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India’s Relations with Other Countries

1. **Deeper trade ties between India and US**
   - Over the past two decades, the partnership between the world’s two largest democracies and free-market societies has strengthened tremendously.
   - But it still lags behind deepening strategic and cultural alignment and it is critical to address this shortfall.

**Positive developments**
- There are gains from strategic cooperation and deepening people-to-people ties.
- Trade and investment volumes between the United States and India have experienced enormous growth.

**US assistance to India**
- India is trying to move up value chains and reach ambitious development targets.
- The aim is to grow to a $-5 trillion economy by 2025, become a hub for high-tech manufacturing, and install 500 GW of renewable energy by 2030.
- These goals can be achieved with US capital and investment, and continued access to the American market.
- On India’s side, there is a positive momentum in the economic partnership with recent moves to raise FDI caps in key sectors and the repeal of the retroactive tax law have boosted investor confidence.

**Concerns / Challenges**
- Some harmful legacy policies have intensified during the pandemic, with India implementing unpredictable tariffs and regulatory regimes targeting foreign firms.
- The Biden administration has not yet offered a full-throated global trade policy.

**Way Forward**
- Both governments can make real progress by building a 21st-century trade framework that can bring together the best of both countries.
- To facilitate growth in the healthcare sector and drive investment in research and development, it is essential that the governments embrace market-based approaches on innovative medical products.
  - Ensure that public procurement policies do not discriminate against foreign firms.
  - Align regulatory structures to speed the approval of medical devices and pharmaceuticals so that critical and lifesaving therapies can get to the market faster.
- To promote further growth in the digital sphere, we must address several foundational issues, such as the digital service tax, cross-border data flows and common cellular standards.
- India and the US must come to a common ground on 5G standards so that they can operate in an integrated telecommunications ecosystem.
- New data regulations should also facilitate the flow of information and respect internationally recognised intellectual property rights.
- Progress on these fronts can address some of our current economic maladies and create the momentum and goodwill to remove the impediments to a bilateral trade deal.
- This can facilitate the movement of the goods, services, technology, talent, and capital necessary to fortify the world against climate disruption, prepare it for future pandemics, and build an economy ready for the challenges of the 21st century.

2. **Indo-US ties in Science and technology**
- The India-United States (US) strategic partnership started with the signing of civil nuclear agreement.
A new China, more aggressive and assertive internationally, pushed the US to give its relationship with India strategic importance.

New Delhi thinks that a **stable and strategic relationship with the US is in India’s interest.**

**Focus in the India-US relationship on science, technology, and trade**

- **Geopolitical and geostrategic interests** take precedence in the bilateral relationship.
- The US administration wants to sell defence equipment, and India is ready to buy it.
- But 21st century wars will not be fought with boots on the ground or with aircraft carriers or submarines.
- It is science, technology, and trade that will determine who wins or loses the war.
- Therefore, the **focus in the India-US relationship needs to shift to science, technology, and trade.**

**What measures can both countries take?**

- India and the US need to jointly establish 100 chair professorships in frontier areas such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), genome technology, nanotechnology, deep ocean exploration, quantum computing and clean energy.
  - Both countries must choose their best academics to work with complete freedom to move, interact and jointly work on those projects.
- They need to **establish a new joint research council** with at least $10 billion funding to support such research projects.
  - Funds for the research council may come from public and private entities and individual donors, with a prominent India-American leading the effort.
- Each of India’s top 20 universities should choose a partner university in the US with a defined budget for research, joint studentships, and a mechanism of free-flowing faculty between them.
- Research programmes on translational areas useful in critical sectors such as agriculture, services and pharmaceuticals should be established.

**Concerns / Challenges**

- Successive US administrations have indeed wanted to push trade with India to the forefront. However, India has been reluctant due to its domestic compulsions.
- In critical sectors such as agriculture, reform in India will take time to overcome tariff and non-tariff barriers.
- US goods and services trade with India is less than $150 billion compared to nearly $630 billion with China.

**Way Forward**

- Discussions on science and technology will not yield dividends unless a robust **trade policy** is in place.
- For the US, scientific collaborations and selling technology to boost productivity for Indian farmers should take precedence.
- **India needs to invest heavily in infrastructure**, both physical and intellectual, and in technology to authenticate agricultural products to help farmers produce internationally competitive produce.
- India also needs to open up its services, finance, legal, health care and pharmaceutical sectors to US companies.
- India and the US can be true partners through joint efforts in making the next generation of quantum computers, achieving breakthroughs in the use of AI, making genome sequencing and analysis affordable, designing and building the next generation of airplanes running on clean energy, and making the first woman pair, one Indian and one American, land on Mars.
- This can make the world believe in the true power of democracy.
3. **Energy cooperation between India and Russia**

- India has been at the forefront of the transformation of global energy and striving to diversify its trade relations.
- **With its abundant energy sources, Russia could be an ultimate long-term partner.**
- But the bilateral ties require more support from both government and corporate leaders.

**India-Russia energy partnership**

- **Energy is one of the major pillars of the strategic partnership.**
- India-Russia energy partnership can help bring stability to the global energy market.
- Indian and Russian Energy Ministers announced that the countries’ companies have been pushing for greater cooperation in the oil and gas sector.
- **Russia is the largest investor in India’s energy sector.**
- One of the examples of cooperation between the two countries in energy transformation is the joint venture between Reliance Industries Ltd. and Russia’s Sibur, the country’s largest petrochemicals producer.
  - It represents a practical example of technology transfer from Russia to India.

**Renewable Energy**

- India has recently achieved a milestone of completing the countrywide installation of 100 gigawatts of total installed renewable energy capacity, excluding large hydro.
- A recent Deloitte report has forecasted that India could gain U.S.$11 trillion in economic value over the next 50 years by limiting rising global temperatures and realising its potential to ‘export decarbonization’.
- However, unknowns of climate change suggest that the country should accelerate its energy transition.
- **Russia could emerge as an indispensable partner for such a transition.**
- Both countries have an extensive record of bilateral cooperation in the energy domain.

**Nuclear Energy**

- Russian companies have been involved in the construction of six nuclear reactors in the Kudankulam nuclear power project at Tamil Nadu.
- Previously, Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed that Russia is ready to build a dozen reactors in India over the next 20 years.
- India and Russia secure the potential of designing a nuclear reactor specifically for developing countries, which is a promising area of cooperation.

**Way Forward**

- Despite significant progress, coal remains India’s most important source of electricity production, and it is not good for the environment.
- To meet the growing energy demand and succeed in green transformation, India needs approximately U.S.$500 billion of investments in wind and solar infrastructure, grid expansion, and storage.
- Therefore, more efforts are needed to expand cooperation with such partners as Russia.

4. **Expanding India’s engagement with Russia**

- Russian President visit to India for the **21st India-Russia Summit** meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlights the constant efforts by both leaders to nurture and to provide further impetus to the ‘India-Russia Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership’.

**Brief History: Reached to Strategic partnership:**
Russia has been one of India’s closest friends and allies with the signing of the “Declaration on the India-Russia Strategic Partnership” in October 2000 which unlocked new opportunities in strategic, science and technology, space, energy, nuclear ties, trade and commerce, culture and a people-to-people connect.

Mr. Putin’s visit to India in December 2010 heralded a new chapter in India-Russia relations when the Strategic Partnership was elevated to the level of a “Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership”.

1. More importantly, the robust partnership between India and Russia has come out of the shackles of the Cold War inheritance.
2. India-Russia relations have withstood the test of time and the ever-shifting nature of national interests.
3. This exceptional resilience is built on the firm foundation of strategic national interest and the synergy of geopolitics.
4. In the post-Cold War era, India has emerged as an economic powerhouse and a key stakeholder in today’s global debate be it climate change, international trade, or the menace of terrorism.

’2+2’ mechanism between countries provide Stability and diversity:
The 2+2 dialogue is held between the foreign and defence ministers of two countries and is generally seen to be aimed at creating a mechanism under which the bilateral relationship takes a decisive strategic turn with greater integration of defence, security and intelligence apparatus. 
1. The uniqueness of this approach not only ensures result-oriented cooperation but also deliberates upon regional and global matters of mutual concerns and interests.
2. Defence, trade and investment, energy, and science and technology may be part of the agenda, but India and Russia need to work together in a trilateral manner or using other flexible frameworks, particularly in Southeast Asia and Central Asia.
3. Their growing collaboration can be a force of stability and will bring more diversity to the region while strengthening multilateralism.

Convergence and divergence between two countries:
India and Russia have much convergence spanning different sectors.
1. Russia is the key and principal supplier of arms and armaments to the Indian armed forces accounting for over 60% of weapons.
2. It comprises the whole gamut covering the Indian Army, Indian Air Force and Indian Navy. India recently inducted the S-400 Triumf missile systems.
3. The India-Russia defence cooperation has evolved from a buyer-seller model to new areas of military-technical collaboration.
4. The BrahMos missile system was a successful collaboration of joint research, development, and production. Science and technology, nuclear, energy, space have been key driving forces.

But changes in interests and capabilities being fuelled by geopolitical differences are widening the divergence between India and Russia.
1. In terms of geostrategy, Russia is aligned with China and India is more anchored toward the United States. This dissonance was apparent in the Indian and Russian approach over Afghanistan.
2. Bilateral trade has seen the two countries progressing from defence and energy to IT, pharmaceuticals, agro-industries, mineral and metallurgy, fertilizers, and infrastructure projects.
3. India-Russia trade was valued at the U.S.$10.11 billion in 2019–20, but is not a true reflection of the potential that can be harnessed.
Therefore, both nations need to focus on youth exchanges and deeper links in various fields including sport, culture, spiritual and religious studies. Their growing collaboration can be a force of stability and will bring more diversity to the region while strengthening multilateralism.

Conclusion:
- Russia with its global status and presence presents a win-win situation for deeper cooperation.
- This relation between both countries has evolved with time, deepening the integration and widening the breadth of the relation.
- Finally, Buddhism can be an area where both countries can expand their interaction, where peace and sustainability can act as a balm in this turbulent world.

5. India-Nepal flood management
- Despite the efforts made on the ground, people continue to suffer with perennial flooding in north Bihar.

Present Status
- North Bihar gets ravaged by floods because of heavy rainfall in the catchment areas of Nepal.
- Bihar had flagged non-cooperation from Nepal in managing flood.
- In accordance with an agreement between India and Nepal, the water resources department of Bihar conducts the flood management work in the bordering areas but in recent times Bihar is not receiving full cooperation from Nepal.
- On Farakka barrage, now water takes longer time to exit from the barrage and therefore, Ganga’s water spread to wider areas takes longer time.

Fundamentals of flooding
- Historically, Bihar has been known to be India’s most flood-prone State.
- 76% of the population in north Bihar faces the recurring threat of flood devastation.
- A large part of north Bihar, adjoining Nepal, is drained by a number of rivers that have their catchments in the steep and geologically nascent Himalayas.
- Originating in Nepal, the high discharge and sediment load in the Kosi, Gandak, Burhi Gandak, Bagmati, Kamla Balan, Mahananda and Adhwar Group wreak havoc in the plains of Nepal’s Tarai and Bihar.
- The plains of North Bihar have recorded the highest number of floods during the last 30-years.
- The Flood of 2004 demonstrates the severity of the flood problem when a vast area was badly affected by the floods.

Recasting water management
- For the people of North Bihar, the flood is a part of their lives.
- Infrastructural interventions such as building embankments and re-routing streams have disturbed the conventional pattern of slow water flow.
- The Kosi Treaty of 1954, under which the embankments in Nepal were established and maintained, did not make enough provisions for the maintenance of embankments and the rivers changing their course.
- The deposition of stones, sand, silt and sediment has led to river beds rising, changing course and causing unimaginable losses.
- Between the mid-18th and mid-20th centuries, the Kosi is said to have shifted over 100 kilometres westward, resulting in large-scale human displacements.
- There is a need for greater sensitisation on climatic imbalances and sustainable development.
The same flood-affected regions also face the issue of drought and a sinking water table.

**Way Forward**
- A solution to the issue of chronic flooding lies in revisiting the old plans and arrangements between India and Nepal.
- For flood control in Bihar, a **dedicated intergovernmental panel must be formed through a bilateral mechanism between India and Nepal.**
- A course correction is needed to re-establish water cooperation as a common cause and draw inspiration for joint action from the 1950s.
- In the mainstream political and policy establishments, **greater attention needs to be given to the annual calamity and its devastating effects on lives and livelihoods.**
- India and Nepal need to be in dialogue to end the crisis of flooding every year.
- With a **long-term strategy of water management cooperation** between India and Nepal, the matter should be looked into.

### 6. Renegotiating FTA between India and the European Union

#### Potential in India-EU FTA
- There is a **significant untapped potential to expand India-EU bilateral trade relation through an FTA.**
- The **FTA will deliver on enhancing India’s market access in key services.**
- For this to happen, regulatory barriers in cross-border supply as well as provision of services through temporary movement of professionals will need to be addressed.

#### Free Trade Agreements (FTAs)
- Economic theory tells us that FTAs are not always sure-win strategies because these create as well as divert trade.
- **FTAs need to be designed in a manner that they enhance complementarities amongst partners and overcome regulatory hurdles.**
- It has been reported that the FTA will be remodelled into three separate deals—trade, investment and geographical indications (GIs).
- While the investment deal is seen as a standalone agreement, the one on GIs could be integrated with the trade deal.
- It may be in India’s interest to ensure that all the three negotiations move in parallel and feed into each other.
- Since India unilaterally terminated bilateral investment treaties (BIT), including those with the EU member states, the EU appears to be keen to conclude an investment deal that includes Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) provisions.

#### FTA negotiations in the Past
- The FTA negotiations had earlier hit a roadblock in 2013.
- Issues such as a certain degree of tariff liberalisation in goods; services liberalisation; issues related to temporary movement of professionals; public procurement; intellectual property particularly pharmaceuticals; and sustainable development are understood to have been the major areas of concern for India then.
- Clearly, India is in a better position today as we know the problem areas to work out.

#### India-EU Trade
- Textiles, leather and apparels are a dominant sector of exports from India to the EU, accounting for about one-fourth of our total exports in this sector.
- **India benefits from the EU’s Generalised System of Preferences (GSP).**
- Through the FTA, we can aim to achieve a **better preferential treatment in key products** of our export interests.
- Regulatory provisions regarding labour and environment that the EU has been demanding will need to be watched for, to realise this potential.
- Turning to services, the EU imports around 7.45% of its total telecommunication, computer and information services from India.
- The UK was a key market in the EU, and with the Brexit the gains from the FTA get reduced to that extent.

**Way Forward**
- There is a significant untapped potential to expand the bilateral trade relation through an FTA.
- India and the EU will need to see that the deal is a win-win for both.

### 7. India’s engagement with Europe

- Europe looms so large in the **Indian diplomatic agenda** today and smaller European states draw unprecedented political attention from India.
- The European Union (EU) is set to **push for a closer relationship and stronger presence in the Indo-Pacific**, as released in the **EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific**.

#### India’s engagement with Europe in recent past:
1. As the deepening confrontation between the US and China begins to squeeze South East Asia, Europe is widely seen as **widening the strategic options** for the region.
2. The perspective is similar in Delhi, which now sees Brussels as a critical element in the construction of a multipolar world.
3. As External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar puts it, **India’s strategy is to “engage America, manage China, cultivate Europe, reassure Russia, bring Japan into play”**.

#### The EU outlined a strategy for India in 2018:
- EU outlined a strategy for India to focus on four themes — **sustainable economic modernisation, promotion of a rules-based order, foreign policy coordination, and security cooperation**.
- Above all, there is a recognition in both Delhi and Brussels that the **India-EU strategic partnership** is crucial for the **rebalancing of the international system** amidst the current global flux.

#### India and EU role in Indo-Pacific region:
1. With an enhanced focus on their strategic relations and engagement with other like-minded regional players, India and EU can play a significant role in **preserving an open, free, inclusive and rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific**.
2. India’s support for France’s membership of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA).
3. India’s backing for a larger European role in the Indo-Pacific. India has welcomed the interest of Germany and Netherlands in **building a new geopolitical architecture in the Indo-Pacific**.
4. Increasing competition, power rivalry, unilateral actions challenging the multilateral order and international laws are some of the common concerns shared by India and Europe.
5. Some of the crucial areas that India and EU can work together include joint efforts in capacity building against challenges like piracy, counter-terrorism etc and cooperation in enhancing interoperability and domain awareness, maritime technologies, blue economy etc.

**Conclusion:**
• **Defence and security** are important elements of the EU’s Indo-Pacific strategy that “seeks to promote an open and rules-based regional security architecture,” including secure sea lines of communication, capacity-building and enhanced naval presence in the Indo-Pacific.

8. **Floods in Europe and Lesson for India**
   - The floods in Europe are a wake-up call for India to adopt the Dutch mantra, ‘live with water, build with nature’.

   **Recent Floods in Europe**
   - A month’s rain poured in just 24 hours in the worst-affected areas of Germany and Belgium.
   - This caused multiple rivers to burst their banks and flood parts of the two countries as well as the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Switzerland.

   **Climate change spares none**
   - The floods showed that climate change spares none.
   - Even if a country has adequate resources and advanced infrastructure (physical as well as organisational), it can find no escape from extreme climatic events.
   - Additionally, increasing temperatures at the poles result in slower movement of storms in the mid-latitudes. As a result, storms linger longer at a specific place.
   - The **combination of a slow-moving storm and the presence of surplus moisture in the atmosphere results in intense rainfall in one location within a short period of time.**

   **What did the Netherlands do right in dealing with the floods**
   - Superior organisation, better preparedness and an advanced flood management system helped the Netherlands, with its centuries of experience in dealing with floods, to avoid casualties.

   **Lessons for India**
   - The floods in Europe call attention to the global need for countries to implement ecologically sensitive flood protection measures.
   - The Dutch have gone beyond their conventional dependence on dikes, dams, walls and gates to protect themselves from floods. Their current disaster resilience mantra is to **live with water, build with nature and make room for the river.**
   - They champion creating adequate space for rivers to overflow by protecting floodplains from human interference, deepening riverbeds and creating alternate channels for excess water.
   - It serve as a wake-up call to us in India to adopt pragmatic policies and practices that are nature friendly.
   - Flood-prone areas should be identified, and projects initiated on an urgent basis to create room for rivers.
   - United Nations report calls for removing obstructions and encroachments from existing water channels, the proper maintenance of such channels and creating additional channels for water to flow.
   - Strengthened disaster readiness, planning and preparation will help us deal with sudden, intense rain and consequent floods.
   - While national and State disaster management authorities have grown in experience, competence and professionalism, there is need for a **higher degree of coordination and preparation across all levels of government.**

9. **India-China maritime capabilities**
   - Naval power will play a decisive role in India-China relations.
   - But India needs greater vision, realistic targets and proper implementation to achieve its maritime goals.
China’s Naval Power
- Today, China has overtaken the US Navy in numbers.
- China is also the world’s top ship-producing nation, with the largest merchant navy, coast-guard and fishing fleet/maritime militia in the world.

Competition between India and China
- The competition between China and India in the economic and military spheres is asymmetric. They compete for the Asian strategic space.
- An economically strong, expansionist, and militaristic China will use the Maritime Silk Route initiative to expand its influence and ensure dominance in the Indo-Pacific.

Gap between maritime capabilities of China and India
- China laid down its first indigenous aircraft-carrier in 2015 and commissioned it in 2018.
- Work on India’s first indigenous aircraft-carrier commenced in 2009 and in 2021 it awaits completion.
- India launched its first “maritime modernisation” plan, the “Sagarmala” in 2003, almost simultaneously with China. But its focus was limited to port development and road/rail connectivity.
- It was assumed that Sagarmala was a panacea for all of India’s maritime shortcomings.
- The exclusive focus of successive governments on port development has led to gross neglect of other critical components of India’s maritime capability.
- These include merchant shipping, shipbuilding, ship repair, seabed exploration and fisheries etc.
- All of this have implications for India’s maritime security as well as its “blue economy”.

Concerns / Challenges
- Initiating programmes with inappropriate aims, choosing unrealistic targets, abandoning/re-naming projects and not ensuring faithful implementation are the reasons underlying the dismal state of our maritime capability.
- Nations which were lagging behind India a few decades ago have surged ahead because of their vision and dynamism in the maritime arena.
- Today, India’s major ports are overloaded and inefficient.
- Our shipbuilding industry is failing, the merchant fleet is inadequate and growing at a snail’s pace, seabed exploitation has yet to take off and human resources are lacking.

Way Forward
- It is time India evolved a National Strategy for the maritime sector that charts a 50-year path and receives Parliament’s approval to ensure survival through changes of government.
- Navies remain hollow without the backing of a strong maritime sector. If “atmanirbharta” has relevance anywhere, it is here.

10. India-Taiwan Relations
- India and Taiwan are celebrating 25 years of their partnership.
- Though mutual efforts between Delhi and Taipei have enabled a range of bilateral agreements covering agriculture, investment, customs cooperation, civil aviation, industrial cooperation and other areas, the time has come to recalibrate India-Taiwan relations.

Cultivating political framework
- Creating a political framework is a prerequisite to recalibrate India-Taiwan relations.
- Both partners have deepened mutual respect, with democracy and diversity as the key principles for collective growth.
• The shared faith in freedom, human rights, justice, and rule of law continues to embolden the partnership.

Mutual Assistance
• Maintaining air quality has become a mammoth challenge for the Indian government.
• Taiwan could be a valuable partner in dealing with this challenge through its bio-friendly technologies.
• Such methods are applied to convert agricultural waste into value-added and environmentally beneficial renewable energy or biochemicals.
• This will be a win-win situation as it will help in dealing with air pollution and also enhance farmers’ income.

Cultural Exchange
• India and Taiwan need to deepen people-to-people connect.
• Cultural exchange is the cornerstone of any civilisational exchange.
• Tourism is the key tool in this exchange. The Buddhist pilgrimage tour needs better connectivity and visibility, in addition to showcasing incredible India’s diversity.
• With the Taiwan Tourism Bureau partnering with Mumbai Metro, Taiwan is trying to raise awareness about the country and increase the inflow of Indian tourists.

Deepening economic ties
• Trade relations have grown. India’s huge market provides Taiwan with investment opportunities.
• Taiwan’s reputation as the world leader in semiconductor and electronics complements India’s leadership in ITES (Information Technology-Enabled Services).
• This convergence of interests will help create new opportunities.
• India’s strides in the ease of business ranking not only provide Taiwan with lucrative business opportunities but also help it mitigate its over-dependence on one country for investment opportunities.
• The signing of a bilateral trade agreement in 2018 was an important milestone.

Concerns / Challenges
• Despite the huge potential, Taiwan investments have been paltry in India.
• Taiwanese firms find the regulatory and labour regime daunting.

Way Forward
• Both sides can create a group of empowered persons or a task force to chart out a road map to make the relationship more meaningful.
• Political will is the key.
• India and Taiwan already collaborate in the area of traditional medicine. The time is ripe to expand cooperation in the field of healthcare.
• Taiwan’s handling of the pandemic and its support to many other countries underlines the need to deepen healthcare cooperation.
• New Delhi and Taipei can also undertake joint research and development initiatives in the field of organic farming.
• Policymakers need to coordinate better with the business community to help them navigate the regulatory and cultural landscape for better ties.
Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or Affecting India’s Interests

1. **Role of SAARC**
   - South Asia is the world’s most complex and closely watched region.
   - The region is beset with unsettled territorial disputes; it remains a theatre for ethnic, cultural, and religious tensions and rivalries.

**Conflict in Afghanistan**
- Afghanistan has been a venue for two great wars.
- The first began in 1979 when Soviet forces invaded Afghanistan. In response, the US made alliances — working with Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and others while backing Afghan Mujahideens against the Soviets.
- After the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan in 1988, the US quickly followed suit.
- The vacuum facilitated the growth of religious fanaticism and the emergence of the Taliban.
- In the early 21st century, Afghanistan became a staging ground for the 9/11 terrorist attacks against America.
- In 2001, the US military went into Afghanistan to Work attack the military capability of the Taliban regime.

**Collective Commitment by SAARC**
- These instruments demonstrate the **collective commitment to rid the region of terror and promote regional peace, stability, and prosperity**.
- SAARC underscored the need for cooperation on a regional basis for fighting the COVID-19 pandemic.
- As the largest regional cooperation organisation, SAARC’s importance in stabilising and effectively transforming the region is becoming increasingly self-evident.
- In 36 years of existence, SAARC has developed a dense network of institutions, linkages, and mechanisms.
- SAARC has made significant contributions to the development of civil society and track-two initiatives.

**Concerns / Challenges**
- Despite the framework SAARC provides for cooperation amongst South Asian nations, it has remained dormant since its 18th summit of 2014 in Kathmandu.
- Allowing SAARC to become dysfunctional and irrelevant greatly distorts our ability to address the realities and mounting challenges facing SAARC nations.
- The failure of South Asian nations to act in accord will plunge South Asia into a perilous theatre of discord.

**Way Forward**
- SAARC members are among the top troop-contributing countries to UN peacekeeping missions.
- SAARC is needed for the diplomacy and coordination that is needed between member-states in order to address the numerous threats and challenges the region faces.
- If the geopolitical dynamics following World War II could allow France and Germany to interface effectively to create the European Union, there is no reason why India and Pakistan cannot come together.
- SAARC has the capacity to bring nations together.
• As Nelson Mandela said, “If you want to make peace with your enemy, you have to work with your enemy. Then he becomes your partner.”

2. Reviving South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)

Need for Reviving SAARC
• Studies have shown that South Asia’s experience of the Covid-19 pandemic has been unique from other regions of the world, and this needs to be studied further in order to counter future pandemics.
• In the longer term, there will be a shift in priorities towards health security, food security, and job security, that will also benefit from an “all-of” South Asia approach.
• While it will be impossible for countries to cut themselves off from the global market entirely, regional initiatives will become the “Goldilocks option”.
• As the world is divided between regional trade arrangements, India’s only regional trading agreement at present is the South Asian Free Trade Area, or SAFTA (with SAARC countries).
• In dealing with the challenge from China too, a unified South Asian platform remains India’s most potent countermeasure.
• Several foreign policy experts argue that India’s strategic dealing with China has to begin with South Asia. In this regard, it is important to reinvigorate SAARC.
• BIMSTEC cannot replace SAARC for reasons such as lack of a common identity and history among all BIMSTEC members.
• BIMSTEC’s focus is on the Bay of Bengal region, thus making it an inappropriate forum to engage all South Asian nations.
• Common threats of Terrorism, Climate Change impacts, Poverty and Socio-Economic backwardness can be fought together as the problems plague all countries equally.
• Connectivity between regions increases the economic interaction and collective growth of region. This increases the economic and political bonhomie between nations and its people.

Concerns / Challenges
• Member countries, as well as international agencies deal with South Asia as a fragmented group rather than a collective.
• South Asia is one of the least integrated regions in the world with intra-regional trade teetering at barely 5% of total South Asian trade, compared to 25% of intra-regional trade in the ASEAN region.
• While South Asian countries have signed trade treaties, the lack of political will and trust deficit has prevented any meaningful movement.
• Tariff and non-tariff barriers have also played their role in keeping the level of integration low.
• Due to same agriculture produce like Basmati rice in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, the scope of trade is also inherently less.
• Even though the region accounts for 21% of world population, its share in global GDP is just around 3%.
• Almost every member is facing numerous internal crises like Tamils issue in Sri Lanka, Constitutional crisis in Nepal, religious fundamentalism in Pakistan and Bangladesh, Terrorism and instability in Afghanistan.

Way Forward
• One way to infuse life in SAARC is to revive the process of South Asian economic integration.
• India should take the lead and work with its neighbours to slash the tariff and non-tariff barriers.
• There’s a need to revive the negotiations on a SAARC investment treaty, pending since 2007.
• The SAARC region can benefit from higher intra-SAARC investment flows.
• Deeper **regional economic integration** will create greater interdependence with India acquiring the central role, which, in turn, would serve India’s strategic interests too.
• **All countries should come together to sort out their differences**, either multilaterally or bilaterally.
• SAARC needs to work on **Improving infrastructure and regional connectivity** – Collaboration in scientific research, universities exchange programs, tourism etc. will have a positive effect on relations among countries.

### 3. Batting for ‘One South Asia’

**South Asian region and Climate Change:**

- **South Asia** is one of the **most vulnerable regions to climate shocks**.
- The region is living through a **“new climate normal”** in which intensifying heat waves, cyclones, droughts, and floods are testing the limits of government, businesses, and citizens to adapt.
- More than half of all South Asians, or 750 million people in the **8 countries** were affected by one or more climate-related disasters in the last two decades.
- Accelerating climate adaptation is **critical to building resilience** to the rapidly warming climate in the region.
- South Asia is pioneering many climate-smart solutions, including innovative community approaches to coastal resilience, scaling up renewable energy and regenerative forestry.

**South Asia’s feeble voice: South Asian initiative on climate change:**

1. The absence of a South Asian initiative on climate change, accrues to a number of obvious reasons:
2. **India-Pakistan tensions** that have led to the degradation of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) process, especially since 2014, when the last SAARC summit was held;
3. Events in **Afghanistan** and the **Taliban takeover** which will bring it closer to its Central Asian rather than South Asian neighbours;
4. The **differences over pollution issues** within the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) grouping that has held up its initiatives like the common Motor Vehicle Agreement (due mainly to Bhutan’s opposition); and
5. Slow movement amongst the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) countries along the Bay of Bengal that have yet to bring about a **common charter at the global level** despite adding climate change as an area of cooperation a decade ago.

**Other drawbacks in South Asian region countries group:**

- South Asia is slowly becoming the **world’s biggest area of concern** when it comes to **climate change**.
- According to this year’s **Global Climate Risk Index**, India and Afghanistan are among the top 10 countries worldwide in terms of vulnerability, but South Asia classifies for the overall lowest values.
- By one estimate, **20 out of 23 major cyclone disasters in the world** in the past have occurred around the Bay of Bengal region, and global warming, coastal degradation and soil salinity as well as water scarcities cause the deaths of thousands in South Asia each year.
- The **Asian Development Bank** now predicts a decrease of 11% in South Asian GDPs by 2100 if “Business-As-Usual (BAU) Emissions” are maintained.

With global warming and sea levels rising, other estimates predict there will be nearly 63 million climate migrants in South Asia by 2050.
1. While India and other countries in the region access global banks, including the BRICS-led New Development Bank (NDB), the Beijing-based Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and Asian Development Bank for projects individually, there is no single South Asian entity the banks could work with for a more targeted focus and more concessional financing for the problem that faces the region.

2. Growing carbon footprints as well as post-COVID-19 economic compulsions are driving countries into closer regional coalitions, looking for solutions closer home, than those provided by globalisation and long-distance supply chains.

3. South Asia has remained an exception, persistently showing lower inter-regional trade and connectivity, and lower levels of cooperation on migrant labour issues, inter-state tourism and cross-border employment than other regions.

4. Finally, New Delhi has often warned of the pernicious influence of ‘Chinese solutions’ to problems in the subcontinent, ranging from unsustainable infrastructure financing to environmentally harmful projects as part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

5. When New Delhi failed to respond to Sri Lanka’s request for assistance with its currency and debt crisis last year, the Rajapaksa government turned to Bangladesh for a currency swap arrangement.

Need to work and implement South Asia Climate Roadmap:
1. The (WBG) World Bank Group’s South Asia Climate Roadmap will help the region ramp up its climate action in key transitions:
   1. The Agriculture, Food, Water, and Land Systems Transition
   2. The Energy and Transport Transition
   3. The Urban Transition

2. The WBG will also work to achieve systemic resilience across sectors and mobilize financing and investment.

Conclusion:
- Mr. Modi’s “One Sun One World One Grid” and ‘Panchamrit plans’ would clearly pack more punch if they contain a clear road map for the region, and strive for a common South Asian taskforce to tackle the enormous challenge that lies ahead for India and its neighbourhood this century.

4. BRICS and its importance
1. BRICS is an acronym for the grouping of the world’s leading emerging economies, namely Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.
2. The importance of BRICS is self-evident: it represents 42% of the world’s population, 30% of the land area, 24% of global GDP and 16% of international trade.
3. The BRICS seeks to deepen, broaden and intensify cooperation within the grouping and among the individual countries for more sustainable, equitable and mutually beneficial development.
4. BRICS takes into consideration each member’s growth, development and poverty objectives to ensure relations are built on the respective country’s economic strengths and to avoid competition where possible.

Achievements: Establishment of the New Development Bank (NDB) and Contingency Reserve Arrangement:
1. During the sixth BRICS Summit in Fortaleza, Brazil (2014), the leaders signed the Agreement for establishing the New Development Bank (NDB).
2. NDB has successfully worked as one of the most promising multilateral development institutions. Since its inception in 2015, it has approved 42 investment projects worth over $11 billion.
3. BRICS nations signed **BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA)** in 2014 as part of Fortaleza Declaration at Sixth BRICS summit.

4. Contingency Reserve Arrangement, aimed at ensuring liquidity for member-states when they are confronted by short term balance of payment crises.

5. The growing contribution of the BRICS to the world economy and the rising importance of the economic relations between the BRICS and other Emerging Market and Developing Countries (EMDCs) create an opportunity for new initiatives that would **better help to support sustainable and inclusive growth and development.**

**What are its immediate goals now?**

As the current chair, **India has outlined four priorities.**

The first is **to pursue reform of multilateral institutions:**

1. Reforms of multilateral institutions ranging from the United Nations, World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to the World Trade Organization and now even the World Health Organization.

The second is **the resolve to combat terrorism.**

1. BRICS is attempting to pragmatically shape its counter-terrorism strategy by crafting the **BRICS Counter Terrorism Action Plan** containing specific measures to fight radicalisation, terrorist financing and misuse of the Internet by terrorist groups.

2. **BRICS Counter Terrorism Action Plan** is expected to be a key deliverable at the forthcoming summit and may hopefully bring some change.

Other priorities like **Promoting technological and digital solutions for the Sustainable Development Goals** and expanding **people-to-people cooperation** are the other two BRICS priorities.

5. **BIMSTEC needs to reinvent itself**

1. Established as a grouping of **four nations**: India, Thailand, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka through the **Bangkok Declaration of 1997** to promote **rapid economic development**, BIMSTEC was expanded later to include **three more countries**: Myanmar, Nepal and Bhutan.

2. But it suddenly received special attention as New Delhi chose to treat it as a more practical instrument for **regional cooperation** over a faltering SAARC.

**Objectives of BIMSTEC formation:**

1. Creating an enabling environment for the rapid economic development of the sub-region.

2. Encouraging the spirit of equality and partnership.

3. Promoting active collaboration and mutual assistance in the areas of common interests of the member countries.

4. Accelerating support for each other in the fields of education, science, and technology, etc.

**Institutional reform and renewal through the BIMSTEC:**

1. The fourth leaders’ summit, held in Kathmandu in August 2018, devised an ambitious plan for institutional reform and renewal that would **encompass economic and security cooperation.**

2. It took the important decision to craft a charter to provide BIMSTEC with a more formal and stronger foundation.

3. The shared goal now is to head towards “**a Peaceful, Prosperous and Sustainable Bay of Bengal Region**”.

4. At the second swearing-in of the Modi government in May 2019, the leaders of BIMSTEC, not SAARC, were invited as honoured guests.

**Recent decisions of BIMSTEC charter and signing of three agreements:**
1. Two and a half years after the Kathmandu Summit, the grouping stands ready to move forward.
2. The foreign ministers cleared the draft for the BIMSTEC charter, recommending its early adoption.
3. They endorsed the rationalisation of sectors and sub-sectors of activity, with each member-state serving as a lead for the assigned areas of special interest.
4. The ministers also conveyed their support for the Master Plan for Transport Connectivity, which will be adopted at the next summit.
5. Preparations have been completed for the signing of three agreements relating to mutual legal assistance in criminal matters, cooperation between diplomatic academies, and the establishment of a technology transfer facility in Colombo.

How to overcome the present obstacles in BIMSTEC:
The goal now should be to overcome the obstacles leading to BIMSTEC’s success.
1. First, a strong BIMSTEC presupposes cordial and tension-free bilateral relations among all its member-states. This has not been the case, given the trajectory of India-Nepal, India-Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh-Myanmar ties in recent years.
2. Second, uncertainties over SAARC hovers, complicating matters. Both Kathmandu and Colombo want the SAARC summit revived, even as they cooperate within BIMSTEC, with diluted zeal.
3. Third, China’s decisive intrusion in the South-Southeast Asian space has cast dark shadows.
4. A renowned Bangladeshi scholar argued at a recent conference that BIMSTEC would make progress if China is accepted as its principal interlocutor and partner.
5. This perspective has hardly any takers in India and its friendly partners in the grouping.
6. Finally, the military coup in Myanmar, brutal crackdown of protesters and continuation of popular resistance resulting in a protracted impasse have produced a new set of challenges.

Conclusion:
1. A January 2018 study by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry had suggested that BIMSTEC urgently needed a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement to be a real game changer.
2. Ideally it should cover trade in goods, services and investment; promote regulatory harmonisation; adopt policies that develop regional value chains; and eliminate non-tariff barriers.
3. Also lacking was an effort to enthuse and engage the vibrant business communities of these seven countries, and expand their dialogue, interactions and transactions.
4. As BIMSTEC readies itself to celebrate the silver jubilee of its formation next year, it faces a serious challenge: to effect “a paradigm-shift in raising the level of our cooperation and regional integration”.
5. The grouping needs to reinvent itself, possibly even rename itself as ‘The Bay of Bengal Community’. It should consider holding regular annual summits.
6. Only then will its leaders convince the region about their strong commitment to the new vision they have for this unique platform linking South Asia and Southeast Asia.

6. Re-energising India’s Africa policy
- Africa is considered a foreign policy priority by India.
- The Government has a forward-looking strategy to deepen relations with African countries.
- When COVID-19 era began in March 2020, New Delhi took new initiatives to assist Africa through prompt despatch of medicines and later vaccines.
Present Status
- The latest economic data confirms that India-Africa trade is on a decline.
- According to the Confederation of Indian Industry, in 2020-21, India’s exports to and imports from Africa reduced 4.4% and 25% over the previous year.
- India’s investments in Africa too saw a decrease in 2020-21.
- Total investments over 25 years, from April 1996 to March 2021 is about one-third of China’s investment in Africa.

Global Competition
- COVID-19 has brought misery to Africa. Africans have been deeply affected.
- According to a study, Africa experienced a sharpened international competition, known as ‘the third scramble’, in the first two decades of the 21st century.
- A dozen nations from the Americas, Europe and Asia have striven to assist Africa in resolving the continent’s political and social challenges and, in turn, benefit from Africa’s markets, minerals, hydrocarbons and oceanic resources, and thereby to expand their geopolitical influence.
- China successfully used the pandemic to expand its footprint by increasing the outflow of its vaccines, unfortunately India’s ‘vax diplomacy’ has suffered a setback.
- This came in the wake of second wave of COVID-19 in India and the shortage of vaccine raw materials from the U.S.
- Geopolitical tensions in Asia and the imperative to consolidate its position in the Indo-Pacific region have compelled New Delhi to concentrate on its ties with the United Kingdom, the EU, and the Quad powers.

India’s Role
- Recently in the UN Security Council’s open debate on conflict and post-pandemic recovery in Africa, India reiterated that “the voice of Africa is not given its proper due” in the Security Council.
- India’s role in Africa
  - peacekeeping in Africa,
  - in lending support to African counter-terrorism operations, and
  - contributing to African institutions through training and capacity-enhancing assistance.

Way Forward
- For mutual benefit, Africa and India should remain optimally engaged.
- It is time to seize the opportunity and restore Africa to its primary position in India’s diplomacy and economic engagement.
- The fourth India-Africa summit, which is pending, should be held as soon as possible, even if in a virtual format.
- Fresh financial resources for grants and concessional loans to Africa must be allocated.
- It is essential “to impart a 21st century complexion to the partnership with Africa”.
- This means developing and deepening collaborations in health, space and digital technologies.
- To overcome the China challenge in Africa, increased cooperation between India and its international allies is required.
- The recent India-EU Summit has identified Africa as a region where a partnership-based approach will be followed.
- Without new commitments, India’s Africa policy would be like a car running on a near-empty fuel tank.
7. **Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)**
   - The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) of four countries, Japan, the US, Australia and India, was formed in 2007 with the initiative of Japanese PM Shinzo Abe.
   - The aim of the Quad is to support a “free, open and prosperous” Indo-Pacific region.

**Background**
- Due to lack of participation and no proper institutional framework, QUAD remained dormant for quite some time.
- By realising the threat China’s expansionist policy is causing, in November 2017, the four countries developed a new strategy to keep the critical sea routes in the Indo-Pacific free of any influence, especially Beijing’s.
- In November 2020, the Quad conducted Malabar Naval drills in the Indian Ocean.

**China’s Response**
- China affirmed that the activities of the Quad do not affect it.
- China has been looking to tap the huge resources in South China Sea and ensure that it asserts its dominance in the region.
- Thus, **Beijing has invested heavily in the East Indian Ocean region all the way up to Djibouti and Port Sudan.**
- Examples of this are the Hambantota port and Colombo Port City projects in Sri Lanka.
- The Colombo Port City Project showed another version where the Chinese public company brought its own labourers to build the port instead of Sri Lankan ones.
- China started the construction of a deep-water port at Kyaukpyu in Myanmar and leased the island of Feydhoo Finolhu in the Maldives and the Gwadar port in Pakistan.
- Saudi Arabia and the UAE has been largely dependent on Chinese resources to sustain its economy.
- China has been facing an internal debt crisis due to the overlending of funds to the BRI and therefore, has been restricting the expenditure the way it did for CPEC in Pakistan.
- Experts suggest China would be most likely to adopt a new approach to fund the BRI through multilateral bodies such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank to reduce the debt burden.

**Quad vs Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**
- The BRI promises economic security but not human security by providing funds to developing countries with a debt trap.
- Here, the **Quad can play a vital role** as it is a group of democratic countries.
- Quad should provide a choice to the nations as to where they want to borrow the money for development purposes from.

**India’s Maritime Policy & Quad**
- India’s maritime policy has been dependent on China’s plans in the Indian Ocean.
- The South China Sea has been the dominant shipping route in Asia and harbours huge natural gas resources.
- India needs to develop positive relations with its neighbours that have already been tapped by China.
- Uncertainty regarding India’s policy with Bangladesh and vice versa has left a void that Beijing is filling, and China’s investments in Dhaka have increased over the years.

**Key Takeaways from the QUAD summit 2021:**
1. The summit was structured around **four main themes:**
   - Climate;
   - Technology and Cyber Security;
• COVID-19 response;
• Afghanistan and Regional Security.

2. The QUAD leaders have agreed to
   • launch a Semiconductor Supply Chain Initiative;
   • Support 5G Deployment and Diversification;
   • Launch a Quad Senior Cyber Group;
   • Share Satellite Data to Protect the Earth & its Waters; and
   • Launch the Quad Fellowship that will sponsor 100 students per year.

3. India has reason to be pleased because two of its biggest security problems – China and Pakistan – have come into sharper focus, prompting more coordination and action by Quad partners.

Way Forward
• The advantage that India has is that the other members are geographically cut off from the Indian Ocean region.
• The only nation with big-enough naval power to rival China in this area is India and thus it can bring peace, stability and security in the region.
• Quad members can benefit from pooling resources through multilateral bodies such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, which will benefit India in expanding its scope in the Indo-Pacific.
• A sustained movement to limit China’s expansionist policy by the Quad will set a precedent for the European Union as well.
• Such a precedent will go a long way in undermining China’s threats and policies on the international stage.

8. India’s Central Asian outreach
The developments in Afghanistan have catalysed new geostrategic and geo-economic concerns for the region. It has also thrown up renewed challenges for India’s regional and bilateral ties with Central Asia and the Caucasus, prompting India to recalibrate its rules of engagement with the region.

Context:
1. External Affairs Minister was in the region in October 2021.
2. In Kyrgyzstan, External Affairs Minister extended a credit line of $200 million for the support of development projects and signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on High-Impact Community Development Projects (HICDP).
3. At Foreign Minister’s Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), India targeted China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

India and Central Asia Relation:
1. India’s relations with Central Asia has a long history. The two regions have shared deep cultural linkages with each other over the past two millennia in terms of people to people contact, trade, and commerce.
2. Ancient kingdoms like the Kushana Empire had territory in parts of both regions.
3. Both regions had been connected through the Silk route from 3rd century BC till 15th Century AD until the sea route from Europe to India was discovered.
4. The Silk Route connected both regions not only for transportation of goods like silk and spices but was also an effective channel of exchange of thoughts, ideas, religion and philosophy.
5. Buddhism travelled over this route from India to Central Asia and from there to West China.
6. The **historical and civilizational linkages** have spilled over into many areas including religion and culture.

7. **Contacts between the both regions** were further strengthened during the medieval ages with the **advent of Islam** and later with the establishment of Muslim rule in India, many of whose rulers had **their origins in Central Asia**.

### Importance of the Central Asia Region:

#### Energy Security:
1. The Central Asian countries are bestowed with substantial hydrocarbon fields, natural gas and oil reserves which makes them an attractive point for investment.
2. Kazakhstan is the **leading manufacturer of uranium** and has **enormous gas and oil reserves** as well.
3. Uzbekistan is also **rich in gas**, and is a significant local producer of gold together with Kyrgyzstan.
4. Tajikistan has **enormous hydropower potential** and Turkmenistan has the **fourth largest gas reserves** of the world.

#### Regional Security:
1. To tackle the challenges of terrorism, drug trafficking and arms smuggling.
2. Keeping a check on the rise of radical Islamist groups that may pose a **threat to India’s security**.

#### Strategic Location:
1. Geographically, the strategic location of Central Asian countries makes them a bridge between **different regions of Asia and between Europe and Asia**.
2. **Strategic location of Central Asia** is a central point of geopolitical manoeuvring affecting India’s relations with Pakistan, China, the US, Russia and other powers in the region.

#### Commercial:
1. Central Asia offers a relatively **untapped market for Indian consumer goods**. Indian tea and pharmaceutical industries have acquired a foothold in the Central Asian market.
2. The **rapid economic development of Central Asia** has sparked a construction boom and development of sectors like IT and tourism.

### India’s Evolution of Relationship with Central Asia:
1. After the breakup of the Soviet Union and the formation of the independent republics in Central Asia, India reset its ties with the strategically critical region.
2. India provided financial aid to the region and established diplomatic relations.
3. India signed the **Strategic Partnership Agreements (SPA)** with Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to stimulate defence cooperation and deepen trade relations.
4. In 2012, India’s **‘Connect Central Asia’ policy** aimed at furthering India’s political, economic, historical and cultural connections with the region.
5. However, India’s efforts were stonewalled by Pakistan’s **lack of willingness to allow India passage through its territory**. China took advantage of the situation and unveiled the much-hyped BRI in Kazakhstan.
6. The growing geostrategic and security concerns regarding the BRI’s **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)** and its violation of India’s sovereignty forced New Delhi to fix its lethargic strategy.
7. India signed MoUs with Iran in 2015 to develop the Chabahar port in the Sistan-Baluchistan province that was in the doldrums from 2003.
8. Most of the Central Asian leaders view India’s Chabahar port as an opportunity to diversify their export markets and control China’s ambitions.

Recent India-Armenia ties:
1. India has become the first Indian External Affairs Minister to visit Armenia.
2. The Minister and his Armenian counterpart, agreed to enhance trade and cultural exchanges to boost bilateral relations.
3. During the visit, Mr. Jaishankar also supported efforts for a peaceful solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia under the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe’s (OSCE) Minsk group.
4. The Taliban re-establishing its supremacy over Afghanistan has also exposed the weaknesses of coalitions such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), created in response to the threats of terrorism that sprang from Afghanistan.
5. However, the SCO has been used by most member countries for their own regional geostrategic and security interests, increasing the trust-deficit and divergence within the forum.

Conclusion:
- Central Asian countries have been keen to have India as a partner as they have sought to diversify their strategic ties.
- Rising anti-Chinese sentiments within the region and security threats from the Taliban allow New Delhi and Central Asia to reimagine their engagement.
- India cannot afford to lose any time in recalibrating its regional engagements.
- Central Asian countries have admitted India into the Ashgabat Agreement, allowing India access to connectivity networks to facilitate trade and commercial interactions with both Central Asia and Eurasia, and also access the natural resources of the region.

9. Virtual meet of Foreign Ministers of India, US, Israel and UAE
- West Asia occupies an important position in international relations due to its geographical location and proximity to continents and countries South Asia, China, Central Asia, Europe, and Africa.
- The virtual meet of the Foreign Ministers of India, the U.S., Israel and the UAE is a strong manifestation of the changes in West Asian geopolitics.

India’s policy towards with West Asia:
1. Over the years, India has built vibrant bilateral ties with all the countries in the grouping.
2. It is a member of the Quad which have common concerns and shared interests on East Asia. Israel is one of India’s top defence suppliers.
3. The UAE is vital for India’s energy security. The Gulf country, which hosts millions of Indian workers, has also shown interest to mediate between India and Pakistan.
4. In the past, there were three pillars to India’s West Asia policy — the Sunni Gulf monarchies, Israel and Iran.
5. Now that the gulf between the Sunni kingdoms and Israel is being narrowed, the normalisation agreements signed between Israel and the UAE and Bahrain, India faces fewer challenges to a regionalist approach.

India, Israel shares similar challenges from radicalism, terrorism:
1. India and Israel share similar challenges to their societies from radicalism and terrorism apart from many other emerging developments on the geopolitical landscape.
2. India and Israel, two countries share values of democracy and pluralism. We also share some of our guiding civilizational philosophies: Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam in India, or the world is one family, and Tikun Olam in Israel, or heal the world.

3. India has been facing major threats emanating from across the border from Pakistan and Israel is also surrounded by hostile neighbours.

4. India and Israel have a Joint Working Group on Counter-terrorism and the two countries also share real-time intelligence to deal with the menace.

Post Abraham Accords, signs of stability in West Asia:
1. In August 2020, Israel, the UAE and the US signed Abraham Accords. The accord helped Israel and the UAE normalise their ties.
2. India had welcomed the agreement, saying it “has always supported peace and stability in West Asia which is our extended neighbourhood.”
3. India and Israel elevated bilateral relations to a strategic partnership during the historic visit of PM Narendra Modi to Israel in July 2017.
4. Since then, the relationship between the two countries has focused on expanding knowledge-based partnership, including collaboration in innovation and research.

Way Ahead for India with West Asia:
- India should also be mindful of the challenges in the region. The U.S. is clearly seeking to lessen its footprint here as part of its pivot to East Asia to tackle China’s rise, which is redrawing West Asia’s traditional equations.
- India should be careful not to get sucked into the many conflicts of West Asia that could intensify amid growing regional rivalries.
- India, which sees itself aligned with the U.S. in the Indo-Pacific, faces deepening insecurities in continental Asia after the American withdrawal from Afghanistan.
- And it will have to work closely with countries such as Iran to deal with the challenges emanating from a post-American Afghanistan.

Conclusion:
- The challenge before New Delhi is to retain a healthy relationship with Iran even as it seeks to build a stronger regional partnership with the U.S.-Israel-UAE bloc.
- There is a need to talk about of the strategic significance of India, the U.S., Israel and the UAE grouping, there are areas where it can deepen its engagement — trade, energy ties, fighting climate change and enhancing maritime security.

10. AUKUS Alliance
1. The U.S, U.K. and Australia announced a new trilateral security partnership, the AUKUS, that aims to ensure that there will be enduring freedom and openness in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly to “address both the current strategic environment in the region and how it may evolve”.
2. While China has criticised these groupings, Indian officials point out China itself is part of a number of similar groupings with select countries, including on the Afghanistan issue, on cooperating in South Asia with countries there except India, Bhutan and the Maldives, as well as through the BRICS and SCO multilateral groupings that both India and China are a part of.

What will AUKUS Alliance will do?
1. Under the ‘AUKUS’ alliance, three countries will enhance the development of joint capabilities and technology sharing, ensuring our people are kept safe from harm and reinforcing our shared goals.
2. AUKUS will foster deeper integration of security and defence-related science, technology, industrial bases and supply chains.
3. **A landmark defence and security partnership** has been agreed by the leaders of the UK, the United States and Australia today which will **protect and defend our shared interests in the Indo-Pacific**.

**Initiatives under AUKUS:**
1. The first initiative under AUKUS will be a **collaboration on future nuclear-powered submarines for the Royal Australian Navy**.
2. This capability will **promote stability in the Indo-Pacific** and will be deployed in support of **shared values and interests**.
3. The UK has built and operated **world-class nuclear-powered submarines** for over 60 years. They will be therefore bring deep expertise and experience to the project.

**Technology sharing to Australia: Significance to India:**
1. In 2020, India and Australia had signed a defence pact — the **Mutual Logistics Support Agreement**.
2. Besides, India is going to participate in Australia’s biggest wargame, Talisman Sabre, in 2023. The US is already part of it.
3. It will augment the capacity of the Quad of which both the US and Australia are members.
4. It also aims at **improving defence capabilities of Australia** which is a **strategic partner of India**.

**Conclusion:**
1. This partnership will become increasingly vital for defending their interests in the **Indo-Pacific region** and, by extension, protecting people back at home.
2. The **UK and US** are already **leading members of NATO** — the world’s most important defence alliance.
3. The work done by AUKUS will support shared goals in new regions, promoting stability and protecting people against new and emerging threats.
4. Whether or not the purpose of AUKUS is to contain China’s aggressive territorial ambitions, the **imperatives of the Indo-Pacific** would be better served by **broadening strategic cooperation initiatives** of this sort to include other powers that are **deeply invested in the region**, including India, Japan, and South Korea.

**11. Developing the sister islands of Indian Ocean**
1. In March 2021, for the first time, Japan’s government approved a grant aid of approximately **Rs.265 crore** toward **developmental projects** in Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
2. Although this is the **first overseas development assistance (ODA) initiative** toward the islands, the hesitation was more for India than in Tokyo.
3. Both India and Japan, as well as India’s other key maritime partners such as the United States, Australia and France acknowledge and **recognise the strategic location of the Andaman and Nicobar**.

**Problems that glitching India in Indian Ocean region:**
1. The primary issues facing island nations in the Indian Ocean are sustainable development, illegal fishing, disaster management, the climate crisis, renewable energy and other aspects of the blue economy.
2. Add to it **issues of waste management**, which impacts both tourism as well as **ecosystems specific to islands**, and it is clear that there aren’t enough **dedicated initiatives** in developing models specific to small islands.
3. As India and its partners compete for access and influence across the Indo-Pacific toward achieving common interests, there is a need to engage with and address **regional concerns and challenges** of strategically located island nations.
**Reunion Islands: Excellent case study to develop strategic islands in a sustainable manner:**

1. Similar to the Andaman and Nicobar group of islands, France’s La Reunion in the Southwest Indian Ocean lies near strategic waters and away from its capital.
2. Australia and the US too have similar island territories in the Indian Ocean with Cocos Keeling and Diego Garcia, although the latter’s sovereignty is disputed by Mauritius, which has garnered support through a United Nations (UN) resolution.
3. However, among the four island territories, Reunion is perhaps the most developed with a framework that supports both the island’s economic needs as well as France’s military priorities in the Indian Ocean.
4. With a population of almost a million on the island, Reunion is an excellent case study to develop strategic islands in a sustainable manner.
5. The similarities between Reunion and Andamans are manifold, from strategic location and military bases to strict conservation and environmental laws as well as governing bodies, climate and marine ecosystems.
6. Yet, the difference in the level of development and connectivity between Reunion and Andamans stand in stark contrast.

**Adoption of proactive policy in Andaman and Nicobar Islands:**

1. In recent years, India has adopted a proactive policy aimed at transforming the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, a tri-services command, as an economic hub and one of the key centres of its defence and security strategy.
2. A focused development plan for the Islands is expected to greatly enhance the country’s geopolitical leverage in the Indian Ocean Region.
3. This policy brief recommends the opening up of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands to the friendly navies of the US, Japan, Australia and France, among others, in order to promote greater naval cooperation.

**Sustainable island development framework for Andaman and Nicobar Islands:**

1. A sustainable island development framework is not only important for the Andamans but will also be applicable and of interest to other island nations across the Indian Ocean.
2. In continuing its Indo-Pacific collaborations, India and France have the opportunity to create an island development framework for the region.
3. These islands not only provide India with a key maritime space but also carry significant potential in shaping the strategic and military dynamics of the Indian Ocean region.
4. Despite its significant military and strategic possibilities, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands will have to be first developed sustainably in order for India to maximise its potential given its economic, ecological, and environmental constraints as well as the laws to protect the indigenous tribes on the islands.

**Solution: Developing a concept of sister islands:**

1. India and France should lead an effort, utilising their island territories of Andaman and Reunion in developing a concept of sister islands aimed at creating a foundation for a sustainable model for island development across the Indian Ocean.
2. While the concept of sister cities is quite common, this could be extended to a framework of “sister islands” addressing specific concerns and challenges for islands.
3. Similar to sister cities, a sister island concept would allow India and France to co-develop a sustainable framework for island development.
4. If India is to invest in capacity building initiatives and maritime projects in the Indian Ocean, there is a need to research and create an island model for development.
5. Such an approach also creates a new avenue for Indian-led initiatives in the Indo-Pacific.
6. India could also borrow lessons from France’s island experiences in both the Indian Ocean as well as in the Pacific.

**Conclusion:**
1. As India continues to recognise the strategic potential of the Andamans and seeks methods and ways to developing these islands, there is scope for collaboration with France, in creating a sustainable framework not only applicable to these two islands but also across the island nations in the region.
2. The Andaman and Reunion provide an excellent starting point to do so.
Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India’s interests

1. **Geopolitics of the Moon**
   - A year ago, eight countries led by the United States signed the *Artemis Accords*.
   - The accords are an agreement to abide by a broad set of principles to guide the expanding human activity on the moon — ranging from mining resources to setting up lunar colonies.
   - The US has also invited India to join the accords.

**Recent Developments towards Outer Space**
- Recently the Quadrilateral Forum agreed to set up a new *Quad working group on outer space*.
- The growing commercialisation and militarisation of outer space have triggered the interest of the Quad leaders.
- As technological capabilities grow, nations are looking beyond the near-earth space to interplanetary probes and deep space research.
- These trends have brought the moon into sharp focus.

**China’s Activities**
- China has put two spacecraft in lunar orbit (Chang’e 1 and 2) and landed two rovers on the moon (Chang’e 3 and 4).
- Chang’e 4 had the distinction of being the first to land on the far side of the moon.
- The Chang’e 5 brought lunar material back to the earth.
- The next moon missions — Chang’e 6,7, and 8 — could contribute to the construction of an *International Lunar Research Station (ILRS)* in the south pole of the moon.
- China has also invited other countries to participate in the ILRS project.
- Russia, once a leading space actor, has now joined hands with China on the ILRS.

**Strategic partnership in Space Cooperation**
- As geopolitical considerations drive Russia towards China, space cooperation has become an extension of their strategic partnership against America.
- Russia is also threatening to cut off space cooperation with the US.
- Washington is willing to restore America’s leadership in lunar exploration in the face of the Chinese challenge.
- The Trump administration announced plans to put astronauts back on the moon by 2024. The new project was named Artemis.
- Like China, the US too is looking for partners for its Artemis programme.

**Consequences of the growing lunar activity**
- The consequences of the growing lunar activity is the pressure on the current international legal regime — centred around the *1967 Outer Space Treaty (OST)*.
- OST declares that outer space shall be the “province of all mankind” and its use “be carried out for the benefit and in the interests of all countries”.
- At present there are advances in space technologies and expansive investment of resources by major powers.
- Many provisions of the OST are increasingly subject to competing interpretations.
- The breakdown of the post-Cold War harmony among the major powers has set the stage for a prolonged geopolitical contestation for the moon.
- US is promoting the Artemis Accords to preserve the OST regime in relation to the moon and promote transparency, interoperability and peaceful international cooperation.
Way Forward

- India must initiate a comprehensive review of its interests on the moon and develop strategies to pursue them through a stronger national lunar mission and deeper partnerships with like-minded countries.
- Delhi must also legislate a strong regulatory framework to promote India’s space activity and protect its international interests.
- India should take a look at the emerging challenges to the current space order and contribute to the development of new global norms that will strengthen the essence of the Outer Space Treaty.

2. Revitalising Multilateralism

- In 2020, the United Nations conducted a worldwide consultation involving more than 1 million people from 193 countries.
- What is encouraging is that young people worldwide clearly want more international cooperation.

Outcome of the Consultation

- The consultation found that the expectations and hopes of the world’s women, men, girls and boys are similar.
- People want better access to basic healthcare, sanitation and education.
- They also want more solidarity with those hit hardest by the pandemic and with those living in poverty.
- Respondents’ top concern over the longer term is the twin crisis of climate change and accelerating biodiversity loss.
- Almost 90% of participants agree that global cooperation is vital to deal with today’s challenges.
- A majority believe that the pandemic has made international cooperation even more urgent.

Interconnected and interdependent world

- The covid pandemic has driven home the message that we live in an interconnected and interdependent world.
- In 2020, record number of people were affected by heat waves, devastating floods, and some of the largest wildfires.
- These events confirm once again the unparalleled threat posed by our changing climate.

International system

- The UN is the heart of the international system.
- The world came together 76 years ago to create UN to “achieve international cooperation in solving international problems”.
- This organization, despite its challenges and shortcomings, has endured.
- It has shown that the path to a better, more peaceful, and sustainable future is paved with cooperation, not zero-sum competition.
- International organizations were built primarily to resolve inter-state challenges, not problems such as financial crises, pandemics, terrorism, crime networks, threats to our oceans, or climate change.

Way Forward

- Cooperation among the UN, regional organizations, and international financial institutions must improve at both the policy and the operational level.
• The multilateral system needs to be more open and inclusive to give young people, civil society, the private sector, academia and others a seat at the table.

• We need bold steps to
  o revive and strengthen our capacity to tackle poverty and inequality;
  o ensure inclusion, equal participation, and justice;
  o address the climate crisis and accelerate biodiversity loss; and
  o equip ourselves for future threats of pandemics.

• We need to strengthen our collective ability to anticipate, prevent and manage disease outbreaks, new wars, massive cyberattacks, environmental disasters, or other unforeseen events.

• In today’s world, with so many issues reverberating across borders and generations, we must seize this moment to create a more agile, effective and accountable multilateral system.

• We must reinvigorate rules-based multilateralism, with a stronger and more inclusive UN at its core.

3. **Strategic importance of outer space**

   • Today, space is integral to our lives and disruption of space-based communications and earth observation will have serious consequences.
   
   • With China’s emergence as a major space power, there is a new urgency for democratic powers to come together to secure their national interests as well as promote sustainable order in the skies above.

Growing importance of outer space

• Until recently, outer space has been the sole preserve of states.

• But private entities are now major players in space commerce.

• As space becomes a critical factor in shaping the military balance of power on the earth, there is growing competition among states.

• The US has traditionally dominated outer space in the commercial domain.

• China’s emergence as a major space power — in both civilian and military — is reshaping astropolitics.

India’s interest in outer space

• India is opening new pathways for outer space cooperation with the US and Quad partners.

• India is engaging more productively with a rapidly evolving domain that is seeing more commerce and contestation.

• New Delhi’s new strategic interest in outer space is based on a recognition of two important trends.
  o One is the centrality of emerging technologies in shaping the 21st-century global order.
  o The other is about the urgency of writing new rules for the road to peace and stability in outer space.

• Although human forays into space began in the middle of the 20th century, the intensity as well as its commercial and security implications have dramatically increased in recent decades.

• India has undertaken some reforms in recent years like letting the private sector participate in space activity.

• It has also taken steps to cope with the unfolding military challenges in outer space.

• It has also initiated space security dialogue with close partners like the US, Japan, and France.

Recent Technological progress

• Technological progress in the last two decades has also “produced” new domains for human activity.
• One is “cyberspace” that occupies so much policy and political attention around the world.
• But the emergence of “outer space” as a strategic domain is yet to get the attention it deserves in New Delhi.

Cooperation among Quad countries
• As outer space becomes a location for lucrative business as well as a site of military competition, the cooperation between the Quad members is likely to increase in the coming years.
• Outer space presents a new arena for space cooperation, and the Quad has set up a new working group to discuss space-related issues.
• India has developed significant space capabilities over the decades.
• The US recognises that it can’t unilaterally define the space order anymore and is looking for partners.
• The new space working group set up by the Quad will identify new collaboration opportunities and share satellite data for peaceful purposes.

Way Forward
• As commercial and military activity in outer space grows, the 20th-century agreements like Outer Space Treaty and the Moon Treaty (1979) need reinforcement and renewal.
• The growing strategic salience of outer space demands substantive national policy action in India.
• The scale of the challenges and opportunities in outer space, demand more urgent and sweeping reform. That can only be mandated by the highest political level.
• India has a focused attention on maritime affairs. India could do with a similar intervention on outer space today.

4. India’s Indo-Pacific outreach
• The geostrategic relevance of the Indo-Pacific expanse has gained currency over the past year.
• A free, open, inclusive and rules-based architecture with security as a core pillar is the underlying objective of the nations that seek to expand their engagement in the region.

India’s Indo-Pacific strategy
• India’s Indo-Pacific strategy was articulated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore in 2018 under the ‘SAGAR’ concept of Security and Growth for All in the Region.
• At the East Asia Summit of November 2019, seven pillars of the Indo-Pacific Oceans’ Initiative were enunciated.
• With Asean as the centre, India’s vision for the Indo-Pacific stretches from the western shores of the Americas to the eastern coastline of the African continent for common progress and prosperity.
• New Delhi has joined and created new partnerships, such as the Quad, Supply Chain Resilience Initiative and various plurilateral configurations.

Indo-Pacific Business Summit
• The Indo-Pacific Business Summit was held by the Confederation of Indian Industry in partnership with the ministry of external affairs.
• It reiterated the relevance of economic engagement in the twin-ocean geography, and highlighted trade and investment as a consensual pillar of an overall strategy.
• The summit saw a wide participation of governments and private sectors across these 21 countries.
• India’s trade with the participating countries has risen by about eight times over the last two decades, with the US, UAE and Singapore as our top export destinations in the region.

**Healthcare Sector**
• **On healthcare, vaccination is the immediate need of the hour.** For vaccine access for all, technology sharing and building manufacturing capacity is critical.
• The countries of the region should also work on healthcare infrastructure and medical supplies.
• **Joint investments and sharing of expertise** can help in this effort, along with conducive policies from the respective governments.
• India has introduced a **production-linked incentive scheme** for certain drugs and inputs and is prioritizing industrial parks for pharmaceuticals, which can help expand capacities for the region.
• **Capacity building and skill development of healthcare personnel** is another area where India could take a lead.

**Digital World**
• The digital world has collapsed borders between nations and also erected a range of challenges that countries can best address together.
• **Cross-border e-commerce** is on the rise, with services being increasingly delivered on digital platforms.
• Physical as well as soft digital infrastructure needs to be in place to ensure that technology becomes a connector and not a differentiator for the region’s countries.
• **Data management, cyber security and capacity building are some of the challenges** that India, with its computer services capabilities, is well positioned to address for the Indo-Pacific.

**Green and sustainable development**
• **Green and sustainable development is no longer an ideal but a compulsion.**
• Issues such as **biodiversity conservation, plastic waste management and water-sustainable agriculture** must be addressed together with the climate-change imperatives of green energy, electric vehicles and energy-efficient products.
• The maritime world and its species-rich environs demand an extraordinary combined effort by nations and their businesses.

**Trade and investment**
• The conventional trade and investment are seeing disruptive change in the region.
• The pandemic has impacted supply chains.
• The **Supply Chain Resilience Initiative** launched by India, Japan and Australia aims to accelerate these shifts.
• The **free, open and rules-based regime is increasingly important** to ensure a transparent and smooth transition of trade channels.

5. **Indian Diaspora in Southeast Asia**
• The diaspora of any country provides a human dimension to the links between two countries.
• **As the “diaspora” has the capacity to influence a country’s foreign policy, it inherently becomes a “soft power” tool in the hands of policy makers.**

**History**
• **Historically, Southeast Asia has been hugely influenced by both India and China** in the realms of art, culture, architecture, religion and many other things.
• The region was intertwined with Indian culture to such an extent that Europeans used to refer to it as “Further India”.

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• Indian civilisation was naturally extended to the territories of present-day Southeast Asia.
• The climatic conditions between India and Southeast Asia are similar. "Monsoon" was a common factor which played an important role in enhancing ties between the people of this region.
• The spice and silk routes helped in the exchange of ideas, culture and people apart from the trade.
• The Colonial takeover of the region changed the equations between Indians and Southeast Asians towards the end of the 15th century.

Indian diaspora in Southeast Asia
• There is no uniformity in terms of social, political and economic prowess among Indians in Southeast Asia.
• Recent trends indicate that the present Indian migration includes professionals holding senior positions in the fields of IT, education, and technology among other aspects.
• In the case of Malaysia, the political, economic and social status of Indians vis-à-vis Chinese and local Malays is not satisfactory.
• In Singapore, Indians are well represented in the judiciary, civil services and armed forces of that country.

Indian Diaspora as a soft power?
• Indian policy towards Diaspora has been varied from colonial times to the early years of independence and on to the present time.
• The relationship between India and Indian diaspora started changing in a dramatic fashion from the second half of the 1990s.
• Indian diaspora in Southeast Asia is numerically very small and does not enjoy the economic clout that may change the state policies to India’s advantage.
• Foreign Direct Investments from these countries is meagre.
• Same is the case with remittances when compared with those from Gulf or Western countries.
• In the political realm, except for Singapore, Indians are not well represented politically in these states.
• The Indian diaspora has little utility for lobbying on behalf of the home government.
• Therefore, the diaspora is not a powerful ‘soft power’ tool in the hands of Indian policy makers with respect to Southeast Asia.

Way Forward
• India needs to cultivate its relationship with the Indian diaspora in these countries.
• Overall, public opinion towards Indians is positive.
• It is important to create a conducive environment to ensure that the diasporic community always remembers its relationship with the homeland.
• Government initiatives such as Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas, Pravasi Bharatiya Sammelan, and Trade Facilitation Centres for overseas Indians are all steps in the right direction.
• The government must also see to it that interests of the Indian community are preserved while negotiating mega trade agreements.
• Given the economic potential of the region, the diaspora has the potential to play an important role in the future.

6. Re-arming the global health order
• The Covid-19 pandemic has mercilessly hit the health system globally.
• The human toll exceeds many times the number of those killed in the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
• The economic cost of the pandemic is incalculable. Estimates vary in trillions of dollars.
Establishing a global order
- While every pandemic has provided a lesson, there has not been enough debate on establishing a global order to deal with the inevitability of suffering from periodic pandemics.
- The UN has an elaborate system of imposing sanctions on member countries for not complying with UN resolutions.
- The Security Council has applied sanctions to support peaceful transitions, deter non-constitutional changes, constrain terrorism, protect human rights and promote non-proliferation.
- The time has come now to add public health to this list.
- FATF regime has become increasingly effective in sending the message that non-compliance with the FATF standards can be costly.
- A similar global order needs to be brought to issues of health.
- In the WHO constitution, there is no mention of international standards on public health and ensuring measures against the spread of epidemics.
- The risks to public health from pandemics like Covid-19 are more widespread and graver in nature than the acts of money laundering, financing of terrorism or the like.
- However, there are no WHO specified uniform international public health standards that universally apply to all countries.
- Countries are not held accountable for negligence and not sharing the related information for an independent review.

Covid’s controversial origin
- In the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, there have been serious questions on the origin of the virus.
- The WHO report, released on March 30, 2021, after a visit of the WHO experts to Wuhan (China), has been inconclusive and criticised by a group of 14 countries.
- These countries held that the WHO team was “significantly delayed and lacked access to complete, original data and samples”.

Way Forward
- The WHO needs to be given more teeth and must have powers to impose sanctions, much like the FATF.
- There is an urgent need to extend the application of Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which charts out a course for “action” with respect to threats to the peace and aggression, without which the WHO is a toothless body.
- There is much for the UN system and the WHO to learn from the FATF experience.
- A comprehensive set of regulations setting down standards of public health and providing a framework for evaluation of the countries for their compliance with these standards, as well as a sanctions regime for non-compliance, will go long way in mitigating the risks posed by pandemics in future.
- It should include obligations of the member countries to provide information and data and subject themselves to an independent audit much in the same manner as the member countries under the IMF/UN/FATF systems.
- If implemented, this will pave the way for enforcing an internationally coordinated and supervised approach with a view to ensuring the safety of public health.

7. Boosting India with Maritime Domain Awareness
- The legendary military theorist, Sun Tzu, is once said that the critical element in battle was foreknowledge, but that it “could not be elicited from spirits, nor from gods, nor by analogy with past events, nor from calculations”.

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• The foreknowledge could only be gathered with specialised tools and by men who knew the enemy well.
• A prior reading of the adversary and the theatre of battle, could decisively shift the balance of fortune in war.

Nature of the enemy at sea
• Today, the enemy at sea is often unrecognisable — a terrorist, a pirate, a criminal or a sea robber.
• Indian maritime planners have been wary of the possibility of a greater Chinese presence in the eastern littorals.

Indian Navy’s Initiatives
• Of late, the Indian Navy has been on a drive to improve domain awareness in the Indian Ocean.
• The Navy is seeking to expand India’s surveillance footprint by setting up radar stations in the Maldives, Myanmar and Bangladesh.
• The Indian Navy’s efforts seem focused primarily on monitoring Chinese activity in the Eastern Indian Ocean.
• In recent months, Indian naval ships have patrolled the Andaman Seas and eastern chokepoints to deter any maritime adventurism by Beijing.
• India has moved to expand its underwater detection capabilities in the Eastern chokepoints.

Neighbourhood synergies
• Maritime domain awareness is also generating cooperative synergies in the neighbourhood.
• There are reports that seven Indian Ocean countries will post Liaison Officers at the Indian Navy’s Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region in Gurugram.
• New Delhi is also upping its engagement in the Western Indian Ocean by positioning a Liaison Officer at the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre (RMIFC) in Madagascar.
• India has also posted an officer at the European Maritime Awareness in the Strait of Hormuz (EMASOH) in Abu Dhabi to assist in the monitoring of maritime activity in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz.
• India’s military satellite (GSAT-7A) may soon facilitate a real time sharing of maritime information with partners.
• These endeavours are a manifestation of Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR), that advances the idea of India as a ‘security provider’ and ‘preferred partner’ in the Indo-Pacific region.

Maritime grand strategy
• New Delhi’s excessive focus on the continental sphere since Independence has not yielded great returns in terms of secure borders, healthy relations with its neighbours or deterrence stability vis-à-vis adversaries.
• It is time for India to change its grand strategic approach — by shifting its focus from the continental sphere to the maritime sphere.
• New Delhi has begun to think in this direction with the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) establishing a new division to deal with the Indo-Pacific in April 2019.
• Unlike in the continental sphere, there is a growing great power interest in the maritime sphere, especially with the arrival of the concept of ‘Indo-Pacific’.
• The maritime space is a lot more important to China than engaging in land grab attempts in the Himalayas, due to the massive Chinese trade that happens via the Oceanic routes.
• Therefore, it is high time New Delhi shifted its almost exclusive focus from the continental space to the maritime space.
Concerns / Challenges

- There is concern among maritime watchers that the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) may be poised to develop a generation of quieter submarines that would be hard to detect in the near-seas.
- Analysts fear that the next generation of PLAN nuclear submarines could be stealthier than ever, capable of beating adversary surveillance.
- The discovery of a Chinese unmanned underwater vehicle close to a southern Indonesian island suggests that China may already be mapping the undersea terrain in the approaches to the Indian Ocean Region.
- While cooperative information sharing allows for a joint evaluation of threats, countries do not always share vital information timeously.

Way Forward

- Law enforcement agencies need to be a lot more vigilant on high-grade sensors and communication networks that observe and track suspicious movements, sharing information in real time.
- This state of enhanced consciousness is described as maritime domain awareness.
- Indian decision makers must recognise the need for cooperative tools to fight transnational crime in the littorals.
- Efforts to help smaller island states build capacity to combat regional threats.
- India must ensure seamless information flow, generating operational synergy with partners, and aim to expand collaborative endeavours in shared spaces.
- New Delhi must ideate on the current and future maritime challenges, consolidate its military and non-military tools, engage its strategic partners, and publish a comprehensive vision document on the Indo-Pacific.
Important International institutions, agencies and fora-their Structure and mandate

1. **Role of WHO in Global Health Efforts**
   - The World Health Organization (WHO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations that is concerned with international public health.
   - The WHO’s stated aim is “to promote health, keep the world safe and serve the vulnerable”.

**Role played by WHO**
- Providing leadership on global health.
- **Initiatives like triple billion goals for better health, convention on tobacco control, TB elimination, campaign and awareness on Anti-microbial resistance are some examples.**
- However, it has no power to impose health policies on national governments.
- It acts as an adviser and offers guidance on best practice in disease prevention and health improvement.

**Successes:**
- The WHO is widely credited with leading a **10-year campaign to eradicate smallpox in the 1970s and has also led global efforts to end polio.**
- In the past few years, the WHO has also coordinated battles against viral epidemics of Ebola in Congo and Zika in Brazil.
- The WHO has also mounted increasing efforts against cancer, which now takes as many lives in the developing countries as in the affluent ones.
- The fight against tobacco, the largest single cause of preventable death in both men and women, is part of WHO effort in every country.
- In 1997, WHO (in collaboration with Canada) rolled out the Global Public Health Intelligence Network (GPHIN), which took advantage of information on the Internet to function as an early warning system for potential epidemics.
- The WHO’s condemnation of the promotion of artificial infant-formula products in developing countries also attracted widespread attention.
- The worldwide control of infantile diarrhea with oral rehydration therapy was another great advance, based on very simple principles.

**Failures:**
- In the COVID-19 disease outbreak, while many have praised the WHO’s leadership, Trump had accused it of being China-centric and giving bad advice about the emerging pandemic.
- Despite initially declaring that Malaria would be eradicated, the WHO has had to concede that the disease has proved more persistent and resistant to drugs than it originally realized.
- There is also the depressing fact that Cholera, Diarrhea and Tuberculosis are still killing thousands of children and adults each year in the developing world despite cures being available.
- In the case of TB, misuse of antibiotics has caused severe problems with the disease becoming resistant to the initial treatments.

**Challenges faced by WHO:**
- **Donor dependency:** with only 30 percent of its budget under WHO control, the organization’s agenda is guided by donor priorities. This goes against the principle of equity, which requires all countries’ requirements to be included in its agenda.
- **Unable to respond effectively** to existing and anticipated global health challenges-
  - **Eg.** faulted response to the 2014 Ebola outbreak. It also failed in insisting more transparency by China regarding Coronavirus and the morbidity attached.
WHO cannot enforce accountability for nations’ actions.

Widening gap between the agency’s mandate and capabilities: A report by independent experts concluded that WHO lacks the capacity to deliver a full emergency public health response.

Emergence of new global institutions: which have challenged the WHO’s leadership in global health such as Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, GAVI Alliance, and Unitaid etc.

Measures to empower WHO

- Increase the WHO’s technical capacities and capabilities
  - Creating new departments focused on science, antimicrobial resistance and digital health will also broaden the WHO’s range of expertise and keep up with the latest public health challenges and opportunities.
- Coordinate with other global health players—like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Doctors Without Borders.
- Mobilize more resources.
- WHO requires a systematic overhaul of its structure and practices to build its capacity.

2. UN Security Council Reforms

- The year 2020 marked the 75th anniversary of the United Nations and its founding Charter with a one-day high-level event at the General Assembly (UNGA 75), under the theme: ‘The Future we Want, the UN we Need: Reaffirming our Collective Commitment to Multilateralism’.

Reform of the UN Security Council

- There has been growing demand to increase the number of permanent members to reflect the contemporary global reality.
- India, Brazil, South Africa, Germany and Japan are strong contenders for permanent membership of the UNSC which has the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.
- Frequent divisions within the UNSC P-5 end up blocking key decisions.
- When the coronavirus pandemic had brought the world to a standstill; yet, the UN, the UNSC, and WHO failed to play an effective role in helping nations deal with the spread.
- The grouping of India, Brazil and South Africa (IBSA) expressed “frustration” over the “slow” pace of progress on reform of the UN Security Council and said the time has come to move towards a result-oriented process to expand the key global body.
- In recent times the credibility of UNSC has suffered a severe blow as it has been ineffective and inefficient in tackling the conflicts in different parts of the world such as Syria, Ukraine etc. in most of these situations UNSC has remained mere a mute spectator.
- Therefore, the demand for reforms in the council has become a necessity to restore its credibility and effectiveness in maintaining international peace and security.

India’s Call for the Reform

- India has been at the forefront of demanding reform in the UN, particularly its principal organ, the Security Council, for decades, staking its claim as one of the world’s largest economies and most populous countries, with a track record in promoting a rules-based international order, and contributing to peacekeeping through UN forces.
- For India, what has been most frustrating is that despite the dysfunctional power balance that prevails, the UN’s reform process, held through Inter Governmental Negotiations (IGN) has not made progress over decades, despite commitments.

Implications on new Global Order
• Broader membership of the Security Council, with increased and enhanced representation of countries with the capacity and willingness to contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security, including from Africa, will allow it to preserve its credibility and create the political backing needed for the peaceful resolution of today’s international crises.
• There is a clear need for an enhanced role of developing countries and of major contributors to the United Nations to make the Council more legitimate, effective and representative.
• On the one hand, the world is experiencing unparalleled levels of prosperity and connectivity, yet these advances are associated with ever greater complexity and systemic risks, increasing the liberal order’s vulnerability to collapse.
• **Faced with threats ranging from climate change to massive technological advancement, the world is in desperate need of stable and able global governance.**

**Way Forward For India**
• India should once again become a consensus-builder, instead of being detached as it has become to be.
• **India’s singular objective as a non-permanent member should be to help build a stable and secure external environment.**
• In doing so, India will promote its own people’s prosperity, regional and global security and growth, and a rule-based world order.
• There is a deficit of international leadership on global issues, especially on security, migrant movement, poverty, and climate change.
• Given this, India has an opportunity to promote well-balanced, common solutions.

**Conclusion**
• The world is shifting to a new multi-polar order with the US and China at its centre.
• We need to restore and rebuild stable institutions and rules that acknowledge the changed context.
• The role of international mechanisms of cooperation such as the UN, G20, regional organizations, non-state actors – especially financial and philanthropic actors – will also need to be elevated. It should start with reform of UNSC.
Security Issues

1. **Cyber Security and Disinformation Attacks**
   - Cybersecurity focuses on protecting and defending computer systems, networks, and our digital lives from disruption.
   - Disinformation is, similarly, an attack and compromise of our cognitive being.
   - Here the *information ecosystem is manipulated* to create social discord, increase polarisation, and in some cases, influence the outcome of an election.

   **Cybersecurity and disinformation attacks**
   - Instances of cyberattacks by national/state actors targeting critical infrastructure and nationally important establishments are becoming more common.
   - **Cybersecurity attacks are executed using malware, viruses, trojans, botnets, and social engineering.**
   - Disinformation attacks use manipulated, mis-contextualised, misappropriated information, deep fakes, and cheap fakes.
   - Historically, the industry has treated these attacks independently, deployed different countermeasures, and even have separate teams working in silos to protect and defend against these attacks.
   - For example, QAnon spread false information claiming that the U.S. 2020 presidential election was fraudulent.
   - COVID-19 disinformation campaigns had prevented people from wearing masks, using potentially dangerous alternative cures, and not getting vaccinated.
   - **Balancing the rights of speech with the dangers of disinformation is a challenge for policymakers and regulators.**

   **Cognitive hacking**
   - Cognitive hacking is a threat from disinformation.
   - **Cognitive hacking attack attempts to change the target audience’s thoughts and actions, galvanise societies and disrupt harmony using disinformation.**
   - It exploits cognitive biases and shapes people by perpetuating their prejudices.
   - The goal is to manipulate the way people perceive reality.
   - The storming of the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, is a prime example of the effects of cognitive hacking.
   - **The implications of cognitive hacking are more devastating than cyberattacks on critical infrastructure.**
   - Revolutions throughout history have used cognitive hacking techniques to overthrow governments and change society.

   **Way Forward**
   - We can learn from decades of experience in the cybersecurity domain to defend, protect and respond, and find effective and practical solutions to counter computational propaganda and infodemics.
   - We can *develop disinformation defence systems* by studying strategy and tactics to understand the activities and behaviours of malicious actors from the cybersecurity domain to mitigate disinformation threats.
   - **By treating disinformation as a cybersecurity threat,** we can find effective countermeasures to cognitive hacking.
   - Information sharing will help disinformation countermeasures to scale better and respond quickly.
   - Technology industry, civil society and the government should coordinate to make users aware of cyber threat vectors such as phishing, viruses, and malware.
• The industry with public-private partnerships must also invest in media literacy efforts to reach out to discerning public.
• It is time that cybersecurity as a specialised discipline becomes an integral component of any IT syllabus being taught within our university systems as well as outside.

2. Creating safe digital spaces
• School-related violence is an infringement of children’s right to education and to health and well-being.
• Recognising this, UNESCO Member States have declared the first Thursday of November as the International Day against Violence and Bullying at School, including cyberbullying.
• The aim is to raise awareness among students, parents, members of the school community, education authorities and others about the problem of online violence and cyberbullying.

Children’s Access to Internet
• In India, an estimated 71 million children aged 5-11 years access the Internet on the devices of their family members.
• They constitute about 14% of the country’s active Internet user base of over 500 million.

Incidence of cyberbullying
• School closures due to COVID-19 lockdowns had led to an unprecedented rise in screen time for children, which in turn exposed them to a greater risk of online violence.
• Various reports have indicated increased incidence of cyberbullying and online child sexual exploitation by adults.
• According to UNESCO’s report, almost one in three students worldwide reported being bullied at least once in the preceding month.

Impact / Consequences
• Cyberbullying has negative consequences on the education, health and well-being of children.
• The impact of online sexual harassment could have long-term negative impacts on mental health and well-being.
• Children who are frequently bullied are nearly three times more likely to feel left out at school than those who are not.
• They are also twice more likely to miss out on school and have a higher tendency to leave formal education after finishing secondary school.

Way Forward
• Cyberbullying prevention interventions should aim at tackling all types of bullying and victimisation experiences at the same time, as opposed to each in silo.
• Effective interventions also require gender-sensitive and targeted approaches.
• Although online violence is not limited to school premises, the education system plays a crucial role in addressing online safety.
• Concerted efforts must be made to provide children with the knowledge and skills to identify online violence so that they can protect themselves from its different forms.
• Teachers also play a critical role by teaching students about online safety.
• The information booklet brought out by UNESCO in partnership with NCERT on Safe Online Learning in Times of COVID-19 can be a useful reference.
• Confidential reporting and redress services must be established.
• Students, parents, schools, education authorities, members of the education community and its partners must take part in preventing online violence and promoting the safety and well-being of children.
3. The epoch of cyber-weapons

- A raging controversy across the world on the misuse of Pegasus spyware has reignited a debate on the role of cyber weapons.
- Cyberattacks on institutions and on critical infrastructure have proliferated to an alarming extent, signalling the emergence of the cyber weapon epoch.

Pegasus spyware

- The Pegasus spyware is by no means the ultimate cyberweapon.
- It has compelled nations to emerge from their deep slumber about the threat posed by such new age weapons.

An evolution

- Many daring exploits of the past, which took months of effort, and the utilisation of large numbers of people and resources to achieve, are, in the cyber era, possible with far less effort and resources.
- The destruction of the Vemork power station during the Second World War which took months of planning, and the extensive resources of the Allied Powers, could be achieved in 2019 with a fraction of this effort.
- In 2019, Norsk Hydro, aluminium and energy producer, became the victim of a cyberattack which was accomplished remotely and anonymously, and in the shortest possible time.
- The internet has become a powerful weapon in the hands of those seeking to exploit its various facets.

Cyber-Weapon

- Cyber is often touted as the fifth dimension of warfare — in addition to land, sea, air and space.
- Cyber, as the domain of military and national security, also co-exists with cyber as a domain of everyday life.
- The war is no longer out there. It is now directly inside one’s drawing room, with cyberweapons becoming the weapon of choice.
- Israelis, though not the cyber pioneers, today dominate the cyber domain along with the Chinese, Russians, Koreans and, of course, the Americans.
- Following the joint U.S.-Israeli effort in unleashing the Stuxnet Worm in 2010 — it became more apparent that mankind had indeed unleashed a new weapon.

Cyberattacks during the past decade

- 2007 devastating cyberattack on Estonia’s critical infrastructure followed by the Stuxnet worm attack a few years later on Iran’s nuclear facility.
- The Shamoon virus attack on Saudi Aramco occurred in 2012.
- 2016 cyberattack on Ukraine’s State power grid.
- 2017 Ransomware attack affected machines in as many as 64 countries.
- 2017 Wannacry attack on the United Kingdom’s National Health Service.
- Series of attacks this year on Ireland’s Health Care System and in the United States such as ‘SolarWinds’, the cyber attack on Colonial Pipeline and JBS, etc.

Grave threat

- With cyberweapons becoming the weapon of choice not only during a conflict but even during peacetime, matters have reached a tipping point.
- Cyberweapons distort systems and structures — civilian or military.
- It interfere with democratic processes, aggravate domestic divisions and, unleash forces over which established institutions or even governments have little control. The Pegasus spyware is all this and more.
As more and more devices are connected to networks, the cyber threat is only bound to intensify, both in the short and the medium term.

What is terrifying is that instruments of everyday use can be infected or infiltrated without any direct involvement of the target.

The possibilities for misuse are immense and involve far graver consequences to an individual, an establishment, or the nation.

** Concerns / Challenges  
- Short-term remedies are unlikely to achieve desired results.
- **At the pace at which cyber technology is evolving, erecting proper defences will prove difficult.**
- Artificial Intelligence (AI) is often seen as a kind of panacea for many of the current problems and ills, but all advances in technology tend to be a double-edged sword.
- AI could in turn make all information warfare — including cyber related — almost impossible to detect, deflect or prevent, at least at the current stage of development of AI tools.
- Easy access to newer cyber espionage tools will add to the existing chaos.

** Way Forward  
- Dealing with the cyber threat, hence, deserves **careful analysis and assessment.**
- Dealing with ‘zero day’ vulnerabilities require more thought and introspection than merely creating special firewalls or special phones that are ‘detached’ from the Internet.
- We must be prepared for, and guard against, a new epoch of cyber threats which will intensify cyber insecurity across the board.
- What is needed is a deeper understanding of not only cyber technologies, but also recognising the mindsets of those who employ spyware of the Pegasus variety.

4. **National security policy**
- National security concepts have, in the two decades of the 21st century, undergone fundamental changes.
- These fundamental changes reveal that a large country, in terms of size of geography, population and GDP, will not deter any country.

** Reduced Deterrence  
- Cyber warfare has vastly reduced the deterrent value of large countries, since cyber weaponry will be available even to small island countries.
- The capacity to cause devastation to a large nation by cyber warfare is within the reach of even small and poorer nations.
- Therefore, in the 21st century, after cybertechnology enters as an important variable in nations’ defence policies, the size of a country will cease to matter.
- Sri Lanka, or North Korea, empowered by cybertechnology, will be equal to the United States, Russia, India or China, in their capability to cause unacceptable damage.
- Geographical land size or GDP size will be irrelevant in deterrence.

** Moving to cyber weapons-based warfare  
- In the 21st century, the world is moving to cyber weapons-based warfare which will also immobilise current tangible advanced weapon systems in a war.
- Weapons in the 21st century will merely mean a cyber button on the desk of the nation’s military and the leader of the government.

** Need for a new national security policy  
- These fundamental changes are entirely due to the earlier 20th century innovations in cybertechnology and software developments.
• Drones, robots, satellites and advanced computers as weapons are already in use. More innovations are around the corner.
• Warfare, therefore will be cyber warfare.
• Hence, national security in the 21st century covers electronic operations from a remote centre beyond the front lines of ground forces.
• Tracking those cyber warfare centres of the adversary will need a new national security policy.
• China, recently by using cybertechnology shut down Mumbai’s electric supply in populated areas of the city, for a few hours.
• Thus, each nation will have to prepare more for bilateral conflicts in the 21st century that are based on cyber warfare rather than in multilateral acts of conventional war.

National security
• National security in the 21st century will depend on many dimensions:
  • Objectives:
    - The objective of the National Security Policy in the 21st century is to define what assets are required to be defended and identify the opponents.
    - Although the novel coronavirus was accidental, it has completely destabilised people globally and their governments in all nations of the world over.
    - Normal life has been disrupted. Never before has there been such a virus attack of this dimension.
    - The national security policy will have to address the kinds of threats that await us, by choosing a nation’s priorities.
  • Priorities:
    - National security priorities will require new departments for supporting several frontiers of innovation and technologies.
    - Every citizen will have to be alerted to new remote-controlled military technology and be ready for it.
  • Strategy:
    - The strategy required for this new national security policy will be to anticipate our enemies in many dimensions and developing a strategy of deterrence of the enemy.
    - For India, it will be the China cyber capability factor which is the new threat for which it has to devise a new strategy.

5. Global Response to tackle Organised Crime
• The COVID-19 crisis raised a new set of challenges for national authorities, as criminals sought to exploit vulnerabilities created by lockdowns and shifting travel patterns.
• Building the capacities to deal with these threats is now a key part of United Nations Office on Drugs And Crime (UNODC)’s focus.

Personal connections, mutual interests
• There are range of links, often in connection with the financing of terrorism.
• Terrorists and organized criminals cooperate on the basis of shared territory or mutual interest, often drawing on personal connections forged in prisons.
• Terrorists benefit from organized criminal activities such as people trafficking, migrant smuggling, kidnapping for ransom and illicit drug trafficking.

Money laundering, strengthening borders
• Need for ratifying legal instruments, such as the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, and various international drug control conventions.
• Need to fight money laundering - by complying with UN resolutions and building public-private partnerships.
• Strengthening border security - in particular by analyzing flight passenger data.
• Improving prison management to prevent radicalization and developing whole-of-society approaches to countering violent extremism.
• Cross-border cooperation through regional platforms, bilateral agreements, the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) and mutual legal assistance treaties.
• National legal frameworks could be updated to include precise definitions of terrorism.
• More resources could be directed towards criminal justice coordination.
• Establishing specialized units, as well as greater focus on intelligence-led policing, and evidence collection.

Rise in phishing scams
• Terrorists are generating funds from illicit trafficking in drugs, goods, natural resources and antiquities, as well as kidnapping for ransom, extorting and committing other heinous crimes.
• There is a significant rise in cybercrime in recent months, with a 350 per cent increase in phishing websites in the first quarter of 2020 – many targeting hospitals and health care systems.
• Therefore it is important to address the nexus between terrorism and organized crime.

Terrorists, crime networks exploiting COVID-19
• Terrorists are exploiting the significant disruption and economic hardships caused by COVID-19 to spread fear, hate and division and radicalize and recruit new followers.
• Efforts must be made to study how the links between terrorism and organized crime evolve - without automatically conflating both threats.

Address local grievances, poor governance
• Countries are focused on tackling the health crisis caused by COVID-19. But we must not be complacent about the continuing threat of terrorism.
• In many parts of the world, terrorists are exploiting local grievances and poor governance to regroup and assert their control.
• Collective action and international cooperation are needed now more than ever.

6. The global war on terror
• Two decades after September 11, 2001, when al-Qaeda carried out its most audacious attacks ever on American soil, leading to the Global war on terror and triggering the invasion of Afghanistan by the United States, it might be worthwhile to do a fact check on the outcome.
• The return of the Taliban in Afghanistan, after humiliating the combined forces of the U.S., the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Afghan Armed Forces is a grim warning of what lies in store for the neighbourhood.

Persistent challenge on Global war on terror:
Two decades of the Global war on terror did not, however, eradicate terrorism.
1. Leadership losses, including that of leaders like bin Laden and al Baghdadi, and despite organisational fracturing and territorial degradation, terror groups such as al-Qaeda and the IS today pose a persistent challenge.
2. It would be tempting for intelligence agencies to think that the current low-tech attacks, involving small arms, the occasional use of Improvised Explosive Devices, and random ‘lone wolf’ attacks reflect the weakening of terror modules, including that of al-Qaeda and the IS.
3. Nothing could be more misleading. Not only the major terror groups but even smaller terror modules currently retain the potential for both sophisticated and mass casualty attacks.
4. Terrorism, stemming from a mixture of religious fervour and fundamentalist aims, remains vibrant.
5. Hence, it is possible to surmise that the broad contours of terrorism, specially Islamist terrorism, remain much the same.

In India: Reviving new wave of Terror Attacks:
1. Kashmir is beginning to see a new wave of terror attacks reviving grim memories of the 1990s.
2. Targeted killings of minorities have begun to send shockwaves across not only Jammu & Kashmir (J&K), but many other pockets of the country.
3. Given the prevailing scenario, the dice is heavily loaded against India, with J&K being in the cross-hairs of several terror factions, further complicated by Pakistan’s efforts to aid and abet them through the use of its ‘regulars’.
4. While the past is often a good guide to the future in comprehending what shape terror could manifest itself going forward, it is even more important to recognise the paradigmatic changes beginning to take shape in the practice of violence in different parts of the world.

The forms of ‘new era’ terror: Remote controlled terror:
1. Intelligence and terror specialists must begin to anticipate how to deal with ‘new era terrorists’, recruited over the Internet, who would thereafter be guided through different steps, over a sustained period, by anonymous handlers located elsewhere.
2. This is not science fiction. There is already evidence of the existence of remote controllers who choose the targets, the actual operatives, the nature of the attack itself, and even the weaponry to be used, operating behind a wall of anonymity.
3. Internet-enabled terrorism, a completely new genre of terrorism would be very different from what we have seen so far.
4. Linked to this is the threat posed by cyber-terrorism. Digital sabotage has already entered the armoury of certain terror groups.
5. Cyber sabotage is a distinct possibility in certain situations today. It is well-known that terror groups that have state backing, have the capacity today to employ cyber techniques to carry out hostile attacks on the ICT-enabled infrastructure of another country.
6. While little is talked about these aspects, the reality is that the limits of human imagination have become the virtual parameters of terror threats today.

Conclusion:
- The emerging shape of terror and terror attacks during coming periods is likely to be very different from what many of today’s experts possibly anticipate.
- While ‘Zero-day’ attacks like New York (9/11) and Mumbai (26/11) are still very much on the drawing board of terror groups, it is also known that a new breed of terrorists is experimenting with newer forms of terror, specially the possibility of ‘remote controlled terror’. This is a frightening prospect.
- History is, therefore, more relevant and important when assessing future threats such as terrorism.