

## Russia, U.K. spar over Black Sea incident

(Topic- GS Paper II –IR, Source- The Hindu)

### Why in the news ?

- Recently, Russia accused Britain of spreading lies over a warship confrontation in the Black Sea and warned London that it would respond resolutely to any further provocative actions by the British Navy off the coast of Russia-annexed Crimea.

### More on the news



- Russia summoned the British Ambassador in Moscow for a formal diplomatic scolding after the warship breached what the Kremlin says are its territorial waters but which Britain and most of the world say belong to Ukraine.

### Background

- The Black Sea, which Russia uses to project its power in the Mediterranean, has for centuries been a flashpoint between Russia and its competitors such as Turkey, France, U.S. and the U.K.

### Western countries opinion

- Western countries deem the Crimea to be part of Ukraine and reject Russia's claim to the seas around it.

### Crimea Profile

- Under Greek and Roman influence for centuries, in 1443 Crimea became the centre of a Tatar Khanate, which later fell under Ottoman control.

- Crimea was annexed by the Russian Empire during the reign of Catherine the Great in 1783 and remained part of Russia until 1954, when it was transferred to Ukraine under the then Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev.
- Ethnic Russians make up the majority of the population, but with significant Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar minorities.
- Rival imperial ambitions in the mid 19th century led to the Crimean War when Britain and France, suspicious of Russian ambitions in the Balkans as the Ottoman Empire declined, sent troops.
- Given autonomous republic status within Russia after the Bolshevik revolution, Crimea was occupied by the Nazis in the early 1940s.
- **Russia seized and annexed the Crimea peninsula from Ukraine in 2014 and considers areas around its coast to be Russian waters.**

### About Black Sea



- The Black Sea is a marginal sea of the Atlantic Ocean lying between Europe and Asia; east of the Balkans (Southeast Europe), south of the East European Plain in Eastern Europe, west of the Caucasus, and north of Anatolia in Western Asia.
- It is supplied by major rivers, principally the Danube, Dnieper, and Don.
- The Black Sea is bordered by Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey, and Ukraine.

## Re-energising India's Africa policy

(Topic- GS Paper II –IR, Source- The Hindu)

### Why in the news ?

- Africa is considered a foreign policy priority by India.
- The present government designed a forward-looking strategy to deepen relations with African countries.
- Its implementation was managed quite well, with much political will invested in expanding the multi-faceted engagement.
- Even as the COVID-19 era began in March 2020, New Delhi took new initiatives to assist Africa through prompt despatch of medicines and later vaccines.
- **But now the policy implementation needs a critical review.**

### Decline in India-Africa Trade

- The latest economic data confirms what was apprehended by experts: India-Africa trade is on a decline.
- According to the Confederation of Indian Industry, in 2020-21, India's exports to and imports from Africa stood, respectively, at \$27.7 billion and \$28.2 billion, a reduction of 4.4% and 25% over the previous year.
- Thus, bilateral trade valued at \$55.9 billion in 2020-21, fell by \$10.8 billion compared to 2019-20, and \$15.5 billion compared to the peak year of 2014-15.

### Decrease in Investment

- India's investments in Africa too saw a decrease from \$3.2 billion in 2019-20 to \$2.9 billion in 2020-21.
- Total investments over 25 years, from April 1996 to March 2021, are now just \$70.7 billion, which is about one-third of China's investment in Africa. COVID-19 has caused an adverse impact on the Indian and African economies.

### India's Top market in Africa

- India's top five markets today are South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt, Kenya and Togo.
- The countries from which India imports the most are South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt, Angola and Guinea.

### Top three exports

- India's top three exports to Africa are mineral fuels and oils (processed petroleum products), pharmaceutical products and vehicles.

- Mineral fuels and oils, (essentially crude oil) and pearls, precious or semi-precious stones are the top two imports accounting for over 77% of our imports from Africa.
- The composition of the India-Africa trade has not changed much over the two decades.

### **Global competition**

- The latest trends in bilateral economic relations should be assessed against two broad developments.
- A dozen nations from the Americas, Europe and Asia have striven to assist Africa in resolving the continent's political and social challenges and, in turn, to benefit from Africa's markets, minerals, hydrocarbons and oceanic resources, and thereby to expand their geopolitical influence.
- A mix of competition and contestation involving traditional and new players, especially the United States, the European Union (EU), China, Japan and India, has attracted much attention from governments, media and academia.

### **India's role**

- For mutual benefit, Africa and India should remain optimally engaged.
- It is time to seize the opportunity and restore Africa to its primary position in India's diplomacy and economic engagement.
- **The third India-Africa Forum Summit was held in 2015.**
- **The fourth summit, pending since last year, should be held as soon as possible, even if in a virtual format.**
- Fresh financial resources for grants and concessional loans to Africa must be allocated, as previous allocations stand almost fully exhausted. Without new commitments, India's Africa policy would be like a car running on a near-empty fuel tank.

### **Areas with promise**

- The promotion of economic relations demands a higher priority. Industry representatives should be consulted about their grievances and challenges in the COVID-19 era.
- It is essential "to impart a 21st century complexion to the partnership with Africa", as the above-mentioned study argues.
- This means developing and deepening collaborations in health, space and digital technologies.
- Finally, to overcome the China challenge in Africa increased cooperation between India and its international allies, rates priority.
- The recent India-EU Summit has identified Africa as a region where a partnership-based approach will be followed.
- Similarly, when the first in-person summit of **the Quad powers is held in Washington, a robust partnership plan for Africa should be announced.**

## Kerala's Kaval Plus project

(Topic- GS Paper II –Schemes/Policies for Vulnerable Section, Source- The Hindu)

### **Why in the news?**

- Recently, the Department of Women and Child Development in Kerala is set to expand Kaval Plus, an ambitious programme for lending holistic support to children in need of care and protection and survivors of sexual abuse, to five more districts.

### **About Kerala's Kaval Plus project**

- It has been rollout in Thiruvananthapuram and Palakkad districts in December 2020.
- The project has been able to reach out to nearly 300 and 150 children respectively.
- Now, the project is set to be implemented in Ernakulam, Idukki, Malappuram, Kozhikode, and Kannur.

### **Significance**

- It covers both children at homes and child care institutes.
- It also covers vulnerable children in the community outside the ambit of child welfare committees (CWCs) and other agencies.
- The beneficiaries of the project are usually identified from among the children produced before CWCs who in turn will hand them to the district child protection units for social investigation as per the Juvenile Justice Act.

## Futuristic Infantry Combat Vehicles (FICVs)

(Topic- GS Paper III –Defence, Source- The Hindu)

### **Why in the news?**

- The Indian Army has recently issued a tender, or a Request For Information (RFI), for the procurement of 1,750 Futuristic Infantry Combat Vehicles (FICVs).

### **About Futuristic Infantry Combat Vehicles**



- The Futuristic Infantry Combat Vehicles (FICVs) to replace the Russian-origin infantry vehicles in service.
- The Ministry of Defence intends to procure an approximate 1,750 quantities of Futuristic Infantry Combat Vehicles (Tracked) in three versions.
- Approximately, 55% of them should be the gun version, 20% command version and 25% command and surveillance version.

According to the RFI, the FICVs would be employed for cross-country operations, including:

- a. Amphibious operations in plain,
- b. Desert terrain along the Western borders,
- c. High altitudes up to 5,000 m,
- d. Mountain terrain along the northern borders in eastern Ladakh, the central sector and North Sikkim.

The main operational tasks that would have to performed by the FICV include destroying:

- a. Enemy tanks,
- b. Armoured personnel carriers,
- c. Combat vehicles,
- d. Low-flying helicopters and
- e. Other ground-based weapon platforms and positions.

### **Related Information**

- Earlier in June 2021, an RFI was also issued for the procurement of 1,770 Future Ready Combat Vehicles (FRCV) for the procurement of the next generation Main Battle Tank, with a planned induction from 2030.

## CEOS COAST

(Topic- GS Paper III –Science and Technology, Source- The Hindu)

### Why in the news?

- Recently a pilot project called Committee on Earth Observation Satellites—Coastal Observations, Applications, Services, and Tools (CEOS COAST) has been launched by ISRO and NOAA from the US.

### About the CEOS COAST Project



- The project is called Committee on Earth Observation Satellites—Coastal Observations, Applications, Services, and Tools (CEOS COAST).
- The pilot projects are uniquely capable of using Earth Observation technologies to meet several of the 17 UN-designated sustainable development goals for the Ocean Decade initiative
- It aims to improve the accuracy of coastal data based on satellite and land-based observations

- The project was recently endorsed by the International Oceanographic Commission (IOC) as an initial Action of the United Nation's Ocean Decade plan that will span from 2021–2030

### **Theme of the Project**

- The themes of these projects include
  - a. disaster risk reduction
  - b. coastal resilience among continental shorelines and small island nations.
- The CEOS COAST has been working collaboratively with stakeholders in industries such as agriculture, construction, and commercial/recreational fishing to support all forms of decision makers from parents deciding which beach to take their kids to, to sailors navigating the coast, to policymakers taking action on climate change and more.

### **Related Information**

#### **About National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

- The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is an American scientific agency within the United States Department of Commerce that focuses on the conditions of the oceans, major waterways, and the atmosphere.
- NOAA warns of dangerous weather, charts seas, guides the use and protection of ocean and coastal resources and conducts research to provide the understanding and improve stewardship of the environment.

### **National Anti-Profiteering Authority (NAA)**

#### **(Topic- GS Paper III –Economics, Source- The Hindu)**

#### **Why in the news?**

- Recently, National Anti-Profiteering Authority (NAA) has directed GST officials across the country to ensure that the tax rate cuts notified on some COVID-19-related essentials are passed on to consumers.

#### **About National Anti-Profiteering Authority (NAPA)**

- It has been constituted under Section 171 of the Central Goods and Services Tax Act, 2017.
- It is to ensure the reduction in rate of tax or the benefit of input tax credit is passed on to the recipient by way of commensurate reduction in prices.

#### **Core Functions**



- The Authority's core function is to ensure that the benefits of the reduction in GST rates on goods and services made by GST Council and proportional change in the Input tax credit passed on to the ultimate consumers and recipient respectively by way of reduction in the prices by the suppliers.

### **Composition**

- The National Anti-profiteering Authority shall be headed by a senior officer of the level of a Secretary to the Government of India and shall have four technical members from the Centre and/or the States. Powers and functions of the authority

### **Power**

- It has the power to order the business concerned to reduce its prices or return the undue benefit availed along with interest to the recipient of the goods or services.
- If the undue benefit cannot be passed on to the recipient, it can be ordered to be deposited in the Consumer Welfare Fund.
- In extreme cases the National Anti-profiteering Authority can impose a penalty on the defaulting business entity and even order the cancellation of its registration under GST.

### **MCA expands small firm definition**


**(Topic- GS Paper III –Economics, Source- The Hindu)**

### **Why in the news?**

- The ministry of corporate affairs has recently expanded the definition of small and medium companies (SMC), raising their turnover and borrowing limits.

### **Definition of small firm**

**RAISING THE BAR** New thresholds for small and medium companies (SMCs)



▶ Turnover not exceeding **₹250 crore, up from ₹50 crore**

---

▶ Borrowings not more than **₹50 crore, up from ₹10 crore**

---

▶ An SMC cannot be a bank, financial institution or an insurance company

- The small and medium companies as unlisted entities which are not banks, financial institutions or insurance firms and have a turnover of up to Rs 250 crore and borrowings up to Rs 50 crore in the immediately preceding accounting year.
- The threshold has been Rs 50 crore and Rs 10 crore for turnover and borrowings under the general accounting standards.

#### **Why has the definition been changed?**

- The threshold of Small and Medium Companies (SMC) has been increased to enable a wider set of companies to follow simplified accounting standards.
- The existing company which was not a small and medium company previously but became so subsequently would not be able to avail of any exemptions in accounting standards.
- It can avail of these exemptions if it continues as a small and medium company for two consecutive accounting periods.
- The simplified accounting standards involve less complexity in its application in terms of the number of required disclosures which are less onerous.

#### **Ramgarh Vishdhari wildlife sanctuary**

**(Topic- GS Paper III –Environment, Source- TOI)**

#### **Why in the news?**

- Recently, the Rajasthan is poised to get its fourth tiger reserve after Ramgarh Vishdhari wildlife sanctuary received a nod from the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)'s technical committee.
- In 2013, the Rajasthan government had upgraded Mukundra hills sanctuary as the third tiger reserve.

### **Reason for declared its as a Tiger reserve**

- The tigers were believed to have disappeared from the sanctuary in 1999.
- The total area of 1,017 sq. km that has been identified as the reserve area comprising two forest blocks of Bhilwara, territorial forest block of Bundi and Indargarh, which falls under buffer zone of Ranthambore Tiger Reserve (RTR).
- The upgrade in the status is expected to strengthen the ongoing tiger conservation efforts in the state.

### **Background**

- In 1982, a part of the forest was declared as Ramgarh Vishdhari Wildlife Sanctuary under Section 5 of the Rajasthan Wild Animals and Birds Protection Act, 1951.
- The core area of the Ramgarh Vishdhari has eight villages.
- The sanctuary currently has leopards, sambhars, chitals, wildboars, smaller cats, caracals, chinkaras and nilgai.

### **Related Information**

#### **About National Tiger Conservation Authority**

- It is a statutory body under the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change.
- It was established in 2005 following the recommendations of the Tiger Task Force.
- It was constituted under enabling provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, as amended in 2006, for strengthening tiger conservation, as per powers and functions assigned to it.

#### **Conservation efforts- National and Global**

#### **Monitoring System for Tigers – Intensive Protection and Ecological Status (M-STrIPES)**

- It has been launched by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA).
- It is a mobile monitoring system for forest guards.

### **T X 2**

- At the Petersburg Tiger Summit in 2010, leaders of 13 tiger range countries resolved to do more for the tiger and embarked on efforts to double its number in the wild, with a popular slogan 'T X 2'.

#### **Global Tiger Initiative**

- The Global Tiger Initiative (GTI) program of the World Bank, using its presence and convening ability, brought global partners together to strengthen the tiger agenda.

## **Project Tiger**

- Project Tiger is an ongoing Centrally Sponsored Scheme of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change providing central assistance to the tiger States for tiger conservation in designated tiger reserves.
- It has been launched way back in 1973.

## **Census of Tiger**

- India now has as many as 2,967 tigers in the wild, with more than half of them in Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka, according to the latest tiger estimation report for 2018.
- The population of tigers have increased by 33% since the last census in 2014 when the total estimate was 2,226.

## **Digital Skill Champions Programme**

**(Topic- GS Paper III –Economics, Source- The Hindu)**

### **Why in the news?**

- The National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and WhatsApp have recently launched its Digital Skill Champions Programme.

### **About the Digital Skill Champions Programme**

#### **Aims**

- It aims to train Indian youth on digital skills to make them employment ready.
- The partnership identifies two broad areas of collaboration – WhatsApp Digital Skills Academy, and Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendra (PMKK) and WhatsApp Business App Training sessions.

### **Digital Skill Champions' certification**

- Through this programme, school and university students would be coached to imbibe digital and online skills that would culminate with WhatsApp and NSDC awarding 'Digital Skill Champions' certification.
- The course is based on a module-format, is comprehensive and intensive in imparting knowledge about important aspects of the online ecosystem, equipping students with technology-based learning on campuses across tier III and IV towns and cities in the country.

### **About National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC)**

- It is a public-private-partnership working under the aegis of the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship.
- It aims to promote skill development by catalyzing the creation of large, quality and for-profit vocational institutions.
- It acts as a catalyst in skill development by providing funding to enterprises, companies, and organizations that provide skill training.
- **NSDC is the implementation agency for skills training in the country.**