

## UPSC Daily Current Affairs 24 AUG 2021

### Egypt closes Gaza border amid tensions with Hamas

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

#### Why in the news?

- Egypt has recently closed its main border crossing point with the Gaza Strip amid tensions with the territory's militant Hamas rulers.

#### Israel- Palestine conflict- Historical Background

- The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the world's longest-running and most controversial conflicts.
- It claims to have its roots in 957 BC when King Solomon built the first temple in the Israelite kingdom.
- The temple was destroyed by Nebuchadrezzar II of Babylonia in 587/586 BC.
- Though both the Jews and the Arab Muslims date their claims to the land back a couple of thousand years, the current political conflict began in the early 20th century.

#### A 100-year-old issue

- After the Ottoman Empire was defeated in World War I, the British took control of the area known as Palestine.
- The land was inhabited by a Jewish minority and Arab majority.
- Tensions between the two peoples grew when the international community gave Britain the task of establishing a "national home" in Palestine for the Jewish people.
- For the Jews, it was their ancestral home.
- However, the Palestinian Arabs also claimed the land and opposed the move.
- The Jews, fleeing persecution in Europe and seeking a homeland after the Holocaust of WWII, arrived in huge numbers between the 1920s and 1940s.
- The swelling numbers led to violence between the Arabs and the Jews and resentment against British rule.
- In 1947, the United Nations voted for Palestine to be split into separate Jewish and Arab states, with Jerusalem becoming an international city.
- That plan was accepted by Jewish leaders but rejected by the Arab side and never implemented.

#### How do things stand now?

- Tensions are always high between Israel and Palestinians living in East Jerusalem, Gaza and the West Bank.
- Gaza is ruled by a Palestinian militant group called Hamas, which has fought Israel many times. Israel and Egypt tightly control Gaza's borders.
- Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank say they're suffering because of Israeli actions and restrictions. Israel says it is only acting to protect itself from Palestinian violence.

### **For Palestinians**

— Most Palestinian refugees and their descendants live in Gaza and the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

— Neither they nor their descendants have been allowed to return to their homes by Israel

— Palestinians claim East Jerusalem as the capital of a future Palestinian state.

### **For Israel**

— Israel says allowing Palestinians to return to their homes would overwhelmingly threaten its existence as a Jewish state.

— It still occupies the West Bank, and although it pulled out of Gaza, the United Nations still regards it as part of occupied territory.

— **Israel claims the whole of Jerusalem as its capital.**

Peace talks have been taking place on and off for more than 25 years, but to no avail.

### **About Hamas**

- Hamas is internationally recognised as a radical Islamic terror organisation.
- Its ultimate goal, which is specified in its charter, is not to establish a Palestinian state, but rather to destroy Israel.
- In 2006, when Hamas won elections in Palestinian territories, they refused to respect the existing written agreements between Israel and the Palestinian leadership, committing to non-violent dialogue and recognition of Israel.
- Hamas forcefully and violently seized power in Gaza and diverted billions of dollars of aid meant for building schools, hospitals and civic amenities to build terror tunnels and rockets meant for destroying Israel.

### **About Gaza Strip**



- The Gaza Strip is a self-governing Palestinian territory on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea.
- It borders Egypt on the southwest and Israel on the east and north border.
- Gaza and the West Bank are claimed by the de jure sovereign State of Palestine.

### Yuktdhara: Geospatial Planning Portal

(Topic- GS Paper II–Governance, Source-Economics Times)

#### Why in the news?

- Union Minister has recently launched a new portal under Bhuvan “Yuktdhara”.

#### About Yuktdhara Portal

- The “Yuktdhara” Geospatial Planning Portal will serve as a repository of assets (Geotags) created under various national rural development programmes i.e. MGNREGA, Integrated Watershed Management Programme, Per Drop More Crop and Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana etc., along with field photographs.
- This portal integrates a wide variety of thematic layers, multi-temporal high-resolution earth observation data with analysis tools.
- Planners will analyse previous assets under various schemes and facilitates the identification of new works using online tools.
- Plans prepared will be evaluated by appropriate authorities under State Departments.
- Thus, Yuktdhara based plans will be prepared by grassroots functionaries and verified by appropriate authorities for relevance and resource allocation.

#### Significance

- The portal would ensure the quality of the plan and enable a long term monitoring of the assets created over the years.

- It will help in G2G service for rural planning in support of decentralized decision making.

### Smog tower

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

#### Why in the news?

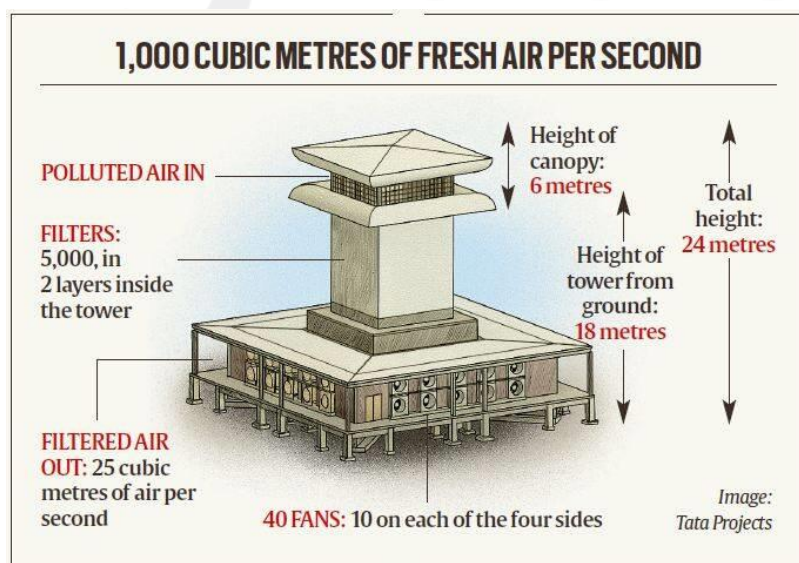
- Chief Minister of Delhi has recently inaugurated the country's first 'smog tower,' on an experimental basis.

#### About Smog towers

- These are the structures designed as large-scale air purifiers to reduce air pollution particles.

#### Components of smog tower

- The structure is 24 m high, about as much as an 8-storey building — an 18-metre concrete tower, topped by a 6-metre-high canopy. At its base are 40 fans, 10 on each side.
- Each fan can discharge 25 cubic metres per second of air, adding up to 1,000 cubic metres per second for the tower as a whole.



#### How does it work?

- The tower uses a 'downdraft air cleaning system' developed by the University of Minnesota.

- Polluted air is sucked in at a height of 24 m, and filtered air is released at the bottom of the tower, at a height of about 10 m from the ground.
- When the fans at the bottom of the tower operate, the negative pressure created sucks in air from the top.
- The ‘macro’ layer in the filter traps particles of 10 microns and larger, while the ‘micro’ layer filters smaller particles of around 0.3 microns.

### **Different from China**

- The downdraft method is different from the system used in China, where a 60-metre smog tower in Xian city uses an ‘updraft’ system — air is sucked in from near the ground, and is propelled upwards by heating and convection. Filtered air is released at the top of the tower.

### **Note:**

- According to the World Health Organization (WHO), India is home to six of the top 10 polluted cities in the world with Delhi sitting on the top of the list.

## **National Monetisation Pipeline**

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

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

- The union finance minister has recently launched the National Monetisation Pipeline.

### **Background**

- The plan is in line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's strategic divestment policy, under which the government will retain a presence in only a few identified areas with the rest tapping the private sector.

### **About National Monetisation Pipeline**

- NMP is envisaged to serve as a medium-term roadmap for identifying potential monetisation-ready projects, across various infrastructure sectors.
- The NMP has been prepared after insights, feedback and experiences consolidated through multi-stakeholder consultations undertaken by Niti Aayog, the finance ministry and infrastructure line ministries.

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## Aims

- Through the National Monetisation Pipeline, the government aims to raise \$81 billion by leasing out state-owned infrastructure assets over the next four years.
- This will help fund new capital expenditure without pressuring government finances.
- The proposal involves handing assets including roads, railways, airports, sports stadiums, power transmission lines and gas pipelines to private operators.

The framework for monetisation of core asset monetisation has three key imperatives:

- a. The monetisation of rights, not ownership (this means the assets will have to be handed back at the end of transaction life,
- b. Brownfield de-risked assets and stable revenue streams,
- c. Structured partnerships under defined contractual frameworks with strike KPIs and performance standards.

## Urban Co-operative Banks

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

### Why in the news?

- RBI appointed panel has recently submitted a report on urban cooperative banks (UCBs).

### Background

- In February 2021, RBI had the constitution of the Expert Committee on Primary (Urban) Co-operative Banks under the chairmanship of **N S Vishwanathan, former RBI Deputy Governor.**

### Key highlights

- The committee appointed by RBI has suggested a four-tier structure for the urban cooperative banks (UCBs) depending upon the deposits and prescribed different capital adequacy and regulatory norms for them based on their sizes.
- The UCBs can be split into four categories –
  - a. Tier-1 with deposits up to Rs 100 crore;
  - b. Tier-2 with deposits between Rs 100-Rs 1,000 crore,
  - c. Tier-3 with deposits between Rs 1,000 crore to Rs 10,000



- d. Tier-4 with deposits of over Rs 10,000 crore.
- It has been suggested that the minimum Capital to Risk-Weighted Assets Ratio (CRAR) for them could vary **from 9 per cent to 15 per cent and for Tier-4 UCBs the Basel III prescribed norms.**
- It also prescribed separate ceilings for home loans, loans against gold ornaments and unsecured loans for different categories of UCBs.

### **Other recommendation**

#### **On consolidation of UCBs**

- The panel in reports said that RBI should be largely neutral to voluntary consolidation except where it is suggested as a supervisory action.
- The minimum capital stipulation provides an embedded size to a UCB.

#### **Resolution of UCBs**

- Regarding its recommendations on the resolution of UCBs, the committee said that under the Banking Regulation (BR) Act, the RBI can prepare a scheme of compulsory amalgamation or reconstruction of UCBs, like banking companies.
- This may be resorted to when the required voluntary actions are not forthcoming or leading to desired results.

#### **Supervisory Action Framework (SAF)**

- It should follow a twin-indicator approach -- it should consider only asset quality and capital measured through NNPA and CRAR -- instead of triple indicators at present.
- The objective of the SAF should be to find a time-bound remedy to the financial stress of a bank.
- If a UCB remains under more stringent stages of SAF for a prolonged period, it may have an adverse effect on its operations and may further erode its financial position.

#### **Amendments to the Banking Regulation Act**

- It suggested that amendments to the BR Act empowering the RBI to declare certain securities issued by UCBs as covered under the Securities Contract Regulation Act to facilitate their listing and trading in a recognised stock exchange may be made.

### **Related Information**

#### **About Co-operative Banks**

- Co-operative banks, which are distinct from commercial banks, were born out of the concept of cooperative credit societies where members from a community band together to extend loans to each other, at favourable terms.
- Credit co-operatives (or co-operative banks) are broadly classified into **urban or rural co-operative banks based on their region of operation.**
- Urban co-operative banks are classified into **scheduled and non-scheduled banks.**

### **Difference between Scheduled commercial banks and co-operative banks**

#### **Regulation**

- The UCBs are only partly regulated by the RBI whereas Scheduled commercial banks are fully regulated by RBI.
- While their banking operations are regulated by the RBI, which lays down their capital adequacy, risk control and lending norms, their management and resolution in the case of distress is regulated by the Registrar of Co-operative Societies either under the State or Central government.

#### **Borrower can be a Shareholder**

- In general for a commercial bank, there is a clear distinction between its shareholders and its borrowers whereas in a UCB, borrowers can even double up as shareholders.

#### **Structured**

- Unlike commercial banks which are structured as joint stock companies, UCBs are structured as co-operatives, with their members carrying unlimited liability.

### **EXERCISE KONKAN 2021**

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(Topic- GS Paper III–Defence, Source-PIB)

### Why in the news?

- Exercise Konkan 2021 was recently held between Indo-UK Naval in the English Channel.

### About EXERCISE KONKAN 2021



- It is a bilateral naval exercise conducted between India and the United Kingdom.
- The Konkan series of exercises was started in 2004.
- Since then, the exercise is hosted in rotation by both the Navies and has grown in complexity, scale, and intensity.

### Other Exercises between India and UK:

- a. Exercise 'Indradhanush' (Air Force Exercise)
- b. Ajeya Warrior (Joint Military Exercise)

### About the English Channel

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- It is an arm of the Atlantic Ocean that separates southern England from northern France.

### Links

- It links to the southern part of the North Sea by **the Strait of Dover at its northeastern end.**
- It is the busiest shipping area in the world.
- It is the smallest of the shallow seas around the continental shelf of Europe.

### NTPC commissions largest Floating Solar PV Project in the country

(Topic- GS Paper III–Environment, Source-PIB)

### Why in the news?

- The National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC ) Ltd has recently commissioned the largest floating solar PV project under the Flexibilisation Scheme.

### Floating Solar Power Project

- It is a 25MW Solar PV Project on the reservoir of Simhadri thermal station in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh.
- It is the solar project to be set up under the Flexibilisation Scheme.
- The project has the potential to generate electricity from more than 1 lakh solar PV modules.
- It will also ensure CO2 emission reduction of at least 46,000 tons every year during the lifespan of this project.

### About Flexibilisation Scheme

- It was launched by the Government of India in the year 2018.
- The scheme allows power generation companies to meet their supply obligations via renewable power instead of thermal power alone.
- Under the scheme, any power generating company having coal/lignite/gas-based thermal generating stations may establish or procure renewable energy generating capacity anywhere in the country, either at existing stations or at new locations.

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