

UAE'S EXIT FROM OPEC - GEOPOLITICAL REALIGNMENT AND IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA'S ENERGY SECURITY

- The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has announced its **withdrawal** from the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) after nearly six decades of membership.
- OPEC is a 12-member group of oil-exporting nations (Algeria, Congo, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Nigeria, Venezuela, etc) founded in **1960** and aiming to coordinate petroleum policies.
- This development — set against the backdrop of the ongoing blockade of the Strait of Hormuz and deepening Saudi-UAE tensions — carries **far-reaching consequences** for global oil markets, Gulf geopolitics, and India's energy and foreign policy calculus.

Why the UAE Left OPEC?

- **Production philosophy at odds with Saudi Arabia:**
 - The fundamental trigger is a divergence in oil production strategy.
 - Saudi Arabia has historically championed **supply restraint** to keep global prices elevated — a stance rooted in both economic interest and post-1970s political assertion against Western oil dominance.
 - OPEC's **quota system** enforces production ceilings on its 12 member states, using collective spare capacity as a lever to guide prices.
 - The UAE, by contrast, seeks to maximise output. With some of the lowest per-barrel production costs in the region, the UAE is comparatively insulated from price drops and therefore has little incentive to hold back.
- **Regional conflicts as a catalyst:**
 - Beyond economics, escalating disagreements over regional conflicts — particularly in **Sudan** and **Yemen** — have strained Saudi-UAE relations.
 - The UAE's growing alignment with the United States and Israel has also created friction within the broader Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) framework.

Implications for India:

- **Diaspora and remittances at risk:**
 - Over **9 million** Indians live in the Gulf, most as low-wage workers.
 - The UAE and Saudi Arabia are the two largest destinations for Indian migrants in the region. Growing tensions between these two powers could jeopardise worker safety and welfare.
 - Annual remittance inflows from the GCC exceed \$50 billion — a figure that could become **volatile** if the Saudi-UAE schism deepens.
- **Sovereign wealth fund investments under strain:**
 - Gulf sovereign wealth funds have already suspended deals due to ongoing regional conflict.
 - Post-conflict reconstruction will divert capital inward, meaning India cannot count on Gulf investment flows at the scale of the past decade.
- **A possible silver lining on oil prices:**
 - As one of the UAE's largest oil customers, India could **benefit** if expanded Emirati production drives global prices down.

Given existing pressures — LPG shortages, rising prices of crude-derived products, and conflict premiums — cheaper oil would offer meaningful **economic relief**.

Way Forward for India:

- **Leverage:** Diplomatic capital with both the UAE and Saudi Arabia to protect migrant workers and remittance flows.
- **Diversify:** Energy partnerships beyond the Gulf, reducing vulnerability to regional instability.
- **Engage:** Proactively in India-OPEC forums while simultaneously deepening ties with non-OPEC producers.
- **Develop:** Domestic energy alternatives (renewables, green hydrogen) to reduce long-run crude oil dependence.



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MISSION SAKSHAM



- The mission SAKSHAM (Sahakari Bank Kshamta Nirman) is a **sector-wide capacity-building and certification framework for urban co-operative banks (UCBs)**.
- It aims to enhance **managerial and operational capabilities**, improve compliance culture, and strengthen institutional resilience across UCBs.
- It is a **mission-mode, sector-wide and all-India capacity-building training initiative** for UCBs, under which the RBI will conduct a large number of **training programmes**,
- **Features:**
 - **Target Groups:** It targets **board members, senior management, heads of risk, compliance and audit functions, and employees working in IT functions and other critical areas.**
 - **Delivery Model:** Blended learning (in-person and digital) with a focus on regional language accessibility.
 - **Collaboration:** Designed with the Umbrella Organisation for UCBs and State/National Federations.
 - **Core Objective:** To improve compliance culture and strengthen the financial health of cooperative institutions
 - It focuses to establish a sustainable, self-reinforcing ecosystem for systemic stability and the healthy growth and **development of the UCB sector.**

PANCHAYAT ADVANCEMENT INDEX 2.0



- It is India's first **nationwide data-driven framework** to assess **Gram Panchayat performance**.
- It serves as a robust tool for **evidence-based planning**, performance monitoring, and

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incentivising Panchayati Raj Institutions.

- It evaluates each of the more than **5 lakh Gram Panchayats** across the country.
- It is built on the framework of **Localization of Sustainable Development Goals (LSDGs)**, which consolidates the **17 global SDGs** into nine thematic areas relevant to Panchayati Raj Institutions.
- Covering Poverty, Health, Child Welfare, Water, Environment, Infrastructure, Social Justice, Good Governance, and Women's Empowerment.
- Based on their composite PAI scores, Gram Panchayats are **classified into five performance categories**
 - Achiever (A+: 90 and above)
 - Front Runner (A: 75 to below 90),
 - Performer (B : 60 to below 75),
 - Aspirant (C: 40 to below 60),
 - Beginner (D: below 40)
- It is prepared by the Union **Ministry of Panchayati Raj**.

EXERCISE PRAGATI



The Indian Army is set to host military delegations to the inaugural edition of the multilateral exercise 'Pragati' at the Foreign Training Node in Umroi, Meghalaya.

- The **PRAGATI** (Partnership of Regional Armies for Growth and Transformation in the Indian Ocean Region) is a **multilateral military exercise**.
 - It is the **first edition** of exercise which **will** be held in Umroi,
- **Participating Countries:** It includes 11 friendly countries Laos, Myanmar, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, Philippines, Nepal, Maldives, Malaysia, Vietnam, Cambodia and Bhutan.

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- **Aim:** It aims to strengthen **defence cooperation**, **enhance interoperability**, and build mutual trust among participating nations.
- It reflects a shared **commitment to collective security and regional stability**.
- **Key Focus of Exercise Pragati:**
 - It centers on **counter-insurgency** and **counter-terrorism** operations, emphasising joint training and defence diplomacy.
 - It is part of India's growing defence engagement with its neighbouring and Indian Ocean region nations, focusing on **building capacity and shared operational capabilities**.
 - It will mark a shift in the Indian Army training from **bilateral to consortium-style engagements**.
 - Besides war games, a key component of the event is a **two-day industry exposition**, highlighting the Indian Army's capabilities and **fostering industrial partnerships with ASEAN nations**.

WHAT IS PLATYPUS?



long ago.

New fossils from South Australia reveal a new species of ancient platypus that still had teeth – something modern platypuses lost

- The platypus is a **semi-aquatic egg-laying mammal endemic to eastern Australia**.
- Scientific Name: *Ornithorhynchus anatinus*
- **Habitat:**
 - Platypuses occur in **freshwater systems from tropical rainforest lowlands and plateaus of far northern Queensland to cold, high altitudes of Tasmania and the Australian Alps**.

- When not foraging, the platypus spends most of the time in its burrow in the bank of the river, creek, or a pond.
- **Features:**
 - Platypus is well adapted for a semi-aquatic lifestyle.
 - In addition, **males possess** a horny spur on their ankles, which is connected to a **venom gland** in the upper leg, making the Platypus **one of the few venomous mammals**.
- **Conservation Status:**
 - **IUCN Red List: Near Threatened**

PIPRAHWA RELICS



Leh witnessed a rare confluence of faith and history recently as the sacred Piprahwa relics of Gautam Buddha were ceremoniously brought to the high-altitude town, ushering in a landmark spiritual celebration across Ladakh.

- The Piprahwa Relics are a collection of **sacred artifacts discovered in 1898** at the **Piprahwa Stupa in Uttar Pradesh**.
- Archaeological evidence associates the **Piprahwa site** with **ancient Kapilavastu**, widely identified as the place where **Lord Buddha spent his early life** prior to renunciation.
- These are among the **earliest and most historically significant relic deposits directly connected to Lord Buddha**.
- These relics, **unearthed by British colonial engineer William Claxton Peppé** in 1898, **include bone fragments believed to be those of Lord Buddha**, along with **crystal caskets, gold ornaments, gemstones, and a sandstone coffer**.
- An **inscription in Brahmi script** on one of the caskets **links the relics directly to the Sakya clan, to which Buddha belonged**, indicating that these remains were enshrined by his followers around the third century BC.

PREAH VIHEAR TEMPLE



In a sad turn of events, Thailand and Cambodia are currently fighting over the centuries-old Preah Vihear Temple, dedicated to Lord Shiva.

- It is a **Hindu temple** located in the **Preah Vihear Province**, in the **northern part of Cambodia**.
- It is situated **atop a cliff on the Cambodia–Thailand border** in the **Dangrek Mountain range**.
- It is dedicated to **Lord Shiva**.
- It was **built** during the period of the **Khmer Empire**, in the **eleventh and twelfth centuries**.
- It was built firstly by **King Suryavarman I (1002-50)** and then **expanded** upon by **Suryavarman II (1113-50)**.
- It was **used by the ancient kings of Angkor** for over 800 years.
- **After the decline of Hinduism** in the region, the **temple gradually transformed** into a **Buddhist monument**, which is why it features some **Buddhist decorations**.
- Due to its location, the Preah Vihear temple has been at the **heart of the conflict between Cambodia and Thailand** since the 19th and 20th centuries.
- In 1904, both countries signed a treaty granting Cambodia the right to occupy the temple.
 - However, the Thai government contested the treaty and took control of the site.
 - This led to a public protest by Cambodians in 1959.
 - To resolve the issue, the **International Court of Justice** in The Hague **ruled in 1960, affirming Cambodia's ownership** of the temple.
- In July 2008, Preah Vihear was designated a **UNESCO World Heritage site**.
- **Architecture:**

- It is an outstanding masterpiece of **Khmer architecture**.
- The temple is composed of a **series of sanctuaries linked by a system of pavements and staircases**.
- It features more than **five successive gopuras**.
- Unlike other structures of this kind, the **gopuras here are connected by a long path and topped with multi-tiered platforms**.
- Some of these gopuras have stone roofs, while others have wooden roofs.

WHAT IS THE E-PRAAPTI PORTAL?



The Employees Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) is set to launch E-PRAAPTI (EPF Aadhaar-Based Access Portal for Tracking Inoperative Accounts).

- E-PRAAPTI (EPF Aadhaar-Based Access Portal for Tracking Inoperative Accounts), a dedicated digital platform of the Employees Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO).
- **Purpose:** To facilitate **identification, tracking, Unique Account Number (UAN) linking, and activation of old EPF accounts**.
- The E-PRAAPTI Portal will provide a **streamlined Aadhaar-based authentication mechanism** that will **enable members to securely access their old EPF account** that are **not linked to a UAN** and **initiate the process for updating their member profile**, followed by **seamless UAN linking and activation**.
- In the **initial phase**, the **portal will be member ID-based**, ensuring a secure and efficient rollout while delivering immediate benefits to a large segment of members who possess their member IDs.
- E-PRAAPTI's scope will **later be expanded to include members who may not be able to recall or access their old member IDs**.

NEW SPECIES OF FIREFLIES



Scientists recently discovered two previously unknown species of fireflies named *Diaphanes meghalayanus* and *Diaphanes mawlynnong* in Meghalaya's East Khasi Hills.

- They are two new species of fireflies.
- They were discovered in Meghalaya's East Khasi Hills.
- *Meghalayanus* has been named after Meghalaya to indicate its broader distribution in the region, while *D. mawlynnong* derives its name from Mawlynnong village, where the species was first recorded, acknowledging the local Khasi community.
- Both species thrive in dark, humid environments with minimal human interference.

KYRGYZSTAN



- **Location:** It is a landlocked mountainous country in Central Asia.
- **Bordering Countries:** It is bordered by four nations; Kazakhstan (north), Uzbekistan (west), Tajikistan (south), and China (east).
- It is occasionally referred as “the Switzerland of Central Asia”.
- **Capital City:** Bishkek
- **Geographical Features of Kyrgyzstan:**
 - **Climate:** The climate is continental and varies according to the altitude. The winters are cold, often freezing, and the summers warm and sunny.
 - **Highest Peak:** Victory Peak
 - **Major Rivers:** Syr Darya, Naryn, Chu.
 - **Lakes:** Lake Issyk-Kul, the second-largest saline lake in the world is located here.
 - **Natural Resources:** It consists of coal, oil, natural gas, and uranium, alongside deposits of gold and rare earth metals.