

MANTHAN

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1. Prime Minister's participation in the 21st ASEAN-India Summit in Lao PDR

- The 21st ASEAN-India Summit was held in Vientiane, Lao PDR, on 10 October 2024. Marking a decade of India's Act East Policy, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi joined ASEAN leaders to review the progress of ASEAN-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and chart the future direction of cooperation. This was Prime Minister's 11th participation in the Summit.
- In his address, PM reiterated India's support for ASEAN Unity, ASEAN Centrality and ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific. Calling the 21st century as the Asian century, he noted that India-ASEAN ties were critical to guiding Asia's future. Emphasizing the vibrancy of India's Act East Policy, PM noted that in the last ten years India-ASEAN trade had doubled to over USD 130 billion; ASEAN is today one of India's largest trade and investment partners; direct flight connectivity established with seven ASEAN countries; promising beginning made with Fin-tech collaboration with the region; and significant progress made in restoration of shared cultural heritage in five ASEAN countries. PM underlined the need to complete the review of ASEAN-India FTA (AITIGA) in a time bound manner towards harnessing greater economic potential for the benefit of the ASEAN-India community. PM also spoke about the progress in India-ASEAN knowledge partnership through the scholarships provided to ASEAN youth at the Nalanda University.
- In keeping with the Chair's theme of "Enhancing Connectivity and Resilience", PM announced a 10-point plan which includes:
 - (i) Celebrating the year 2025 as ASEAN-India Year of Tourism for which India would make available USD 5 million towards joint activities;
 - (ii) To celebrate a decade of Act East Policy through several people centric activities including Youth Summit, Start-up Festival, Hackathon, Music Festival, ASEAN-India Network of Think Tanks and Delhi Dialogue;
 - (iii) To organise ASEAN-India Women Scientists Conclave under ASEAN-India Science and Technology Development Fund;
 - (iv) Doubling the number of scholarships at Nalanda University and provision of new scholarships for ASEAN students at Agricultural Universities in India;
 - (v) Review of ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement by 2025;
 - (vi) Enhancing Disaster Resilience for which India would make available USD 5 million;
 - (vii) Initiate a new Health Ministers' track towards building Health Resilience;
 - (viii) Initiate a regular mechanism of ASEAN-India Cyber Policy Dialogue towards strengthening Digital and Cyber Resilience;
 - (ix) Workshop on Green Hydrogen; and
 - (x) Invited ASEAN Leaders to join 'Plant a Tree for Mother' campaign towards building climate resilience.
- In the meeting, Leaders agreed to create a new ASEAN-India Plan of Action (2026-2030) that will guide both sides in realizing the full potential of the ASEAN-India partnership and adopted Two Joint Statements:

- (i) Joint Statement on Strengthening ASEAN-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership for Peace, Stability and Prosperity in the Region in the context of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) with the Support of India's Act East Policy (AEP) – Leaders recognized the contribution of India's Act East Policy in advancing the partnership between ASEAN and India.
- (ii) ASEAN-India Joint Statement on Advancing Digital Transformation Leaders appreciated India's leadership in the field of digital transformation and welcomed partnership with India in digital public infrastructure.
- Prime Minister thanked Prime Minister of Laos for successfully hosting the 21st ASEAN-India Summit and for his warmth and hospitality. Prime Minister also thanked Singapore for its constructive role as Country Coordinator over the last three years and looked forward to working with the Philippines, the new Country Coordinator for India.

Know more about East Asia Summit (EAS):

- The East Asia Summit (EAS) is the Indo-Pacific's premier forum for strategic dialogue. It is the only leader-led forum at which all key Indo-Pacific partners meet to discuss political, security and economic challenges facing the region, and has an important role to play in advancing closer regional cooperation. Australia participated, as a founding member, in the inaugural EAS held in Kuala Lumpur on 14 December 2005. The EAS operates on the principles of openness, inclusiveness, respect for international law, ASEAN centrality, and ASEAN's role as the driving force.
- The idea of an East Asia Grouping was first proposed by then Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad in 1991. The first summit was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 14 December 2005. The EAS comprises 18 members: the 10 ASEAN countries (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam) and eight dialogue partners (Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Russia and the United States). In 2023, EAS members represented approximately 53 per cent of the world's population and accounted for approximately 60 per cent of global GDP. The EAS includes eight of Australia's top 10 trading partners. In 2023, Australia's two-way trade with EAS countries was worth \$884 billion, 72.4 per cent of total two-way trade. Lao PDR handed over ASEAN Chair responsibilities to Malaysia in October 2024, following the ASEAN Summits. Malaysia's 2025 ASEAN Chair year theme is 'Inclusivity and Sustainability' and 2025 will mark the 20th anniversary of the EAS.

Know more about Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN):

- The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a regional grouping that aims to promote economic and security cooperation among its ten members: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. The motto of ASEAN is "One Vision, One Identity, One Community". 8th August is observed as ASEAN Day. ASEAN Secretariat is located in Jakarta, Indonesia. It was established on 8 August 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand, with the signing of the ASEAN Declaration (Bangkok Declaration) by the founding fathers of ASEAN: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.

QUESTIONS

Fill in the Blank:

1. The 21st ASEAN-India Summit was held in _____ on 10 October 2024.
2. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi joined ASEAN leaders to review the progress of the ASEAN-India _____.
3. This was Prime Minister Modi's _____ participation in the ASEAN-India Summit.
4. India-ASEAN trade had doubled to over _____ USD in the last ten years.

5. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi underlined the need to complete the review of the ASEAN-India _____ (AITIGA) in a time-bound manner.
6. The year _____ will be celebrated as ASEAN-India Year of Tourism.
7. As part of the 10-point plan, India will provide USD _____ towards joint activities for ASEAN-India Year of Tourism.
8. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi announced the organization of an ASEAN-India _____ Scientists Conclave under ASEAN-India Science and Technology Development Fund.
9. India will double the number of scholarships at _____ University for ASEAN students.
10. The leaders agreed to create a new ASEAN-India _____ (2026-2030) to guide both sides in realizing the full potential of the partnership.

2. India-China Agreement

- In a significant development that could mark a turning point in India-China relations, China officially confirmed that it had reached a resolution with India to resolve the prolonged border standoff in eastern Ladakh.
- This breakthrough comes after years of military tension between the two nuclear-armed neighbours, which escalated in 2020 and has remained a source of concern in regional geopolitics.

Diplomatic and Military Dialogue Yields Results

- The recent resolution between China and India over their border tensions marks a significant milestone in efforts to de-escalate one of the most dangerous flashpoints in the region.
- Lin Jian, a spokesperson for China's Foreign Ministry, announced that the two nations had reached an agreement on key issues related to the border, particularly along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).
- While the Chinese government has not provided detailed specifics about the agreement, both sides have lauded the development as a step towards stabilizing relations.
- India also confirmed the agreement, with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar that the disengagement process with China in eastern Ladakh had been completed, restoring the patrolling rights that were disrupted following violent clashes in 2020.
- The disengagement likely includes the strategic regions of Depsang and Demchok, areas that have been points of contention since the military standoff began four years ago.
- These locations are crucial due to their proximity to military supply routes and outposts, adding to their significance in the broader context of the dispute.
- The violent clashes that occurred in June 2020 in the Galwan Valley, which resulted in the deaths of 20 Indian soldiers and four Chinese troops, marked a turning point in the conflict.
- The clash was one of the deadliest confrontations between the two nations in decades and underscored the volatility of the border situation.
- The LAC, much of which remains undefined, has been a major source of tension between the two nuclear-armed neighbors.

- Since the 2020 clash, both India and China have maintained a heightened military presence in eastern Ladakh, with numerous rounds of diplomatic and military talks that failed to produce concrete results—until now.
- The agreement reached in late October appears to signal a willingness on both sides to resolve the border issue through peaceful means.
- Jaishankar emphasized that the disengagement process would allow Indian troops to resume patrolling in areas that had been off-limits since 2020, a positive development for India's strategic interests.
- The timing of the agreement is significant, coinciding with the 16th BRICS Summit in Kazan, Russia, where Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping were expected to discuss bilateral issues on the sidelines.
- While the specifics of their discussions remain undisclosed, the announcement of the disengagement agreement suggests a broader effort to repair and stabilize India-China relations.
- The possibility of future bilateral cooperation, particularly on trade and regional security, now seems more likely with this diplomatic breakthrough.
- The long-standing border dispute between India and China dates back to the post-colonial period when the two countries inherited a 3,488-kilometer-long border, much of which remains unclear and hotly contested.
- The most significant military conflict occurred in 1962, when China decisively defeated India in a brief war over disputed territories in Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh.
- Since then, skirmishes have been frequent, with both sides accusing each other of transgressions. The Galwan Valley clash of 2020 served as a stark reminder of how quickly tensions can escalate into violence, even in a time of nuclear deterrence. The recent standoff in eastern Ladakh added further complexity to the issue, forcing both nations to divert military resources to maintain an uneasy peace.
- The successful resolution of the Ladakh standoff could have wide-reaching implications for regional and global stability.
- One immediate consequence is the resumption of patrolling along the LAC, particularly in critical areas like Depsang and Demchok.
- This marks a reduction in military tensions between the two countries and lowers the risk of accidental skirmishes.
- Additionally, the agreement opens the door for broader diplomatic discussions aimed at improving bilateral ties, including potential cooperation on economic, trade, and security matters.
- Given that both India and China are significant players in global geopolitics, a peaceful resolution to their border dispute could have a stabilizing effect not just in South Asia but also globally.
- However, challenges remain.
- The border between India and China is still not clearly defined, and periodic confrontations could flare up in the future.
- Moreover, broader territorial claims, such as China's claim over Arunachal Pradesh, remain unresolved.
- The success of the current agreement will depend heavily on how both nations manage the disengagement process and address future disagreements along the LAC.
- Continued dialogue, confidence-building measures, and diplomatic efforts will be critical in preventing future flare-ups and ensuring that the two countries maintain a peaceful coexistence.
- In conclusion, the resolution of the eastern Ladakh standoff marks a positive step forward in India-China relations.

- While challenges remain, the disengagement signals a broader willingness on both sides to resolve disputes peacefully and stabilize bilateral ties.
- If successfully implemented, this agreement could serve as a model for resolving other contentious issues between the two nations and contribute to a more stable and secure South Asia.
- The relationship between India and China has been marked by several contentious issues since both countries gained independence, leading to periodic tensions and conflicts.

Key matters of contention include:

1. Territorial Disputes

Aksai Chin:

- China controls the Aksai Chin region in the western sector of the disputed boundary. India claims it as part of Ladakh, while China considers it part of its Xinjiang region.
- The construction of a road through Aksai Chin by China in the 1950s led to serious tensions.

Arunachal Pradesh:

- In the eastern sector, China claims the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh as part of its territory, referring to it as "South Tibet." India firmly rejects these claims.

Sino-Indian War (1962):

- These territorial disputes culminated in the 1962 war between India and China. China emerged victorious, solidifying its control over Aksai Chin, while India retained control over Arunachal Pradesh.

2. Border Incidents and Standoffs

Sumdorong Chu (1986-87):

- A major border standoff occurred in the Sumdorong Chu Valley in Arunachal Pradesh, nearly leading to another war.
- The conflict was eventually diffused through diplomatic efforts.

Doklam (2017):

- In 2017, a tense standoff took place at Doklam, a tri-junction between India, China, and Bhutan, when Indian troops intervened to stop Chinese road construction in the area claimed by Bhutan.
- The situation was resolved after two months of diplomatic negotiations.

Galwan Valley Clash (2020):

- One of the most violent clashes since 1962 occurred in June 2020 in the Galwan Valley of eastern Ladakh, where soldiers from both sides were involved in hand-to-hand combat, leading to casualties.
- This heightened tensions between the two nations and led to increased military presence on both sides of the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

3. Boundary Agreements and Dialogues

- Despite various agreements, such as the 1993 Border Peace and Tranquility Agreement and the 2005 Agreement on Political Parameters and Guiding Principles, the boundary between India and China remains disputed. Multiple rounds of military and diplomatic talks have failed to resolve the boundary question.

4. China-Pakistan Nexus

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC):

- China's close relationship with Pakistan has been another source of tension.
- The CPEC passes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), which India claims as its own territory. India strongly opposes the project as it violates its territorial sovereignty.

Military and Diplomatic Support to Pakistan:

- China's military support to Pakistan, including assistance in the development of Pakistan's nuclear weapons program, has further strained relations.

5. Tibet Issue

Dalai Lama and Tibetan Refugees:

- India's granting of asylum to the Dalai Lama in 1959 after China's crackdown on Tibetan uprisings is a major source of friction.
- The Tibetan government-in-exile operates from India, which China views with suspicion.

Sino-Indian Agreement (1954):

- Initially, India recognized Tibet as part of China under the 1954 Panchsheel Agreement.
- However, after the 1959 Tibetan uprising, India's stance shifted, exacerbating tensions with Beijing.

6. Geopolitical and Strategic Rivalry

Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific Region:

- Both countries seek influence in the Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific regions. India has been wary of China's increasing presence, including port investments in countries like Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Pakistan (Gwadar Port).

Quad and Alliances:

- India's growing involvement in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) with the U.S., Japan, and Australia is seen by China as an attempt to counter its influence in the Indo-Pacific.

7. Infrastructure Development Along the LAC

- Both countries have increased infrastructure development along the LAC, including roads, bridges, and military installations, leading to a military buildup and standoffs like the one seen in Ladakh.

8. Trade and Economic Disparities

Trade Imbalance:

- Despite political and military tensions, China remains one of India's largest trading partners. However, the trade imbalance (India's deficit) is a significant concern for India.

Bans on Chinese Apps:

- In response to the Galwan clash, India banned numerous Chinese apps, including TikTok, citing national security concerns. This escalated economic tensions between the two nations.

9. Multilateral Engagement and Diplomatic Rivalry

United Nations and Global Fora:

- China has often used its veto power in the UN Security Council to block resolutions against Pakistan, particularly in designating Pakistani terrorists under the UN sanctions regime.
- South Asian Influence: India and China compete for influence in South Asia, particularly in countries like Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh.
- China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and investments in South Asian infrastructure projects have raised concerns in India about encirclement.

10. Water Disputes

Brahmaputra River:

- The flow of the Brahmaputra River (known as the Yarlung Tsangpo in Tibet) is a critical issue.
- China's plans to build dams and divert water from the river, which flows into India's northeastern states, have raised concerns about potential water shortages and ecological impacts.

QUESTIONS

Fill in the Blank:

1. The recent agreement between India and China to resolve the prolonged border standoff primarily focuses on the _____ region in eastern Ladakh.
2. The violent clashes in June 2020 between India and China took place in the _____ Valley, resulting in the deaths of 20 Indian soldiers and 4 Chinese troops.
3. The regions of _____ and _____ are considered strategic locations and have been points of contention between India and China during the military standoff.
4. The Sino-Indian War of 1962 resulted in China gaining control over _____, while India retained control over _____.
5. One of the key sources of tension between India and China is the construction of the _____ by China in the 1950s through the Aksai Chin region.
6. The 2017 standoff at _____ occurred at a tri-junction between India, China, and Bhutan, involving Indian troops intervening to halt Chinese road construction.
7. One of the most significant diplomatic concerns for India regarding China is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which passes through _____, an area claimed by India.
8. The Indian state of _____, which China refers to as "South Tibet," is a major point of contention in the territorial dispute between the two countries.
9. Despite political tensions, China remains one of India's largest _____ partners, though the trade imbalance remains a concern.
10. The flow of the _____ River, also known as the Yarlung Tsangpo in Tibet, is a source of dispute between India and China, particularly regarding China's plans to build dams and divert water.

3. Prime Minister participates in the 16th BRICS Summit

- The 16th BRICS Summit, chaired by Russia, was held in Kazan from October 22 to 24, 2024.
- It brought together the leaders of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa for discussions centered around multilateralism, economic cooperation, counter-terrorism efforts, and the concerns of the Global South.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India participated actively, addressing several key issues in his speeches and contributing to the adoption of the Kazan Declaration.

Key Themes and Discussions at the Summit

- The summit's theme, "Strengthening Multilateralism for Just Global Development and Security," guided discussions aimed at addressing global uncertainties and challenges.
- The leaders emphasized the importance of BRICS solidarity and cooperation in dealing with the current international environment, marked by conflicts, economic instability, climate change, and cybersecurity threats.

- Prime Minister Modi underscored the importance of BRICS taking a people-centric approach to tackle these global challenges.
- He pointed out the rising expectations from BRICS due to these uncertainties and highlighted the need for reforms in global governance, particularly in multilateral institutions like the United Nations.
- In this context, he called for the early adoption of a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism, stressing the urgency of combating terrorism through international consensus and collaboration.
- Another key focus of Modi's address was the need to prioritize the concerns of the Global South. Recalling the Voice of Global South Summits hosted by India during its G-20 Presidency, he emphasized that BRICS must push for global governance reforms to reflect the needs and aspirations of developing countries.
- This included fostering more inclusive economic growth, strengthening supply chains, and expanding opportunities for small and medium-scale industries.
- He also mentioned the upcoming BRICS Startup Forum, an initiative by India, which will further support economic growth and innovation among member states.

BRICS Economic Cooperation

- Prime Minister Modi also highlighted the economic impact of BRICS initiatives, particularly in the areas of trade facilitation, agriculture, e-commerce, and Special Economic Zones.
- He praised the New Development Bank's regional presence, including in GIFT City, India, and its contributions to creating new economic opportunities.
- Modi's focus on economic cooperation extended to sustainable development, urging BRICS nations to join green initiatives spearheaded by India, such as the International Solar Alliance and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure.
- During the summit, leaders discussed the importance of bolstering economic ties within BRICS, and Modi emphasized the importance of supporting small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to enhance resilient supply chains and trade facilitation.
- India's BRICS Startup Forum, set to be launched this year, will support innovation and entrepreneurship within member countries, further strengthening the economic pillar of BRICS cooperation.

BRICS and the Global South

- A central theme of the summit was the growing importance of the Global South in BRICS discussions.
- The leaders welcomed 13 new partner countries into the BRICS framework, marking an expansion in the group's outreach to emerging markets and developing countries (EMDCs) across Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East.
- This expansion reflects the group's increasing focus on addressing the developmental needs of these regions.
- Russia, as the Chair, hosted a "BRICS Plus" dialogue with EMDCs under the motto "BRICS and Global South: Building a Better World Together." The discussions reinforced BRICS' role in promoting solidarity among EMDCs and strengthening international cooperation.
- The leaders expressed their belief that the inclusion of Global South countries in the BRICS framework would enhance the group's collective ability to address international issues such as economic inequality and global security.
- Prime Minister Modi reiterated the need for BRICS to advocate for reforms in international institutions to better represent the interests of the Global South.

- He highlighted the importance of inclusivity and collaboration in building a more equitable international order.
- Modi also mentioned India's efforts, particularly during its G-20 Presidency, to highlight the concerns of developing countries and bring their voices to the forefront of international discussions.

Environmental and Sustainable Development Initiatives

- India's commitment to environmental sustainability was another key aspect of Modi's address at the summit.
- He outlined several green initiatives that India has undertaken, including the International Solar Alliance, Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, Mission LIFE, and the Green Credit initiative announced during COP28.
- Modi invited BRICS countries to join these initiatives to promote sustainable development and address the growing challenges posed by climate change.
- These initiatives reflect India's broader efforts to lead the way in global environmental governance and demonstrate BRICS' commitment to fostering a greener future.
- The emphasis on sustainability and disaster resilience was in line with the summit's focus on tackling global challenges through multilateral cooperation.

The Kazan Declaration

- The summit concluded with the adoption of the Kazan Declaration, a document that outlines the collective vision and goals of the BRICS nations.
- The declaration emphasizes the group's commitment to promoting peace, fostering a fairer international order, and enhancing strategic partnerships.
- It reaffirms the importance of BRICS cooperation across three pillars: political and security cooperation, economic and financial collaboration, and cultural and people-to-people exchanges.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin announced that the Kazan Declaration has been approved by all member nations and will be presented to the United Nations as a key expression of BRICS' support for global multipolarity.
- The document reflects BRICS' growing influence in global affairs and its commitment to addressing international issues such as economic inequality, climate change, and security threats.

Modi-Xi Bilateral Meeting

- A major diplomatic development occurred on the sidelines of the summit when Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping held their first bilateral meeting in over four and a half years.
- The meeting, which was highly anticipated, could signal a thaw in India-China relations, which have been strained due to border tensions in recent years.
- The bilateral talks may open the door for renewed dialogue and cooperation between the two Asian powers, particularly in the context of regional security and economic cooperation.

Conclusion

- The 16th BRICS Summit in Kazan marked a significant milestone in the group's efforts to address global challenges and promote a more just and inclusive international order.
- The adoption of the Kazan Declaration and the expansion of BRICS partnerships with the Global South reflect the growing influence of the group on the world stage.

- Prime Minister Modi's emphasis on a people-centric approach, economic cooperation, and sustainable development demonstrated India's commitment to playing a leading role within BRICS and advocating for the interests of developing countries.
- The summit's outcomes, including the Modi-Xi bilateral meeting, underscore the importance of diplomacy and dialogue in maintaining global peace and stability.

QUESTIONS

Fill in the Blank:

1. The 16th BRICS Summit, chaired by Russia, was held in _____ from October 22 to 24, 2024.
2. The theme of the 16th BRICS Summit was "Strengthening Multilateralism for _____ Global Development and Security."
3. Prime Minister Narendra Modi called for the early adoption of a Comprehensive Convention on _____ to combat terrorism through international consensus.
4. One of the key focuses of Prime Minister Modi's address at the summit was the concerns of the _____ and the need for global governance reforms.
5. India is set to launch the _____ Forum to support innovation and entrepreneurship within BRICS member states.
6. During the summit, BRICS leaders welcomed 13 new partner countries, expanding the group's outreach to Emerging Markets and Developing Countries (EMDCs) in regions like _____, _____, and _____.
7. Russia hosted a "BRICS Plus" dialogue with EMDCs under the motto "BRICS and Global South: Building a _____ Together."
8. Prime Minister Modi invited BRICS countries to join India's green initiatives, such as the International _____ Alliance and the Coalition for _____ Resilient Infrastructure.
9. The Kazan Declaration reaffirms BRICS' commitment to cooperation across three pillars: political and security cooperation, economic and financial collaboration, and _____ and people-to-people exchanges.
10. A significant diplomatic event at the summit was the first bilateral meeting in over four years between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President _____.

4. Google's landmark nuclear deal with Kairos and how that could boost SMRs

- Nearly a decade-and-a-half after pioneering the first corporate purchase agreements for renewable electricity over a decade ago, technology major Google has yet another global landmark: signing the first ever corporate agreement to purchase nuclear energy from multiple small modular reactors (SMRs) to be developed by Alameda, California-based Kairos Power.
- This new deal aims to use small nuclear reactors to generate the huge amounts of energy needed to power Google's artificial intelligence (AI) data centres and the tech major has said the pact with Kairos Power will see it "start using the first reactor this decade" and bring more online by 2035.
- Both companies did not give any details about how much the deal is worth or where the plants will be constructed.

- In 2010, Google had entered its first power purchase agreement with a 20-year pact with a 114-megawatt-capacity wind farm in Iowa, marking a global first at that time.

The Google-Kairos deal

- Technology firms such as Google are increasingly turning to nuclear sources of energy to supply the power needed to run vast data centres that drive AI.
- While renewables have been the first choice for companies, including for Google, there are hurdles that green power poses.
- Nuclear offers a solution, especially since the grid needs new electricity sources to support AI applications and nuclear solutions offer a clean, round-the-clock power source that can tide over the limitations of renewables – not generating power when the sun's not shining or the wind is not blowing, and there not being enough storage options at this point in time to tide over these shortfalls.

Big boost for SMRs

- SMRs – small reactors with a capacity of 30MWe to 300 MWe per unit – are increasingly seen as important for nuclear energy to remain a commercially competitive option in the future, especially in the wake of surging power demand from technology companies given the massive incremental electricity requirement coming in from AI machine learning applications and data centres.
- As of now, two SMR projects have reached the operational stage globally. One is an SMR named Akademik Lomonosov floating power unit in Russia that has two-modules of 35 MWe (megawatt electric) and started commercial operation in May 2020.
- The other is a demonstration SMR project called HTR-PM in China that was grid-connected in December 2021 and is reported to have started commercial operations in December 2023.
- Apart from Kairos, other global companies that are in the fray with SMR technology include New Jersey-based Holtec, Rolls-Royce SMR, NuScale's VOYGR SMR, Westinghouse Electric's AP300 SMR and GE-Hitachi's BWRX-300.
- India too is working to get into the manufacturing value chain of small reactors, both as a way of fulfilling its commitment to clean energy transition, and bundling SMRs as a technology-led foreign policy pitch.

Kairos' SMR tech

- Kairos Power's technology uses a molten-salt cooling system, combined with a "ceramic, pebble-type fuel", to efficiently transport heat to a steam turbine to generate power.
- This is a different technology as compared to the most commonly used light water model, where reactors use water as moderator and coolant.
- Kairos claims its SMR's passively safe system "allows the reactor to operate at low pressure, enabling a simpler more affordable nuclear reactor design".
- The company says it will complete "multiple successive hardware demonstrations" ahead of its first commercial plant to enable critical learnings and efficiency improvements that accelerate reactor deployments, as well as greater cost certainty for Google and other customers.
- Earlier this year, Kairos Power broke ground on its Hermes non-powered demonstration reactor in Tennessee, the first American advanced reactor project to receive a construction permit from the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

Key Details of the Agreement:

- **Reactor Deployment Timeline:** The initial reactor is slated for operation by 2030, with additional reactors expected to come online by 2035.
- **Energy Output:** The partnership aims to generate 500 megawatts of power, sufficient to supply electricity to approximately 438,000 U.S. households.

- **Technology Specifications:** Kairos Power's SMRs employ a molten-salt cooling system, offering a more efficient and potentially safer alternative to traditional water-cooled reactors.
- This collaboration underscores a significant shift in the tech industry, with major corporations like Google, Amazon, and Microsoft investing in nuclear energy to sustainably power data centers and AI operations.

QUESTIONS

Fill in the Blank:

1. Google has signed the first-ever corporate agreement to purchase nuclear energy from multiple _____ developed by Kairos Power.
2. The new Google-Kairos deal aims to power Google's _____ using small nuclear reactors.
3. Kairos Power's SMRs use a _____ cooling system, combined with ceramic, pebble-type fuel, to generate power.
4. The first SMR under the Google-Kairos agreement is expected to start operating by the year _____.
5. SMRs are seen as crucial for nuclear energy to remain commercially competitive due to the surging power demand from _____ applications and data centres.
6. Kairos Power's SMR technology is different from traditional nuclear reactors, which typically use _____ as a coolant and moderator.
7. The two operational SMR projects globally include the Akademik Lomonosov floating power unit in _____ and the HTR-PM project in China.
8. Kairos Power's SMRs will initially generate _____ megawatts of power, sufficient to supply electricity to approximately 438,000 U.S. households.
9. The _____ SMR project in China started commercial operations in December 2023.
10. Kairos Power's demonstration reactor, named _____, is located in Tennessee and received a construction permit from the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission earlier this year.

5. US to send THAAD defence battery system to Israel

- US to send THAAD defence battery system to Israel: Even as Israel faces increasing criticism for targetting UN peacekeepers in Lebanon, the US, underlining its “ironclad commitment to the defence of Israel”, has announced it will send its advanced missile defence system THAAD, along with troops to operate it, to the West Asian nation.
- THAAD stands for Terminal High-Altitude Area Defence, and the battery is used to intercept and destroy enemy missiles.
- THAAD will “help bolster Israel’s air defenses following Iran’s unprecedented attacks against Israel on April 13 and again on October 1.
- This action underscores the United States’ ironclad commitment to the defense of Israel, and to defend Americans in Israel, from any further ballistic missile attacks by Iran.”

What is THAAD?

- A THAAD battery consists of 95 soldiers, six truck-mounted launchers, 48 interceptors (eight per launcher), radar surveillance and radar, and a tactical fire component, according to a paper by the US Congressional Research Service.

- THAAD provides a “rapidly deployable capability against short-range (up to 1,000 km), medium-range (1,000–3,000 km), and limited intermediate-range (3,000–5,000 km) ballistic missile threats inside or outside the atmosphere during their final (terminal) phase of flight,” the paper says.
- Employing “hit-to-kill” technology to destroy threat missiles, the THAAD can defend a larger area than the older Patriot Air and Missile Defense System. It has been developed by Lockheed Martin Corporation.

Why is THAAD being sent to Israel significant?

- According to the US defence department press release, the latest decision is “part of the broader adjustments the US military has made in recent months, to support the defense of Israel and protect Americans from attacks by Iran and Iranian-aligned militias.”
- In effect, this means that a highly advanced American defence system, along with an “associated crew of US military personnel” will be directly stationed in Israel, at a time when the situation in West Asia is already highly tense.
- Iran has warned the US against more involvement in the West Asian conflict. “The US has been delivering record amount of arms to Israel.
- It is now also putting lives of its troops at risk by deploying them to operate US missile systems in Israel.
- While we have made tremendous efforts in recent days to contain an all-out war in our region, I say it clearly that we have no red lines in defending our people and interests.
- Israel is readying a revenge plan for the missile attack by Iran on October 1, and the US is learnt to have urged restraint.
- The presence of its missile defence system is likely to serve as a deterrent to Iran, and reassurance to Israel.
- Iran has fired missiles on Israel twice since the Gaza war began October last year, and the US along with its allies has helped defend the Jewish nation.
- The THAAD being stationed in Israel, however, is a more significant step.
- Notably, Ukraine has been requesting a THAAD battery for a long time to defend itself against Russia, but has been refused.
- THAAD is not only very expensive to use, it requires trained US personnel to operate it.
- According to an article in European Security and Defence, “While the export model of PATRIOT is estimated to cost nearly USD 1 billion, THAAD’s price tag for a single battery is estimated at approximately USD 2.5 billion.”

As of October 2024, the Middle East is experiencing heightened tensions marked by intensified conflicts and diplomatic strains:

Israel-Hamas Conflict:

- Israel continues its military operations against Hamas in the Gaza Strip, leading to significant casualties and widespread displacement. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has urged Israel to conclude its war with Hamas and prioritize the release of hostages.

Israel-Hezbollah Tensions:

- Hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah have escalated, with mutual attacks across the Israel-Lebanon border.
- Israeli airstrikes have targeted Hezbollah positions in Lebanon, resulting in civilian casualties.
- In retaliation, Hezbollah has launched rockets into northern Israel, causing further casualties and raising concerns about broader regional escalation.

Iran-Israel Relations:

- The adversarial relationship between Iran and Israel has intensified. Iran has suspended indirect talks with the United States, citing the "special situation in the region."
- Additionally, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant has indicated potential military actions against Iran, emphasizing that strikes would demonstrate Israel's strength and serve as a significant lesson to its adversaries.

Regional Diplomatic Efforts:

- Diplomatic initiatives are underway to mitigate further escalation. U.S. Secretary of State Blinken has engaged in discussions with regional leaders, including Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, aiming to de-escalate conflicts and address humanitarian concerns.

QUESTIONS

Fill in the Blank:

1. The US is sending the _____ defense battery system to Israel to enhance its missile defense capabilities.
2. THAAD stands for Terminal High-Altitude Area _____.
3. A THAAD battery consists of _____ soldiers and several truck-mounted launchers.
4. THAAD is designed to intercept and destroy enemy missiles during their _____ phase of flight.
5. The deployment of THAAD to Israel is a reflection of the US's "ironclad commitment" to defend both _____ and Americans in Israel.
6. The recent decision to send THAAD is part of broader adjustments made by the US military to support the defense of _____.
7. Iran has issued warnings against increased US involvement, stating that there are no _____ lines in defending its people and interests.
8. The estimated cost for a single THAAD battery is approximately _____ billion dollars.
9. The ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas has led to significant casualties and widespread _____ in the Gaza Strip.
10. Diplomatic efforts are being made by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken to engage with regional leaders and address _____ concerns.

6. Quad partners take part in back-to-back naval war games

- The Quad group, consisting of India, Australia, Japan, and the United States, has recently enhanced its maritime cooperation through two significant naval exercises: Exercise Malabar 2024 and Exercise Kakadu.
- These exercises focus on deepening interoperability among the member nations, particularly in anti-submarine warfare, amid rising maritime security challenges, especially concerning the increasing assertiveness of the Chinese Navy.

Exercise Malabar 2024

- Exercise Malabar 2024, held from October 8 to 18, was conducted off the coast of Visakhapatnam, India, and is regarded as the “most comprehensive” edition to date.
- The exercise featured complex operational scenarios designed to test and improve the capabilities of the participating navies.
- It comprised two main phases: the Harbour Phase in Visakhapatnam and the Sea Phase in the Bay of Bengal.
- The Indian Navy emphasized the importance of Exercise Malabar in reinforcing the commitment of the participating nations to enhance mutual understanding and collaboration in maritime security.
- The exercise is particularly significant as it evolves from its origins in 1992 as a bilateral naval drill between India and the U.S. to a key multilateral event aimed at addressing shared maritime challenges in the Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific regions.
- The primary focus areas for the Quad partners during Exercise Malabar included anti-submarine warfare and undersea domain awareness.
- These have become critical as all four nations express concerns regarding China's expanding naval capabilities and its increased activities in the Indian Ocean Region.
- The exercises conducted during the Sea Phase included surface weapon firings, anti-air drills, air defense operations, anti-submarine warfare training, extensive operations of ship-borne helicopters, and seamanship evolutions, such as refueling from tankers and maritime interdiction operations.
- The Sea Phase concluded with a review of the operational aspects, culminating in a closing ceremony.
- Notably, the naval units participating in the exercise included HMAS Stuart, an Anzac Class Frigate from Australia, equipped with an MH-60R helicopter and P-8 Maritime Patrol Aircraft. Japan contributed the JS Ariake, a Murasame-class destroyer, while the U.S. Navy fielded the USS Dewey, an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer with an integrated helicopter and P-8 MPA.
- Special forces from all four nations also participated, highlighting the multifaceted nature of the collaboration.

Exercise Kakadu

- Prior to Exercise Malabar, the Quad nations participated in Exercise Kakadu, which took place from September 9 to 20, hosted by the Royal Australian Navy.
- This flagship maritime exercise gathered nearly 3,000 personnel from 30 nations, alongside ships from 10 countries and aircraft from five nations, underscoring Australia's commitment to regional maritime security and international partnerships.
- The Indian Navy deployed a P-8I MPA to contribute to this extensive exercise.
- Exercise Kakadu is characterized as more than just a naval exercise; it serves as a demonstration of enduring partnerships and strategic solidarity among participating nations.
- Captain David Tietzel, the Exercise Director for Kakadu 2024, highlighted its significance in reinforcing operational excellence and expanding capabilities across a broad spectrum of naval activities, which included warfighting and humanitarian operations.
- The overarching goal of Exercise Kakadu was to showcase new technologies and tactics while demonstrating the full range of naval training.
- Captain Tietzel noted that the exercise reflects a commitment to maintaining a leading edge in maritime operations, crucial for addressing the complexities of modern naval warfare.

Conclusion

- Both Exercise Malabar 2024 and Exercise Kakadu represent a concerted effort by the Quad nations to enhance their maritime capabilities and strengthen their strategic partnerships.

- As the global maritime landscape evolves, these exercises illustrate the commitment of India, Australia, Japan, and the U.S. to addressing shared security concerns, particularly in the context of an increasingly assertive Chinese Navy.
- The collaboration reflects a broader strategic vision to ensure peace and stability in the Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific regions, fostering a network of alliances dedicated to maintaining maritime security amidst emerging challenges.

QUESTIONS

Fill in the Blank:

1. Exercise Malabar 2024 was conducted off the coast of _____ from October 8 to 18.
2. The primary focus areas for the Quad partners during Exercise Malabar included _____ warfare and undersea domain awareness.
3. Exercise Malabar evolved from its origins in 1992 as a bilateral naval drill between India and the _____.
4. The Sea Phase of Exercise Malabar included operations such as anti-air drills, air defense operations, and _____ training.
5. The Indian Navy emphasized the importance of Exercise Malabar in reinforcing the commitment of the participating nations to enhance mutual understanding in _____ security.
6. Exercise Kakadu 2024 was hosted by the _____ Australian Navy from September 9 to 20.
7. Nearly _____ personnel from 30 nations participated in Exercise Kakadu, showcasing international partnerships.
8. The overarching goal of Exercise Kakadu was to showcase new technologies and tactics while demonstrating the full range of _____ training.
9. Captain David Tietzel highlighted the significance of Exercise Kakadu in reinforcing operational excellence and expanding _____ across various naval activities.
10. Both Exercise Malabar 2024 and Exercise Kakadu illustrate the commitment of India, Australia, Japan, and the U.S. to addressing shared security concerns, particularly regarding the assertiveness of the _____ Navy.

7. Maldives President introduces UPI payment service to boost economy

- Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu has initiated steps to introduce India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) to the island nation, a move expected to significantly benefit the Maldivian economy.
- UPI, a real-time payment system developed by India's National Payments Corporation (NPCI), enables instant inter-bank transactions via mobile phones.
- The introduction of UPI is aimed at enhancing financial inclusion, improving transaction efficiency, and strengthening the digital infrastructure of the Maldives.
- To oversee the implementation, President Muizzu has formed a consortium, with TradeNet Maldives Corporation Limited acting as the leading agency.

- This consortium is expected to involve key stakeholders, including banks, telecom companies, state-owned enterprises, and fintech companies.
- Furthermore, the president has established an inter-agency coordination team composed of the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Homeland Security and Technology, and the Monetary Authority of Maldives.
- This team will guide the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade in managing the UPI rollout.
- The decision to adopt UPI in the Maldives was formalized during Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's visit to the country in August.
- The partnership highlights growing economic ties between the two nations, despite political tensions in recent times.
- Muizzu's decision to introduce UPI is seen as a positive step toward modernizing the Maldives' financial infrastructure and addressing some of its economic challenges.
- One of the significant economic challenges for the Maldives is its foreign currency shortage, exacerbated by the downturn in tourism, the country's primary source of income.
- Tourism accounts for about 30% of the GDP and more than 60% of foreign exchange earnings.
- However, political tensions with India have had an adverse effect on tourism.
- Last year, Muizzu, running on an "India Out" campaign, called for the withdrawal of Indian military personnel stationed in the Maldives. This anti-India stance, which appealed to nationalist sentiments, contributed to his election victory.
- However, the subsequent economic impact, particularly the reduction in Indian tourist arrivals, has prompted Muizzu to soften his stance. Recently, he visited India on his first state visit, signaling a shift toward rebuilding diplomatic and economic ties.
- Earlier this month, in response to the worsening foreign currency situation, the Maldives government imposed new regulations that limit the types of transactions allowed in foreign currency and enforce mandatory foreign currency exchange controls on tourism establishments and banks.
- These measures reflect the growing pressure on the country's economy, which has been struggling due to the declining influx of foreign currency, particularly from tourism.
- The introduction of UPI could serve as an essential tool in addressing some of these financial constraints by facilitating easier and more efficient transactions, potentially boosting tourism and other sectors reliant on digital financial services.
- In summary, President Muizzu's efforts to introduce India's UPI in the Maldives mark a significant step toward improving the country's financial infrastructure, particularly at a time when the economy is grappling with foreign currency shortages and declining tourism revenues.
- The initiative could lead to increased financial inclusion and more efficient financial transactions, offering a pathway for economic recovery and strengthening ties with India.

Unified Payments Interface (UPI)

- Unified Payments Interface (UPI) is a real-time payment system developed by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), launched in April 2016.
- It has revolutionized the way digital payments are made in India, providing a simple, fast, and secure method for transferring money between bank accounts using a smartphone.
- UPI is regulated by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), ensuring it complies with the country's financial regulations.

How UPI Works

- UPI enables users to link multiple bank accounts to a single mobile application, allowing seamless transfers of funds.

- It facilitates person-to-person (P2P) and person-to-merchant (P2M) transactions.
- The system works by generating a Virtual Payment Address (VPA), which eliminates the need to share sensitive information such as bank account numbers or IFSC codes.
- This feature enhances privacy and security.
- A user initiates a transaction by selecting a recipient and entering their VPA or UPI ID, which is often linked to the recipient's phone number.
- After entering the transaction amount and confirming it with a personal identification number (PIN), the money is transferred directly from the sender's bank account to the recipient's bank account in real-time.

Key Features of UPI

- **Interoperability:** UPI allows seamless transactions between different banks and financial institutions. Users are not restricted to using the apps provided by their own banks, as various third-party apps like Google Pay, PhonePe, and Paytm also support UPI transactions.
- **Real-Time Transactions:** UPI operates 24/7, ensuring instant transactions, even on weekends and public holidays. This real-time settlement sets UPI apart from traditional banking methods like NEFT or RTGS, which are often time-bound.
- **Low-Cost Transactions:** UPI transactions are either free or attract minimal charges. This affordability has played a crucial role in its mass adoption across various sections of Indian society, including small businesses and informal sectors.
- **Enhanced Security:** UPI incorporates multi-factor authentication, including device binding, PIN verification, and dynamic addresses (VPAs), providing a secure platform for digital payments. The two-factor authentication system aligns with RBI's guidelines to ensure the safety of users' transactions.
- **QR Code Payments:** UPI supports QR code scanning for payments, which makes it easier for users to make payments in retail stores, taxis, and other services without manually entering any details.
- **Benefits of UPI**
- **Financial Inclusion:** UPI has been instrumental in enhancing financial inclusion in India by enabling digital banking for millions of unbanked and underbanked individuals. People in rural areas or small towns, who may have previously struggled to access formal banking services, can now easily make digital transactions.
- **Ease of Use:** The user-friendly interface and minimal requirements (smartphone, bank account, and internet access) have made UPI highly accessible. Its integration with smartphones allows users to bypass traditional banking procedures, making it more convenient for everyone.
- **Growth of Digital Economy:** UPI has contributed significantly to the growth of India's digital economy. It has reduced dependency on cash, promoted e-commerce, and enabled small and medium businesses to accept digital payments, thereby driving the growth of online transactions.
- **Innovation and Expansion:** UPI's open platform encourages innovation, leading to the development of various third-party apps and value-added services, such as bill payments, investment options, and insurance.
- **International Expansion:** UPI's success has attracted attention globally, with countries like Singapore, UAE, and Nepal adopting or showing interest in implementing UPI-like systems for their domestic payment needs.

Future Prospects

- The NPCI has ambitious plans for UPI, aiming to make it a global standard for digital payments.

- Upcoming features, such as UPI Lite (for small offline payments) and integration with credit cards, will further enhance the utility of the platform. Additionally, initiatives to enable cross-border payments will widen its reach and impact, potentially transforming the global remittance market.
- UPI has revolutionized the Indian payment ecosystem by providing a fast, secure, and low-cost alternative to traditional banking methods.
- Its simplicity and convenience have made digital payments accessible to millions, driving India toward a cashless economy and setting a benchmark for other countries to follow.

QUESTIONS

Fill in the Blank:

1. The introduction of India's _____ in the Maldives is expected to enhance financial inclusion and strengthen the digital infrastructure of the country.
2. _____, a real-time payment system developed by India's National Payments Corporation (NPCI), enables instant inter-bank transactions via mobile phones.
3. To manage the rollout of UPI in the Maldives, President Muizzu formed a consortium led by _____.
4. The Maldives' decision to adopt UPI was formalized during the visit of Indian External Affairs Minister _____ to the country in August.
5. One of the significant challenges facing the Maldives' economy is the shortage of _____, primarily due to the downturn in the tourism sector.
6. UPI allows users to link multiple _____ to a single mobile application, facilitating seamless transactions.
7. UPI transactions are authenticated using multi-factor authentication, including _____ verification and _____ addresses.
8. UPI supports payments through _____ scanning, allowing users to make payments without manually entering details.
9. One of the primary benefits of UPI is that it operates _____, ensuring real-time transactions even on weekends and public holidays.
10. The success of UPI in India has garnered international interest, with countries like _____, _____, and _____ adopting or showing interest in implementing similar systems.

8. Supreme Court says secularism a core part of the Constitution

- The Supreme Court of India recently reaffirmed that secularism is a fundamental and non-negotiable part of the Basic Structure of the Indian Constitution.
- This observation was made during the hearing of a series of petitions, notably one filed by former Rajya Sabha member Subramanian Swamy, challenging the inclusion of the words "socialist" and "secular" in the Preamble of the Constitution.
- The issue at the heart of these petitions was the 42nd Constitutional Amendment, passed during the Emergency in 1976, which inserted the words "socialist" and "secular" into the Preamble and changed "unity of the nation" to "unity and integrity of the nation."
- The petitioners argued against this amendment, primarily on the grounds that it altered the original intent of the Constitution, which previously declared India as a "sovereign, democratic republic."

- A bench composed of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Sanjay Kumar made several critical observations regarding the case.
- Justice Khanna pointed out that the concept of secularism was always embedded in the Constitution, even before the formal insertion of the word in the Preamble.
- The bench cited the right to equality and the principle of fraternity as key indicators that secularism has always been a core feature of the Constitution.
- These elements, the court maintained, illustrate that secularism is essential to India's democratic fabric and forms part of the Basic Structure of the Constitution, which cannot be altered or dismantled, even through a constitutional amendment.
- The court also responded to the petitioners' contention that the term "socialist" might limit personal liberty and individualism, arguing that such concerns stem from a narrow interpretation of socialism, particularly one influenced by Western definitions.
- Justice Khanna emphasized that the Indian understanding of socialism does not mirror the doctrines followed in certain Western countries.
- Instead, he offered a broader interpretation, suggesting that socialism in the Indian context signifies equality of opportunity and a more equitable distribution of the country's wealth.
- The bench indicated that socialism, as incorporated into the Constitution, should be understood as ensuring that economic resources benefit all sections of society, without curbing personal freedom or individual initiative.
- Advocate Ashwini Upadhyay, one of the petitioners, clarified that he was not opposed to the principles of socialism, secularism, or integrity themselves.
- Rather, his issue lay with the manner in which these terms were introduced into the Constitution—via the 42nd Constitutional Amendment during the Emergency period under then-Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's government.
- Upadhyay expressed particular concern with the retrospective application of this amendment, which made the changes effective from November 26, 1949, the date the Constitution was adopted, despite the amendment being passed in 1976.
- He argued that altering the Preamble in this way, with retrospective effect, was inappropriate and went against constitutional principles.
- The bench also delved into the historical context of the 42nd Amendment. The amendment, passed during a particularly controversial period in Indian history, is often referred to as the "Mini-Constitution" because of the extensive changes it introduced.
- Apart from adding "socialist" and "secular" to the Preamble, the amendment sought to significantly curtail the powers of the judiciary, particularly the Supreme Court and High Courts.
- This attempt to reduce judicial oversight and consolidate power in the executive was widely criticized.
- Following the Emergency, subsequent governments, particularly under the Janata Party, worked to undo many of the amendments made during this time. However, the changes to the Preamble—specifically the inclusion of the words "socialist" and "secular"—were retained.
- Advocate Sriram Parakkat, representing Communist Party of India (CPI) leader Binoy Viswam, provided additional context, noting that while the 42nd Amendment was infamous for its attempts to diminish judicial authority, the retention of the terms "secular" and "socialist" in the Preamble was appropriate.
- According to Parakkat, these terms reflect the values that India strives to uphold, even if the broader 42nd Amendment was seen as an overreach of executive power.

- The debate around the 42nd Amendment ties back to the landmark Kesavananda Bharati case, which established the Basic Structure doctrine.
- In 1973, a 13-judge bench of the Supreme Court ruled that while Parliament has the authority to amend the Constitution, it cannot alter its Basic Structure.
- The court held that the Preamble is an integral part of the Constitution, and while it can be amended, any changes must not infringe upon the Constitution's Basic Structure, which includes principles such as democracy, secularism, and the rule of law.
- This doctrine has since become a cornerstone of Indian constitutional law, preventing any drastic or fundamental changes that could undermine the core values of the Constitution.
- In conclusion, the current case brings to light ongoing debates about the role of socialism and secularism in India's constitutional framework.
- While the petitioners argue that the insertion of these terms in the Preamble in 1976 was an unwarranted change, the Supreme Court's stance remains that these principles are intrinsic to the spirit of the Constitution.
- Secularism, the court asserted, is particularly vital, as it ensures equality and fraternity among India's diverse population, regardless of religion.
- Similarly, the court viewed socialism not as an imposition on personal freedom but as a means to promote equality and equitable distribution of resources.
- The case reflects the enduring relevance of the Basic Structure doctrine and its role in safeguarding the fundamental values of the Indian Constitution against potential overreach by any arm of the government.

Basic structure of the Indian Constitution

- The basic structure of the Indian Constitution is a doctrine developed by the Supreme Court of India to ensure that certain fundamental features of the Constitution cannot be altered by amendments under Article 368.
- This doctrine was established to protect the essence of the Constitution and prevent any authoritarian changes.

Key elements that constitute the Basic Structure of the Indian Constitution:

- **Supremacy of the Constitution:** The Constitution is the supreme law of the land, and all laws must conform to it.
- **Sovereignty, Unity, and Integrity of India:** The sovereignty of India and its territorial integrity are inviolable.
- **Republican and Democratic form of Government:** India is a republic, where the head of state is elected, and the governance follows democratic principles.
- **Secular Character of the State:** India is a secular nation, which means the state does not favor any religion and maintains equality in religious matters.
- **Separation of Powers:** The three organs of government—Executive, Legislature, and Judiciary—have distinct powers and operate independently.
- **Federalism:** India follows a federal structure where powers are divided between the Central and State Governments.
- **Judicial Review:** The judiciary has the power to review laws and amendments to ensure they are in conformity with the Constitution.
- **Fundamental Rights:** Certain rights are guaranteed to individuals (e.g., right to equality, freedom of speech, etc.), which cannot be abridged or taken away by amendments.
- **Parliamentary System of Government:** India follows a parliamentary system where the executive is accountable to the legislature.

- **Rule of Law:** Every citizen, regardless of status, is subject to the law, and the law must be applied equally to all.
- **Key Judgments related to the Basic Structure Doctrine:**
- **Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala (1973):** The Supreme Court ruled that Parliament cannot alter the basic structure of the Constitution, even through amendments.
- **Indira Nehru Gandhi v. Raj Narain (1975):** The Court reaffirmed the doctrine while striking down amendments that interfered with judicial review.
- These elements and the doctrine as a whole serve as a safeguard to protect the core principles of the Constitution against potential abuse.

QUESTIONS

Fill in the Blank:

1. The Supreme Court reaffirmed that secularism is a core part of the _____ of the Constitution.
2. The 42nd Constitutional Amendment introduced the words 'socialist' and _____ into the Preamble.
3. The petitioners argued that the amendment was introduced during the period of _____ in 1976.
4. Justice Khanna stated that Indian socialism means equality of _____ and equitable wealth distribution.
5. The Preamble originally described India as a _____, democratic republic before the amendment.
6. Advocate Ashwini Upadhyay opposed the retrospective application of the amendment from _____ 26, 1949.
7. The 42nd Amendment replaced the phrase "unity of the nation" with "unity and _____ of the nation."
8. The Kesavananda Bharati judgment ruled that the Basic Structure of the Constitution cannot be _____ by Parliament.
9. The largest Bench in the history of the Supreme Court, consisting of _____ judges, heard the Kesavananda Bharati case.
10. Advocate Sriram Parakkat acknowledged that the 42nd Amendment attempted to diminish the powers of the _____.

9. Chief Justice of India unveiled the 'new lady justice' statue in the Supreme Court

What does the new 'lady justice' statue signify?

- The Chief Justice of India unveiled the 'new lady justice' statue in the Supreme Court premises that replaced the 'original lady justice'.
- The new statue is clothed in a saree, has shed the blindfold and holds scales on one hand and the Indian Constitution on the other.

What is the background?

- It is believed that the origin of the modern-day 'lady justice' is Justitia, the goddess of Justice in Roman mythology.
- 'Lady justice' is depicted with a blindfold, scales, and a sword.

- The blindfold was added during the Renaissance period (14th century) probably as a satire on the corrupt state of legal systems with judicial institutions turning a blind eye.
- It was only during the enlightenment period (17th-18th century) that it was reinterpreted as representing impartiality.
- It signifies that justice should be administered without bias regardless of wealth, power and social status. The scales represent balance.
- It emphasises that courts must weigh both sides of an argument before delivering a judgment.
- Finally, the sword symbolises the power and authority of the law, signifying that the law can both protect and punish.

Why the change?

- When the British established their control over India, they introduced their legal system.
- The hierarchy of courts from lower courts to the Supreme Court is a relic of the British system.
- It was during British rule that the 'lady justice' became a prominent symbol in India and was placed outside courtrooms.
- The new statue is an attempt at decoloniality, with an aim to shed colonial symbols.
- The saree replacing the western attire brings the statue closer to Indian tradition.
- The removal of the blindfold and having eyes open is significant in the Indian context.
- It conveys that the law is not blind and it 'sees' everyone equally.
- More importantly our social diversity, the discrimination faced by underprivileged sections, constitutional provisions and laws made for their upliftment require a nuanced approach of 'viewing' every case appropriately and delivering justice.
- The sword being replaced with the Constitution symbolises the supremacy of the Constitution and its value in our jurisprudence.
- The preserving of the scales goes on to show that the courts will continue weighing evidence impartially and hearing both sides before delivering its final judgment.

What urgent actions are needed?

- The Supreme Court last week dismissed a Public Interest Litigation which sought a time frame of three years for disposal of over five crore cases pending in all courts of the country.
- The Supreme Court held that while the demand was desirable, it is practically impossible considering the flood of litigation faced by the justice delivery system.
- However, 'justice delayed is justice denied' and there are some urgent actions needed in this regard with respect to the institution that delivers justice.
- Firstly, the revised Memorandum of Procedure that deals with appointment of judges by the collegium has not been finalised for the past eight years.
- This needs to be finalised by the government and judiciary without any further delay to bring transparency and accountability to the process of appointment.
- Secondly, the representation of backward classes, scheduled castes, schedule tribes, and religious minorities is less than 25% in the higher judiciary and women constitute less than 15%.
- The appointments to higher judiciary should reflect the social diversity of our country.
- Third, the High Court's invariably operate at only 60-70% strength thereby contributing to the huge pendency of over 60 lakh cases at present.
- The government needs to appoint collegium recommendations for High Courts without dragging its feet.

- The vacancies in lower courts, where 4.4 crore cases are pending, should also be filled by the States without backlog.
- Finally, cases dealing with the constitutional validity of amendments/laws and individual liberty should be heard on a priority basis by the higher judiciary.
- These measures would ensure that the new symbol is not just symbolic but reflects the actions taken for the delivery of fair and prompt justice.

Significance of Statue of Liberty

- Lady Justice is a symbol of justice that has deep significance in India, as well as in many other legal systems around the world.
- The figure of Lady Justice, often depicted as a blindfolded woman holding a sword and scales, embodies the essential ideals of the judiciary and the rule of law.
- Her presence in India's legal system holds particular importance due to the country's commitment to justice, fairness, and equality.

Here is the significance of each element associated with Lady Justice in the Indian context:

Blindfold:

- The blindfold on Lady Justice represents impartiality, signifying that justice should be administered without bias or favoritism, regardless of a person's identity, power, or wealth.
- In India, this is especially important due to the nation's vast diversity in terms of caste, religion, class, and language.
- The blindfold symbolizes the idea that justice is blind to these differences, upholding equality before the law as enshrined in the Indian Constitution.

Scales:

- The scales represent balance and fairness, illustrating that evidence must be weighed carefully in every case before reaching a verdict.
- In India, where the judiciary plays a vital role in safeguarding constitutional rights and delivering justice, the scales underscore the importance of a fair and balanced legal process, ensuring that judgments are based on merit rather than influence.

Sword:

- The sword symbolizes the power of justice, enforcing laws and protecting society by punishing wrongdoing.
- In India, the sword reminds us of the authority of the courts to impose penalties, ensuring that justice is served swiftly and effectively.
- It also symbolizes the need for justice to be carried out with moral courage and decisiveness, which is critical in a country with complex legal challenges.

Woman Figure:

- The portrayal of Lady Justice as a woman emphasizes the nurturing and protective aspect of justice.
- In India, where gender equality is still a critical issue, the feminine representation of justice underscores the importance of ensuring fairness and equal treatment for all, regardless of gender.
- In the Indian legal context, Lady Justice represents the core values of the judiciary—fairness, equality, impartiality, and the rule of law.
- These ideals are fundamental to India's democratic system, where the judiciary is seen as a guardian of individual rights and freedoms, ensuring that justice prevails in all legal matters.

QUESTIONS

Fill in the Blank:

1. The new statue of Lady Justice in the Supreme Court of India is clothed in a _____, replacing the previous western attire.
2. The removal of the _____ from the new Lady Justice statue symbolizes that the law in India 'sees' everyone equally.
3. The sword in the original Lady Justice statue has been replaced by the _____ in the new statue, emphasizing its importance in Indian jurisprudence.
4. The symbol of Lady Justice with a blindfold was added during the _____ period, possibly as a satire on the corrupt state of legal systems.
5. The scales in Lady Justice's hand represent _____, emphasizing that courts must weigh both sides of an argument before delivering judgment.
6. In Roman mythology, the modern-day Lady Justice is believed to have originated from the goddess _____.
7. The new Lady Justice statue reflects an attempt at _____, moving away from colonial symbols in India's justice system.
8. The _____ in India's higher judiciary is less than 15%, highlighting the need for better gender representation.

10. Bihar gets its first dry port

- Bihar Industry minister Nitish Mishra inaugurated the state's first dry port at Bihta, a town near state capital Patna.
- The dry port is being seen as the state's big initiative to boost export of goods being produced in Bihar, in collaboration with a private company.

What is a dry port and why was it needed in Bihar?

- A dry port, or inland container depot (ICD), provides a logistics facility away from a seaport or airport for cargo handling, storage, and transportation. It acts as a bridge between sea/air ports and inland regions, facilitating efficient movement of goods.
- It was a much needed initiative for a state like Bihar, where its export items — mainly agro-based, garments and leather products — are manufactured in diverse locations.
- Now, cargo from various shippers can be consolidated at the dry port, making it easier to transport. The best part of a dry port is that it handles customs clearance procedures, reducing congestion at seaports/airports.
- Overall, a dry port was needed in Bihar to streamline cargo handling and transportation, lowering transportation costs, and securing storage and handling.
- The Bihta dry port is spread over seven acres. It is being run in a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) mode by Pristine Magadh Infrastructure Private Limited and the state industry department.

What products is Bihar looking to export?

- Bihar is a major producer of fruits and vegetables such as potato, tomato, banana, litchi and makhana (fox nuts). It also has significant export capacities of maize (with 11 of 38 Bihar districts focussing on maize production), sponge iron, packed food, waste paper, newsprint, rice, and meat.

- While maize production is heavily concentrated in North Bihar districts such as Khagaria, Begusarai, Saharsa and Purnea, the state government has opened several leather and garment units in North Bihar districts of Muzaffarpur, East Champaran and West Champaran. Vaishali, Nalanda, Patna, and Begusarai also have vast export potential in food processing.
- The first consignment exported from the dry port was of leather shoes, which were sent to Russia.
- Recently, half a dozen investors have opened leather manufacturing units in the state. Industry minister Mishra said: “Leather and garment have vast export potential in the state. We are increasing our land bank to encourage more and more investments.”
- As per Bihar government data, the state recorded exports worth Rs 20,000 crore in 2022-23. Now, with the availability of ICD Bihta, the state looks at boosting its export potential.

Can adjoining states benefit from the Bihta dry port?

- ICD Bihta is fully commissioned and approved under the department of revenue, Union ministry of finance.
- It is connected by railways to gateway ports of Kolkata and Haldia in West Bengal, Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh, Nhava Sheva in Maharashtra, Mundra in Gujarat, among others.
- Catering to the entire eastern India, ICD Bihta can help neighbouring states of Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and Odisha.

Dry Port

- A dry port, also known as an inland port, is an inland terminal connected directly to a seaport by road, rail, or both. It serves as a hub for the shipment of goods to and from coastal ports, reducing congestion at the seaport while offering comprehensive logistics services like customs clearance, warehousing, and multimodal transport.

Benefits of a Dry Port:

- **Decongestion of Seaports:** Dry ports alleviate traffic and congestion at seaports by relocating container storage and customs clearance inland. This allows for faster turnaround times for ships, improving port efficiency.
- **Cost Efficiency:** Dry ports reduce transportation costs by optimizing cargo handling and distribution. They facilitate easier access to inland markets, reducing the need for direct trips to the seaport. Rail connectivity to dry ports, in particular, can be more cost-effective than road transport over long distances.
- **Improved Supply Chain Management:** By providing customs, warehousing, and distribution facilities inland, dry ports help streamline logistics operations. They support just-in-time delivery systems, minimizing delays and enhancing supply chain reliability.
- **Environmental Benefits:** Transporting goods via rail to a dry port reduces road traffic and emissions, contributing to environmental sustainability. Additionally, dry ports can serve as hubs for green logistics, further reducing the carbon footprint of supply chains.
- **Boost to Local Economies:** Dry ports stimulate regional economic growth by creating jobs, attracting businesses, and improving access to global markets for inland regions. This can lead to the development of industrial parks and trade zones around the dry port.
- **Customs and Trade Facilitation:** Dry ports offer customs clearance and other regulatory services away from the congested coastal ports, speeding up international trade processes and reducing delays in shipment handling.

QUESTIONS

Fill in the Blank:

1. Bihar's first dry port, inaugurated by Industry Minister Nitish Mishra, is located in _____, a town near the state capital Patna.
2. A dry port, also known as an _____, provides logistics facilities for cargo handling, storage, and transportation away from seaports or airports.
3. The Bihta dry port is spread over _____ acres and is run under a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model by Pristine Magadh Infrastructure Private Limited and the state industry department.
4. The first consignment exported from the Bihta dry port was of _____, which was sent to Russia.
5. Bihar's key export items include agro-based products, garments, and _____, which are manufactured in various locations across the state.
6. One of the significant benefits of a dry port is that it handles _____ procedures, reducing congestion at seaports and airports.
7. Bihar recorded exports worth Rs _____ crore in 2022-23, with expectations to boost its export potential further with the dry port.
8. The Bihta dry port is connected by railways to gateway ports in _____, _____, and Nhava Sheva, among others.
9. The dry port can help neighboring states like Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, and _____ benefit from its facilities.
10. Transporting goods via _____ to a dry port reduces road traffic and emissions, contributing to environmental sustainability.