

INDIAN TEAM DELIBERATING ON OCEAN DIVERSITY PACT



In News:

- A delegation from India and other member countries of the United Nations are in New York to deliberate on a one-of-its-kind agreement to conserve marine biodiversity in the high seas.
- High seas are the oceans that extend beyond countries' territorial waters.

High Seas:

- The high seas are the parts of the ocean that are not included in the exclusive economic zones, territorial sea or internal waters of a State.
- High seas are the areas of the ocean for which no one nation has sole responsibility for management.
- Geographically, the ocean constitutes approximately two-thirds of the planet and the high seas comprise 64 percent of its surface and nearly 95 percent of the ocean's volume.

Need for an Ocean Diversity Pact:

- Because these areas are largely far from coastlines, the myriad human activities-- and corresponding impacts on marine life in those areas-- are extremely challenging to monitor and control.
- The marine ecosystems in these areas are subject to negative impacts from human activities in many sectors — from shipping to marine pollution to overfishing and potentially to deep seabed mining, as well as impacts from climate change.
- All of these get compounded by lack of oversight and comprehensive and coherent governance.
- This lack of monitoring and surveillance means human rights violations are abundant in the open ocean.
- There is no single global mechanism to establish Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) outside States' territorial seas or uniform requirements for undertaking environmental impact assessments.

News Summary:

- A delegation from India and other member countries of the United Nations are in New York to deliberate on a one-of-its-kind agreement to conserve marine biodiversity in the high seas.
- The agreement is expected to be the final in a series set in motion since 2018 to draft an international legally binding instrument under the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).
- A key aspect of the agreement is deciding on the rights of companies that undertake exploration for biological resources in the high seas.

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS):

- The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, also called the **Law of the Sea Convention**, is an international agreement that was adopted in 1982 to establish jurisdictional limits over the ocean areas.
- It defines the rights and responsibilities of nations with respect to their use of the world's oceans, establishing guidelines for businesses, the environment, and the management of marine natural resources.
- It defines distance of 12 nautical miles (approx. 22 km) from the baseline as **Territorial Sea limit** and a distance of 200 nautical miles distance as **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) limit**.
 - Exclusive Economic Zone is an area of the sea in which a sovereign state has special rights regarding the exploration and use of marine resources, including energy production from water and wind.
- **India became a signatory to the UNCLOS in 1982.**

Why the need for a separate ocean biodiversity agreement when UNCLOS is already in place?

- Despite its benefits, UNCLOS contains unforeseen gaps in international governance.
- It lacks specific requirements that are needed to ensure effective implementation of its obligations to protect the marine environment and its resources.
- Hence, a separate, internationally binding, agreement to conserve marine biodiversity in the high seas is required.

EYE ON CHINA, JAISHANKAR SAYS QUAD WILL BENEFIT INDO-PACIFIC

In News:

- External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said that the entire Indo-Pacific region will benefit from the Quad.
- He was speaking on the 'India's Vision of the Indo-Pacific' at the prestigious Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok.

In Focus: Quad

- The grouping of four democracies –India, Australia, US and Japan– is known as the quadrilateral security dialogue or quad.
- The aim of this grouping is to ensure a free and open international order based on the rule of law in the Indo- Pacific.

Objectives of the Quad

- maritime security,
- combating the Covid-19 crisis, especially vis-à-vis vaccine diplomacy,
- addressing the risks of climate change,
- creating an ecosystem for investment in the region and
- boosting technological innovation.

Evolution

- Following the Indian Ocean tsunami, India, Japan, Australia, and the US created an informal alliance to collaborate on disaster relief efforts.
- Quad as a formal group was first mooted by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007.
- However, due to Chinese resistance and reluctance shown by India, it could not move ahead.
- Later, during the 2017 ASEAN Summits, all four former members re-joined negotiations to revive the quadrilateral alliance.
- The Quad was upgraded to the ministerial level in September 2019.

Key Highlights of the speech

- **Importance of Quad highlighted**

- Jaishankar said the Quad is the most prominent plurilateral platform that addresses contemporary challenges and opportunities in the Indo-Pacific.
- The energies of the Quad, are directed at a very broad range of activities. They range from:
 - maritime safety and security, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, cyber security, critical and emerging technologies and connectivity to education, health and even space cooperation.
- He further said that any reservations to activities of the four-nation bloc is possibly a unilateralist opposition to a collective and cooperative endeavours.
- **How India sees the Indo-Pacific**
 - He highlighted that India considers the Indo-Pacific as a region that extends from the eastern shores of Africa to the western shores of America.
 - He mentioned that it is an increasingly seamless space that is home to more than 64% of the global population and which contributes over 60% of world's GDP.
 - About half of the global trade happens through the maritime trade routes in this region.
 - Over the years, this region has seen strong and sustained economic growth spreading across the Pacific rim, Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Gulf region and the East and Southern Coast of Africa.
- **On India-China relationship**
 - He said the India-China relationship is going through an extremely difficult phase.
 - Chinese and Indian troops are engaged in a prolonged standoff in Eastern Ladakh.
 - However, he emphasised that the Asian Century will happen when China and India come together.

AK-203 ASSAULT RIFLES

The production of the AK-203 assault rifles by the Indo-Russian joint venture at Amethi, Uttar Pradesh, is set to begin by year-end and the manufacturing equipment required for it will be dispatched from Russia shortly, according to a senior official of Kalashnikov, the Russian company which



manufactures the rifles.

About:

- The production was originally scheduled to begin early this year. As per the contract, over 6.1 lakh AK-203 assault rifles costing over ₹5,000 crore will be manufactured by a Joint Venture, Indo-Russian Rifles Private Ltd (IRRPL), at Korwa, Amethi in Uttar Pradesh.
- IRRPL was set up jointly between erstwhile OFB [now Advanced Weapons and Equipment India Limited (AWEIL) and Munitions India Limited (MIL)] of India and Rosoboronexport (RoE) and concern Kalashnikov of Russia.
- As per contractual terms, first 70,000 AK-203 rifles will be produced in India with a phased increase in the extent of localisation from 5% to 70%. The remaining rifles will be produced with 100% localisation.

CBI SEARCHES DELHI DY. CM'S PREMISES IN EXCISE POLICY CASE

In News:

- CBI raided the premises of Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia, in connection with a case alleging irregularities in the State government's now-withdrawn excise policy.

Delhi Excise Policy 2021-22

- Also known as the new liquor policy, the Delhi Excise Policy 2021-22 was implemented in November, 2021.
- It changed how liquor was sold in the city — with the government withdrawing from the business and allowing only private operators to run liquor shops.

Key features of the policy

- Under the new liquor policy, the city was divided into **32 zones** inviting firms to bid on the zones.
- Also, licenses for 849 retail vends were issued through open bidding by the Excise department last year.

- Under the old liquor policy, Delhi had 864 liquor shops, including 475 run by the four government agencies, and 389 were private.
- For the first time, shops were allowed to offer discounts to retail customers and reduced the number of dry days to three from 21.
- The new policy also had a provision for home delivery of liquor. It even proposed lowering the drinking age from 25 to 21.
- It also suggested the opening of shops till 3 am. However, these were not implemented.

Controversy

- Before the implementation, the policy had first to be examined by the Chief Secretary (CS) of Delhi Naresh Kumar.
- The CS allegedly found procedural lapses and irregularities in the new policy.
- In the report, Delhi Deputy CM Sisodia, who heads the excise department, was accused of making changes to the excise policy without the approval of the L-G.
- These changes included a waiver of Rs 144.36 crore on tendered licence fee because of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Undue benefits were given to liquor licensees by revising the rates of foreign liquor and removing the import pass fee of Rs 50 per case of beer.
 - This made foreign liquor and beer cheaper for retail, leading to a loss of revenue for the state exchequer.
- It allowed the licensees to open additional shops in conforming areas without approval of competent authority.
- It failed to take penal action against licensees for promoting liquor through social media, banners, hoardings in violation of Delhi Excise Rules 2010.
- After reviewing the report, the L-G suggested a CBI probe into the matter.

EXERCISE PITCH BLACK

An Indian Air Force contingent has reached Australia to participate in Exercise Pitch Black 2022.



About:

- The exercise is being held in Darwin till the 8th of next month.
- This is a biennial, multi-national exercise hosted by the Royal Australian Air Force.
- The Defence Ministry said that the exercise will see the participation of over one hundred aircraft and two thousand 500 military personnel from various air forces.

PRAVASI BHARTIYA DIVAS

The 17th Pravasi Bhartiya Divas 2023 will be held at Indore in January next year.



**Pravasi
Bharatiya
Divas**

About:

- Pravasi Bharatiya Divas is celebrated every year on 9th January to mark the contribution of the overseas Indian community in the development of India.
- It also commemorates the return of Mahatma Gandhi from South Africa to India on 9th January 1915.

INDIA-SOUTHEAST ASIA HISTORICAL LINKS

As part of his visit to Thailand for the ninth India-Thailand joint commission meeting, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar visited the Devasthan in Bangkok.



About:

- The Devasthan is the Royal Brahmin Office of the Thai Royal Court and is the official centre of Hinduism in Thailand.
- India and the Southeast Asia region share a long history of cultural and commercial relations.

- The classical Sanskrit and Pali texts from India carry references of the region using various names such as Kathakosha, Suvarnabhumi (the land of god) or Suvarnavipa (the golden island), indicating that this was a region that attracted Indian merchants.
 - In more recent times, European and Indian scholars have referred to Southeast Asia as ‘Farther India’, ‘Greater India’, or ‘Hinduised or Indianised states’.
 - The Ramayana — known in Thailand as Ramakriti (the glory of Rama) or Ramakien (the account of Rama) — has provided an outlet of cultural expression in Thailand for both the elite and the common man. Episodes from the epic are painted on the walls of Buddhist temples and enacted in dramas and ballets.
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