

1. India-US Dialogue on Africa

Why in News?

- The second round of the **India-US Dialogue on Africa** is being held in Washington.



About

- This is the first such dialogue on Africa between India and the US **after the inclusion of the African Union as a permanent member of the G20** during India's presidency.
- The two day India-US dialogue aims to share ideas and perspectives and explore ways to develop institutional, technical and bilateral synergies to work together in Africa.
- It also targets identification of developmental projects and programs of cooperation in Africa, leveraging the strengths of India and the US, in accordance with African priorities.

Significance of Africa for India

- **Economic Partnership and Growth Rate:** Indian investments in Africa reached \$98 billion in 2023, with trade totalling \$100 billion.
 - Forty-two African countries are the second-largest recipients of all credit extended by India.
 - Around 200 developmental projects have been completed in the region.
 - Africa's significant growth rate of 3.8 per cent and its young population, with 60 percent under the age of 25, estimated to reach 1.1 billion people by 2040.
- **Influence on Global Forums:** Africa's influence in global forums will be important for India's vision for global governance.

- Global South houses three-fourths of humanity and over 39 percent of the global GDP.
- **Cooperation in Critical Minerals:** Africa, with 30 percent of the world's mineral reserves, is vital to power the energy transition.
 - Given the geographical concentration of critical minerals, diversifying sources and fostering strategic partnerships with resource-rich nations are imperative for India's growth and national security.
- **Support in UNSC:** India is keen to garner the support from Africa for Permanent Membership of the UNSC.

African Union

- The African Union (AU) was officially launched in **2002** in Durban, South Africa.
- It is made up of **55 Member States** representing all the countries on the African continent.
- The African Union is a key driving force for the continent's political and economic development, its primary purpose being African integration and increased cooperation among African countries, with a view to achieving peace, security, and prosperity for all the people of the continent.

India Africa Relations

- **Long history of partnership:**
 - India has a long history of partnership with Africa, with solidarity and political affinity going back to the early 1920s when both regions were fighting against colonial rule and oppression.
 - After India gained independence, it became a leading voice in support of African decolonization at the United Nations.
- **Diplomatic Relations:** India has diplomatic relations with all African countries. The Forum for India-Africa Cooperation (IAFS) serves as the primary framework for engagement.
 - It was established in **2008** to deepen political and economic cooperation between India and African nations.
- **Trade Relations:** India-Africa trade has grown 18 percent annually since 2003, reaching \$103 billion in 2023. This makes India Africa's third largest trading partner after the European Union and China.
 - India is now one of the top five investors in Africa.
- **Global Cooperation:** Together, India and Africa have also made effective contributions to protect the interests of developing countries at international fora, particularly the World Trade Organisation (WTO).
 - They moved joint proposals such as the Agriculture Framework Proposal and more recently, India and South Africa proposed an intellectual property right waiver for COVID-19 vaccines at the WTO.
- **Concerns:**
 - **Competition from Global Players:** Africa has become the playground for major powers like the US, Russia, China and European countries, all vying for political and economic influence in the resource-rich continent.

- **Chinese Presence:** China has been aggressively pursuing its own economic interests in the resource-rich African continent through investments in infrastructure and mining under the Belt and Road Initiative though, it has faced criticism for burdening African countries with debt, much like Sri Lanka.

Way Ahead

- The African Union's inclusion to G20 is seen as a big win for India, which has been championing the cause of Global South.
- In this era of geopolitical competition and realignment, India's multifaceted relationship with African nations is poised for a fundamental transformation.
- As India's aspirations for the Global South take shape, leveraging historical partnerships with African countries remains imperative.

2. World Wildlife Crime Report 2024

Why in News?

- The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has released the World Wildlife Crime Report 2024.



Key Findings

- The market for **rhino horn (29 percent)** constituted the biggest chunk among animal species.
- It was followed by the market for **pangolin scales at 28 percent**, followed by the market for **elephant ivory at 15 percent**.
- **Other animal species** most affected by the global illegal animal trade included eels (5 percent), crocodilians (5 percent), parrots and cockatoos (2 percent), carnivores (2 percent), turtles and tortoises (2 percent), snakes (2 percent), seahorses (2 percent) and others (8 percent).

- **The rhino and the cedar** were the animal and plant species most affected by global illegal wildlife trade during 2015-2021.

Factors driving wildlife crime

- **Demand for Wildlife Products:** Demand for products derived from wildlife, such as ivory, rhino horn, tiger parts, etc. often fueled by cultural beliefs, traditional medicine practices, fashion trends, and status symbols leads to wildlife crime.
- **Economic Incentives:** Wildlife crimes are highly lucrative, offering significant financial gains for poachers, traffickers, and organized crime syndicates.
- **Weak Law Enforcement:** Inadequate enforcement of wildlife protection laws, corruption within law enforcement agencies, and limited resources allocated to combat wildlife crime contribute to its persistence.
- **Poverty and Lack of Livelihood Alternatives:** Poverty and lack of employment options drives people to engage in poaching or trafficking activities.
- **Globalization:** The globalization of trade and transportation networks has facilitated the illegal movement of wildlife and wildlife products across borders.

Impacts of wildlife crime

- Wildlife crime leads to **population declines and even extinction** of endangered species. The loss of biodiversity can disrupt entire ecosystems, affecting their resilience and ability to provide essential services.
- The illegal trade **deprives governments of revenue** from legitimate wildlife-based industries such as ecotourism and sustainable harvesting.
- The **overexploitation of top predators increases in prey species**, which in turn negatively impact vegetation and other wildlife populations further down the food chain, causing a cascade effect.
- Illegal wildlife trade involves the smuggling of live animals or animal products, which **carries diseases that pose risks to human health**.
- Many indigenous communities rely on wildlife for their **cultural and spiritual practices**. The loss of key species erodes traditional knowledge and cultural identities, leading to a loss of **cultural diversity**.

International Conventions to tackle wildlife crimes

- **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES):** Its aim is to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten the survival of the species.
- **International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN):** It is an international organization working in the field of nature conservation and sustainable use of natural resources.
- **Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS):** It is an international agreement that aims to conserve migratory species throughout their ranges.

Steps taken by Government to Protect Wildlife

- **The Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972** provides for stringent punishment for violation of its provisions.

- **The Wild Life Crime Control Bureau (WCCB)** coordinates with State/UTs and other enforcement agencies to gather intelligence about poaching and unlawful trade in wild animals and animal articles.
- **Recovery of Endangered Species** has been included in **Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats** which is a centrally sponsored scheme.
- The enactment of the **National Biological Diversity Act (NBA), 2002** was done in order to ensure the protection of threatened species and their habitats.

Constitutional Provisions

- **Article 48A:** The State shall endeavor to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country.
- **Article 51A(g):** To protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife, and to have compassion for living creatures;

Way Ahead

- Addressing wildlife crime requires a comprehensive approach including strengthening law enforcement, addressing poverty, promoting sustainable livelihoods, raising awareness, and engaging local communities in conservation efforts.
- Governments need to provide training and organize capacity-building programs for law enforcement officials, wildlife managers, and local communities to enhance their skills in wildlife protection, monitoring, and conservation.

3. 50 years of Pokhran-I

Why in News?

- On **May 18, 1974**, India conducted its first successful nuclear test, code-named “Smiling Buddha,” at the Pokhran test range in Rajasthan.

About

- With Smiling Buddha, India became the first nation to conduct a nuclear test apart from the five permanent members of the **United Nations Security Council**.
- Its code name came from the test’s date being on the same day as Buddha Jayanti, the **birth date of Gautam Buddha**.



Criticism faced by India

- After the nuclear test, there were criticisms that it was an attempt to divert people's attention from the economic crisis the country was facing in the 1970s.
- In **1978**, the US President signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Act, following which the US ceased exporting nuclear assistance to India.
- **Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG):** It is a group of nuclear supplier countries established in **1974** that seeks to contribute to the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons.
 - It would go on to implement agreed rules for exporting nuclear equipment, with a view to controlling the spread of nuclear weapons and where members would be admitted only by consensus.

What is the Pokhran-II test?

- In 1998, under the leadership of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, India conducted a series of nuclear tests in Pokhran once again, code-named Operation Shakti.
- The nuclear test of **1974 was a peaceful nuclear explosion**, on the other hand, the nuclear tests of May 1998, were undertaken as part of the **nuclear weaponization process**.
- And with Operation Shakti, India declared itself a **full-fledged nuclear state**.

What is India's Nuclear Doctrine?

- Building and maintaining a **credible minimum deterrence**;
- A posture of **"No First Use"** nuclear weapons will only be used in retaliation against a nuclear attack on Indian territory or on Indian forces anywhere;
- Nuclear retaliatory attacks can only be authorized by the civilian political leadership through the **Nuclear Command Authority**.
- **Non-use of nuclear weapons** against non-nuclear weapon states;
- However, in the event of a major attack against India, or Indian forces anywhere, by biological or chemical weapons, India will retain the option of retaliating with nuclear weapons.

Way Ahead

- After the nuclear test the international reaction was critical, but over the years India has projected itself as a "responsible" owner of these weapons, allowing acceptance among countries and into groups like the NSG.
- **No First Use:** India has a "no first use" policy, meaning it pledges not to use nuclear weapons first in a conflict but reserves the right to retaliate if attacked with nuclear weapons.

Treaties Related to Nuclear Disarmament

- **Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT):** To maintain the peace between nations, after world war II, a treaty was signed in **1968**, called the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT).
 - a. **Nuclear-weapon States parties are defined** as those that manufactured and

- exploded a nuclear weapon or other nuclear explosive devices before January 1, 1967, effectively meaning the P-5 countries.
- Its signatories agreed not to transfer either nuclear weapons or nuclear weapons technology to any other state.
 - Also the non-nuclear states agreed that they would not receive, develop or otherwise acquire nuclear weapons.
 - All of the signatories agreed to submit to the safeguards against proliferation established by the **International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)**.
 - India objected** to NPT on the grounds that it was discriminatory to countries except the P-5.
- **Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW):** Adopted by the United Nations in 2017 and opened for signature in 2018, the TPNW aims to prohibit the development, testing, production, stockpiling, stationing, transfer, use, and threat of use of nuclear weapons.
 - It represents a significant step towards nuclear disarmament, although it has not been signed by nuclear-armed states.
 - **Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT):** Opened for signature in 1996, the CTBT aims to ban all nuclear explosions for both civilian and military purposes.
 - While the treaty has been signed by 185 countries and ratified by 170, it has not entered into force as nuclear-armed states must ratify it to become operational.
 - **Outer Space Treaty:** This multilateral agreement entered into force in 1967 and bans the siting of weapons of mass destruction in space.
 - All nine states believed to have nuclear weapons are parties to this treaty.

4. Key facts about Gulf of Aden

Why in News?

European Union naval forces recently arrested six suspected pirates after they allegedly opened fire on an oil tanker traveling through the Gulf of Aden.

About Gulf of Aden:

- It is an **extension of the Indian Ocean**, located **between the Arabian Peninsula** and the **African** continent.
- It **connects the Red Sea to the Arabian Sea** and ultimately the Indian Ocean.



- The gulf is named after “Aden,” a port city on Yemen’s coast.
- It is approximately 900 km long and 500 km wide and covers roughly 410,000 square kilometers.
- It is **bounded** to the south **by Somalia** and the **Socotra Islands** (part of Yemen), north by **Yemen**, east by the **Arabian Sea**, and west by **Djibouti**.
- The gulf is **connected to** the **Somali Sea** to the south **by the Guardafui Channel**, and **to the Red Sea** on the west **by the** Strait of Bab el Mandeb.
- In the west, it **narrows into the Gulf of Tadjoura, near Djibouti**.
- It is **demarcated from** the **Arabian Sea by the Horn of Africa and the Socotra Islands**.
- The **dominant relief feature** of the gulf’s terrain is the **Sheba Ridge**, an **extension of the Indian Ocean ridge system**, which extends along the middle of the gulf.
- Some of the **major cities** near the gulf include **Aden, Mukalla, Ahnwar, Balhaf, Berbera, Bosaso, and Djibouti City**.
- **Major Ports: Aden** in Yemen, and **Berbera and Bosaso** in Somalia.
- It is also a **critical part of the Suez Canal shipping route**, which connects the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea.

5. Registered Unrecognised Political Party

Why in News?

Recently, it has been noticed that less than a third of Registered Unrecognised Political Parties (RUPP) are contesting elections in India.

About Registered Unrecognised Political Party:



- These are the parties which are either **newly registered parties** or those which **have not secured enough percentage** of votes in the assembly or general elections to become a state party, or those which have never contested elections since being registered.
- **Allocation of symbols to RUPP:** Common symbols are provided to RUPPs based upon an undertaking that they would put up “at least 5% of total candidates with regard to said Legislative Assembly election of a State”.
 - Election Commission of India made it mandatory for RUPPs to furnish audited accounts of **last three financial years**, expenditure statements of last two elections.
 - The EC receives the applications from RUPPs in prescribed proforma for allotment of symbol under **Provisions of Para 10B of the Election Symbols (Reservation & Allotment) Order, 1968.**

What are registered parties?

- The Section 29A of the **Representation of the People Act, 1951** (RP Act) lays down the requirements for registration of a political party with the ECI.
- Any political party that seeks registration should submit a copy of its **memorandum/constitution**.
 - Such document should declare that the party shall bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution of India. It should also bear allegiance to the principles of **socialism, secularism and democracy**, and uphold the sovereignty, unity and integrity of India.
- **Benefits**
 - **Tax exemption** for donations received under Section 13A of the Income Tax Act, 1961.
 - Common symbol for contesting general elections to the Lok Sabha/State Assemblies, and
 - **Twenty ‘star campaigners’** during the election campaign.