

UPSC Daily Current Affairs 14 Jun 2021

1. G7 Summit

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

Why in the news ?

- Recently, the 47th G7 summit was held on 11–13 June 2021 in Cornwall in the United Kingdom while it holds the presidency of the G7.

Key outcomes of the G7 Summit

Making a commitment
A look at some of the key outcomes of the G7 summit

- G7 to donate 1 billion vaccine doses to developing nations
- G7 to Build Back Better World (B3W) alternative infrastructure initiative to counter China's BRI
- It reaffirms tax deal for global minimum corporate tax rates
- It calls for inquiry into the origins of COVID-19
- PM calls on tech companies and social media platforms to ensure a safe cyber environment for all

To Build Back Better World (B3W) initiative

- It is a new global infrastructure initiative Build Back Better World (B3W) to help developing nations, countering China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
- It has been proposed by the U.S President.
- The initiative is a values-driven, high-standard, and transparent infrastructure partnership led by major democracies to help narrow the over 40 trillion Dollar infrastructure need in the developing world, which has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The B3W will collectively catalyze hundreds of billions of dollars of infrastructure investment for low and middle income countries in the coming years.

TRIPs (Intellectual Property Rights) waiver

- Prime Minister of India has sought “strong support” from the G7 countries for the joint India-South Africa proposal for a TRIPs (Intellectual Property Rights) waiver for coronavirus-related medicines and vaccines.
- The G7 countries all supported “text-based negotiations” on the TRIPs waiver proposal, although the European Union is yet to endorse it.

To boost climate finance

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- G7 leaders agreed to raise their contributions to meet an overdue spending pledge of \$100 billion a year to help poorer countries cut carbon emissions and cope with global warming, calling on other developed countries to join the effort.
- In the communique, the seven nations — the U.S., Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan — reaffirmed their commitment to “jointly mobilise \$100 billion per year from public and private sources, through to 2025”.

Contribution of G7 in Global Carbon emissions

- The G7 countries account for 20% of global carbon emissions.

One Earth One health approach

- Prime Minister of India calls for open vaccine chains, ‘one world, one health’ approached during the session, titled ‘Building Back Stronger – Health’, focussed on global recovery from the pandemic and strengthening resilience against future pandemics.
- It was supported by German Chancellor Angela Merkel.
- India’s emphasis on keeping “open supply chains for vaccine raw materials and components to help enhance vaccine production received widespread support”.
- This came days after French President Emanuel Macron supported India’s demand for lifting restrictions on export of raw materials needed to manufacture vaccines.

About G7 Countries

- It stands for “Group of Seven” industrialized nations.
- It is a group consisting of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK, and the US.
- EU is also represented within the G7.
- It was formerly called G8 with Russia in it, but due to Crimean crisis Russia was ejected from the group
- It is an informal bloc and takes no mandatory decisions, so the leaders’ declarations at the end of the summit are not binding.

2. Rare earth metals at the heart of China-U.S. rivalry

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, there is a dilemma among the US and EU that what if China were to cut off the U.S. and Europe from access to rare minerals that are essential to electric vehicles, wind turbines and drones?

More on the news

- At a time of frequent geopolitical friction among those three powers, Washington and Brussels want to avoid this scenario by investing in the market for 17 minerals with unique properties that today are largely extracted and refined in China.

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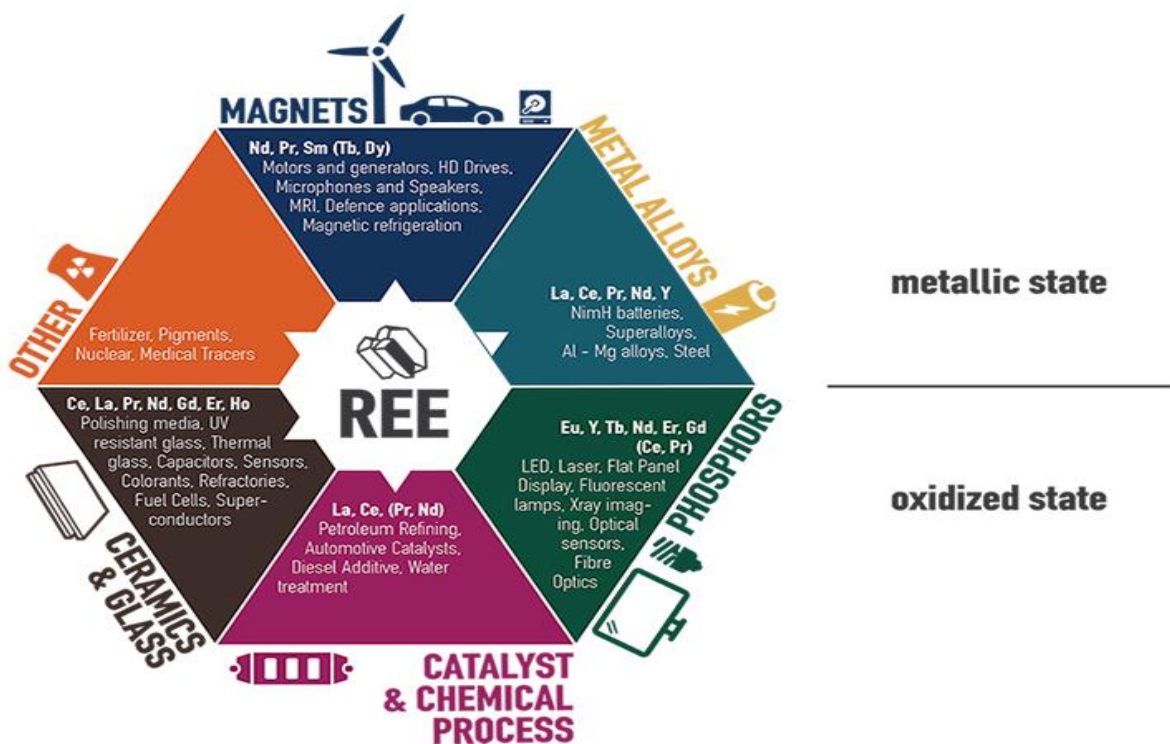
Law Passed By the US

- Recently, the U.S. Senate passed a law aimed at improving American competitiveness that includes provisions to improve critical minerals supply chains.
- U.S. aims to boost production and processing of rare earths and lithium, another key mineral component, while “working with allies to increase sustainable global supply and reduce reliance on competitors.

Heavy dependence

- According to the U.S. Geological Survey, in 2019 the U.S. imported 80% of its rare earth minerals from China.
- The EU gets 98% of its supply from China, the European Commission said last year.
- Rare earth minerals, with names like neodymium, praseodymium and dysprosium, are crucial to the manufacture of magnets used in industries of the future, such as wind turbines and electric cars.
- They are already being used in consumer goods such as smartphones, computer screens and telescopic lenses.

About Rare Earth Elements



- The rare earths minerals (REM) are a set of seventeen metallic elements.

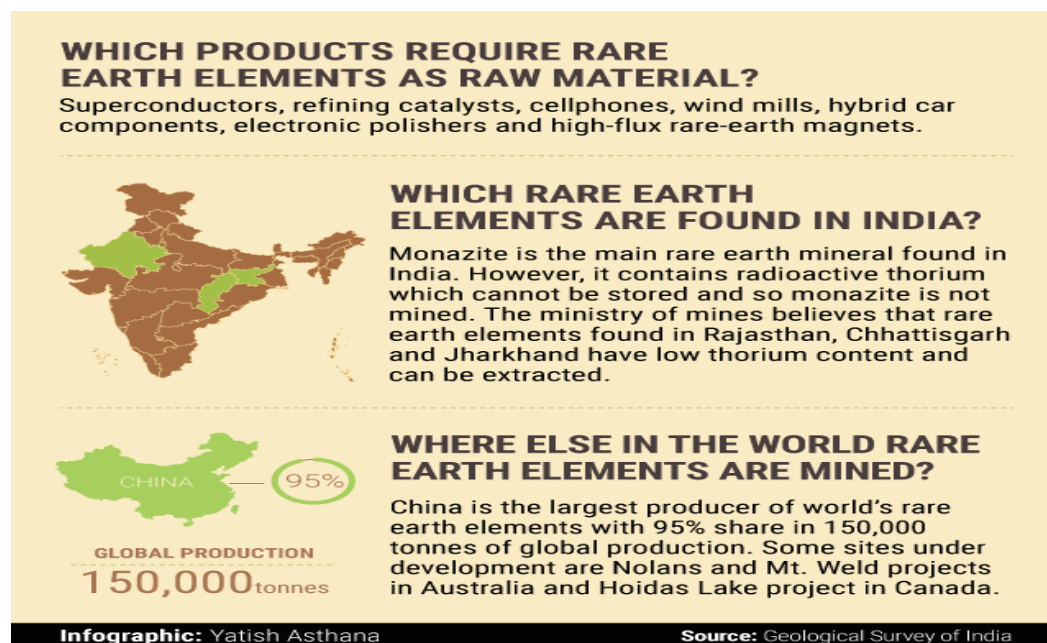
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- These include the fifteen lanthanides on the periodic table in addition to scandium and yttrium that show similar physical and chemical properties to the lanthanides.
- The REMs have unique catalytic, metallurgical, nuclear, electrical, magnetic and luminescent properties.

Strategic importance of REMs



- They have distinctive electrical, metallurgical, catalytic, nuclear, magnetic and luminescent properties.
- Its usage range from daily use (e.g., lighter flints, glass polishing mediums, car alternators) to high-end technology (lasers, magnets, batteries, fibre-optic telecommunication cables).
- Even futuristic technologies need these REMs (For example high-temperature superconductivity, safe storage and transport of hydrogen for a post-hydrocarbon economy, environmental global warming and energy efficiency issues).
- Due to their unique magnetic, luminescent, and electrochemical properties, they help in technologies perform with reduced weight, reduced emissions, and energy consumption; therefore give them greater efficiency, performance, miniaturization, speed, durability, and thermal stability.

3. Pulitzer Prize

(Topic- GS Paper I +II – Art and Culture + IR, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, **Megha Rajagopalan, an Indian-origin journalist**, along with two contributors, has won the Pulitzer Prize.

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- They got the Pulitzer prize for innovative investigative reports that exposed a vast infrastructure of prisons and mass internment camps secretly built by China for detaining hundreds of thousands of Muslims in its restive Xinjiang region.

About Pulitzer Prize

- It is awarded for outstanding public service and achievement in American journalism, letters, and music.
- It is awarded in the name of Joseph Pulitzer, a newspaper publisher who gave money in his will to Columbia University to launch a journalism school and establish the Prize.
- It was established in 1917 and is administered by Columbia University and Pulitzer Prize Board.

Related Information

About Xinjiang detention camps

- Recently, Uyghur survivors of detention camps in the Xinjiang region of China have told a London tribunal that prisoners there are routinely raped, tortured and forcibly sterilised.
- Other detainees, mostly healthy men and women aged between 20 and 30, have disappeared in captivity and are presumed to have died after their organs were removed to service China's lucrative black-market trade in transplant surgery.
- The violence against Uyghurs and other Muslim groups in Xinjiang has coincided with a draconian suppression of religious practice in the region and the destruction, defacement or closure of mosques, shrines, Muslim cemeteries and other sacred spaces.

Who are the Uighurs?

- There are about 12 million Uighurs, mostly Muslim, living in north-western China in the region of Xinjiang, officially known as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR).
- The Uighurs speaks their own language, similar to Turkish, and sees themselves as culturally and ethnically close to Central Asian nations.
- They make up less than half of the Xinjiang population.

About Xinjiang

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- Xinjiang, an autonomous territory in northwest China, is a vast region of deserts and mountains.
- It is bordered by the Chinese provinces of Qinghai and Gansu to the east, the Tibet Autonomous Region to the south, Afghanistan and the disputed territory of Kashmir to the southwest, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to the west, Kazakhstan to the northwest, Russia to the north, and Mongolia to the northeast.
- Its home too many ethnic minority groups, including the Turkic Uyghur people.
- The ancient Silk Road trade route linking China and the Middle East passed through Xinjiang.
- **It is China's largest political unit.**
- **Its capital is at Ürümqi (Wulumuqi)**

4. Northern Ireland

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

Why in the news ?

- Recently, Britain accused European Union leaders of holding the “offensive” view that Northern Ireland is not fully part of the United Kingdom, as Brexit cast a shadow over the Group of Seven summit.

More on the news

- Britain and the EU are in a spat over post-Brexit trade arrangements that could see British sausages banned from entering Northern Ireland, the only part of the U.K. that borders the 27-nation bloc.
- The dispute is raising political tensions in Northern Ireland, where some people identify as British and some as Irish.

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- Relations between Britain and the EU have soured since the U.K. made its final break from the bloc at the end of 2020, more than four years after voting to leave.

Related Information

- The terms United Kingdom, Great Britain, and England have separate identity.



- "Great Britain" is often used to refer to England, Scotland and Wales, including their component adjoining islands.
- The United Kingdom is a sovereign state that includes England, Scotland, Wales (Great Britain) and Northern Ireland.
- The single Kingdom of Great Britain resulted from the 1707 Acts of Union between the kingdoms of England (which at the time incorporated Wales) and Scotland.
- England is a country within the UK.

5. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, the U.N. General Assembly has approved the nomination of Costa Rican economist **Rebecca Grynspan to head the U.N. agency promoting trade and development.**
- **She became the first woman and Central American to lead the Geneva-based organization.**
- She was nominated by Secretary-General Antonio Guterres as secretary-general of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, known as UNCTAD.

More on the news

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- Since 2014, Grynspan has been secretary-general of the Ibero-American General Secretariat, which supports preparations **for Ibero-American summits**.
- From 2010 to 2014, she was the deputy administrator of the United Nations Development Program.

About the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

- UNCTAD was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1964 and it reports to the UN General Assembly and United Nations Economic and Social Council.
- The Headquarters of the UNCTAD are located at the Palais des Nations in Geneva
- The primary objective of UNCTAD is to formulate policies relating to all aspects of development including trade, aid, transport, finance and technology.

6. *Pyrostria laljii*: A new species of Coffee

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, a new species, *Pyrostria laljii*, that belongs to the genus of the coffee family has recently been discovered from the Andaman Islands by a team of researchers from India and the Philippines.

About *Pyrostria laljii*



Pyrostria laljii

- This plants belonging to genus *Pyrostria* are usually found in Madagascar.
- The tree is distinguished by a long stem with a whitish coating on the trunk and oblong-obovate leaves with a cuneate base, and was first reported from the Wandoor forest in South Andaman.

Conservation Status

- *Pyrostria laljii* has been assessed as **‘Critically Endangered’** based on the International Union for Conservation of Nature’s (IUCN) Red List criteria.

Significance

- The discovery was unique as the species was a big tree and had not been recorded as a new species yet.
- The species has been named *Pyrostria laljii* after Lal Ji Singh, Joint Director and Head of Office, Andaman and Nicobar Regional Centre, Botanical Survey of India.

7. Operation Olivia

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

Why in the news ?

- Every year, the Indian Coast Guard’s “Operation Olivia”, initiated in the early 1980s, helps protect Olive Ridley turtles as they congregate along the Odisha coast for breeding and nesting from November to December.
- The Orissa Marine Fisheries Act empowers the Coast Guard as one of its enforcement agencies.

About the Olive ridley turtles



- These are the smallest and most abundant of all sea turtles found in the world.
- These turtles are carnivores and get their name from their olive colored carapace.

Habitat

- They are found in warm waters of the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian oceans.

Conservation Status

- These are listed as **Vulnerable** in the **IUCN Red List**.
- In **CITES** these are listed in **Appendix I**
- Listed in **Schedule I of Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972**

Step Taken for Conservation

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- The Odisha government has recently made it mandatory for trawls to use **Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs)**, a net specially designed with an exit cover which allows the turtles to escape while retaining the catch.

8. EnVision mission to Venus

(Topic- GS Paper III –Science and Technology, Source- Indian Express)

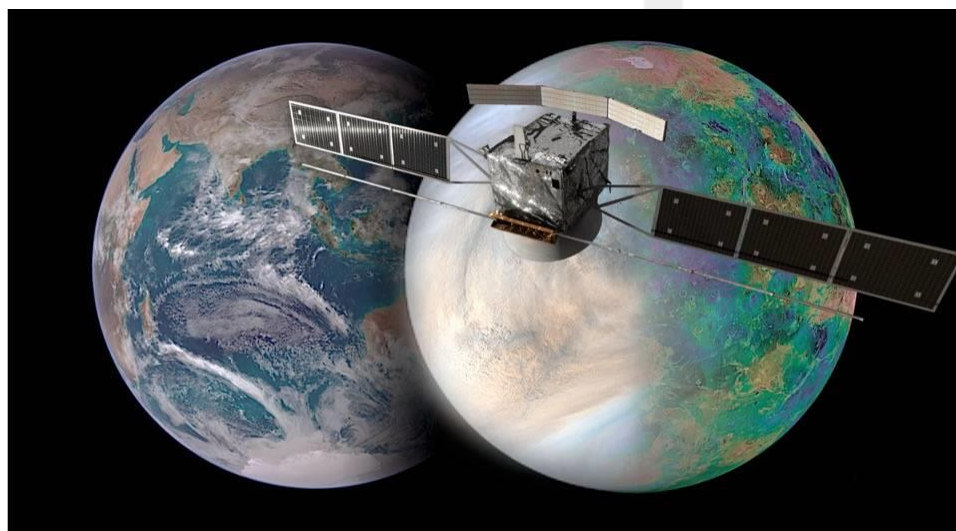
Why in the news?

- Recently, the European Space Agency (ESA) has announced that it has selected EnVision as its next orbiter that will visit Venus sometime in the 2030s.

Previous Mission

- NASA had selected two missions called DAVINCI+ and VERITAS to the planet Venus based on their potential for scientific value and the feasibility of their development plans.
- NASA is expected to allot \$500 million to each of these missions that will launch between 2028-2030.

About EnVision



- EnVision is an ESA led mission with contributions from NASA.
- It is likely to be launched sometime in the 2030s.
- The earliest launch opportunity for EnVision is 2031, followed by 2032 and 2033.
- Once launched on an Ariane 6 rocket, the spacecraft will take about 15 months to reach Venus and will take 16 more months to achieve orbit circularisation.
- The spacecraft will carry a range of instruments to study the planet's atmosphere and surface, monitor trace gases in the atmosphere and analyse its surface composition.
- A radar provided by NASA will help to image and map the surface.

Venus Express' (2005-2014)

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- EnVision will follow another ESA-led mission to Venus called ‘Venus Express’ (2005-2014) that focussed on atmospheric research and pointed to volcanic hotspots on the planet’s surface.
- Other than this, **Japan’s Akatsuki spacecraft** has also been studying the planet’s atmosphere since 2015.

Why are scientists interested in studying Venus?

- At the core of the ESA’s mission is the question of how Earth and Venus evolved so differently from each other considering that they are roughly of the same size and composition.
- Venus is the hottest planet in the solar system because of the heat that is trapped by its thick cloud cover.
- The scientists speculate about the existence of life on Venus in its distant past and the possibility that life may exist in the top layers of its clouds where temperatures are less extreme.
- Last year, a team of scientists reported that they had found phosphine gas (a chemical produced only through biological processes) in the atmosphere of Venus that triggered excitement in the scientific community that some life forms might be supported by the planet.
- But the existence of life on the planet is nearly impossible given the high temperatures of Venus and its acidic atmosphere.
- Even so, this discovery could mean that life forms could have existed on Venus before when it was habitable.
- **As per this theory, the discovery of phosphine could simply be remnants from the past.**