

WHAT IS 'SOUL OF STEEL' CHALLENGE?

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh recently kick-started the 'Soul of Steel' alpine challenge, an initiative to promote tourism in border areas, at an event in Dehradun coinciding with Veterans Day.



About 'Soul of Steel' challenge:

- The 'Soul of Steel' expedition will test one's high-altitude endurance and adventure in Uttarakhand's Garhwal Himalayas.
- It will initially have 12 Indian participants plus six international teams, between the age group of 18 and 30 years.
- The challenge will be spread across three months.
- It is being organized by CLAW Global, an entity comprising a group of veterans.
- The Indian Army is supporting the adventure challenge.
- It is based on the lines of the 'Ironman triathlon', a long-distance triathlon held in Europe which tests an individual's physical capabilities.
- Participants will be selected through a detailed screening and training model through traditional and modern standards.
- The initiative is aimed at enabling life skill training and youth development.
- It is also expected to boost global promotion of adventure tourism in Uttarakhand.

WHAT IS GEOSPATIAL HACKATHON?

Union Minister of Science & Technology recently launched Geospatial Hackathon to promote Innovation and Start-Ups in India's Geospatial ecosystem.



About Geospatial Hackathon:

- It is a hackathon to create interest in geospatial tech and specifically build solutions leveraging maps and satellite data for solving India's problems.
- The **Department of Science and Technology (DST)** under the Minister of Science & Technology in partnership with **IIIT Hyderabad** and **Microsoft** has launched this Hackathon.
- The Geospatial Hackathon will be divided into 2 parts,
 - **Research Challenge:** The National Science & Technology Entrepreneurship Development Board and IIIT Hyderabad brings the Startup Challenge as part of this Hackathon intending to promote the use of geospatial technologies in solving real-world problems and fostering innovation in the Indian geospatial ecosystem
 - **Startup Challenge:** The Research Challenge is specific to the **problem statements** given by DST (Survey of India.) is proposing a Geospatial Data Processing, Solution development, and Servicing Challenge to foster the adoption of geospatial technologies and to promote innovation in India's Geospatial ecosystem.

WHAT IS BAY OF BENGAL INITIATIVE FOR MULTI-SECTORAL TECHNICAL AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION (BIMSTEC)?

Recently, a meeting of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime was hosted by the Government of India in New Delhi.



Why in News?

- The meeting discussed traditional and emerging non-traditional security threats in the BIMSTEC region.
- The working group on counter-terror deals with a few key realms of policy. These include
 - Intelligence Sharing
 - Legal and Law Enforcement
 - Countering Radicalization and Terrorism
 - Anti- Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism

- Human Trafficking
- Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and Precursor Chemicals,

Key facts about BIMSTEC?

- The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation is a regional grouping started in 1997.
- **Member countries:** Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Bhutan and Nepal
- This group was launched by signing **the Bangkok Declaration**.

MAARG PLATFORM

The Union Commerce and industry minister will launch the mentorship, advisory, assistance, resilience and growth (MAARG) platform on 16th January 2023 in New Delhi.



What is MAARG PLATFORM?

- It is the **National Mentorship Platform** by Start-up India to help and guide new start-ups to grow and flourish.
- It is a one-stop platform to facilitate mentorship for start-ups across diverse sectors, functions, stages, geographies, and backgrounds.
- **Nodal Ministry:** Launched by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) under **the Ministry of Commerce and Industry**.

What are the objectives?

- To provide **sector-focused guidance**, handholding, and support to start-ups throughout their lifecycle.
- To establish a formalized and structured platform that facilitates intelligent matchmaking between the mentors and their respective mentees
- To facilitate efficient and expert mentorship for start-ups and build an outcome-oriented mechanism that allows timely tracking of mentor-mentee engagements.

Implementation of MAARG Initiative:

- **Phase I:** Mentor Onboarding

- Successfully launched and executed, 400+ expert mentors are on board across sectors.
 - **Phase II:** Startup Onboarding
 - DPIIT launched the onboarding of startups on the MAARG Portal with effect from 14th November 2022
 - **Phase III:** MAARG Portal Launch and Mentor Matchmaking.
 - Final launch where the mentors will be matched to the startups DPIIT has initiated the onboarding process of startups under Phase II.
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WHAT DOES THE CENTRE WANT IN BHOPAL GAS CASE?

Why in News?

- The Union of India calls the Bhopal gas leak tragedy (1984) the world's largest industrial disaster.
- The Government, in 2010, had filed a petition to seek additional compensation of Rs 7,844 crore from the successors of the Union Carbide Corporation for the victims of the industrial accident.
- A Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court has reserved its judgment w.r.t. the petition filed by the Government.

Historical Background:

- Union Carbide (India) Ltd. (UCIL) was a subsidiary of the Union Carbide Corporation, a US corporation.
- A UCIL pesticide manufacturing factory was located on the outskirts of **Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh**.
- On December 2, 1984, highly toxic **methyl isocyanate (MIC)** gas started leaking from the plant.
- People living in nearby areas reported a burning sensation in their eyes and difficulties in breathing, with many also losing consciousness.
- An estimated **3,000 people died** within the first few days.
- Its effects were such that apart from killing thousands of people in a short span of time, it **led to disease and other long-term problems for many who inhaled the gas.**

- To date, the reproductive health of many of Bhopal's women has been affected.
- Children born to those exposed to the gas have faced congenital health problems.

Aftermath of the Accident:

- A 2019 report by the UN's International Labour Organization (ILO) said at least 30 tonnes of the poisonous gas affected more than 600,000 workers and nearby inhabitants.
- It added that the disaster was among the world's "major industrial accidents after 1919".
- Multiple analyses have alleged that the **leak was a result of general laxity in safety rules**, and in the training of the workers, most of whom were unaware of the MIC's dangers.
- **Legislative Measures taken after the accident –**
 - The **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986** was enacted.
 - The act authorised the central government to take relevant measures and regulate industrial activity for environmental and public safety.
 - The **Public Liability Insurance Act of 1991** was passed.
 - It provides public liability insurance for providing immediate relief to the persons affected by an accident occurring while handling any hazardous substance.

Demand for Compensation:

- After the disaster, the **Bhopal Gas Leak Disaster (Processing of Claims) Act** was passed in 1985, giving certain powers to the Indian government for settling claims.
- It said the Central Government would have the "**exclusive right**" to represent, and act in place of every person connected with the claims.
- In February 1989, the Indian government and Union Carbide struck an out-of-court deal and **compensation of \$470 million was given by UC**.
- The Supreme Court also upheld it in a judgement. Over the years, the government gradually released the money, but the delay led to frequent protests by those affected.

Why did the Government file a Curative Petition in 2010?

- In 2010, the Central government filed a curative petition in the Supreme Court.
- As per the government, the basis of the \$470 million settlement reached on May 4, 1989 was that there were only around 3,000 death cases in the gas leak incident.

- However, as per the government, the **actual figure is 5,295 deaths**.
- The government's chart in the apex court shows that the total number of cases of deaths, disability, injuries, loss of property and livestock have **increased to 5,74,376 from the 2,05,000 "assumed" in May, 1989.**

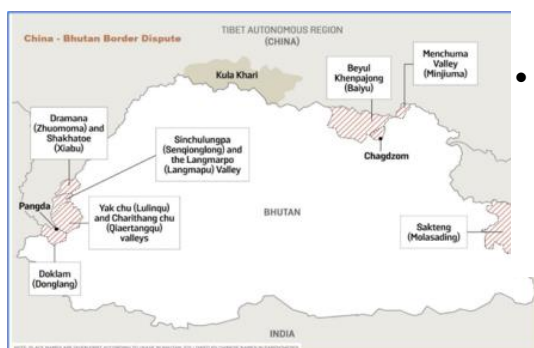
What is a Curative Petition?

- The Supreme Court evolved the idea of curative petitions in the **landmark judgment of Rupa Ashok Hurra vs. Ashok Hurra.**
- In this case, SC observed that Article 142 of the Constitution empowers the Supreme Court to act in whatever manner they may deem fit to establish complete justice.
- Therefore, to protect the substantive rights of the litigant, the Constitution Bench came up with the theory of a curative petition.
- **Grounds that allow entertainment of curative petition:**
 - Curative petition will be entertained on strong grounds only e.g.
 - Violation of principles of natural justice;
 - Where the judge has a bias
 - It has to be **certified by a senior advocate.** If the bench finds that the petition is vexatious and without any merit **it may impose exemplary costs on the petition.**

CHINA - BHUTAN BORDER DISPUTE

Why in news?

- The 11th Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on the China-Bhutan Boundary Issues was held in China's Kunming city.



- After the meeting, both sides announced that a positive consensus has been reached to push forward the implementation of all steps of the **Three Step-Roadmap.**

China - Bhutan Border Dispute

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- Bhutan shares a 477 km-long border with China.
- China claims certain territories from Bhutan:
 - **In the north** - Pasamlung and Jakarlung valleys;
 - Both of these places are culturally vital for Bhutan.
 - **In the west** - Doklam, Dramana, and Shakhatoe, Yak Chu and Charithang Chu, and Sinchulungpa and Langmarpo valleys.
 - These places are pasture-rich and strategically located in the Bhutan-India-China trijunction, lying close to India's Siliguri Corridor.
- In 2020, China made new claims on Bhutan's East in the **Sakteng sanctuary**.
 - Surprisingly, there has been no mention of Eastern Bhutan in the previous rounds of boundary negotiations held between the two countries.
 - Hence, addition of Eastern Bhutan in the list of disputed territories has baffled Bhutan.
 - This eastern sector of Bhutan has a large Bhutanese population, traditional Dzongs (fortified monastery) and two Bhutanese districts since time immemorial.

Boundary Negotiation between Bhutan and China

- Although, Bhutan does not have a formal diplomatic relation with China, the country began its first border negotiations with China in 1984.
- To date, both countries have held 11 expert group meetings and 24 rounds of border negotiations.
- In October 2021, Bhutan and China signed an MoU on the Three-Step Roadmap for Expediting the China-Bhutan Boundary Negotiations.
 - The three-step roadmap has still not been made public.

Why India is keeping an eye on the developments related to China-Bhutan boundary dispute?

- India views Chinese presence near Doklam as a major security concern close to the strategic Siliguri corridor.

- China has also staked claim to a wildlife sanctuary in Bhutan near the border with Arunachal.
- This assumes significance as, in December 2022, Indian and Chinese army troops clashed along the LAC in the Tawang Sector of Arunachal Pradesh.

What are the challenges in solving the border dispute between China and Bhutan?

- **Bhutan-China border dispute is not a bilateral issue**
 - The first challenge is to see if China would be keen on discussing the trijunction areas with India.
 - For this, China has to shun its decades-old policy of treating the Bhutan-China border dispute as a bilateral issue and involve India as well.
- **Increasing Chinese expansion in the Western disputed regions**
 - India has briefed and sensitised Bhutan of China's increasing inroads on multiple occasions.
 - Bhutan lacks the material capability and presence to avert these continuing intrusions.
 - Despite this, it stays reluctant to seek more Indian assistance, fearing more Chinese assertiveness.
- **China is keen on establishing diplomatic relations with Bhutan**
 - China's solution to border disputes has often been inclusive of establishing diplomatic relations with Bhutan.
 - Such demands from Beijing will only intensify as its tensions with the US and India increase. Bhutan has to balance its ties with China. Safety of Border from China is a concern for both India and Bhutan. Therefore, both sides need to work together on this issue.

WHAT IS THE FINANCIAL SERVICES INSTITUTIONS BUREAU (FSIB)?

The Financial Services Institutions Bureau (FSIB), the headhunter for directors of state-owned banks and financial institutions, recently recommended names for the posts of managing directors of Bank of Baroda and Bank of India.



About Financial Services Institutions Bureau (FSIB):

- **What is it?** It's a government body set up under the Department of Financial Services.
- **It replaced the Bank Board's Bureau (BBB)** which was declared an incompetent authority.

- **Structure:**
 - FSIB would be headed by a chairman, a central government nominee.
 - The board would comprise the Secretaries of the DFS, the chairman of IRDAI, and a deputy governor of the RBI.
 - Additionally, it will have **three part-time members** who are experts in banking and three more from the insurance sector.
- **The Primary role of FSIB:**
 - To **identify manpower capabilities and ensure proper selection of talent for senior positions at financial institutions** owned by the government.
 - It is entrusted with **making recommendations for the appointment of full-time directors and non-executive chairman of state-run financial services institutions.**
 - The **final decision on the FSIB recommendation** would be taken by the **Appointments Committee of the Cabinet** headed by the Prime Minister.
- **Other Mandates of FSIB:**
 - It would also **issue guidelines for selecting general managers and directors of public sector general insurance companies.**
 - It will also be involved in **formulating and developing business strategies for state-run banks** and help them in their fund-raising plans.
 - It would also **monitor and assess the performance of public sector banks, government-owned financial institutions and insurance companies.**

MAGELLANIC CLOUD

Recently, the world's most powerful telescope, NASA's James Webb telescope, has found a star formation in a dynamic cluster that lies within a nebula 200,000 light years away.



Why in news?

- As per the American space agency, the Small Magellanic Cloud (SMC) star-forming region NGC 346 is one of the most dynamic

in nearby galaxies and is a dwarf galaxy. It is close to the Milky Way with lower metal concentrations.

What is Magellanic Cloud?

- The Magellanic Clouds are **irregular galaxies** that share a gaseous envelope and lie about 22° apart in the sky near the south celestial pole.
 - They are comprised of two irregular galaxies, **the Large Magellanic Cloud (LMC)** and the **Small Magellanic Cloud (SMC)**, which orbit the Milky Way once every 1,500 million years and each other once every 900 million years.
 - These companion galaxies were named for the Portuguese navigator Ferdinand Magellan, whose crew discovered them during the first voyage around the world (1519–22).
 - Magellanic Clouds were formed at about the same time as the Milky Way Galaxy, approximately 13 billion years ago.
 - They are presently captured in orbits around the Milky Way Galaxy and have experienced several tidal encounters with each other and with the Galaxy.
 - They contain numerous **young stars and star clusters**, as well as some much older stars.
 - The Magellanic Clouds are visible to the unaided eye in the Southern Hemisphere.
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