

**INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS****1. India-Oman Relations**

Context: Oman's head of state, Sultan Haitham bin Tarik is on his first visit to India since becoming Oman's head of State in 2020.

**About**

- India and Oman have announced the third installment of \$300 million for the Oman-India Joint Investment Fund.
- The fund is a 50-50 joint venture between the State Bank of India and the Oman Investment Authority, aimed at directing funds into the rapidly growing sectors of the Indian economy.
- Both countries have endorsed the "India-Oman Joint Vision: A Partnership for the Future," outlining the pathway for bilateral engagement in the coming decades. This vision is based on Oman Vision 2040 and India's development vision until 2047.
- An agreement has been signed between the Financial Intelligence Unit of India and the National Centre for Financial Information of Oman to prevent money laundering.
- India and Oman are progressing towards signing a comprehensive economic partnership agreement (CEPA) during Oman's head of state visit to India.

**India-Oman Relation**

- Economic Cooperation: India is among Oman's top trading partners. Bilateral trade in 2022-23 stood at around \$12.3 billion between both the nations.
  - India is the 2nd largest market for Oman's crude oil exports for the year 2022 after China.
  - India is also the 4th largest market for Oman's non-oil exports for the year 2022 and 2nd largest source of its import after UAE.
- Defense Cooperation: India and Oman conduct regular biennial bilateral exercises between all three services.
  - Army exercise: Al Najah
  - Air Force exercise: Eastern Bridge
  - Naval Exercise: Naseem Al Bahr
- Indian Diaspora: There are about 7,00,000 Indians in Oman, of which about 5,67,000 are workers and professionals.
  - There are Indian families living in Oman for more than 150-200 years.
- Maritime Cooperation: Oman is at the gateway of Strait of Hormuz through which India imports one-fifth of its oil imports.
  - India signed a pact with the country in 2018 to access the Duqm port of Oman.

**Agreements between India and Oman**

- In 2022, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) to link the payment systems between the two countries.
- Another MOU between Oman News Agency and Asia News International was exchanged. The MOU facilitates the exchange of news and information between both countries.

**Way Ahead**

- Oman is a key pillar to India's West Asia Policy. The strategic location of Oman in the Gulf region and India's emergence as a global player further enhance the significance of their relationship.
- By building on their historical ties and adapting to the changing global landscape, India and Oman can continue to contribute to regional stability and prosperity.

**ECONOMY****1. Tourism in India**

Context- Foreign tourists visits up, but still below pre-pandemic levels

**Contribution of Tourism to Economy**

- India ranks 6th according to World Travel and Tourism Council in terms of Travel & Tourism total contribution to GDP in 2021.
- Travel & Tourism contributed 5.8% to GDP and the sector created 32.1 million jobs, which is equivalent to 6.9% of total jobs in 2021.

- Also, India is currently ranked 54th in World Economic Forum's Travel & Tourism Development Index (2021).
- According to Global Data, international arrivals to the country are forecast to reach 7.2 million in 2022 and 8.6 million in 2023.

### **Significance of Tourism**

#### Economic Benefits:

- Tourism generates revenue through the sale of goods and services to tourists, such as accommodation, transport, and heritage attractions.
- This can stimulate economic growth and create employment opportunities in the tourism sector and related industries.

#### Cultural Exchange:

- Tourism provides an opportunity for cultural exchange, as visitors from different parts of the world can learn about and experience India's diverse cultures and traditions

#### Preservation of Cultural Heritage:

- Tourism can also help to preserve cultural heritage sites, such as temples, forts, and palaces, by providing the funds needed for their maintenance and restoration.

#### Environmental Benefits:

- In some cases, tourism can also have environmental benefits, such as through the development of eco-tourism initiatives that promote the conservation of natural areas.

#### Social Benefits:

- Tourism can also bring social benefits to local communities, such as through the creation of employment opportunities and the provision of social infrastructure, such as schools and healthcare facilities.

### **Challenges Related to the Tourism Sector in India**

#### Safety and Security Issues:

- India has faced challenges with regard to the safety and security of tourists, particularly in certain areas of the country.
- This can deter tourists from visiting certain destinations and can also impact the overall perception of India as a tourist destination.

#### Lack of Human Resource:

- Since tourism is a labour-intensive industry, practical training is of utmost importance. However, as the tourism sector in India has grown, the availability of trained professionals has not kept pace.
- Due to a lack of multilingual trained guides and an inadequate understanding of the benefits and responsibilities associated with tourism among locals, the sector's growth is restricted.

#### Unsustainable Tourism:

- In India, especially in the Himalayan regions, where resources are already scarce, unsustainable tourism often puts pressure on natural resources through overconsumption of natural resources.
- Additionally, unsustainable tourism affects local land use, causing soil erosion, increased pollution, and the destruction of endangered species' habitats.

#### Lack of Connectivity:

- There are many places in India that remain unexplored because of inadequate surveys, infrastructure, and connectivity, resulting in lukewarm attitudes towards domestic travel.
- Example, despite the Northeast's breathtaking natural beauty, it is not often included in domestic or international tourists' travel plans because of a lack of connectivity with the rest of the country as well as a lack of infrastructure and necessary facilities.

#### Pollution and Climate Change:

- Our major tourist sites (heritage sites) are also affected by pollution. India still struggles to protect its wonder, Taj Mahal, from pollution. There have been floods in India in recent years, including in places where heritage sites are located, as a result of climate change.
- Example: Puri in Odisha and Hampi in Karnataka

#### Recent Initiatives Related to Tourism in India

- Swadesh Darshan Scheme
- Draft National Tourism Policy 2022
- Dekho Apna Desh Initiative
- Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat

### Way Forward

Tourism Infrastructure Development:

- Investing in the development of infrastructure, such as roads, airports, and hotels, would make it easier for tourists to access and travel around different parts of the country.
- This could be done through public-private partnerships or through government investment.

Focusing on Safety and Security:

- Improving safety and security for tourists is essential for the growth of the tourism sector in India.
- This could be achieved through measures such as the deployment of tourism police, the implementation of security protocols at tourist attractions, and the promotion of safe travel practices.

Sustainable Tourism:

- To address the issue of overcrowding and the impact on the environment, the tourism industry could focus on promoting sustainable tourism practices.
- This could include initiatives such as promoting off-season travel, supporting local businesses, and preserving natural and cultural heritage sites.

Visa Simplification:

- Streamlining the visa application process and making it more accessible for foreign tourists would encourage more people to visit India.
- This could be done through the implementation of online visa systems and the expansion of visa on-arrival programs.

## **2. Logistics Ease Across Different State (LEADS) 2023**

- Context: The Ministry of Commerce & Industry has released the 5th edition of “Logistics Ease Across Different States (LEADS) 2023” report.

### Logistics Ease Across Different States (LEADS) Index

- Logistics is the management of the flow of resources such as cargo, documents, information and funds through a range of activities and services between points of origin and destination.
- LEADS were conceived on the lines of the Logistics Performance Index of World Bank in 2018.
- The index is a composite indicator to assess international trade logistics across states and Union territories. It is based on a stakeholders’ survey conducted by Deloitte for the ministry of commerce and industry.

### Performance highlights from LEADS 2023

- **Coastal Group**
  - Achievers: Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu
  - Fast Movers: Kerala, Maharashtra
  - Aspirers: Goa, Odisha, West Bengal
- **Landlocked Group**
  - Achievers: Haryana, Punjab, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh
  - Fast Movers: Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand
  - Aspirers: Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand
- **North-East Group**
  - Achievers: Assam, Sikkim, Tripura
  - Fast Movers: Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland
  - Aspirers: Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram
- **Union Territories**
  - Achievers: Chandigarh, Delhi
  - Fast Movers: Andaman & Nicobar, Lakshadweep, Puducherry
  - Aspirers: Daman & Diu/ Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh

### Issues with Logistics sector in India

- **Lack of Technology Adoption:** Slow adoption of advanced technologies, such as Internet of Things (IoT), RFID (Radio-Frequency Identification), and automation. The lack of technological integration can result in manual processes, errors, and increased costs.
- **Infrastructure Bottlenecks:** Inadequate infrastructure, especially in terms of roads, ports, and last-mile connectivity, along with Poor road conditions and congestion can lead to delays and increased costs.

- Higher logistics costs: India's expenditure on logistics costs amounts to approximately 13-14% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which is considerably higher than the global average of around 8%.
- Inefficient Warehousing: Inefficiencies in warehousing, such as outdated infrastructure, lack of automation, and inadequate storage capacity, contribute to higher logistics costs.
- Limited Modal Choice: Overreliance on road transport and limited use of alternative modes such as rail and coastal shipping contribute to higher logistics costs.

#### **Steps taken by Government of India**

- Grant of Infrastructure status to Logistics sector: The government has granted infrastructure status to the logistics sector, enabling the industry to access cheaper finances.
- PM Gati Shakti's initiative: It is a National Master Plan for multimodal connectivity, to reduce logistics costs and boost the economy by 2024-25.
- National Logistics Policy (NLP): In 2022, NLP was launched to ensure quick last-mile delivery, end transport-related challenges, save time and money for the manufacturing sector and ensure desired speed in the logistics sector. The policy aims to reduce logistics costs from the current 14-18% of GDP to 8% by 2030, aligning with global best practices.
- Dedicated Freight Corridors (DFCs): The government is working on the construction of dedicated freight corridors such as the Eastern Dedicated Freight Corridor and the Western Dedicated Freight Corridor.
- Bharatmala Pariyojana: This is a flagship road and highways development program aimed at improving connectivity across the country. The project includes the development of economic corridors, inter-corridors, and feeder routes.
- Sagarmala Project: This initiative focuses on promoting port-led development to reduce logistics costs for domestic and export-import trade. It includes the development of ports, coastal shipping, and inland waterways.

#### **Way Ahead**

- Digitalisation: It enables the digitisation of documents and transactions, reducing paperwork and improving the overall efficiency of logistics operations.
- Data analytics: It can provide valuable insights into supply chain performance, allowing for better decision-making and optimisation of routes, inventory management, and resource allocation.
- Technology upgradation: Technologies such as barcode scanning, RFID, and real-time tracking can significantly enhance tracking and tracing capabilities, improving operational efficiency and reducing costs.
- Warehouse efficiency: Improved inventory accuracy, reduced warehouse stock, and optimized on-shelf stock availability, can enhance overall warehouse efficiency.

### **3. Economic pact between India and EFTA States**

- Context: Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) Negotiations between India and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) on a trade deal have run into a logjam because of Switzerland's concerns.

#### **About**

- Talks on the trade deal began in 2008 and negotiations resumed again in 2016.
- The latest round of negotiations covered trade in goods and services, rules of origin, Intellectual property rights (IPR), trade and sustainable development, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, technical barriers to trade, trade remedies, and customs and trade facilitations.

#### **About European Free Trade Association (EFTA)**

- The European Free Trade Association (EFTA) is the intergovernmental organisation of Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.
- It was set up in 1960 by its then seven Member States for the promotion of free trade and economic integration between its members.
- Trade with India: In 2022, the combined EFTA-India merchandise trade surpassed USD 6.1 billion.
  - The primary imports to the EFTA States consisted of organic chemicals (27.5%), while machinery (17.5%) and pharmaceutical products (11.4%), constituted the main exports to India.

### Significance of TEPA Between EFTA and India

- **Market Access:** The EFTA states has imports and exports of goods and services close to \$1.3 trillion in 2021, making them the 10th largest merchandise traders and eighth largest services traders worldwide.
  - It would provide Indian businesses with improved access to the markets of EFTA member countries.
- **Diversification of Trade Partners:** Reducing dependency on a few key trading partners can help mitigate risks associated with economic fluctuations in specific regions.
- **Tariff Reductions:** The trade agreements typically involves the reduction or elimination of tariffs on goods traded between the participating countries.
  - This can make Indian goods more competitive in EFTA markets, potentially boosting exports.
- **Technology and Innovation Exchange:** EFTA companies are world leaders in pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, machinery manufacturing, R&D-driven technology products, geothermal-related technologies, marine technology, energy-related services, financial services, banking and insurance.
  - Collaboration in research, technology transfer, and innovation can be enhanced through a trade agreement.
- **Potential for Increased Foreign Direct Investment (FDI):** It can attract foreign direct investment by creating a more favorable and predictable business environment.
- **Mutually Beneficial Trade:** EFTA has a track record of negotiating mutually beneficial trade agreements, which to date cover an extensive network of 29 free trade agreements (FTAs) with 40 partner countries.

### Concerns

- **Divergent Regulatory Standards:** Harmonizing standards related to product quality, safety, and environmental regulations is crucial for smooth trade, and differences may lead to additional compliance costs for businesses.
- **Intellectual Property Rights (IPR):** Both parties need to agree on the standards and enforcement mechanisms for patents, copyrights, trademarks, and other intellectual property issues.
- **Services and Investment Barriers:** Concerns may arise if there are obstacles to the free flow of services or restrictions on foreign investment in certain sectors.
- **Labor and Environmental Standards:** Ensuring that the trade deal includes provisions for maintaining or improving labor rights and environmental protections is essential.

### Way Ahead

- The potential benefits of a TEPA between India and EFTA states are significant.
- The agreement will foster a strong partnership and increase trade between trusted democratic partners that share values such as promoting sustainable development and gender equality.
- EFTA and India are committed to make these trade talks priority and aims for a swift process towards a balanced agreement with strong political involvement and guidance.

## **PRELIMS FACTS**

### **1. Secure Email Network**

Context: In the wake of cyber attacks, the Union government sets up a secure email network for staff of critical Ministries and departments.

#### About

- The e-mail system that works on **Zero Trust Authentication (ZTA)** has been designed by the **National Informatics Centre (NIC)**.
- Through this, the government has activated **two-factor authentication**, other than passwords, facial recognition or biometrics.
  - The log-in and log-out times are recorded and monitored.

#### Zero Trust Authentication

- It is a new security model that effectively adapts to the complexity of the modern environment, embraces the hybrid workplace, and protects people, devices, apps, and data wherever they're located.

#### Significances

- **Enhance Productivity:** Empower users to work more securely anywhere and anytime, on any device.



- **Cloud migration:** Enable digital transformation with intelligent security for today's complex environment.
- **Network security solution:** It protects your network infrastructure against advanced threats and malware.
- **Data security solution:** It protects enterprise data across multiple environments, meets privacy regulations and simplifies operational complexity.

## 2. Suspension of MPs from Parliament

Context: 78 MPs were suspended from both Houses of Parliament

### Suspension of MPs

- It is the role and duty of the Presiding Officer — Speaker of Lok Sabha and Chairman of Rajya Sabha — to maintain order so that the House can function smoothly.
- In order to ensure that proceedings are conducted in the proper manner, the Speaker/ Chairman is empowered to force a Member to withdraw from the House.
- Rules under which the Presiding Officer/Chairman acts
- For Lok Sabha
  - Rule Number 373 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business
    - It empowers presiding officers to direct an MP to withdraw from the House for any disorderly conduct.
    - This rule says that any Member so ordered to withdraw shall remain absent during the remainder of the day's sitting.
  - Rules 374 and 374A - To deal with more recalcitrant (uncooperative)
    - Rule 374 empowers the Presiding officers to name the legislators if the MP continues disrupting the House even after repeated warnings.
    - After that, the House can move a motion to suspend the MP for a period not exceeding the remainder of the session
    - Rule 374A was incorporated in the Rule Book in December 2001. The intention was to circumvent the necessity of adopting a motion for suspension.
      - Under this rule, the Speaker can name an MP, who shall then automatically stand suspended for five days or the remaining part of the session, whichever is less.
      - Provided that the House may, at any time, on a motion being made, resolve that such suspension be terminated.
- For Rajya Sabha
  - Rule 255 of the Rule Book of Rajya Sabha
    - It empowers the Chairman of Rajya Sabha to direct any Member to withdraw immediately from the House for any disorderly conduct.
  - Rule 256
    - This rule empowers the Chairman to name the members who persistently disregards the authority of the Chair or abuses the rules of the Council.
    - After that, the House may adopt a motion suspending the Member for a period not exceeding the remainder of the session.
  - It should be noted that, unlike Lok Sabha (under rule 374A), Rajya Sabha cannot suspend its members without passing a motion for the same.

### Can courts intervene in a matter of suspension of MPs?

- Article 122 of the Indian Constitution says parliamentary proceedings cannot be questioned before a court.
- In some cases, however, courts have intervened in the procedural functioning of legislatures.
- For example, the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly passed a resolution in its 2021 Monsoon Session suspending 12 BJP MLAs for a year.
- The matter came before the Supreme Court, which held that the resolution was ineffective in law beyond the remainder of the Monsoon Session.

## 3. Telecommunications Bill, 2023

Context: The Telecommunications Bill, 2023 was introduced in the Lok Sabha by Union minister for Communications, Electronics & Information Technology Ashwini Vaishnaw.

**About**

- The Telecommunications Bill, 2023 amends and consolidates the laws relating to “development, expansion and operation of telecommunication services and telecommunication networks; assignment of spectrum; and for matters connected therewith”
- The new Bill seeks to replace the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885, the Indian Wireless Telegraphy Act, 1933, and the Telegraph Wires (Unlawful Possession) Act, 1950.
- The Bill allows the government to take over telecom services and intercept messages in the interests of national security and in case of emergencies.
- Under the new Bill, the government can also ask telecommunication services to transmit specific messages.

**ANSWER WRITING****Q. Highlighting the achievements of the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, discuss the reasons behind its success.**

The Montreal Protocol, is an international treaty, adopted in Montreal in 1987, that aimed to regulate the production and use of substances that contribute to ozone depletion.

**Achievements of the Montreal Protocol**

- Truly global participation: In 2009, the Montreal Protocol became the first UN treaty to achieve universal ratification, demonstrating the world’s commitment to ozone protection, and global environmental protection.
- Healing the ozone layer: Global observations have verified that atmospheric levels of key Ozone Depleting Substances (ODS) are going down and it is believed that with implementation of the Protocol’s provisions, the ozone layer should return to pre-1980 levels by the middle of this century.
- Supporting developing countries: With the assistance of the Multilateral Fund for the Implementation of the Montreal Protocol, developing countries had, by mid 2010, permanently phased out over 270,000 tonnes of Ozone Depleting Substances (ODS) that had been used to produce various products and have eliminated virtually all of their production of CFCs and halons.
- High rates of compliance: Taking into account all the Parties and all their phase-out commitments, the Parties to the Montreal Protocol have achieved a compliance rate of over 98%. Further, in the process of phasing-out, many countries, both developed and developing, have met their phase-out targets well ahead of the schedule.
- 2010 phase-out milestone: 1 January 2010 was the date by which all the Parties phased-out the consumption and production of chlorofluorocarbons, halons, carbon tetrachloride and other fully hydrogenated Ozone Depleting Substances (ODS).

Thus, the Montreal Protocol has indeed been successful in protecting the ozone layer. The reasons behind the success of the Montreal Protocol can be attributed to following factors which are generally absent in other environmental treaties:

- Cooperative approach: Much negotiation was held in small, informal groups leading to a genuine exchange of views amongst credible people.
- Principles based: The “precautionary principle” and the concept of common, but differentiated, responsibility (CBDR) took root in the Montreal Protocol when developing countries were given longer time to phase-out ODS.
- Flexibility to accommodate newer information: The protocol could be amended to include stricter controls i.e. more Ozone Depleting Substances (ODS) were added to the control list and ensure total phase out, rather than partial phase-out.
- Trade Provisions and restrictions: These limited the supplies of CFCs and other Ozone Depleting Substances (ODS) to non-signatories which forced them to ratify the Protocol.
- Clear List of Targeted Sectors: Clear articulation of chemicals and sectors allowed governments to prioritise the main sectors early.
- Institutional Support: An expert and independent Technology and Economic Assessment Panel (and its predecessors) helped signatories reach solid and timely decisions on often complex matters.
- Compliance Procedure: It prioritised helping wayward countries back into compliance. If necessary, resources from the Multilateral Fund are available for some short-term projects.

Thus, the flexible and agile approach to the Montreal Protocol helped it become successful, which is also evident from the Kigali Agreement, which amended the Montreal Protocol to also include phasing out Hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) as one of aims of the Protocol.

**MCQs**

1. In the recent years Chad, Guinea, Mali and Sudan caught international attention for which one of the following reasons is common to all of them?
  - a) Discovery of rich deposits and rare earth elements
  - b) Establishment of Chinese military bases
  - c) Southward expansion of Sahara Desert
  - d) Successful Coups**
2. The Archaeological Survey of India is an attached office of the Department / Ministry of :
  - a) Culture**
  - b) Tourism
  - c) Science & Technology
  - d) Human Resource Development
3. The Sargasso Sea is a vast patch of the Atlantic Ocean characterized by an abundance of floating brown seaweed called 'Sargassum'. Sargasso Sea is bound by
  1. North Atlantic Current
  2. Gulf Stream
  3. North Atlantic Equatorial Current
  4. Canary current
 Select the correct answer using the code given below
 

a) 1,2 and 3	b) 2 and 4
c) 1,3 and 4	<b>d) All of these</b>
4. Consider the following statements about Rhine River
  1. It originates from the southeastern part of the Swiss Alps in Switzerland.
  2. It is a trans boundary river flows through 6 countries before draining into Baltic Sea.
  3. Berlin and Paris are located on the banks of river Rhine.
 How many of the statements given above are correct?
 

<b>a) Only one</b>	b) Only two
c) All three	d) None
5. Consider the following statements about Guru Teg Bahadur
  1. He built the city of Anandpur Sahib and founded the Khalsa Panth in 1699.
  2. He was publicly beheaded on the orders of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb in Delhi.
 Choose the incorrect statements:
 

<b>a) 1 only</b>	b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2	d) Neither 1 nor 2
6. Ketamine, sometimes seen in the news is related to which of the following?
 

a) Bio-electrochemical device that generates electricity by harnessing the metabolic activity of microorganisms	b) A sub-variant of COVID19 that was recently found in Kerala
<b>c) A dissociative anaesthetic that has some hallucinogenic effects</b>	d) A drug to cure Multidrug-Resistant Tuberculosis (MDR TB)
7. Consider the following statements about Radon
  1. It is a radioactive gas that forms naturally when thorium breaks down in rocks, soil, and groundwater.
  2. It is the second-most important cause of lung cancer after smoking and the leading cause of lung cancer among non-smokers.

a) 1 Only	b) 2 Only
<b>c) Both 1 and 2</b>	d) None
8. Consider the following statements about International Institute for the Unification of Private Law
  1. It is an independent intergovernmental Organisation.
  2. It has three-tiered structure, made up of a Secretariat, a Governing Council and a General Assembly.
  3. Its purpose is to study needs and methods for modernising private and in particular commercial law as between States and groups of States.
 How many of the statements given above are correct?
 

a) Only one	b) Only two
<b>c) All three</b>	d) None
9. Consider the following about Tax Inspectors without Borders (TIWB)
  1. TIWB is a joint initiative of the United Nations Development Programme and Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.
  2. They train the local countries' personnel in fields of Criminal tax investigations and tax capacity and audits.
 Choose the incorrect statements:
 

a) 1 only	b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2	<b>d) Neither 1 nor 2</b>
10. Consider the following statements about Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLAD)
  1. It is a Central Sector Scheme.
  2. Funds under MPLAD Scheme are Lapsable.
  3. It is implemented by Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.
 How many of the statements given above are correct?
 

a) Only one	b) Only two
<b>c) All three</b>	d) None