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Current affairs summary for prelims

5 August, 2024

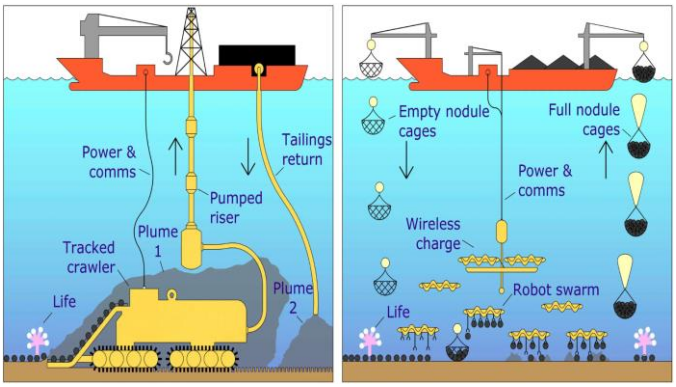
Deep-sea Mining

Context: *The International Seabed Authority (ISA) is developing regulations for the extraction of raw materials from the ocean floor.*

- Sea Mining cannot proceed without regulations from the International Seabed Authority (ISA).
- Discussions on these rules have been ongoing for years.
- The latest talks highlight significant divisions, especially on underwater monitoring and environmental protection.
- Germany, Brazil, and Palau insist on a full environmental impact investigation before agreeing to new rules.
- China, Norway, Japan, and Nauru are pushing for a quick agreement to start mining operations.
- 32 out of 169 ISA member countries now support suspending or banning deep-sea mining, backed by environmental organizations and marine scientists.

What is Deep Sea Mining?

- Deep sea mining involves removing mineral deposits and metals from the ocean's seabed.
- There are three types of deep sea mining: extracting deposit-rich polymetallic nodules from the ocean floor, mining massive seafloor sulfide deposits, and stripping cobalt crusts from rocks.
- These nodules, deposits, and crusts contain materials such as nickel, rare earths, and cobalt, which are needed for batteries, renewable energy technologies, and everyday items like cellphones and computers.
- Companies and governments view these resources as strategically important due to the depletion of onshore reserves and the rising demand for these materials.



How is Deep Sea Mining Regulated?

- Countries manage their own maritime territories and exclusive economic zones, while the high seas and international ocean floor are governed by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).
- Under the UNCLOS treaty, the seabed and its mineral resources are considered the "common heritage of mankind," which must be managed to protect human interests, share economic benefits, support marine scientific research, and protect marine environments.

What is the International Seabed Authority (ISA)?

- The International Seabed Authority (ISA) is an autonomous organization within the United Nations common system, with its headquarters located in Kingston, Jamaica.
- All States parties to the 1982 UNCLOS are members of the ISA, amounting to 168 members, including the European Union.
- The ISA is one of three international institutions established by UNCLOS, the others being the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf and the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea.
- The primary function of the ISA is to regulate the exploration and exploitation of deep seabed minerals found in 'the Area,' which is defined by the Convention as the seabed and subsoil beyond the limits of national jurisdiction, specifically beyond the outer limits of the continental shelf.
- 'The Area' comprises just over 50% of the entire seabed on Earth.

Article 311

Context*: Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant-Governor invoked Article 311 to terminate the services of six government employees, including five policemen, based on security agency reports.*

Provisions:

- Deals with the dismissal, removal, or reduction in rank of a person employed in civil capacities under the Union or a State.
- Article 311 (1): No person who is a member of a civil service of the Union or an all-India service or a civil service of a State or holds a civil post under the Union or a State shall be dismissed or removed by an authority subordinate to that by which he was appointed.
- Article 311 (2): No civil servant shall be dismissed or removed or reduced in rank except after an enquiry in which they have been informed of the charges and given a reasonable opportunity of being heard in respect of those charges.

Doctrine of Pleasure

- **Article 310:**
  - Members of the defence services, the civil services of the Centre, and the all-India services or persons holding military posts or civil posts under the Centre, hold office during the pleasure of the president.

Face to Face Centres
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- A 'civil post' means an appointment or office or employment on the civil side of the administration, as distinguished from the military side.
- Members of the civil services of a state or persons holding civil posts under a state, hold office during the pleasure of the governor of the state.

- **Exceptions**:
  - The President or the governor may provide compensation for the services of a person with special qualifications if the post is abolished before the contractual period ends, or if they are required to vacate the post for reasons not connected with misconduct.
  - Such a contract can only be made with a new entrant, not someone already in a defence service, civil service of the Centre, all-India service, or civil service of a state.

Opportunity of Being Heard

- **Original Provision:**
  - Civil servants were given the opportunity of being heard at both the inquiry and punishment stages.
- **42nd Amendment Act of 1976:**
  - Abolished the provision for a second opportunity to make representation against the proposed punishment after the inquiry.
- **Supreme Court Interpretation:**
- **Reasonable opportunity of being heard includes:**
  - Denying guilt and establishing innocence based on informed charges.
  - Defending oneself through cross-examination of witnesses and presenting own witnesses.
  - Receiving a copy of the inquiry officer's report for observations and comments.

Protection Under Article 311

- Members of the civil service of the Union.
- Members of the all-India service.
- Members of the civil service of any State.
- People holding a civil post under the Union or any State.
- Article 311 safeguards apply only to civil servants (public officers), not to defence personnel.

Process of a Departmental Enquiry in Civil Services

- The civil servant receives a formal charge sheet after an enquiry officer is appointed.
- The civil servant can choose to have a lawyer or represent themselves.
- Witnesses can be called during the enquiry, after which the enquiry officer prepares a report and submits it to the government for further action.
- Dismissed employees can approach tribunals like the Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT), state administrative tribunals, or the courts.

ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement

Context: *The 5th AITIGA Joint Committee and related meetings to review the ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA) took place at the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta, Indonesia.*

- The ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA) is a trade pact between the ten ASEAN member states and India.
- It was ratified during the 7th ASEAN Economic Ministers-India Consultations held in Bangkok, Thailand, in 2009 and took effect in 2010.
- AITIGA is also known as the ASEAN-India Free Trade Agreement and focuses on trade in tangible goods and merchandise.
- Its main objectives are the reduction or elimination of customs tariffs and non-tariff barriers to facilitate trade among the participating nations.

Key Features of AITIGA

- It covers the exchange of physical goods, excluding services, establishing one of the world's largest free trade areas, spanning nearly 1.8 billion individuals.
- The agreement mandates ASEAN and India to gradually abolish duties on a significant portion of goods and liberalise tariffs.
- It incorporates varying tariff rates based on the economic development stages of the ASEAN member countries.
- AITIGA contains provisions for lowering tariffs on sensitive products and instituting transparent, predictable trade practices to mitigate non-tariff barriers.
- The agreement's goal is to enhance trade efficiency, stimulate trade growth, and address trade imbalances between ASEAN and India.

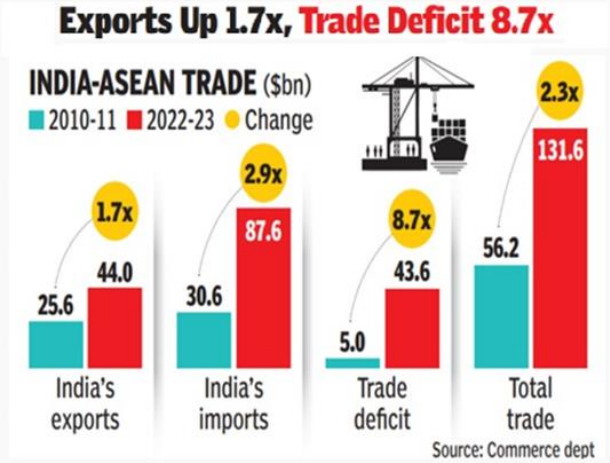
Elements of AIFTA (ASEAN-India Free Trade Agreement)

- **Trade in Goods Agreement:** Effective January 1, 2010, aims to gradually diminish and eradicate tariffs on 76.4% of goods exchanged between ASEAN member states and India.
- **Trade in Services Agreement:** Established in November 2014, includes clauses on transparency, domestic regulations, recognition, market access, national treatment, and dispute resolution.

- **Investment Agreement:** Also ratified in November 2014, ensures equitable and impartial treatment for investors, non-preferential treatment in cases of expropriation or nationalisation, and just compensation.

➢ **Trade Statistics:**

- Bilateral trade between India and ASEAN reached $122.67 billion in 2023-24.
- ASEAN accounts for 11% of India's global trade.
- Exports to ASEAN grew from $37.47 billion in FY2019 to $41.21 billion in FY2024, a 9.96% increase.
- Imports from ASEAN increased by 34.30%, from $59.32 billion to $79.67 billion.



NEWS IN BETWEEN THE LINES

Commemorative Postage Stamps

Recently, the central government has announced that it will release a set of commemorative postage stamps to celebrate the Paris 2024 Olympics today on 5th of August at 12:00 pm.

About the Commemorative Postage Stamps:

- Commemorative postage stamps are **regular postage stamps** that are issued to **honor people**, **events**, or **activities** of national importance.
- Unlike other postage stamps, commemorative stamps are **only printed once** and go out of circulation as their supply runs out.
- In India, commemorative stamps can honor subjects such as **freedom fighters**, **politicians**, **sports**, **space**, **science and technology**, **defense**, **arts** and crafts, environmental issues and agricultural activities.
- Commemorative stamps are printed in limited quantities and are only available at Philatelic Bureaux and counters or through the **Philatelic Deposit Account Scheme**.
- Citizens of India can submit proposals for commemorative stamps to the Philatelic Advisory Committee (PAC) or Sub Committee of the PAC on **India Post's website** at least two years in advance.

Damodar Valley Corporation

Recently, the chief minister of West Bengal discussed excessive water flow from the Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC) dams in Jharkhand with her counterpart Hemant Soren, which is causing floods in southern Bengal.

About the Damodar Valley Corporation:

- The Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC) is a **government-owned organization** in India that operates in the states of **Jharkhand** and **West Bengal**.
- It was **established on 7th July 1948** as the **first multipurpose river valley project of independent India.**
- It functions under the **Ministry of Power**.
- It has built **four multipurpose dams** to manage the Damodar River's water and reduce flooding: **Tilaiya Dam** (1953, Barakar River), **Konar Dam** (1955, Konar River), **Maithon Dam** (1957, Barakar River) and **Panchet Dam** (1959, Damodar River).
- Its headquarter is in **Kolkata**.

Ceramic Pottery

Recently, the archaeologists have discovered ceramic pottery and figurines in the Indus Valley and Keezhadi in Tamil Nadu.

About Ceramic Pottery:

- Ceramic pottery is a type of ceramic, which is a broad term for objects made from non-metallic and inorganic substances.
- Ceramic pottery is **made from clay**, a **natural material** that's **soft** and **malleable**, but hardens when baked at high temperatures.
- There are three main types of ceramic pottery including **earthenware**, **stoneware** and **porcelain**, and each type has different properties.
- Advanced ceramics can also include compounds like **oxides**, **nitrides** or **carbides** to increase their durability and specialized characteristics.
- Modern applications of ceramics include use in **heat shields for space shuttles**, **microwave furnaces**, abrasives and semiconductors production, **nuclear fuel**, **fighter aircraft windows** and **tomographic scanners**.
- The discovery of high-temperature superconductivity in some ceramic materials won two scientists the **1987 physics Nobel Prize**.

The Great Four-Ring Butterfly

Recently, a new study has revealed that the four-ringed butterfly belonging to a family with most members in China has resurfaced in India after 61 years.

About the Great Four-Ring Butterfly:

- The great four-ring butterfly (Ypthima cantliei) is a species of **Satyrinae butterfly** with **dull brown-gray wings.**
- It is a low-flying butterfly that prefers grasses as its host plant.
- It has **black** and **yellow eye spots** that are used to confuse predators.
- It has three **yellow-ringed single eye spots** (ocelli) on its hind wing and a large bi-pupilled apical ocellus on its forewing that is obscurely ringed with yellow.
- This butterfly is larger than other species in the genus Ypthima and has a **wing expanse of 34–40 mm**.
- It is found in **India**, **Nepal**, **Bhutan** and **Myanmar**, with the highest diversity in China.
- The highest Ypthima diversity is in **China**, particularly in the Yunnan and Sichuan.
- It is currently listed **endangered** in IUCN Red list.

Glacier du Tour

Recently, it has been seen that the Glacier du Tour is melting rapidly due to climate change, with its snow tinged pink by Sahara dust and is expected to vanish by 2100 if current conditions persist.

About Glacier du Tour:

- Glacier du Tour is located in the **French part of the Alps**, specifically in the **Mont Blanc massif**, which spans across **France** and **Switzerland**.
- It is one of the glaciers feeding into the Arve River, which is a tributary of the **Rhône River**.
- It is a popular destination for **hikers** and **climbers**.
- It serves as an important **site for studying glacial dynamics** and the impacts of climate change on alpine glaciers.

Place in News

Timor-Leste

President Droupadi Murmu embarked on a three-nation visit to Fiji, New Zealand and Timor-Leste today.

Timor Leste: (Capital: Dili)

Location: Timor Leste or East Timor is an island country, located in Southeast Asia.

Boundaries: Timor Leste is bounded by **Timor Sea** (Southeast), **Wetar Strait** (North), **Ombai Strait** (Northwest) and **western Timor** (part of Indonesian province of East Nusa Tenggara) to Southwest.

Significance:

- **Mount Tatamailau**, also known as Mount Ramelau, is the **highest mountain** in East Timor.
- **Tetum and Portuguese are the official languages**, while Indonesian and English are also widely spoken.
- Timor-Leste gained independence from Indonesia on May 20, 2002, becoming the fourth youngest country in the world after a long struggle for self-determination.

POINTS TO PONDER

- What position does India hold in the 2024 Travel & Tourism Development Index? **– 39th**
- Who recently became the first woman to be appointed as the Director General of Medical Services? **– Lt Gen Sadhna Saxena Nair**
- Which ministry launched the Defence Testing Infrastructure Scheme (DTIS), recently mentioned in the news? **– Ministry of Defence**
- Which institute was recently granted Special Consultative Status by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (UN ECOSOC)? **– KIIT DU**
- Where was the 52nd Conference of Governors recently held? **– New Delhi**