

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

CONTEXT: Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Global grouping and agreements involving India or affecting its interests

Why in News?

- Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, two neighboring countries of India, are thinking about joining the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), four years after India withdrew.



What is a Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership?

ABOUT:

- Significant economic cooperation between ASEAN countries and Free Trade Agreement (FTA) partners is represented by the RCEP.
- The world's largest free trading bloc is called RCEP. Its goals are to encourage member country collaboration, trade liberalization, and economic integration.
- In 2012, the RCEP negotiations started underway. A significant turning point in regional commerce was reached when it was formally inked in November 2020. It became operative on January 1, 2022.
- RCEP was concluded signed and brought into force in the face of major international uncertainty and is a significant boost to the global trading system

Member nations:

- 15 nations, including ASEAN nations (Bhutan, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam) and China, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, Australia, and so on.

Covered Regions:

- Trade in products and services, investment, intellectual property, economic and technical cooperation, competition, dispute resolution, e-commerce, small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs), and other concerns are all included in the RCEP negotiation.

Objectives of RCEP:

- Encourage investment and trade among participating countries.
- Remove or minimize trade barriers, including tariffs.
- Strengthen regional supply networks and economic collaboration.

Benefits of RCEP:

- Encourages stability in the region and economic progress.
- Simplifies trading rules and processes.
- Promotes international investment.
- Increases inventiveness and competitiveness.

TRADE VOLUME:

- The countries that make up the RCE account for more over 30% of the world's GDP. Approximately one-third of the world's population is included in the trading bloc. It might have a big effect on international trade.
- The AsiaPacific region's importance in international trade is strengthened by the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).
Future trade agreements and regional cooperation may be modelled after this accord.

ECONOMIC IMPACTS:

- RCEP offers to boost growth and support recovery from the Covid 19 pandemic
- The gains are significant with real income gains in the region between 0.21 % (reduction of tariffs and NTMs) and 2.5 % (accounting for potential productivity improvements)

INDIA AND RCEP

- One of the original members of the RCEP was India. India made the decision to leave the RCEP talks in 2019.
- Apprehensions about the RCEP's potential effects on India's internal economy led to the country's decision to withdraw.
- The main worries were about Chinese goods entering the Indian market and hurting domestic industries.
- Contributing factors included misgivings from the small business and farm sectors as well as issues with service mobility.

Conclusion

- RCEP was concluded signed and brought into force in the face of major international uncertainty and is a significant boost to the global trading system

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE**Recent Context: Judgment of the Supreme court on some key questions**

Same-sex marriages were recently denied legal status by a five-judge Supreme Court Constitution Bench led by Chief Justice of India (CJI) D Y Chandrachud.

Although two judges—the Chief Justice of India and Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul—acknowledged that homosexual couples can establish "civil unions," they were not the majority. Three judges, majority ruling that the matter was solely legislative in nature.

1. The fundamental right to marry**➤ Petitioners**

- The petitioners had contended that the court ought to address the denial of the fundamental constitutional right to marry the person of one's choosing.
- The state would be required to defend this right if the court declared it to be a fundamental one, as it did in the 2017 Aadhaar judgment regarding privacy.

➤ SC's Minority View:

- The petitioners' claim that marriage is an innate right that the state merely regulates was rejected by CJI Chandrachud.

- According to the minority opinion, if marriage had not been governed by law, it might not have had the social and legal significance that it does today.
- Therefore, despite the fact that marriage is not fundamental in and of itself, it may have gained relevance due to the advantages that come with regulation.
- **Majority opinion view**
- The majority opinion distinguished between what is "fundamentally important to an individual" and an enforceable fundamental right, concurring with the CJI on this point.
- The fact that marriage is based on personal preference and bestows social status makes it fundamentally important.
- Even when a preference is widely supported or accepted, it does not automatically follow that it should be regarded as a fundamental right because of its importance to the individual.

2. Meaning of the Special Marriage Act

Appellant

- The petitioners had requested that the SC read "spouses" rather than "man and woman" when interpreting the term marriage.
- Alternately, the petitioners had requested that the SMA's gender-restrictive clauses be removed.
- **SC's Minority View:**
- The court could not permit that, according to CJI Chandrachud, since it would "in effect be entering the realm of the legislature."
- It would "take India back to the pre-Independence era where two persons of different religions and caste were unable to celebrate love in the form of marriage," if the court were to instead allow the second alternative to read down the SMA to the degree that it is gender limiting.
- **Majority Opinion:**
- Despite reaching the same decision, Justice Bhat said that as the goal of the law is not to bring same-sex couples into the marriage sphere, the court could not interpret the SMA to include them.
- The SMA's goals and provisions make it abundantly evident that Parliament intended for only one type of couple—heterosexual couples who practice different religions—to be granted the privilege of a civil marriage.

3. The right of queer couples to adopt a child

- **Petitioner**
- The petitioners claimed that the Central Adoption Resource Authority's (CARA) policies, which forbid unmarried couples from adopting children together, discriminate against LGBT couples who are legally unable to wed.
- **SC minority view:**
- According to the CJI, some CARA regulations should be invalidated because the purpose of the law is not to prevent single couples from adopting children.
- The child's best interests are actually guaranteed by all the other requirements. The CJI stated that "the Union of India has not demonstrated that prohibiting single individuals from adopting a child is in the best interests of the child, despite the fact that the same people are eligible to adopt individually."
- According to the minority opinion, the prohibition on same-sex adoptions has the unintended consequence of "reinforcing the disadvantage already faced by the queer community." Law cannot judge what constitutes good and terrible parenting based on an individual's sexual orientation.
- **Majority Opinion:**
- The discriminatory implications of prohibiting LGBT couples from adopting children were generally accepted by the majority view.
- Although couples who are married are neither a "morally superior choice" or better parents in and of themselves, Justice Bhat described this as having the "most visible" discriminatory effect on homosexual couples.
- Because all other laws derive protections and benefits from the institution of marriage, Parliament has chosen to include only "married" couples for joint adoption (i.e., where two parents are legally liable). This decision was made legislatively.

- The proposed interpretation of "marital" status could have negative effects that could only be addressed by the legislative and executive branches

Conclusion:

- Even if the court created some space and increased the minority's quality of being easy to move, it did not go far enough.
- Many of its sympathetic remarks on rights and discrimination might also be seen as symbolic gestures because of its unwavering opposition to same-sex marriage.
- Ultimately, then, the decision highlights the bigger struggles that still need to be waged: the need for protections both inside and outside the family, the acceptance of civil unions as a viable option for the community, and most importantly, the understanding that, similar to other struggles for equal rights, this one will also require time and effort to win.

PRELIM FACTS

1. Muthuvan tribe:

- These people dwell in Kerala's and Tamil Nadu's border hill forests.
- They speak somewhat distinct dialects and are known as Malayalam Muthuvan and Pandi Muthuvan, respectively.
- They are animists, spirit worshippers, and forest gods worshippers.
- They think that their ancestors' souls were the first to go to the highland forests.
- With their traditional knowledge, they are noted for coexisting with animals.
- The 'Kani form' is a unique form of governance that these indigenous people follow.
- Each village is led by a 'Kani', who is in charge of the village's administration.
- They are experts in ancient treatments that are incredibly effective, and the medicine is kept private and passed down through generations.
- **Occupation:** Agriculture is the main occupation of these Muthuvan tribes, producing quite a number of products like ragi, cardamom and lemon grass.

What is Project Tahr?

- The Tamil Nadu government intends to conduct surveys and radio telemetry investigations to have a better understanding of the Nilgiri Tahr population as part of this project.
- Address immediate risks by reintroducing Tahrs to their historical environment.
- Raising public awareness about the species
- Timeline: The project will last for five years, from 2022 to 2027.

2. India Ransomware Report 2022

Context: According to the Computer Emergency Response Team of India (CERT-In), ransomware assaults are motivated not only by money but also by geopolitical tensions.

What is Ransomware?

Ransomware is a type of malicious software or malware that is designed to block access to a computer system, network, or data until a ransom is paid. **E.g., WannaCry (2017), Petya/NotPetya (2017); GandCrab (2018)**

Major findings of the Report:

Findings	Descriptions
Ransomware incidents	The number of reported ransomware attacks in India in 2022 was 53% higher than in 2021
Target	Ransomware attacks targeted critical infrastructure organizations to disrupt services and extract ransom payments
Sector most impacted	The IT/ITeS sector in India was the most impacted by ransomware attacks, followed by the finance and manufacturing sectors
Most prevalent variants	Lockbit was the most prevalent ransomware variant in India, followed by Makop and DJVU/Stop, Makop and Phobos; Vice Society and BlueSky were new variants
RaaS ecosystem	The RaaS (Ransomware-as-a-service) ecosystem is becoming more prominent, allowing even non-technical individuals to launch ransomware attacks
Restoration time	On average, the restoration time is about 10 days for infections in reasonably large infrastructure networks
Recommendations	Organizations should regularly update their contingency plan; have higher cyber awareness among

their employees

- **Global:**
 - **Budapest Convention on Cybercrime** (2004, the first international treaty that seeks to address Internet and cybercrime by harmonizing national laws)—India is not a signatory
- **India**
 - **Policies:** National Cyber Security Policy 2013; National Cyber Security Strategy 2020
 - **Schemes:** Cyber Surakshit Bharat Yojana (2018, MeITY+ NeGD+ Industry)—to create awareness programs on cyber security; Cyber Swachhta Kendra (free Botnet Cleaning and Malware Analysis tools)
 - **Institutions:** Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre(I4C) (est. in 2018; under **Home Ministry**)—to combat cybercrime in India in a comprehensive and coordinated manner; National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC); National Cyber Coordination Centre (NCCC) (under CERT-In)

Conclude:

Continuous efforts are required in the sphere of cyberspace in India to secure (National Cyberspace), strengthen (Structures, People, Processes, and Capabilities), and synergize (Resources including Cooperation and Collaboration).

3.Palliative care

Context: Many Indians are either one hospital bill away from being impoverished or are unable to afford healthcare. Every year, about 5.5 crore people fall below the poverty line as a result of out-of-pocket healthcare costs.

About

- Only the cost of drugs causes 3.8 crore people out of 5.5 crore to become impoverished.
- Furthermore, India is becoming a hotspot for noncommunicable diseases, and many patients with these diseases, such as cancer and cardiac disease, eventually reach an incurable stage.

Palliative care:

- Palliative care is a method of improving the quality of life of patients and their families who are dealing with life-threatening illnesses such as cancer, end-stage kidney disease, and debilitating cognitive diseases.
- It prevents and alleviates suffering by detecting, assessing, and treating pain and other physical and mental problems as early as possible.
- Addressing suffering entails attending to factors other than physical sensations. Palliative care employs a multidisciplinary approach to assist patients and caregivers.
- This involves meeting practical needs and giving bereavement support. It provides a support system to assist patients in remaining as active as possible until death.

The Importance of Palliative Care:

- Palliative care differs from other medical specialties in that it focuses on controlling uncontrollable symptoms of incurable illnesses.
- It considers not only the physical aspects of health, but also the social and economic circumstances of the patient and his or her family.
- Early palliative care beginning in patients with advanced disease has been demonstrated to lower health cost by up to 25%.
 - Early palliative care not only improves patients' quality of life, but it also decreases avoidable hospitalizations and health-care utilization.
 - Home-based palliative care lowers the cost of seeking care even more because home-bound patients no longer have to travel to seek care.

4. Sharda Temple

Context:

For the first time since 1947, Navratri pujas were held in Kashmir's Sharda Temple this year.

Sharda Peeth Temple:

- It is located in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK) and falls along the Line of Control (LoC) in the Kupwara District of Jammu & Kashmir.
- It is one of the 18 Maha Shakti Peethas and is thought to be the home of the Hindu Goddess Saraswati.
- Kashmira-Puravasani was the name given to Goddess Sharada.

- The temple was previously considered one of the most important centers of higher learning for Vedic texts, scriptures, and commentaries.
- It was thought to be on par with the ancient learning centers of Nalanda and Takshila.
- This temple is also associated with Sharda culture and Sharda-writing, which is regarded as the earliest script of Kashmir.

5. Angel tax for start-ups

Context: The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) recently asked its officials not to investigate angel tax provisions for start-ups recognized by the Department of Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT).

About:

- The tax department has directed its field officials not to conduct verification for recognized start-ups in cases involving Section 56 (2) (viib) of the Income-tax Act, which was revised in the Finance Act of 2023 to include non-resident investors in the angel tax levy.
- In its directive, the CBDT stated that a procedure has been laid out for the assessment of such startup companies, which have been recognized by the DPIIT, and no verification is required for such start-ups for notices related to the amended provisions for angel tax.

Angel tax:

- Angel tax is a 30.6 percent income tax applied when an unlisted firm sells shares to an investor at a price greater than their fair market value.
- It was initially implemented in 2012 to discourage the development and use of unexplained money by the subscribing of shares of a closely held company at a price greater than the firm's fair market value.
- Previously, it was solely levied on investments made by a resident investor. However, the Finance Act 2023 proposes extending the angel tax to non-resident investors as well.

Changes made for angel tax in Budget 2023-24:

- The provision previously stated that when an unlisted company, such as a start-up, receives equity investment from a resident for the issuance of shares that exceeds the face value of such shares, the amount will be counted as income for the start-up and subject to income tax under the heading 'Income from Other Sources' for the relevant fiscal year.
- The government suggested in the amendment to include overseas investors in the ambit, which means that when a start-up raises capital from a foreign investor, it will now be counted as income and taxable.
- The angel tax charge did not apply to DPIIT-recognized startups.
- The Finance Ministry exempted investors from 21 countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, from the assessment of angel tax for non-resident investment in unlisted Indian start-ups in May 2023.
- The list, however, excluded investment from nations such as Singapore, the Netherlands, and Mauritius, which have traditionally been important locations for start-ups to raise capital.

ANSWER WRITING

Discuss how important the Indian Ocean Region is to global trade, security, and prosperity. Emphasize the primary obstacles linked to the region as well.

Introduction

The Indian Ocean is a vast theatre that stretches from the Mozambique Channel in the west to the western coast of Australia and the Strait of Malacca in the east. It extends from the Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf in the north to the southern Indian Ocean. The region's Geoeconomic significance can be explained by its size and diversity.

The importance of the Indian Ocean Region to international trade, security, and economic prosperity:

➤ Economics and Trade

- The region is home to 2.6 billion people, or one-third of the world's population. It also handles 80% of the world's oil traffic, 50% of containerized freight, and 33% of bulk cargo.
- The flow of liquid energy around the world depends on the Indian Ocean region as well. Ten states around the Indian Ocean's coast hold about 65 percent of the world's oil reserves.
- The region generates \$1 trillion in products and services in total, with intra-IORA (Indian Ocean Rim Association) trade accounting for about \$800 billion of that total.
- The Indian Ocean's marine capture fisheries, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), provided almost 15% of the global fish harvest in 2020.

- Hydrothermal vents with mineral deposits of copper, cobalt, nickel, zinc, gold, and rare earth elements can be found in the Indian Ocean.
- India leads the region in terms of both import and export volume, and is followed by Singapore, Malaysia, Australia, and Thailand. The GDPs of several nations, notably Singapore, Indonesia, and India, have increased significantly during the previous 20 years.

➤ **SECURITY**

- The IOR has great strategic importance due to its proximity to unstable areas of the East African and West Asian continents.
- It is also linked to the well-known SLOCs and the unstable waters off the coast of Somalia, where maritime terrorism and international piracy are still major problems.
- As a result, the region is essential to the IOR's stability and security.

➤ **Challenges associated with IOR**

- Due to its importance as a driver of global economic expansion, the Indian Ocean serves as a significant hub for drug smuggling, piracy, and illegal, unreported (IUU) fishing.
- **IUU Fishing:** According to FAO estimates, 30 percent of the stocks in the Indian Ocean are not being fished at levels that are ecologically viable.
- **Piracy:** The global economy bears heavy losses as a result of piracy. An estimated \$7 billion to \$12 billion in damages occur annually as a result of piracy.
- **Drug Trafficking and Small guns trafficking:** Two of the most common marine crimes in the area are drug trafficking and small guns trafficking. The "Golden Crescent" and the "Golden Triangle" are the two primary places where drug production affects the Indian Ocean, the eastern coast of Africa has become a transshipment hub for drugs and small guns in the western Indian Ocean, with an annual worth of about \$190 million.
- **World's hazard belt:** The Indian Ocean region is sometimes referred to as the "world's hazard belt" due to its geographic susceptibility to disasters. Additionally, the area has the world's least advanced disaster response coordinating systems.
- **Choke points:** The Straits of Malacca, Hormuz, and Bab-el-Mandeb are the three principal choke points in the Indian Ocean. Due to the critical nature of these choke sites for global trade, even a slight disruption could have a significant effect on global transportation.

Conclusion:

The Indian Ocean region is becoming increasingly significant for international trade, geopolitical rivalry, and marine security. Regional frameworks including the Indian Ocean Commission, Indian Ocean Rim Association, and Indian Ocean Naval Symposium are primarily responsible for facilitating cooperation throughout the Indian Ocean. All parties involved will be able to coordinate and collaborate more effectively if the Indian Ocean is given a unified maritime identity and strategy.

DAILY CA MCQ

1. With reference to the Navratna companies, consider the following statements:
 - 1.As of 2023, India has 16 Navratna Companies.
 - 2.To attain Navratna status, a firm must initially hold the Miniratna designation .
 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
2. With reference to Methane gas, consider the following statements:
 - 1.Methane is a highly potent greenhouse gas responsible for about 30% of global warming since the Industrial Revolution.
 - 2.Methane has more than 80 times the warming power of carbon dioxide over the first 20 years of its lifetime in the atmosphere.
 - 3.Methane is the primary reason for ground-level ozone pollution .
 Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
 (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 only (c) 3 only (d) **1, 2 and 3 only**
3. Consider the following statements, with reference to Graphene-Aurora Program:
 1. The program is implemented by Ministry of Mines.
 2. The program aims to foster innovation of graphene technologies

3. India Innovation Centre Graphene (IICG) is set under the program to boost Research and Development in graphene.
How many of the statements given above are correct?
(a) **Only one** (b) Only two
(c) All three (d) None
4. The terms 'jus in bello, jus ad bellum', often seen in news are in context of:
(a) **Warfare**
(b) Artificial Intelligence
(c) Medical Science
(d) None of the Above
5. With reference to 'Psyche Mission', consider the following statements:
1. It aims to understand iron core of earth
2. It is launched by Roscosmos and ISRO.
Which of the statements given above is/are **not** correct?
(a) **1 only** (b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2 (d) Neither
6. Which of the following states are common to the Eastern & Western Dedicated Freight Corridor?
1. Rajasthan
2. Gujarat
3. Haryana
4. Uttar Pradesh
Select the correct answer using the code given below:
(a) 1 and 4 only (b) **3 and 4 only**
(c) 1, 2 and 3 only (d) None of the above
7. Consider the following countries:
1. Laos
2. Brunei
3. Thailand
4. Vietnam
5. Papua New Guinea
6. Philippines
How many of the above countries are members of ASEAN grouping?
(a) Only three (b) Only four
(c) **Only five** (d) All six
8. Which of the following statements is/are correct about the deposits of 'methane hydrate'?
1. Global warming might trigger the release of methane gas from these deposits.
2. Large deposits of 'methane hydrate' are found in Arctic Tundra and under the sea floor.
3. Methane in atmosphere oxidizes to carbon dioxide after a decade or two.
Select the correct answer using the code given below.
(a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only (d) **1, 2 and 3**
9. Who are the Sangha sisters?
(a) **Five sisters from Nawanpind Sardaran who have dedicated themselves to preserving their ancestral homes and promoting sustainable tourism in their village.**
(b) Five sisters from Amritsar who are known for their philanthropic work.
(c) Five sisters from Patiala who are successful entrepreneurs.
(d) Five sisters from Ludhiana who are famous for their singing and dancing skills.
10. When was the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) formed?
(a) **1997** (b) 1985
(c) 2000 (d) 2010