

PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT TO UZBEKISTAN FOR THE SCO SUMMIT

In News:

- Recently, PM Modi visited Samarkand, Uzbekistan to attend the 22nd Meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)



- SCO is a permanent intergovernmental international organisation, created in June 2001 in Shanghai (China).
- 6 Founding members included Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.
- This organization represents approximately 42% of the world's population, 22% of its land area and 20% of its GDP.
- In 2021 summit held in Dushanbe, members decided to include Iran as a full member.

Observers

- Before 2021, SCO had four observer states. This included - Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran and Mongolia.
- In 2021, Iran became a full member and Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Qatar were added as new observer states. Hence, currently, SCO has 6 observer states namely:
 - Afghanistan, Belarus, Mongolia, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Qatar.

News Summary

- PM Modi participated in the 22nd Meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO.
- Samarkand Declaration of the Council of Heads of State of SCO was released after the summit.
- After the summit, Uzbekistan handed over the rotating presidency of the SCO to India. India will host the next SCO summit as a chairman of organisation in 2023.

List of Decisions adopted at the summit:

- Decision on the **Comprehensive Action Plan for 2023-2027** for implementation of provisions of the Treaty on Long-Term Good Neighbourliness, Friendship and Cooperation among the Member States.
 - This was the 15th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty on Long-term Neighbourliness, Friendship and Cooperation of the SCO Member States.
- Decision to Develop Interconnectivity and Create Efficient Transport Corridors among members states.
- **Decision on inclusion of new members**
 - Iran to become a member State of the SCO
 - Iran was admitted in SCO in 2021 and will become full member in 2023.
 - Launched the procedure of admitting Belarus as a member of the SCO.
 - Granting Maldives, Bahrain, Myanmar, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, the status of SCO dialogue partner.
- **Tourist and Cultural Capital of the SCO in 2022-2023**
 - The member countries decided to declare **Varanasi**, India, as the Tourist and Cultural Capital of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 2022-2023.
 - In 2021 summit, it was decided to nominate SCO Tourism and Cultural Capital with an objective of promoting cooperation in the field of culture and tourism.
 - Hence, Varanasi became the first Cultural capital of SCO.
 - In Order to increase the cooperation with UNESCO, member countries of SCO decided to sign an MoU between the Secretariat of the SCO and the UNESCO (2023-2027).

Other areas of cooperation

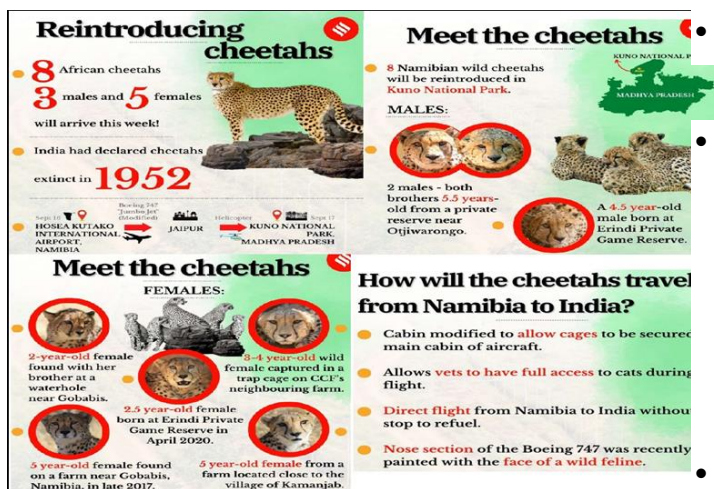
- Member countries signed agreement on cooperation in various fields including:
 - Tourism, Museum affairs, Digital Literacy Development, Artificial Intelligence and Telemedicine.
- Programme of Cooperation in the Use of Renewable Energy Sources was signed the between Member States.
- Action Plan for Scientific and Technical Cooperation in Priority Areas (2022-2025) was also finalised.

- The leaders also finalised the concept of interaction between member states in the field of smart agriculture and agro- innovation.

HOW CHEETAHS WENT EXTINCT IN INDIA, AND HOW THEY ARE BEING BROUGHT BACK

In News:

- Over 70 years after it went extinct in India, the cheetah will return to the country on September 17.
- Eight African cheetahs from Namibia — five females and three males between the ages of 4-6 years — will be flown to India.
 - They will be released in the Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh as part of India’s Rs 90-crore Cheetah Introduction project.
- This is the first time in the world that a large carnivore will be relocated from one continent to another.



Reintroducing cheetahs

- 8 African cheetahs (3 males and 5 females) will arrive this week!
- India had declared cheetahs extinct in 1952

Meet the cheetahs

8 Namibian wild cheetahs will be reintroduced in Kuno National Park.

MALES:

- 2 males - both brothers 5.5 year-old from a private reserve near Otjiwarongo.
- A 4.5 year-old male born at Erindi Private Game Reserve.

How will the cheetahs travel from Namibia to India?

- Cabin modified to allow cages to be secured main cabin of aircraft.
- Allows vets to have full access to cats during flight.
- Direct flight from Namibia to India without stop to refuel.
- Nose section of the Boeing 747 was recently painted with the face of a wild feline.

Meet the cheetahs

FEMALES:

- 2-year-old female found with her brother at a waterhole near Gobabis.
- 2.5 year-old female born at Erindi Private Game Reserve in April 2020.
- 3 year-old female found on a farm near Gobabis, Namibia, in late 2017.
- 3-4 year-old wild female captured in a trap cage on C.C.I.'s neighbouring farm.
- 5 year-old female from a farm located close to the village of Kamanjab.

Cheetah in India

- The cheetah has an ancient history in the country, with a Neolithic cave painting of a ‘slender spotted feline being hunted’ having been found at Chaturbunj Nala in Mandasur, Madhya Pradesh.
- In India, the cheetah population used to

be fairly widespread. The animal was found from Jaipur and Lucknow in the north to Mysore in the south, and from Kathiawar in the west to Deogarh in the east.

- The cheetah is believed to have disappeared from the Indian landscape in 1947 when Maharaja Ramanuj Pratap Singh Deo of Koriya princely state hunted down and shot the last three recorded Asiatic cheetahs in India.

- The cheetah was officially declared extinct by the Indian government in 1952.
- Since the 1940s, the cheetah has gone extinct in 14 other countries – Jordan, Iraq, Israel, Morocco, Syria, Oman, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Djibouti, Ghana, Nigeria, Kazakhstan, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

How did cheetahs go extinct in India?

- Over-hunting was a major contributing factor for the cheetah's extinction.
- The decimation (killing) of its relatively narrow prey base species and the loss of its grassland-forest habitat also played a role.
- India's emphasis on agriculture – which included acquiring and parcelling off grassland – led to a decline in the cheetah's habitat.

Why is the cheetah being brought back?

- The main aim is to restore India's historic evolutionary balance.
- This translocation also aims to develop a cheetah 'metapopulation' that will help in the global conservation of the animal.
- As it is a flagship species, the conservation of the cheetah will revive grassland-forests and its biome and habitat.
- Project Tiger has also resulted in the conservation of 250 water bodies found in India's 52 Tiger Reserves. The Cheetah Project is likely to have a similar impact.

Earlier attempts to bring back the cheetah

- India's first attempt to bring back the cheetah was in the early 1970s. Dr Ranjitsinh was tasked with carrying out negotiations with Iran.
- However, it could not lead to the translocation of Cheetahs due to following reasons:
 - Potential release sites in India needed to be upgraded with an increase in prey base and greater protection.
 - During the process, Emergency was declared in the country and soon after, the regime of the Shah of Iran fell.
 - While the Persian Cheetah was preferred for relocation, as it was Asiatic, this is no longer possible as the cheetah population in Iran has dwindled to under 50.

- While attempts to relocate cheetahs to India began in 2009, it was only in 2020 that the Supreme Court of India finally gave the green signal for such efforts.

Associated Concerns

- Critics of the project have pointed out that the gene flow in such a small group of cheetahs is a matter of concern.
 - Gene flow between populations can help maintain genetic diversity and prevent **inbreeding** (parent and offspring, full brother and sister or half brother and sister).
- However, experts point out that South Africa has already undertaken similar projects within the continent, in which measures are taken to ensure gene flow.
- India is expected to follow the same.
 - Over the next five to 10 years, 5-10 cheetahs will be relocated to India annually.
 - From time to time, some of these cheetahs from India will be brought back, and taking some others there. This will ensure the proper gene flow.
 - Ministry officials, meanwhile, pointed out that even if this movement does not take place, gene flow is unlikely to be a problem in India because of the country's animal corridors that allow animals to move around.

Future plans to increase cheetah population in India

- Over the coming 15 years, the Indian government will acquire two to four cheetahs from Africa, to establish a breeding cheetah metapopulation of 35-40 in the country.
- Once the population in Kuno National Park has adapted and is flourishing, the Indian government will expand the efforts to reserves in other parts of the country as well.

PM MEETS IRAN PRESIDENT, REVIEWS CHABAHAAR PORT PROGRESS

In News:

- At the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) meeting in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, PM Modi met Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi and discussed India – Iran relations and the progress on Chabahar port development project.

India – Iran relationship:



- India-Iran relations span centuries marked by meaningful interactions.

- The two countries shared a border till 1947 and share several common features in their language, culture and traditions.
- Independent India and Iran established diplomatic links in **March 1950**.
- Both South Asia and the Persian Gulf have strong commercial, energy, cultural and people-to-people links.

Relations between 1950 and 1991:

- During much of the Cold War, relations between India and Iran suffered due to their differing political interests.
- India endorsed a non-aligned position but fostered strong links with the Soviet Union (USSR), while Iran was an open member of the Western Bloc and enjoyed close ties with the United States.

Post-Cold War Era:

- Iran's continued support for Pakistan in the India–Pakistan conflict and India's close relations with Iraq during the Iran–Iraq War greatly strained bilateral ties.
- However, in the 1990s, both India and Iran supported the Northern Alliance's fight against the Taliban in Afghanistan.
- They continued to collaborate in supporting the broad-based anti-Taliban government, until the Taliban recaptured Afghanistan in 2021.
- India has expressed strong opposition to Iran's nuclear program.

Economic Ties:

- India-Iran bilateral trade during the FY 2020-21 was **USD 2.1 billion**, a decrease of 56 % as compared to **USD 4.8 billion** during FY 2019-20.
- **Major Indian exports** – rice, tea, sugar, fresh fruits, drugs/pharmaceuticals, man-made staple fibres, electrical machinery, artificial jewellery etc.

- **Major Indian imports** – dry fruits, inorganic/organic chemicals, glass and glassware, natural or cultured pearls, precious or semiprecious stones, leather, gypsum etc.
- **Why has India stopped importing crude oil from Iran?**
 - In 2019, due to the sanctions imposed by the US on Iran, India had stopped importing crude oil from the country.
 - Before 2019, India was the second biggest buyer of oil from Iran.
- **Why it is in India's favour to restart oil import from Iran?**
 - Firstly, most of India's refineries are adept to Iranian sweet oil.
 - Secondly, Iran trades oil for Indian rupee or goods.
 - Thirdly, transportation costs of goods from **Bandar Abbas port** and **Chabahar port** are lower.

About Chabahar Port:



- Chabahar Port is a seaport in Chabahar located in south-eastern Iran, on the **Gulf of Oman**.
- The port consists of two separate ports named **Shahid Kalantari** and **Shahid Beheshti**, each of which has five berths.
- In May 2016, India and Iran signed a bilateral agreement in which India would refurbish one of the berths at Shahid Beheshti port, and reconstruct a 600-meter-long container handling facility at the port.

Significance of the Port:

- The port is partly intended to provide an alternative for trade between India and Afghanistan as it is 800 kilometres closer to the border of Afghanistan than Pakistan's Karachi port.
 - At present, Pakistan does not allow India to transport through its territory to Afghanistan.
- In October 2017, India's first shipment of wheat to Afghanistan was sent through the Chabahar Port. In December 2018, India took over the port's operations.
- However, the sanctions imposed by the US in 2019 played a role in reducing India's involvement and investment in the USD 1.6 billion **Chabahar–Zahedan railway project**.

INDIA-SRI LANKA FTA

Sri Lanka will revive its Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with India and upgrade it to a “a comprehensive economic and technological partnership”, President Ranil Wickremesinghe has said, signalling Colombo’s willingness to revisit a stalled pact.



About:

- The current Indo-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement (ISFTA) came into effect in 2000 and several rounds of bilateral discussions later, Colombo and New Delhi are yet to reach an agreement on its upgraded version.
- Wickremesinghe, as Prime Minister between 2015 and 2019, attempted to sign an upgraded trade pact with India, but was unsuccessful.

BIOFUEL

As part of efforts to reduce its carbon footprint, the Indian Air Force (IAF) is looking to fly an AN-32 transport aircraft modified to operate on 10% blended biodiesel for 200 flight hours in the next six months.

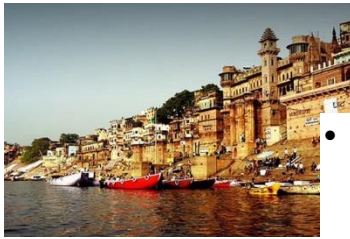


About:

- The aircraft took flight on biodiesel blended with aviation turbine fuel (ATF) for the first time in December 2018.
- A second aircraft, a Dornier, was now undergoing ground tests after it had been cleared by the original manufacturer of the engine, Honeywell, for use of 50% biofuel.
- The global aviation industry is one of the biggest emitter of greenhouse gases that cause global warming. The fuel consumption of the IAF for 2021-22 was 6.2 lakh kilo litres, which contributed 15 lakh tonnes of carbon dioxide.
- On the civil aviation front, an official from aircraft manufacturer Airbus said it had plans to offer 100% sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) compatibility on its commercial aircraft latest by 2030.

VARANASI

Varanasi has been nominated as the first-ever Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Tourism and Cultural Capital during the period 2022-2023 at the 22nd Meeting of SCO Council of Heads of State in Samarkand, Uzbekistan.



About:

- The nomination of Varanasi as the first ever SCO Tourism and Cultural Capital will promote tourism, cultural and humanitarian exchanges between India and the SCO member Countries.
- It also underlines country's ancient civilizational links with Member States of SCO especially the Central Asian Republics.
- Under the framework of this major cultural outreach program, a number of events will be hosted in Varanasi during 2022-23, for which guests will be invited to participate from SCO Member States.
- Varanasi is a city in Uttar Pradesh on the Ganga river. The city is still widely known by its earlier name Banaras and its ancient name Kashi.