

Current Affairs



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International Affairs

COUP IN MYANMAR



Issue

The Myanmar military grabbed power in a coup, ahead of a scheduled meeting of the country's newly elected Parliament.

Background

Leaders of the civilian government including Aung San Suu Kyi have been put under house arrest.

Details

- The military takeover came after a week of rumours and speculation ahead of the scheduled opening of Myanmar's newly elected lower house of Parliament.
- Amid heightened civilian military tensions, the Myanmar military has put out a statement declaring it would protect and abide by the Constitution.

Reasons for coup

- The military has alleged that the general elections held in November 2020 were full of irregularities and that therefore, the results are not valid.
- The military had demanded that the United Elections Commission (UEC) of Myanmar or the government, or outgoing parliamentarians prove at a special session before the new parliament convenes on February 1, that the elections were free and fair.

Democratic transition

- Myanmar's democratic transition had been a work in progress. The results of the 2020 election were being seen by the NLD as a mandate for its plan of constitutional reform.
- But this was never going to be easy, given the tight constitutional restrictions for amendments.

NOTES

STUDY IQ

JAPAN PLANS FOUR DAY WORKING WEEK



Issue

Members of the Japanese parliament have opened discussions on a proposal to permit workers to opt for a four-day working week instead of the traditional five-day.

Background

Japanese employees are famous for putting in long hours at their desks and declining to take all their annual holidays for fear of inconveniencing office colleagues.

Details

- A handful of Japanese companies have already instituted flexible working systems, but the changes brought by COVID-19 have hastened the debate on the issue.
- In recent decades, Japan has shifted from an economy that is based on manufacturing to one that is more reliant on the service sector and financial services.
- The nation's population continues to contract from 126.5 million at present to possibly as few as 83 million by the end of the century.
- The government wants changes in the working environment for millions of Japanese to bring an end to "karoshi," the primarily Japanese problem of death brought on by overwork.

- A 2016 government study determined that one in five Japanese workers were at risk of karoshi, with nearly a quarter of companies requiring staff to put in more than 80 hours of overtime each month.
- As a consequence, several hundred people were dying every year of heart attacks, strokes or other medical problems brought on by overwork, with more driven to suicide.
- A new law went into effect in April 2019 that limited overwork to 100 hours a month and imposed fines on companies that broke the rules.

Benefits

- The law would enable more people to work fewer hours and be less stressed, which would in turn reduce the likelihood of karoshi.
- Enabling workers to choose to have a three-day weekend would give them more opportunities to spend time with their children or elderly relatives, pursue educational opportunities, examine the possibility of other business ventures and contribute to the national economy by consuming.
- Couples who want to have more children but fear they just do not have the time to raise youngsters, might change their minds and have larger families. This would help in reversing the problem of a declining population.

Drawbacks

- The major drawback that has been identified is, inevitably, the lower wage associated with working one day less per week.
- The biggest obstacle to a widespread acceptance of the system would be from older and traditionally minded manager-level employees, who are likely to frown upon a new generation of workers.

UK'S VISA SCHEME FOR HONG KONG RESIDENTS



Issue

The UK is opening a special visa scheme that will allow Hong Kong residents a chance to migrate and eventually apply for British citizenship.

Background

The move comes months after China imposed a sweeping national security law over the former British colony.

Details

- The visas will be issued to those in Hong Kong who hold a British National (Overseas) passport and their immediate dependents, and will offer a fast track to UK citizenship.
- Applicants who get the visa can live and work in the UK for 5 years, after which they apply for settlement. After twelve months, they can apply for citizenship.
- To avoid applying for the visa in person, the BN (O) holders would be able to apply through a smartphone app from February 23.
- There is no minimum salary requirement for those wanting to move but it is necessary to first secure a job in the UK before migrating.
- The move is considered the UK's most generous welcoming of foreign workers since the entry of new EU citizens in 2004 — when 10 countries were added to the bloc.

Reason for the scheme

- China has implemented its far-reaching new national security law for Hong Kong, greatly expanding Beijing's power in the city.
- Under the law, four widely defined offences can invite life imprisonment as the maximum punishment, followed by lesser penalties.

China's reaction

- China criticised the UK move. It also said that it would no longer be recognising BN (O) passports.
- It is still unclear how this could deter Hong Kongers from leaving, since city residents are usually known to use Hong Kong passports while leaving for another country.
- The BN (O) passport can only be used while arriving in the UK, or in any other country that recognises the document.

NOTES

INDIA DROPPED FROM COLOMBO TERMINAL PROJECT



Issue

After the strong opposition from trade unions across the country, the Sri Lankan government has been forced to drop a 2019 agreement with India and Japan to develop the strategic East Container Terminal (ECT) at the Colombo Port.

Background

Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa gave a statement that the operation of the east terminal would be done by Sri Lanka Ports Authority on its own.

Details

- Another meeting approved a proposal to develop the West Terminal at the Colombo Port as a Public Private Partnership with India and Japan, which was seen as a bid to compensate India.
- India's response was that the island nation should not be taking a decision in a unilateral manner on an existing tripartite agreement.
- It is unclear whether India would accept the latest proposal even as the Sri Lankan government rules out chances of further troubles.

Compensatory offer

- Commercially, the west terminal offer is better for India as it gives 85% stake for developers of the West Terminal against the 49% in ECT.
- West Terminal is almost the same if they consider the security aspect and the necessity to have a port terminal in Sri Lanka.

Reasons for dropping India

- Senior leaders of Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa-led Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) party said the pressure was immense on the President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to cancel the 2019 agreement.
- Opposers had quoted his own presidential manifesto that was contrary to this 2019 agreement. He did argue with them citing the agreement in which the Sri Lanka government owned 51% stake in the development and operational project of ECT.

The East Container Terminal

- As per the agreement signed by the former government administration, India and Japan together was to hold 49% stake in ECT.
- There were reports and allegations among diplomatic circle that the Chinese had played a role in instigating port unions protest against India's interest.

Impact on Indo-Sri Lanka relationship

- Many who are part of the Sri Lanka government as well as those who were known to the developments hope that the issue will die down soon with the offer of West Terminal.
- Internationally an offended India can make life tough for Sri Lanka, isolating the tiny island nation, geo-politically and on the economic front.
- The economic isolation will not help Sri Lanka at a time when the country is taking steps to revive the economy amid a pandemic.

NOTES

EU'S U-TURN ON VACCINE SUPPLIES TO NORTHERN IRELAND AND UK



Issue

The EU said it would not invoke the Brexit deal's Article 16, which it wanted to do to control the export of vaccines from the bloc to Northern Ireland and the UK.

Background

EU wanted to trigger the article giving it powers to erect checkpoints at the border between Northern Ireland and the UK to restrict vaccines from crossing over.

Details

- The EU's decision was reversed within hours, after an uproar in Britain, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.
- Under the Brexit deal between the bloc and the UK, which went into force with the start of 2021, Northern Ireland is to remain a part of the EU single market.
- This means that there is supposed to be an open border between the EU and Northern Ireland, with no restrictions on exported goods.
- Article 16 of the Northern Ireland Protocol creates an exception to this principle. By invoking this legal measure, either the EU or the UK can unilaterally suspend any part of the Brexit deal which is causing "economic, societal or environmental difficulties".

Reasons for invoking

- In the EU, the debate is on about delays in the production and

and distribution of Covid-19 vaccines to its member countries.

- Many member states have accused Brussels of being slow in finalising contracts with pharmaceutical companies to ensure the rollout of vaccines, as compared with other rich countries such as the UK and the US.
- This has placed great pressure on the EU leadership, as doubts have arisen whether the bloc can stick to its plan of vaccinating 70% of adults by the summer.
- Matters worsened after British-Swedish manufacturer AstraZeneca that it would cut down on vaccine deliveries due to problems at one of its facilities in the EU.

The U-turn embarrassment

- Ever since the UK chose to leave the EU during the Brexit referendum of 2016, the Irish border had remained a stumbling block in negotiations to decide the future of the EU-UK relationship.
- The EU appeared to be expressing disregard for its own long-held position on the Irish single market issue. This has put out questions on EU's credibility.
- The EU was also criticised for not consulting member countries, or the UK, before announcing the Article 16 decision.

NOTES

THE 'WALKING WHILE TRANS' BAN



Issue

New York Governor has signed a bill repealing a controversial law known as the "Walking While Trans" ban.

Background

The law has been widely criticised for disproportionately discriminating against transgender people of colour.

Details

- 'Walking While Trans' ban is the colloquial name for a law, which was originally passed in 1976 with the intention of prohibiting loitering for the purpose of prostitution.
- The law is widely criticised for its vagueness as it allows New York police to arrest or apprehend someone walking on the street if they suspect that they are sex workers.
- While the law is mostly used against women, several men have also been arrested or detained. But the law is known for disproportionately impacting trans-women, especially trans-women of colour.

Discriminatory law

- Between 2012 and 2015, at least 85 per cent of those arrested under the law were Black or Latino people.

- In 2019 alone, 91 per cent of people arrested under the law belonged to these two groups, and around 80 per cent identified as women.
- The law permits the police to stop-and-frisk trans-women of colour and other marginalised groups for simply walking down the street.

NOTES

STUDY IQ

STUDENT PROTESTS IN TURKEY



Issue

Students and teachers at Turkey's Bogazici University have been protesting against the appointment of a former political candidate and academic as the Istanbul-based University's rector.

Background

The rector was appointed directly by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, which demonstrators see as an undemocratic move.

Details

- Four students were arrested over a photograph that mixed LGBT symbols with Islamic images. More than 150 protesters were detained after they did not agree to end the protests.
- Turkey's handling of the protests has faced criticism from the US, UN and the European Union. They have condemned homophobic & transphobic comments by officials.

Government response

- Following weeks of protests in the university, Erdogan made remarks against the LGBT movement in the country.
- Supporters of the government are defending appointment by saying that the move has been taken to fight elitism in higher education.

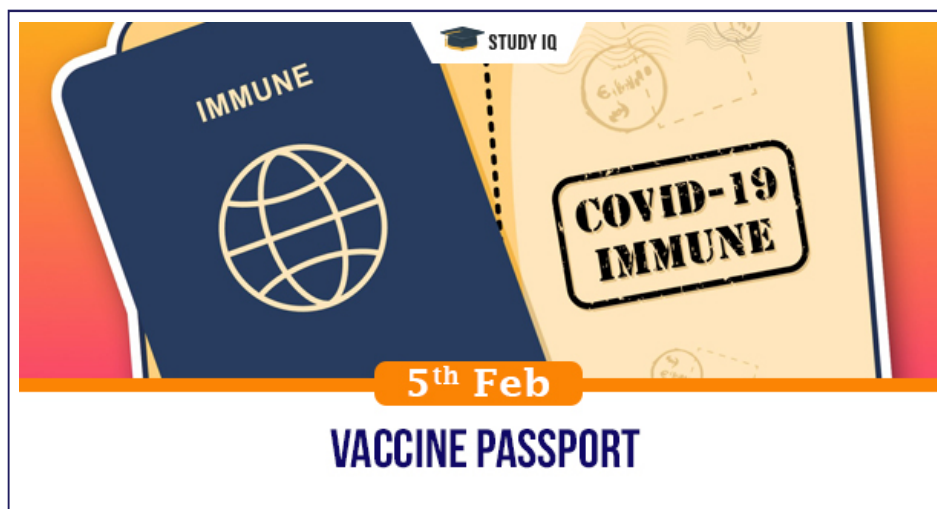
- On the other hand, the supporters of the protests see the move as restricting academic freedom at an institution that has been known to defend the rights of all its students.

Crackdowns in Turkey

- In early 2020, Turkish prosecutors ordered the arrest of nearly 700 people including military personnel and people working in the justice ministry as part of a move against those who were involved in a 2016 coup attempt to overthrow the government.
- Since the unsuccessful coup took place, the Turkish authorities have been carrying out a crackdown on the alleged followers of US-based Muslim cleric Fethullah Gülen.
- Significantly, in late 2020, the Turkish parliament passed a bill that would increase the monitoring of civil society groups.

NOTES

VACCINE PASSPORT



Issue

In an effort to reduce curbs on travel and public life, Denmark is in the process of rolling out a digital passport that would show if holders have been vaccinated against the coronavirus.

Details

- The first step will be completed by the end of February, when Danish citizens who have been vaccinated will be able to see a record on a government health website. After another three or four months, the digital passport and an app will be launched.
- Denmark, along with countries in northern Europe, has in recent years pushed for paperless communications in both the public and private sectors.
- The corona passport is considered a part of its effort to reduce bureaucracy by using electronic verification.
- The government will take a decision at a later date whether the digital passport would be used for purposes other than travel, such as access to restaurants, music festivals and sports events.

Opening up travel in Europe

- Europe's tourism sector was severely impacted because of the pandemic. So, the EU has been under pressure this year to evolve mechanisms to safely restart travel.
- The EU has been considering the use of vaccination certificates, but has so far such certificates would only be used for medical reasons.

- The World Health Organisation had also said it was working on an e-vaccination certificate. Estonia would permit those travelling to the country to skip quarantine requirements if they are able to show proof of Covid-19 vaccination.

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PROUD BOYS



Issue

Canada has announced that it will be designating the US-based far-right group 'Proud Boys' as a terrorist entity.

Background

The all-male neo-fascist group will be added to a lengthy list of international terrorist organisations, that includes ISIS, Al Qaeda and al-Shabab.

Details

- The Proud Boys grabbed headlines worldwide last year during the first presidential debate between then-President Donald Trump and his Democratic contender Biden.
- The all-male neo-fascist group was founded in 2016 by Vice Media co-founder and Canadian-British right-wing activist Gavin McInnes.
- The Proud Boys are known for their anti-Muslim and misogynistic rhetoric and have been classified as an 'extremist group' by the FBI.
- To be inducted into the fold, a Proud Boy must first proclaim that he is a Western chauvinist who refuses to apologise for creating the modern world.
- The group claim that they do not support white supremacists, and merely banded together to oppose the activities of the anti-fascist movement known as Antifa.

- Members of the group are often seen at rallies carrying guns and bats and a few have even been convicted of violent crimes against left-wing groups and activists.
- They were also a regular feature at the nationwide anti-racism protests in the US sparked by the custodial killing of African American George Floyd.
- The Proud Boys were known to intimidate anti-racism protesters and in some places have incited violence and fighting.

Reasons for ban

- The Parliament in Canada had unanimously passed a motion calling on Canadian PM Justin Trudeau's government to ban the Proud Boys and to label them a terrorist group
- The group was added to the list along with a number of other extremist groups with links to Al Qaeda, Islamic State and Hizbul Mujahideen.
- But some groups argue that banning the Proud Boys would expand the definition of terrorism to a point where free speech and the right to protest will be threatened.
- Canadian officials will not be able to automatically make any arrests. But they will be able to seize their assets and prosecute members or associates for carrying out or contributing to extremist activities.
- Even providing a terrorist group with funds would qualify as a crime. This also includes purchasing group-related clothing or paraphernalia.
- Authorities will also be able to take down online posts with more ease and add the group's members to no-fly lists.

US OPIOID CRISIS



Issue

Prominent global consultancy firm McKinsey & Co has agreed to pay nearly \$600 million to settle claims relating to its role in exacerbating the opioid crisis in the US.

Background

McKinsey was being investigated for its work with US-based drugmaker Purdue Pharma to boost the sales of OxyContin, an addictive pain killer manufactured by the company.

Details

- The US is currently going through an opioid overdose epidemic, with over 130 people dying each day from opioid-related drug overdoses.
- The misuse and addiction to opioids, including prescription pain relievers, heroin, and synthetic opioids such as fentanyl, has caused a national health crisis that has affected public health as well as social and economic welfare.
- The misuse of prescription opioids alone is estimated to cost the US \$78.5 billion each year, including the costs of healthcare, lost productivity, addiction treatment, and criminal justice involvement.
- The crisis began in the late 1990s, when pharmaceutical companies in the country aggressively marketed prescription opioid painkillers.
- As rates of prescription soared, so did the diversion and misuse of drugs, making it clear that they were highly addictive.

- Since 2000, prescription opioids, heroin and fentanyl have been linked to the death of over 4.7 lakh Americans. In 2017, an estimated 1.7 million people suffered from substance use disorders related to prescription opioid pain relievers.

Accusations

- State and local governments in the US began filing lawsuits against pharmaceutical companies making and selling opioid drugs for their role in causing the addiction epidemic.
- The consulting firm McKinsey came under scrutiny for its advising work for Purdue Pharma, whose painkiller drug OxyContin was among those that fuelled the opioid crisis.
- The documents showed that McKinsey advised Purdue to focus sales calls to doctors known to be high prescribers, and to try and move patients to more potent doses of OxyContin.

Opioids

Opioids are substances that have effects similar to those of morphine. Medically they are primarily used for pain relief, including anaesthesia.

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NORD STREAM 2



Issue

The Russian consortium building the Nord Stream 2 pipeline has said that it has resumed work on the controversial project.

Background

The development could potentially develop tensions between the United States and Germany.

Details

- In 2015, Gazprom and 5 other European energy firms decided to build Nord Stream 2, valued at around \$11 billion.
- The 1,200 km pipeline will run from Ust-Luga in Russia to Greifswald in Germany, and will carry 55 billion cubic metres of gas per year.
- The under-construction pipeline will run along the already-completed Nord Stream 1 system, and the two together will supply an aggregate of 110 billion cubic metres of gas to Germany per year.
- The pipeline falls in German and Danish territory, and all but 150 km of pipes for the project have already been laid.

Controversy

- Nord Stream 2 has drawn criticism from the US, where both the Democratic and Republican parties believe that the project would increase Europe's dependence on Russia for natural gas.

- The project has also irked Ukraine, whose ties with Russia have seriously deteriorated in the aftermath of the Crimean conflict in 2014.
- There is an existing land pipeline between Russia and Europe that runs through Ukraine, which feels that once Nord Stream 2 is completed, Russia could bypass the Ukrainian pipeline, and deprive the country of lucrative transit fees.
- Germany has solidly stood behind the Nord Stream 2, despite opposition from allies, with government insisting that it is a commercial project.
- In December 2019, work on the project was suspended due the threat of US sanctions. The US carried out its threat for the first time, imposing sanctions on a Russian ship tasked with laying pipes for the project.

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COLUMBIA GRANTS TEMPORARY LEGAL STATUS TO VENEZUELAN



Issue

Columbian President has announced that Venezuelans will have temporary protected status for the next ten years.

Background

The decision covers more than 1.7 million Venezuelans who have fled to Columbia in the last few years.

Details

- Venezuelans who entered Columbia without permission before January 31 will be eligible for legalisation and those who already have legal status will have a decade to reapply for permission to stay in the country.
- The government's move has been welcomed by multiple sectors including the opposition. Some have criticised the move and has said that President took this decision to win the upcoming elections.

Venezuelan migration

- Venezuela is currently under the authoritarian rule of President Maduro, who belongs to the United Socialist Party of Venezuela.
- The country has been facing problems since the mid-2010s when the global boom in commodities ended. As a result of this, the country slipped into an economic crisis and entered recession in 2014.
- Among Latin America's poorest countries, its oil-dependent economy had grown significantly during the boom, and massive investments in social spending during that time by President Hugo Chávez.

- After the economic collapse, the crime rate in the country doubled and inflation multiplied in a situation that was made worse by Western sanctions.
- Maduro has blamed the US sanctions on Venezuela's state oil company and government for the economic problems that the country is currently riddled with, which include hyperinflation, food and medicine shortages and electricity blackouts.
- According to UN estimates, over 90 per cent of the country was living in poverty in April 2019 and an estimated 4.8 million Venezuelans have fled the country for other places in Latin America and for the Caribbean countries as of February 2020.

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WTO



Issue

Nigerian economist Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala is set to become the WTO's director-general on March 1. She's the first woman and first African to lead the group.

Details

- The World Trade Organization (WTO) is an international institution that oversees the global trade rules among nations.
- It superseded the 1947 General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) created in the wake of World War II.

Components of WTO

The General Council

- The WTO General Council is the highest-level decision-making body in the WTO that meets on a regular basis during the year.
- It has representatives from all member governments and has the authority to act on behalf of the ministerial conference which only meets about every two years.

The Dispute Settlement Body

- The operation of the WTO dispute settlement process involves case-specific panels appointed by the Dispute Settlement Body (DSB), the Appellate Body, The Director-General and the WTO Secretariat, arbitrators, and advisory experts.
- The priority is to settle disputes, preferably through a mutually agreed solution, and provision has been made for the process to be conducted in an efficient and timely manner.
- The dispute settlement system cannot be used to resolve trade disputes that arise from political disagreements.

The Trade Policy Review Body

- The Trade Policy Review Body (TPRB) is a subsidiary body of the General Council created by the Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the WTO to administer the Trade
- Policy Review Mechanism (TPRM). The WTO Secretariat produces an independent report on the trade policies and practices of the Member under review.

Role played by WTO

- Its main function is to ensure that trade flows as smoothly, predictably and freely as possible.
- By lowering trade barriers through negotiations among member governments, the WTO's system also breaks down other barriers between peoples and trading economies.
- They also bind governments to keep their trade policies transparent and predictable which is to everybody's benefit.
- The agreements provide a stable and transparent framework to help producers of goods and services, exporters and importers conduct their business.
- It also administers an independent dispute resolution process aimed at enforcing participants' adherence to WTO agreements and resolving trade-related disputes.

TWO STATE SOLUTION



Issue

The incumbent US administration of Joe Biden has assured Palestine of Two State solution at United Nations.

Background

The two-state solution would establish an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel, which effectively means two states for two peoples.

History

- After the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Jews and Arabs both claimed the right to self-determination in historical Palestine.
- A first attempt at partitioning the land in 1948 resulted in an Israeli state but no Palestinian state, and the West Bank and Gaza Strip fell under Jordanian and Egyptian rule, respectively.
- In the Six-Day War of 1967, Israel captured and occupied the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and other Arab territories, which in the aftermath led to the idea that Israel would exchange land it had captured for peace with its Arab neighbour
- Over the following decades, waves of Jewish immigration to Palestine led to a significant increase in the Jewish population.
- In 1947, as the United Kingdom prepared to withdraw from the region, the United Nations passed a partition plan (known as UN Resolution 181) that would divide Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state.

Details

- In 1993 the Israeli government and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) agreed on a plan to implement a two-state solution as part of the Oslo Accords, leading to the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA).
- In theory, this would win Israel security and allow it to retain a Jewish demographic majority (letting the country remain Jewish and democratic) while granting the Palestinians a state.
- Most governments and world bodies have set achievement of the two-state solution as official policy, including the United States, the United Nations, the Palestinian Authority and Israel.

Benefits of Two state solution

- It would bring a peaceful solution to one of the major problems of the world in modern times.
- It would uphold rights of Jewish people to co-exist with its Arab neighbours. Rights of both the groups will be upheld.
- It would also prevent radicalisation of the region. Terrorist groups like PLA and Hamas will be reined in.

Issue in implementation

- There is no consensus about precisely where to draw the line. Generally, most believe the border would follow the lines before the Arab-Israeli war of 1967, but Israel has extended its territory extensively.
- Both sides claim Jerusalem as their capital and consider it a centre of religious worship and cultural heritage. There is no consensus regarding its division.
- The Palestinian leadership is divided between two governments that cannot come to consensus.

INTERNATIONAL SOLAR ALLIANCE



Issue

The International Solar Alliance has opened its membership to all member countries of United Nations.

Details

- The International Solar Alliance (ISA) is a global alliance of 121 countries initiated by India.
- Most of the members are sunshine countries, which lie either completely or partly between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn.
- The primary objective of the alliance is to work for efficient consumption of solar energy to reduce dependence on fossil fuels.
- The alliance is a treaty-based inter-governmental organization. Countries that do not fall within the Tropics can join the alliance and enjoy all benefits as other members, with the exception of voting rights. After the United Nations, it is the largest grouping of states world-wide.

Initiative

- The initiative was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the India Africa Summit, and a meeting of member countries ahead of the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris in November 2015.
- The framework agreement of the International Solar Alliance opened for signatures in Marrakech, Morocco in November 2016, and 200 countries have joined.

Objectives and benefits

- The launching of such an alliance in Paris also sends a strong signal to the global communities about the sincerity of the developing nations towards their concern about climate change and to switch to a low-carbon growth path.
- For India, possible additional benefits from the alliance can be a strengthening of ties with the major African countries and increasing goodwill for India among them.
- It is also seen as an alliance by the developing countries to form a united front and to undertake research and development for making solar power equipment within developing countries.
- The alliance has partnered with World Bank to launch. Global Solar Atlas is a free online tool that displays annual average solar power potential at any location in the world and thus identifies potential sites for solar power generation.

NOTES

UN COMMITTEE ON WORLD FOOD SECURITY



Issue

The first-ever voluntary guidelines on food systems and nutrition meant to end hunger and malnutrition were endorsed by members of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS).

Background

The guidelines are intended to build upon and complement the work and mandate of other international bodies.

Details

- The Committee on World Food Security (CFS) was established in 1974 as an intergovernmental body to serve as a forum in the United Nations System for review and follow-up of policies concerning world food security including production and physical and economic access to food.
- The CFS has a permanent Secretariat located in Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) headquarters in Rome, Italy which includes members from the World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).
- CFS develops and endorses policy recommendations and guidance on a wide range of food security and nutrition topics.
- They call for realisation of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security for all, particularly for the most vulnerable and affected groups.

- They focus on policy planning and governance so that food systems can be made more resilient and responsive and are in accordance with needs of consumers and producers too, especially small and marginal farmers.

Functions

- Coordinate a global approach to food security
- Promote policy convergence
- Support and advice countries and regions
- Coordinate at national and regional levels
- Promote accountability and share best practices
- Develop a global strategic framework for food security and nutrition

NOTES

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TRANSIT BAIL



Issue

The Bombay High Court has granted transit anticipatory bail to Shantanu Shrivastava in the Greta Thunberg toolkit case registered by the Delhi Police in connection with the ongoing protests against the three farm laws.

Details

- The transit anticipatory bail has been granted for 10 days to allow him to approach the competent court in the national capital for a pre-arrest bail.
- Section 56 of the CrPC states that the person arrested has to be taken before the magistrate without unnecessary delay.
- According to Section 167 (2) of CrPC, when the Magistrate before whom the accused person has been produced does not have the jurisdiction to try the case or commit it for trial, the judicial officer is required to forward the accused to a Magistrate having such jurisdiction.

Anticipatory transit bail

- When a person is apprehending arrest by the police of a state other than where they are at present, they approach the nearest competent court for a transit anticipatory or pre-arrest bail.
- The court does not have jurisdiction over the place where the case is registered or where crime has been alleged to have been committed but since the question of personal liberty is involved, the High Courts across India generally allow such prayer depending upon the merits of the case.

- The relief is sought to seek temporary protection from arrest and simultaneously get time to approach the appropriate court of that place, wherefrom the police has come or where the case is registered.

Transit remand

- Since the arrested person is required under the law to be presented before a magistrate within 24 hours of arrest, they are produced by the police of the other state before the nearest magistrate of the place from where the person has been arrested to get a transit remand.
- This is done to comply with the provisions of law regarding the production of the accused before a magistrate within 24 hours since it may not be otherwise possible due to travel from one state to another.
- The application is filed by the police who have come to arrest the accused, before the nearest magistrate of that area where the accused is at present or residing.
- The Magistrate should ask the person arrested and brought before him whether he has been informed of the grounds of arrest and whether he was required to consult and be defended by any legal practitioner of his choice.
- The apex court in different judgments has also held and reiterated that a Magistrate should not pass a remand order of remand automatically or in a mechanical manner.

ICC RULINGS ON PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES



Issue

The International Criminal Court said that the court has jurisdiction over war crimes committed in the Palestinian territories.

Background

The ICC would have jurisdiction to investigate potential war crimes committed in Palestinian territories. Israel has criticised this move.

Details

- This ruling was a result of the Palestinian Authority gaining formal membership of international criminal court in 2015. Israel is not a member of the ICC.
- The Court's territorial jurisdiction in the Situation in Palestine extends to the territories occupied by Israel since 1967, namely Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.
- The US had imposed sanctions on ICC officials for investigating war crimes committed by the US in the Middle East and had openly opposed and rejected the ICC's jurisdiction.
- According to this new ruling, it is not only Israelis and the Israel Defence Forces who could be potentially prosecuted for war crimes, but also Palestinians and groups like Hamas.

Indian stand

- Israel has been pushing its good friend India to take a stand against the ICC ruling, but Delhi is reluctant to do so given its own geopolitical interests.

- India is not a member of the Rome Statute, the founding treaty of the ICC and it would not want to comment or take a position on any of the court's decisions or rulings.

International Criminal Court

- The ICC is the first and only permanent international court with jurisdiction to prosecute individuals for the international crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and the crime of aggression.
- It is intended to complement existing national judicial systems and it may therefore exercise its jurisdiction only when national courts are unwilling or unable to prosecute criminals.
- The ICC has faced a number of criticisms from states and society, including objections about its jurisdiction, accusations of bias, questioning of the fairness of its case-selection and trial procedures, and doubts about its effectiveness.

NOTES

AUSTRALIA'S MEDIA BARGAINING LAW



Issue

Facebook has decided to black out news content from its social networking platform in Australia.

Background

The Australian government has introduced a new bargaining law to control social media giants. The response of Facebook is based on the law.

Details

- Australia's new media bargaining code requires big tech companies like Google and Facebook to enter into agreements with news outlets that result in a commercial contract for showing the latter's content on their platforms.
- At the moment, news publishers get only a portion of the ad revenues generated from their content, or revenue from an agreement like for generating instant articles.

Facebook's issue

- Facebook says that the code fundamentally misunderstands the relationship between our platform and publishers who use it to share news content.
- It says that publishers willingly choose to post news on Facebook, as it allows them to sell more subscriptions, grow their audiences and increase advertising revenue.

Implications

- Across the world, publishers have used Facebook as a means to reach out to audiences who use it as a content consumption platform, thus increasing their reach and revenues.
- Users too re-share a lot of news content, adding to their virality. All this results in millions of visits for news sites referred from Facebook's timeline.
- Publishers also have commercial agreements in place with Facebook to allow the social network to host their content in the form of Instant Articles that open faster than publisher pages.
- Facebook and Google rightly fear the action in Australia could trigger similar laws across the world.

STUDY IQ

FACEBOOK RESTORING NEWS SHARING IN AUSTRALIA



Issue

Facebook has announced that it would restore the sharing of news links by users and news publishers after it struck a deal with the Australian government.

Background

The Australian government is adding four new amendments to the proposed legislation. Earlier it said it would not make any amendments to the proposed legislation.

Details

- The new media code will not be applied to Facebook if the company can show that it has signed enough deals with news publishers in order to continue supporting newsrooms.
- Facebook has said that if the code is applied to them in the future, then they could pull out news from the country once again.
- Facebook had banned all users and news publishers based in Australia from posting links to news on the platform.
- The ban also impacted pages of Australian hospitals, charities, government organisations who found their pages had been wiped clean.
- Facebook will retain the ability to decide if news appears on the platform, thus ensuring that they won't automatically be subject to a forced negotiation.

New changes to the code

- Australian government's amendments include a two-month mediation period, which will give two sides more time to negotiate commercial deals, before going into arbitration.
- Earlier, the code called for mandatory arbitration with a government-appointed arbitrator, if news publishers and tech giants were unable to come to a fair deal for displaying news content.
- The amendments also insert a rule that an internet company's contribution to the sustainability of the Australian news industry via existing deals be taken into account before the code is applied to them, and at least a month's notice would be given before it is actually applied.
- These amendments will provide further clarity to digital platforms and news media businesses about the way the code is intended to operate and strengthen the framework for ensuring news media businesses are fairly remunerated.

NOTES

RISE OF SUICIDES IN JAPAN



Issue

Japan has appointed a Minister of Loneliness after the country's suicide rate went up for the first time in 11 years.

Background

Japan's suicide rate rose in 2020, with 20,919 people taking their lives according to data by the National Police Agency.

Details

- Most experts believe that the problem of escalating suicides in Japan is tied to the country's culture of loneliness.
- Japan's ageing population is the highest proportion for that category in the world and has created a huge section of middle-aged and older people who feel they have no one to turn to for help and company.
- Since most ageing people do not socialise much, many of them die alone. Their bodies are discovered a long time after their death. The phenomenon is known as 'kodokushi', which means 'lonely death'.
- The country also has some of the longest working hours in the world, which leaves people with little opportunity to spend time with their friends or be engaged in hobbies they are interested in.
- While Japanese labour laws dictate that employed persons should work for a maximum of 8 hours a day, or 40 hours a week, this is hardly the case in reality.

- It was found during a government survey conducted in 2016 that over 25% of Japanese companies demand overtime of 80 hours every month, with the extra hours often being not paid for.
- Long hours at work without any time for recreation have created a largely unhappy population which often finds itself unable to cope with the pressure to the point of no return.

Culture of loneliness

- The culture of self-isolation has reached so extremes in the country that there are about one million people who live in absolute self-imposed confinement for many years with no contact with the outside world.
- Japan has also been witnessing a rising trend of glorifying the culture of loneliness, with books that portrayed isolation as independence and a condition of superiority turning out to be bestsellers.
- In a culture that continuously seeks to glorify loneliness, it often becomes extremely difficult for people to reach out or seek help when in mental distress.

Impact of pandemic

- The job losses due to the pandemic and the continuous exhortations to stay back at home worsened the crisis.
- The growing job losses and the increasing instances of domestic violence during the pandemic compelled many women to take their lives.

Tackling the crisis

- The appointment of minister shows that Japan understands the gravity of the situation and is trying to make policy-level interventions to tackle the crisis.
- The Japanese government has created an isolation/loneliness countermeasures office within the cabinet to look into issues such as suicide and child poverty.

HOUSEWORK COMPENSATION



Issue

A divorce court in Beijing has ordered a man to compensate his ex-wife for the housework she did during five years of marriage.

Background

The court has split their joint property equally. The ruling has since sparked intense debate online over the value of unpaid domestic work.

Details

- The Chinese government brought into force a new civil code, which legal experts have described as offering greater protection for individual rights.
- Under the civil code, restitution is allowed in divorce cases where one spouse bears greater responsibility than the other in raising children and taking care of elderly relatives.
- Before the new law came into force, such compensation could be demanded only in cases where a prenuptial agreement had been signed.

Resulting debate

- Since the verdict was first reported by local media in early February, debates over it have raged on the social media platforms.
- Many have commented that 50,000 Yuan is too small an amount for five years of household work, and have expressed that men should take up a greater role in managing domestic duties.
- Divorce rates have soared in China in the recent past, growing over five times over the last three decades. At the same time, marriage rates have also dropped.

UN RIGHTS COUNCIL



Issue

Sri Lanka is facing another resolution in UN Human Rights Council regarding its Human rights abuse during the civil war.

Background

Sri Lanka had exited UNHRC alleging unfair treatment when a resolution was passed against its actions.

Details

- The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is a United Nations body whose mission is to promote and protect human rights around the world.
- The UNHRC has 47 members elected for staggered three-year terms on a regional group basis. The headquarters of UNHRC is in Geneva, Switzerland.
- The UNHRC was established by the UN General Assembly on 15 March 2006 to replace the UN Commission on Human Rights that had been strongly criticised for allowing countries with poor human rights records to be members.
- The UNHRC investigates allegations of breaches of human rights in United Nations member states, and addresses important thematic human rights issues such as freedom of association and assembly, freedom of expression, freedom of belief and religion, women's rights, LGBT rights, and the rights of racial and ethnic minorities.

Structure

- The members of the General Assembly elect the members who occupy the UNHRC's 47 seats. The term of each seat is three years, and no member may occupy a seat for more than two consecutive terms. The seats are distributed among the UN's regional groups
- The General Assembly can suspend the rights and privileges of any Council member that it decides has persistently committed gross and systematic violations of human rights during its term of membership.

Seat distribution

- 13 for the African Group
- 13 for the Asia-Pacific Group
- 6 for the Eastern European Group
- 8 for the Latin American and Caribbean Group
- 7 for the Western European and Others Group

Criticism

- The UNHRC has been criticised for the repressive states among its membership.
- Countries with questionable human rights records that have served on the UNHRC include Pakistan, Cuba, Saudi Arabia, China, Indonesia and Russia.
- The UNHRC has been accused of anti-Israel bias, a particular criticism being its focus on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict at each session as Agenda Item 7.

SRI LANKA'S COVID-19 BURIAL BAN



Issue

Sri Lanka has reversed its controversial order banning the burial of bodies of those who died of Covid-19.

Background

The reversal has come after months of international pressure and protests by Muslim groups, who were against the move.

Details

- Soon after the coronavirus pandemic spread across continents, the Sri Lankan government in April passed an order that banned burials of Covid-19 victims in the country.
- It came amid concerns by influential Buddhist monks that burials could contaminate groundwater, which several experts dismissed as baseless. Under the order, burials were strictly not allowed, and all bodies were to be cremated.
- The order, which had been in force since April last year, had been criticised for targeting minorities.
- The World Health Organisation (WHO) also said that there was no risk of contamination, and recommended both the burial and cremation of those who died of Covid-19.

Controversy

- The Muslim community numbers are about 11 per cent of Sri Lanka's 2.1 crore population and has had tense relations with the state and with the Sinhala Buddhist majority for much of the last decade.
- But the tensions have spiked after the synchronised Easter suicide bombings by a group of men and women who proclaimed themselves to be members of ISIS.
- International Human Rights watchdog Amnesty International had also urged Khan to take up the issue with Sri Lanka during his visit to the country.

Implications

- Sri Lanka now expects Pakistan's support at the 46th regular session of the UNHRC, where it is facing a resolution against Human Rights abuse.
- Sri Lanka had committed at the UNHRC to conduct a time-bound investigation of war crimes that took place during the military campaign against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Sri Lanka now faces another resolution at the current session.

NOTES

CHURMOSQUAGOGUE



Issue

A new sacred building is coming up with the aim of bringing Christians, Jews and Muslims to a single place of worship.

Background

Called the House of One or, colloquially, Churmosquagogue, it incorporates a church, a mosque and a synagogue.

Details

- The House of One is coming up on the site of the old St Peter's Church, which was damaged in World War II and completely demolished by the government of East Germany in 1964.
- The people who come here will remain true to their own religion, continue to draw from its power, and engage in peaceable dialogue with one another and with members of the city's secular population.
- The original idea came from the Protestant church community, St. Petri-St. Marien, which then joined forces with the Jewish community of Berlin, the rabbinical seminary Abraham-Geiger-Kolleg and the Muslim initiative for dialogue Forum Dialog e.V.
- The Churmosquagogue has been 10 years in the planning and construction is estimated to take four years.
- A campaign was launched around Christmas last year to raise the remaining funds. In 2012, a competition was launched for architects from around the world to design the one-of-a-kind building, something that no one had ever attempted before.

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