external agencies:

- This option would also provide immediate relief to the affected areas, but it would also increase the debt burden of the state and affect its fiscal health.
- This could also limit the state's autonomy and flexibility in implementing its own policies and programs, as it would have to comply with the terms and conditions of the lenders.
- Moreover, this option would also not address the root cause of the problem, which is the lack of sustainable water management and conservation practices.
- I would also not recommend this option, unless there is no other alternative.

Implementing long-term solutions, such as building dams, canals, or pipelines:

- This option would address the root cause of the problem, which is the lack of sustainable water management and conservation practices.
- This would also ensure the availability and accessibility of water for various purposes, such as agriculture, industry, domestic use, etc.
- This would also improve the socio-economic conditions of the people and the state.
- However, this option would require a lot of time, money, and resources, which the state does not have at the moment.
- I would recommend this option, but only as a long-term goal, not as an immediate solution.

Providing temporary relief by supplying water through tankers and trains:

- This option would provide immediate relief to the affected areas, but it would also require a lot of coordination and logistics, as well as a huge amount of money.
- This option would also depend on the availability and cooperation of other states and agencies, which may not be reliable or consistent.
- Moreover, this option would also not address the root cause of the problem, which is the lack of sustainable water management and conservation practices.
- I would recommend this option, but only as a short-term measure.

5

Conclusion:

- I would suggest that the state should adopt a combination of short-term (providing temporary relief by supplying water through tankers and trains) and long-term measures (implementing sustainable water management practices, such as building dams, canals, or pipelines) to deal with the water crisis.
- To fund these measures, the state should seek the assistance of the central government and external agencies, but also try to mobilize its own resources and generate revenue through various means, such as taxes, fees, tariffs, etc. The state should also involve the participation of the people.
- The state should also create awareness about the importance of water conservation. By doing so, the state would be able to overcome the water crisis and ensure the well-being of the people.

MCQs

1. What did Claudia Goldin's research, who was recently awarded the 2023 Economics Nobel Prize, reveal about the historical trend of women's labor market participation?
a) It consistently increased over the centuries.
b) It consistently decreased over the centuries.
c) It followed a U-shaped curve, with periods of both increase and decrease.
d) It remained stagnant over the centuries.

2. Mount Kun, recently seen in the news, lies in which one of the following mountain ranges?
a) Karakoram   **b) Zanskar**
c) Pir Panjal   d) Lower Himalayan

3. With reference to Curative Petition, consider the following statements:
1. It is meant to ensure there is no miscarriage of justice and to prevent abuse of process.
2. It is filed after a review petition is dismissed.
3. It must be decided by judges in an open-court hearing.
How many of the above statements are correct?
a) Only one   **b) Only two**
c) All three   d) None

4. Consider the following statements regarding Satellite Spectrum:
1. It is a segment of radio spectrum used to implement satellite broadcasting and communication services.
2. Higher the frequency of a satellite signal, higher will be the strength of the signal over a distance.
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

5. Consider the following statements regarding International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA):
1. It is an initiative of the United Nations for the conservation of seven big cats.
2. Its membership is open only to countries which contain the natural habitat of big cats.
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. Exercise CHAKRAVAT, recently seen in the news, is a:
a) humanitarian assistance and disaster relief exercise
b) joint military exercise
c) multilateral maritime exercise
d) joint air force exercise

7. Consider the following statements regarding the reticulated python:
1. It is endemic only to Western Ghats region of India.
2. It has a unique disruptive coloration mechanism which makes it unrecognizable in environment.
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 Periodic Labour Force Survey, consider the following statements:
1. It is conducted by the National Sample Survey office.
2. It measures the unemployment rates for rural area only.
3. It estimates unemployment in both Usual Status and Current Weekly Status.
How many of the above statements are correct?
a) Only One   **b) Only Two**
c) All three   d) None

9. Consider the following statements regarding Hemochromatosis:
1. It is a condition where iron levels in the body slowly build up over years.
2. It can be treated by a standard technique called Phlebotomy.
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. Which one of the following best describes Phonotaxis recently seen in news?
a) It is a tool to detect online phishing activities.
b) It is a new technique to measure speed of a computer.
c) It is a tool to detect illegal crypto currency operation.
d) It is behaviour of an organism in response to a sound.

6