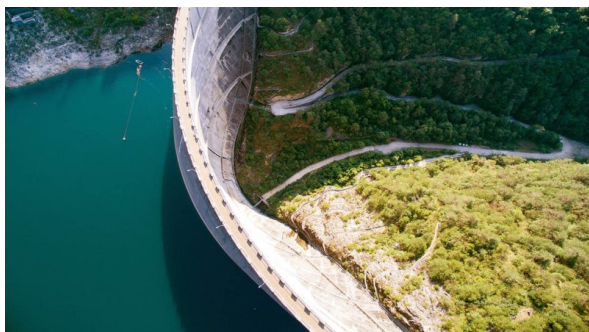


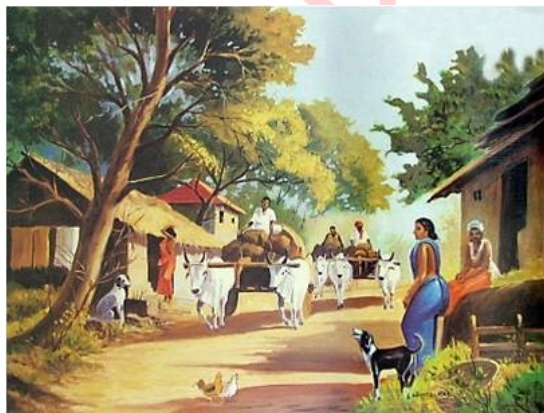
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Lalandar (Shatoot) Dam



- India and Afghanistan have signed a Memorandum of Understanding MoU over video-teleconferencing (VTC), for the construction of the Shahtoot Dam (Lalander Dam) on a tributary of the Kabul river in Afghanistan.
- The project, which costs nearly \$ 300 million, is a part of the New Development Partnership between India and Afghanistan.
- The project is a part of the New Development Partnership between India and Afghanistan.
- The Lalander [Shatoot] Dam would meet the safe drinking water needs of Kabul City, provide irrigation water to nearby areas, rehabilitate the existing irrigation and drainage network, aid in flood protection and management efforts in the area, and also provide electricity to the region.
- This is the second major dam being built by India in Afghanistan, after the India-Afghanistan Friendship Dam (Salma Dam), which was inaugurated by the Prime Minister and the President in June 2016.

Mera Gaon Mera Gaurav

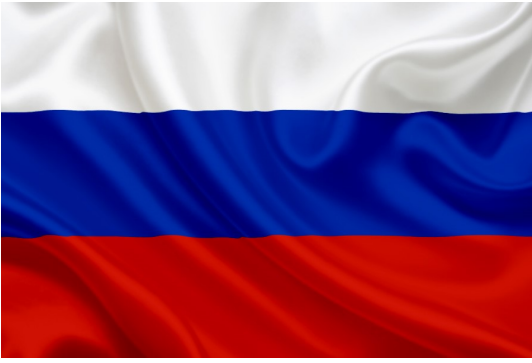


- The scheme was launched in 2015.
- The scheme envisages scientists to select villages as per their convenience and remain in touch with the selected villages and provide information to the farmers on technical and other related aspects of agriculture in a time frame through personal visits or on telephone.
- They may function with the help of Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) and Agriculture Technology Management Agency (ATMA).

Objectives of this scheme

- To provide farmers with required information, knowledge and advisories on a regular basis by adopting villages.
- To promote the direct interface of scientists with the farmers to hasten the lab to land process.
- To ensure that farmers benefit from best farm practices by providing required information, knowledge and advisories on regular basis by adopting villages
- To create awareness among farmers about the organisations and their programmes and schemes as well as government policies related to the farming sector.

The Russian Foreign Policy in 2020



- In 2020, Russia's foreign policy focused on making better use of the potential for international cooperation in the interests of protecting national security, promoting the country's socio economic development and encouraging approaches to current global and regional problems that meet the interests of Russia.
- Russia proposed a positive unifying agenda in the name of global stability and predictability and stronger central role of the UN as the main coordinating agency of international politics.
- Russia urged its partners to stop playing zero sum games and to abandon double standards in favour of an open and honest dialogue.
- Seeking to start a serious and frank discussion on the principles of interstate interaction and ways to address a current problems,
- President of Russia Vladimir Putin put forth an initiative of holding a summit meeting of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, which they supported in principle and which the international community welcomed.
- Activities within the framework of the Russian
- initiative for creating a Greater Eurasian Partnership have reached a new level: the Joint Commission on implementing the Agreement on Trade and Economic Cooperation between the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the People's Republic of China held its first meeting, and the updated programme of cooperation between the Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC) and ASEAN until 2025 has been approved.
- The Greater Eurasia concept was supported in the final documents of the SCO heads of state and government meetings.
- Russian-Indian dialogue was very productive, including within multilateral formats.
- In February, India hosted a meeting of the Russian-Indian Defence Industry Conference, and in September, the Indra Navy-20 joint naval manoeuvres

Quad Countries To Arrange First Meeting, Amid China's Growing Influence



- Members of the Quad framework- the US, India, Japan and Australia – are working to arrange the first meeting of their leaders amid China's growing clout in the region, reported the Japan Times.

- The move comes as the US President Joe Biden's new administration appears eager to build on renewed attention to the grouping of the four major Indo-Pacific democracies, with national security adviser Jake Sullivan calling it "a foundation upon which to build substantial American policy in the Indo-Pacific", reported the daily quoting a source.
- According to the source, the US has already proposed to other countries the idea of holding an online meeting of the Quad leaders.
- During the envisioned meeting, the Quad members are expected to discuss cooperation for the realisation of a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" amid concerns over China's maritime assertiveness in the region. It is speculated that China may react with displeasure to the meeting.
- The Japan Times reported that for the first time under the Quad framework, the foreign ministers of the four countries met in New York in 2019.
- The four countries held another meeting last year in Tokyo during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- During the October meeting, then-US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has reprimanded the dragon (China) for using its economic power to increase its hegemony over the neighbouring countries in South Asia.
- Pompeo brought to the forum a denunciation of China's "exploitation, corruption, and coercion" of neighbouring countries. He said, "This is for the soul of the world.
- This is about whether this will be a world that operates in this sense that we're on a rules-based international order system or one that's dominated by a coercive totalitarian regime like the one in China."
- The Quad initiative is expected to put an end to the economic coercion tactics of China and cooperation with Japan and other allies will checkmate Chinese development assistance and its hegemony in the region.

Garud Special Forces



- During the three-day Aero India air show held this week, the elite Garud Special Forces operatives provided counter-terrorism cover to the prestigious event.
- India's youngest Special Forces 'Garud' has acted as a force multiplier in the Air Force and is presently deployed on China border in substantial numbers where they were deployed soon after the Chinese transgressions in March-April time frame last year.
- The Garuds have proved their mettle in counter-terrorism operations with the Indian Army as they eliminated around 10 terrorists, including the nephew of international terrorist Zaki ur Rehman Lakhvi in 2017, in a prolonged operation spread over months.

- The force was awarded one Ashok Chakra and several other gallantry medals for those operations.

India must return to traditional diplomacy (Vivek Katju)

- The direction of Indian diplomacy's external publicity is no longer confined to other governments, international organisations, external and domestic political and business elites, and conference halls and negotiating tables.
- It now extends to international "celebrities", some of whose status is determined very largely by their pop star status.
- The hash tags attached to the statements lend credence to this view as also the intensely orchestrated social media response from Indian personalities to tweets by Ms. Rihanna and others.
- There is nothing intrinsically wrong in building public opinion; all governments as well as groups do so.
- It is part of the global political and diplomatic processes but must be part of a careful strategy to achieve objectives.
- Mr. Jaishankar tweeted after the MEA statement: "Motivated campaigns targeting India will never succeed. We have the self-confidence today to hold our own. This India will push back".
- On this occasion, was the severe response to Ms. Rihanna's tweet on account of her large social media following while the popular reach of global liberal opinion especially in the Trumpian era was limited?
- Was the object to deter foreign critics from lending their names to "manipulated campaigns"?
- Was it thought that if more celebrities joined, the farmers' protest would be energised?
- Finally, it is not the Rihanna-like celebrities who will pose the real challenge in the coming months to the Narendra Modi government, but liberal opinion in democratic western societies.
- And, it will have far more traction with the advent of the Joe Biden administration in the United States.

Fine-tuning the State-of-the-app technology

(Carsten Maple & Venkat Goli)

- The issue of privacy is crucial for government technology platforms and services as governments typically have a monopoly in providing public services, unlike the private sector.
- The development of COVID-19 mobile apps was well-received and perceived as a strong proactive initiative, especially by sections of the population that were digitally empowered.

- However, as of October, 2020, more than 40% of mobile phone subscribers in India lack access to Internet services.
- This includes those with feature phones that have no Internet and when added to those with no mobile phone at all, India's digitally excluded could be more than 50%.
- Hence, while the creation of mobile applications makes information readily available to those with the technology to access it, it does not solve the problem for individuals and communities that remain excluded digitally.
- The analysis shows that the various mobile apps on COVID-19 operated by the different State governments lack consistency in terms of the features, functionalities, and frequency of information updates they offer.
- As information was being updated manually in many of the mobile applications, the data in the mobile application was different from the actual data, leading to multiple sources of truth.
- Most of these State mobile apps also differ significantly on the data privacy they provide, depending on the information or permissions they request from the user.

Belated, but bold

- The government's spending plans for 2021-22 hinge on better compliance lifting tax collections, and an ambitious plan to raise non-tax revenue.
- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has announced large-scale monetisation of government sector assets, including vast tracts of land, and is banking on disinvestment receipts of ₹1.75-lakh crore.
- This includes likely inflows from the strategic sale of entities such as Air India and BPCL,
- the new strategic disinvestment policy for public sector enterprises and the promise to privatise two public sector banks and a general insurance company in the year.
- The policy, promised as part of the Atma Nirbhar Bharat package, states the government will exit all businesses in non-strategic sectors, with only a 'bare minimum' presence in four broad sectors.
- These strategic sectors are — atomic energy, space and defence; transport and telecom; power, petroleum, coal and other minerals; and banking and financial services.
- Apart from raising precious revenues, the sale or closure of such firms will help the exchequer stop throwing good money after bad, and funnel it into more productive endeavours.

Cutting trans fat

- January 1, 2022, India will join a select group of countries limiting industrial trans fat to 2% by mass of the total oils/fats present in the product. India would thus be achieving the WHO target a year in advance.
- In mid-2016, the trans fat content limit was halved from 10% to 5%, and in December 2020, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) capped it to 3% by 2021.
- While trans fat is naturally present in red meat and dairy products, the focus is on restricting the industrially produced trans fat used solely to prolong the shelf life of products at less cost.
- Also, even when the fat/oil contains less than 2% trans fat, repeated use at high temperature can increase the trans fat content.
- The focus on cutting down trans fat content in food arises from its proclivity to negatively alter the lipoprotein cholesterol profile by increasing the level of bad cholesterol (LDL) while decreasing the level of HDL or good cholesterol.
- These changes in the lipoprotein cholesterol profile increase the risk of cardiovascular diseases.
- According to a 2020 report of WHO, 32 countries already have some form of mandatory limits on trans fat.
- The benefits of reducing trans fat can become quickly apparent, as seen in Denmark; three years after the cap came into effect, it saw a reduction of about 14 deaths attributable to cardiovascular diseases per 1,00,000 population.

Dams and damages (Kavita Upadhyay)

- The use of explosives has repeatedly been questioned for dam construction, and the construction of other infrastructure projects, such as roads, in the fragile Himalayan State.
- Other than this, deforestation takes place when dams are constructed.
- The construction material that is supposed to be dumped on separate land is often dumped into the rivers.
- The Chopra Committee report of 2014 brings more clarity on how dams exacerbate a disaster such as floods.
- How dams exacerbated the 2013 deluge, mainly as riverbeds were already raised from the disposed muck at the dam construction sites, and could not contain the sudden increased flow from floodwaters.
- The report presents evidence to prove that dams are not only damaged in floods, they also cause immense damage in downstream areas.
- This is because as floodwaters damage a barrage, they increase the destructive capacity of the water that flows downstream of the barrage.

- The Chopra Committee suggested that 23 of the 24 proposed dam projects it reviewed be cancelled for the potential damage they could do.
- To make matters worse, Himalayan glaciers are receding and disintegrating as a result of climate change, and the snow cover in the Himalayas is also thinning.
- Research also shows how an increased number and volume of glacial lakes should be expected as a direct impact of increased temperatures.
- For dams, this means rapid increase or decrease in the reservoir water level.
- It also means that the projections on the life of a dam reservoir may not stand due to erratic events, such as floods, that could rapidly fill a reservoir with muck and boulders brought along with the floods.
- There is also the threat of earthquakes. In terms of earthquake risk, Uttarakhand lies in Seismic Zone-IV (severe intensity) and Seismic Zone-V (very severe intensity).
- Ignoring this, many dams have been constructed in zones that are under high risk of witnessing severe earthquakes.
- Irrespective of the evidence, the Uttarakhand government plans on continuing to build dams as a source of revenue.
- The State plans to construct up to 450 hydropower projects of 27,039 MW installed capacity.
- Clearly, the Uttarakhand government has chosen to ignore the disastrous impacts of rampant dam-building.

Dangers of hard sovereignty (Atul Mishra)

- Hard sovereignty.
- The posture delivers a firm message: outsiders have no stake in India's internal affairs, especially as it undergoes profound and rapid changes
- The statements by outsiders threatened to compromise India's sovereignty.
- On the strategic front, five of India's key partners in the Indo-Pacific context are democracies: Japan, Australia, the U.S., the U.K., and France. Four of these are liberal and western.
- A special understanding exists among liberal democracies because they share common norms and beliefs.
- Second, hard sovereignty invariably tends towards national isolationism and siege mentality.