DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS 30-05-2024

GS-2

1. Chabahar's opportunities and challenges

GS-3

2. Pravaah portal

3. Eucalyptus tree

4. Deepfakes

5. Integrated theatre commands

Chabahar's opportunities and challenges

Syllabus: GS-2: Bilateral Relations.

Context:

➢ *Recently, The Hindu published an article titled* **'Chabahar's opportunities and challenges'.**

Background:

➢ **India-Iran Contract***: India and Iran signed a new 10-year contract.*
➢ **Chabahar Port:** *India can invest in and operate the Shahid-Behesti terminal at Chabahar Port.*
➢ **Economic Importance***: The port is a key project in economic relations between India and Iran.*
➢ **Timing:** *The deal was made during a turbulent period in West Asia.*
➢ **Conflict in Gaza:** *The war in Gaza is ongoing.*
➢ **Israel-Iran Tensions***: Relations between Israel and Iran are very tense.*
➢ **Iran's Leadership Changes***: Iran's President and Foreign Minister died in a helicopter accident, impacting Iranian politics.*

Representative of India's thinking

➢ **Chabahar Project's Importance***: The Chabahar project is crucial for India for economic and strategic reasons.*
➢ **Extended Neighbourhood***: India views Chabahar as part of its extended neighbourhood strategy, not just its West Asia outlook.*
➢ **Transport Corrido***r: The port is central to the International North-South Transport Corridor, linking India to Central Asia and Russia while bypassing Pakistan.*
➢ **Afghanistan's Support***: The Taliban-led government in Afghanistan supports Chabahar, investing $35 million to reduce reliance on Pakistani ports.*
➢ **Bilateral Challenges***: Despite public support for Chabahar, India-Iran relations face challenges, with other projects like the Farzad-B gas field and IranoHind shipping company being abandoned.*
➢ **Legacy Project***: Chabahar dates back to 2003, when India began developing economic assets abroad, similar to the Sakhalin-I project in Russia.*

A reflection of diplomacy

➢ **Geopolitical Context:** *The Chabahar deal between India and Iran comes amid tense geopolitics, including recent near-conflict between Israel and Iran.*
➢ **India's Investments:** *India's Adani Group has also invested in Israel's Haifa port, showing India's balanced approach in the region.*

> ➢ **Diplomatic Success:** *The Chabahar deal showcases Indian diplomacy, managing relations with both Iran and Israel without conflicts.*
> ➢ **U.S. Perspective:** *The U.S. recognizes India's strategic access in Chabahar as beneficial, despite some U.S. concerns about sanctions.*
> ➢ **Regional Integration:** *Chabahar is important for India to access Central Asia and Afghanistan, offering alternatives to China-backed projects.*
> ➢ **Iran's Independence:** *Despite its ties with China, Iran remains independent and strategic in its geopolitical decisions.*
> ➢ **U.S. Foreign Policy:** *The Biden administration is advised to handle India-Iran ties carefully, learning from past mistakes when India stopped importing Iranian oil to align with U.S. policies under Obama, which later backfired when Trump exited the Iran nuclear deal.*

The bigger picture

> ➢ **Diverse Interests Needed:** *Chabahar shouldn't be the only focus in India-Iran relations, as relying too much on one project is risky.*
> ➢ **U.S. Sanctions:** *The U.S. should be flexible about sanctions on Chabahar. The port is important for India's regional strategy, which can also support broader American goals.*
> ➢ **U.S.-Iran Channels:** *The U.S. maintains communication with Iran through intermediaries like Switzerland, Oman, and Qatar, highlighting the importance of nuanced diplomacy.*

Practice Question

Q. Analyze the strategic importance of the Chabahar Port for India-Iran relations and its impact on regional geopolitics, considering the complexities of U.S. sanctions and India's diplomatic balancing. (15 marks, 250 words)

Pravaah portal

Syllabus: GS-3: Indian Economy.

Context:

> ➢ *The* **Reserve Bank of India** *(RBI) launched three new initiatives: PRAVAAH portal, RBI Retail Direct mobile app, and FinTech Repository.*
> ➢ *These initiatives were* **announced in the RBI's statements in April 2023**, *December 2023, and April 2024.*

PRAVAAH Portal

- ➢ *Allows individuals and entities to* **apply online for regulatory approvals**.
- ➢ **Enhances the efficiency of processes** *related to regulatory approvals by RBI.*
- ➢ *Currently offers 60 application forms for different* **regulatory and supervisory departments.**
- ➢ *Includes a general-purpose form for requests* **not covered by specific forms.**

RBI Retail Direct Mobile App

- ➢ *Provides retail investors easy access to the* **retail direct platform.**
- ➢ *Makes it convenient to transact in* **government securities** *(G-Secs).*

FinTech Repository

- ➢ *Contains data on* **Indian FinTech firms** *to help understand the sector from a regulatory perspective.*
- ➢ *Aims to* **design appropriate policies** *for the FinTech sector.*

EmTech Repository

- ➢ *Specifically for RBI-regulated entities like* **banks and NBFCs.**
- ➢ *Captures information on the adoption of* **emerging technologies** *(AI, ML, Cloud Computing, etc.).*
- ➢ *Both* **FinTech and EmTech Repositories** *are managed by the Reserve Bank Innovation Hub (RBIH).*
- ➢ *The repositories are secure web-based applications.*
- ➢ *They provide aggregate sectoral data, trends, and analytics useful for policymakers and industry members.*

Eucalyptus tree

Syllabus: GS-3: Forest Conservation & invasive alien species.

Context:

- ➢ *The controversy over eucalyptus planting in Kerala.*
- ➢ *Why did the Kerala government allow the Kerala Forest Development Corporation to plant eucalyptus trees? Why were environmentalists and social activists against the order?*

What are KDFC and its plantations?

KFDC (Kerala Forest Development Corporation):

➢ **Established on January 24, 1975**, *as a part of a dynamic production forestry enterprise.*
➢ *Manages around 7,000 hectares (ha) of plantations.*

Plantation Working Circle Species:

➢ *Eucalyptus grandis*
➢ *Acacia auriculiformis*
➢ *Acacia mangium*
➢ *Acacia crassicarpa*
➢ *Acacia pycnantha (also known as wattle)*
➢ *Alnus nepalensis*
➢ *Casuarina equisetifolia*
➢ *Pinus patula*

Rotation Ages:

➢ *Eucalyptus: 9 years*
➢ *Acacia auriculiformis: 18 years*
➢ *Acacia mangium: 7 years*

Management of Plantations:

- ➤ *Approved plantations undergo* **clear-felling at the end of each cycle.**
- ➤ **Planting of new species** *is based on a management plan.*
- ➤ **Soil quality is checked**, *and consultations with the Kerala Forest Research Institute are conducted before planting.*

Conversion to Indigenous Species:

- ➤ *Exotic species, including eucalyptus, are* **being replaced with indigenous species** *after the exotic flora is felled to be more ecologically and environmentally friendly.*

What was the issue with the order?

Eco-Restoration Policy (2021):

- ➤ *Aimed to address the* **proliferation of invasive species** *not suitable for the environment and the* **resulting depletion of natural forests**.
- ➤ *Noted that* **depletion of natural forests was forcing wild animals** *to move to human-occupied areas in search of food, leading to increased human-wildlife conflict.*

Example from Study:

- ➤ *Study by the Kerala State Forest Protective Staff Organisation suggested that* **replacing exotic plants with natural species** *could ensure food for wild elephants in areas like Chinnakanal in Munnar.*
- ➤ **Chinnakanal landscape,** *rich in eucalyptus trees, is prime elephant habitat in the Munnar forest division.*

Policy's Stance on Invasive Species:

- ➤ *Acknowledged that* **invasive plant and animal species** *had caused serious damage to natural habitats and ecosystems.*
- ➤ *Emphasized the* **high priority of eradicating** *such invasive species.*

Criticism of the Order:

- ➤ *Environmental activists alleged that the government's order, permitting KFDC to plant eucalyptus trees,* **contradicted the policy's goals**.
- ➤ *They argued that it* **undermined efforts to combat invasive species** *and mitigate human-animal conflicts.*

What is eco-restoration?

- ➤ *Eco-restoration is the* **process of restoring ecosystems** *to their natural state by* **removing invasive or non-native species** *and replanting with indigenous vegetation.*
- ➤ *In Kerala, this involves phasing out industrial plantations of* **eucalyptus, acacia, wattle, and pine by 2024** *and* **replacing them with natural forests**.

➢ This approach **aims to combat climate change** *by harnessing the benefits trees offer in mitigating its effects.*

➢ *For instance, a* **project in the Marayoor Sandal Division** *removed 108 hectares of exotic species, allowing natural grasses to thrive.*

➢ **As a result, active water streams**, *absent for 30 years, were restored, demonstrating the positive impact* **of eco-restoration on local ecosystems**.

Deepfakes

Syllabus : GS – 3; Science & Technology

Context :

➢ *Recently, during the on-going Lok Sabha elections, deepfake posed a significant threat to democracy and social institutions with spreading the fake news and hate speeches.*

More about Deepfakes

➢ *Deepfake gained* **public attention in 2017** *when a Reddit user shared explicit videos featuring celebrities, marking the initial instance. Subsequently, various cases of deepfake occurrences have been documented.*

➢ *Deepfakes refer to* **synthetic media** *created through the application of advanced techniques from machine learning and AI, such as deep learning and Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs), deepfakes are created where* **visual and audio content** *is manipulated or generated.*

➢ *The* **primary purpose of deepfakes** *is typically to deceive or mislead individuals.*

➢ *Further, Deepfake are digitally manipulated to convincingly replace one person's likeness with another's.*

Purpose of Deepfake technology

➢ *Deepfake technology* **serves various purposes** *like entertainment, education, art, and activism.*

Uses of Deepfake Technology

➢ **Film Dubbing:** *Deepfake tech enables realistic lip-syncing for actors speaking different languages, enhancing global accessibility and immersion in films. Example: A video petition to end malaria featured celebrities like David Beckham, Hugh Jackman, and Bill Gates speaking different languages using deepfake technology.*

➢ **Education:** *Teachers use deepfakes to bring historical figures to life or simulate scenarios for engaging lessons. Example: A deepfake video of Abraham Lincoln delivering his Gettysburg Address could teach students about the American Civil War.*

- ➢ **Art:** *Artists leverage deepfakes for creative expression and collaboration, as seen in cases.*
- ➢ **Autonomy and Expression:** *Deepfakes empower individuals to control their digital identity and explore new forms of self-expression. Example: The Reface app allows users to swap their faces with celebrities or characters in videos or gifs for fun or personalization.*
- ➢ **Amplification of Messages:** *Deepfakes amplify voices of marginalised individuals, enabling them to share important messages. Example: A deepfake video was created to deliver the final message of a journalist killed by the Saudi government, calling for justice.*
- ➢ **Digital Reconstruction:** *Deepfakes aid in restoring old photos, enhancing low-quality footage, and creating realistic training materials for public safety. Example: A deepfake video of a school shooting was developed to train teachers on emergency response tactics.*
- ➢ **Innovation:** *Deepfake technology drives innovation in entertainment, gaming, and marketing, enabling new forms of storytelling and interaction. Example: A deepfake video of Mark Zuckerberg was created to showcase the potential of synthetic media and its societal implications.*

Challenges to Deepfake technology

- ➢ *Deepfakes presents **ethical and social challenges**, including generating fake news, spreading misinformation, violating privacy, and damaging reputation.*
- ➢ **Spreading False Information:** *Deepfakes can purposefully spread misinformation, influencing public opinion or elections.Example: Deepfake videos of politicians or celebrities can manipulate viewers and create confusion about important issues.*
- ➢ **Harassment and Intimidation:** *Deepfakes can fuel harassment, especially targeting women, and lead to psychological distress. Example: Deepfake technology facilitates the creation of revenge porn, violating privacy and causing harm.*
- ➢ **Fabricating Evidence:** *Deepfakes can fabricate evidence, influencing legal proceedings or defrauding the public. Example: Deepfake audio or video impersonates individuals to make false claims or accusations.*
- ➢ **Reputation Tarnishing:** *Deepfakes can damage reputations by creating false media of individuals. Example: Synthesised media can tarnish credibility and cause reputational or financial losses.*
- ➢ **Financial Frauds:** *Deepfake technology enables impersonation for financial frauds, tricking individuals into revealing sensitive information. Example: A deepfake audio of a CEO led to fraudulent money transfers totaling USD 243,000.*

Legal provisions to Curb Deepfakes:

- ➢ **IT Act, 2000 and IT Rules, 2021:** *These regulations require social media intermediaries to promptly remove deepfake content. Failure to do so may result in imprisonment or fines.*
- ➢ **Section 66D of IT Act:** *This section penalises individuals for cheating through personation using communication devices or computer resources.Punishment includes imprisonment for up to three years and a fine of up to one lakh rupees.*
- ➢ **Rule 3(1)(b)(vii):** *This rule mandates that social media intermediaries prevent the hosting of content impersonating others.*
- ➢ **Rule 3(2)(b):** *This rule requires social media platforms to remove such content within 24 hours of receiving a complaint.*

Integrated theatre commands

Syllabus: GS-3: Security - Indian Armed Forces.

Context:

- ➢ *The Indian Armed Forces are finalizing plans to create integrated theatre commands.*
- ➢ *This reform aims to combine the Army, Navy, and Air Force to work together in specific regions during conflicts.*

Background:

- ➢ *In 2019, the government started this reform by creating the* **Chief of Defence Staff (CDS)** *role and the Department of Military Affairs (DMA).*
- ➢ *Some initiatives to* **integrate the services at lower levels** *are already in place.*

Services working together:

- ➢ *Currently, the* **Indian Army, Navy, and Air Force** *operate separately under their own commands.*
- ➢ **Theaterisation***aims to place units from all three services under one theatre commander to fight as a single unit.*
- ➢ *This approach would* **optimize manpower and resources** *across the services.*
- ➢ *Each service has its own* **distinct culture and practices***.*
- ➢ *Integrating their personnel, assets, infrastructure, and logistics is* **key to achieving unified military goals in specific regions.**

A STRUCTURAL REVAMP

A look at the theaterisation plan to best utilise India's military resources

AIR DEFENCE COMMAND

WHAT IT WILL DO: Control the air defence resources of all the three services and will be tasked with protecting military assets from airborne enemies

ROLL-OUT: April

HEADQUARTERS: Prayagraj

HEADED BY: Its commander-in-chief will be a top three-star IAF officer

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT: The synergy between the military's air assets will provide seamless air defence cover, which will be critical to counter the Chinese and Pakistani threat

MARITIME THEATRE COMMAND

WHAT IT WILL DO: Responsible for securing India from seaborne threats and will have army and air force elements under it

ROLL-OUT: May   **HEADQUARTERS:** Karwar

HEADED BY: Its commander-in-chief will be a top three-star Indian Navy officer

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT: India's geographical advantage will be an asset in deterring China in the Indian Ocean

WHY IS JOINTMANSHIP IMPORTANT?

CDS General Bipin Rawat is expected to bring about jointness among the three services by January 2023. This includes bringing jointness in operations, logistics, transport, training, support services and repairs and maintenance of the three services

IN THE WORKS: India is expected to have three other integrated commands to secure its western, northern and eastern fronts — these will be rolled out by Dec 2022. A logistics command is also in the works

OPERATIONAL CONTROL

The operational control of all the theatre commands will come under CDS, with service chiefs being responsible for raising, training and sustaining forces. Dept of military affairs may be restructured later to allow CDS to focus on theatre commands

Steps towards integration include:

➢ *Making Mumbai the first tri-service common defence station.*
➢ **Setting up joint logistics nodes** *nationwide to enhance logistics and streamline supply chains.*
➢ *Facilitating inter-service postings of officers.*

Command and headquarters:

The latest military draft envisions three adversary-based theatre commands:

➢ **Western Theatre Command***: Facing Pakistan, planned to be headquartered in Jaipur.*
➢ **Northern Theatre Command***: Facing China, planned to be headquartered in Lucknow.*
➢ **Maritime Theatre Command***: Addressing threats from the Indian Ocean Region, possibly headquartered in Coimbatore (with Karwar and Thiruvananthapuram also considered).*

Previous plans proposed additional commands:

➢ *Air Defence Command*
➢ *Eastern, Northern, and Western theatre commands*
➢ *Joint Logistics Command*
➢ *Space Command*

Training Command

➢ *Drafts have changed multiple times due to lack of consensus among the three services on the structure and number of theatre commands.*

Rationalisation process

Current Structure:

➢ *Army: 7 commands*
➢ *Air Force: 7 commands*
➢ *Navy: 3 commands*
➢ *Tri-Service Commands: Andaman and Nicobar Command, Strategic Forces Command (SFC)*
➢ *Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff (HQIDS)*

Post-Theatre Commands Creation:

➢ *Three existing service command headquarters will be converted into theatre command headquarters.*
➢ *Andaman and Nicobar Command will likely become part of the maritime theatre command.*
➢ *HQIDS will operate under the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS).*
➢ *SFC will continue to function independently.*

Rationalisation:

➢ *Integrates and streamlines command structures.*
➢ *Promotes joint operations and resource optimization.*
➢ *Enhances coordination across the Army, Navy, and Air Force for specific regional threats.*

Command leadership

Theatre Command Leadership:

➢ *Each theatre command will be led by a commander of the rank of General or equivalent.*
➢ *Theatre commanders will report to a National Defence Committee, likely headed by the Defence Minister.*

New Appointments:

- *Vice CDS:*
  - *Focus: Strategic planning, capability development, procurement.*
  - *Rank: General or equivalent.*
- *Deputy CDS:*
  - *Focus: Operations, intelligence, coordination of asset allocation among theatres.*
  - *Rank: Lieutenant General or equivalent.*
- **Roles of Service Chiefs:**
  - *Responsible for raising, training, and sustaining the Army, Navy, and Air Force.*
  - *Unclear if they will retain any operational roles post-restructuring.*
- **Status:**
  - *These plans have not yet received final government approval.*

About Theatre of command

- *A theatre of command, or theatre command, refers to a* **unified military structure that integrates** *different branches of the armed forces (Army, Navy, and Air Force) to operate under a single command in a specific geographic region or operational area.*
- *This structure is* **designed to enhance coordination and efficiency** *during conflicts or military operations by having a single commander oversee all military activities within that area.*

Key Features of Theatre Commands:

- **Unified Leadership:** *A single commander, typically of high rank (e.g., General or equivalent), leads all forces in the theatre.*
- **Integrated Operations**: *Forces from different services (Army, Navy, Air Force) work together as a cohesive unit.*
- **Defined Geographic Area**: *Each theatre command covers a specific region or operational area.*
- **Resource Optimization**: *Manpower and resources from different services are rationalized and used more efficiently.*
- **Operational Focus**: *Theatre commanders focus on achieving military goals and responding to threats within their designated areas.*

Purpose:

- *To improve the effectiveness of military operations through better coordination.*
- *To streamline command structures and eliminate redundancies.*
- *To ensure rapid and unified response to regional threats.*

Practice Question

Q. Analyze the implications of India's proposed theatre command structure on national security, inter-service coordination, and operational efficiency, considering the challenges in consensus among the armed services. (15 marks, 250 words)