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Current affairs summary for prelims

13 September, 2024

BRICS Summit

Context: *NSA Ajit Doval will attend BRICS meeting in St. Petersburg, meeting Russian and possibly Chinese counterparts.*

Overview:

- NSA Ajit Doval will attend a BRICS and BRICS Plus security meeting in St. Petersburg, engaging with Russian NSA Sergei Shoigu and possibly China's Wang Yi.
- In July, EAM S. Jaishankar met Wang Yi twice—in Astana during the SCO Summit and in Vientiane at an ASEAN-India meeting—to seek an early LAC resolution and rebuild relations.

BRICS is an acronym for Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.

- Introduced by Jim O'Neill of Goldman Sachs in 2001; initially just BRIC without South Africa.
- **Current Representation:** Represents about 37.3% of the global economy and about 40% of the world's population.
- **Chairmanship:** Rotates annually among member countries.
- **Principles:** Openness, pragmatism, solidarity, non-bloc nature, neutrality.

Agenda of BRICS

- **International Terrorism:**
  - Focus on global counterterrorism efforts and security cooperation.
- **Climate Change:**
  - Joint actions and strategies to combat climate change.
- **Food and Energy Security:**
  - Ensuring global food and energy stability and equitable access.
- **International Economic and Financial Situation:**
  - Coordinated responses to global economic and financial challenges.
- **Reform of Bretton Woods Institutions:**
  - Advocating for changes in the IMF and World Bank to better represent emerging economies.
- **Trade Protectionism and WTO:**
  - Promoting free trade and opposing protectionist policies.

Evolution of BRICS

- **2006:** Informal BRIC formation during G8 Outreach Summit.
- **2009:** First BRIC Summit held in Yekaterinburg, Russia.
- **2010:** South Africa joins, creating BRICS.
- **2011:** South Africa's first BRICS summit participation in China.
- **2014:** Fortaleza Declaration, establishment of New Development Bank (NDB).
- **2015:** Ufa Declaration on global governance and economic cooperation.
- **2021:** 13th BRICS Summit under India's Chairmanship.
- **2022:** Beijing Declaration on support for Russia-Ukraine dialogue, COVID-19 cooperation, and digital transformation.
- **2023:** 15th BRICS Summit in Johannesburg, focused on Africa, endorsed G20 Presidencies, supported UN reform, and highlighted human rights and food security.
- **2024**:16th BRICS Summit in Russia,aims for just global development and security,under the theme **"Strengthening Multilateralism for Just Global Development and Security"**

Initiatives:

- **BRICS National Security Advisors' Meeting:** Addresses counter-terrorism, cybersecurity, and regional security.
- **Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA):** Financial mechanism with $100 billion capacity for liquidity support.
- **New Development Bank (NDB):** Provides funding for infrastructure and sustainable projects; headquartered in Shanghai.
- **Events:** BRICS Parliamentary Forum, Film Festival, Youth Summit, Academic Forum.

India's Role in BRICS

- **Strategic Cooperation:** Platform for global engagement on security, terrorism, and trade.
- **Economic Benefits:** Access to large markets and funding from NDB.
- **Multilateral Reform:** Advocates for a more inclusive global order.
- **South-South Cooperation:** Promotes trade, investment, and technology transfer.
- **New World Order:** Supports India's role in global governance.

Challenges Facing BRICS

- **Overlap with IBSA:** Potential duplication of efforts with the India-Brazil-South Africa grouping.

- **Economic and Trade Disputes:** Internal conflicts and economic slowdowns.
- **Geopolitical Tensions:** Diverse interests and regional disputes (e.g., China-India tensions).
- **Dominance of Major Powers:** Influence of Russia, India, and China may overshadow Brazil and South Africa.
- **Currency and De-Dollarization:** Proposed common currency faces challenges; de-dollarization requires broad global adoption.

➢ **Expansion of BRICS**

- **First Phase:** Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and UAE to join from January 2024.
- **Reasons for Expansion:** Increase global influence, address anti-western sentiment, and offer new opportunities.

Universal Basic Income (UBI)

Context: *Recent jobless growth prompts countries to consider Universal Basic Income (UBI) to address insufficient employment generation.*

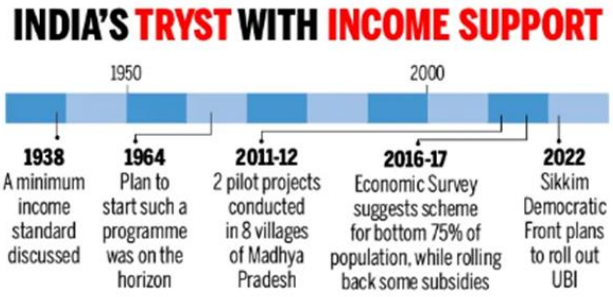
➢ **Overview:**

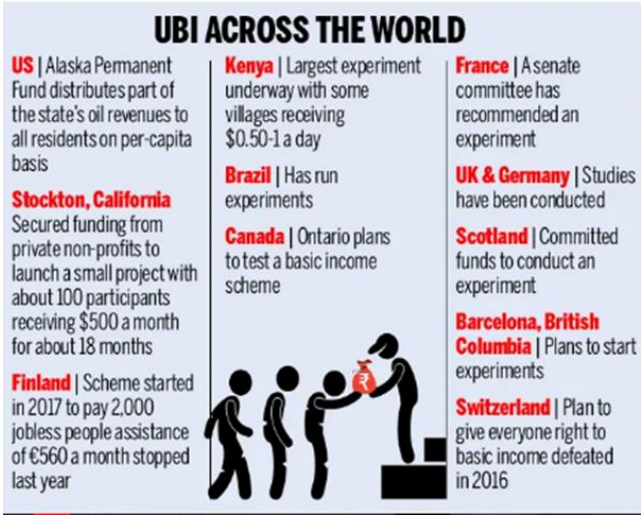
- The idea of UBI has gained traction, especially after the ILO's report linking decreased job growth and inequality to automation and AI.
- India's existing cash transfer schemes suggest challenges in implementing a pure Universal Basic Income model.

Universal Basic Income (UBI) is a social welfare proposal where all citizens receive a regular, unconditional payment from the government. This income is designed to cover basic living expenses, alleviating poverty and potentially replacing more complex welfare programs. Here's a closer look:

➢ **Benefits of UBI:**

- **Poverty Alleviation:** Reduces poverty and income inequality, covering basic needs like food, healthcare, and housing.
- **Health Benefits:** Lowers stress and improves mental and physical health; enhances access to healthcare and nutrition.
- **Simplified Welfare System:** Streamlines welfare by replacing multiple programs, reducing bureaucracy and costs.
- **Enhanced Freedom:** Provides financial security, allowing freedom to choose work, education, or fulfilling activities.
- **Economic Stimulus:** Boosts consumer spending, supports businesses, and encourages entrepreneurship.





➢ **Challenges to UBI:**

- **Cost and Fiscal Sustainability:** High costs may necessitate tax increases, spending cuts, or debt, potentially causing inflation or labor market distortions.
- **Incentive Issues:** Might reduce work motivation, lower productivity, and foster dependency, impacting skill development.
- **Inflationary Pressures:** Increased cash flow could raise prices, reducing the real value of payments.
- **Potential for Dependency:** Risks creating reliance on government support, potentially decreasing employment incentives.

➢ **Alternatives of UBI:**

- **Quasi-UBI (QUBRI):** Universal cash transfers with exclusions for wealthier individuals, like targeted rural assistance.
- **Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT):** Cash or subsidies transferred directly to accounts, reducing inefficiencies and corruption (e.g., PM Kisan).
- **Conditional Cash Transfers (CCT):** Cash based on conditions like school attendance or vaccinations, incentivizing positive behaviours.

- **Other Income Support Schemes:** Specific assistance for vulnerable groups (e.g., elderly, disabled).
- **Employment Guarantee Schemes:** Legal job guarantees, such as MGNREGA, ensuring employment opportunities.
- **Universal Basic Services:** Provides essential services (healthcare, education) instead of direct income, aiming to reduce inequality and improve living standards.

Second Asia Pacific (APAC) Ministerial Conference on Civil Aviation

Context: *The Asia Pacific Ministerial Conference on Civil Aviation is held in New Delhi, addressing the region's expanding travel needs.*

➢ **Overview:**

- The ICAO Asia Pacific (APAC) Ministerial Conference on Civil Aviation is a two-day conference scheduled at Bharat Mandapam.
- The Asia Pacific Ministerial Conference on Civil Aviation focuses on airport development to meet growing travel demands, uniting global leaders to explore opportunities and forge partnerships.
- Celebrating 80 years of ICAO and the Chicago Convention.

➢ **Second Asia Pacific Ministerial Conference on Civil Aviation**

- The first Ministerial Conference of the Asia Pacific Region was held in Beijing, China, in 2018.
- **Organiser Details:** The second Ministerial Conference is jointly organised by the Indian government and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Asia Pacific.
- **Participation:** The conference is expected to attract around 250 representatives from 41 countries, underscoring the Asia Pacific region's critical role in global air traffic.
- **Conference Goals:** The primary aim is to establish a comprehensive roadmap for advancing the civil aviation sector in the Asia Pacific region.

➢ **About the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)**

- **Headquarters:** Montreal, Canada
- **Formation and Purpose:** Known as the Chicago Convention, ICAO was established on December 7, 1944, by 52 states and became a specialised agency of the United Nations in 1947.
- **Membership:** As of 2024, ICAO has 193 member states. India is a founding member, having joined in 1944.
- **Strategic Objectives:**
  - **Safety:** Enhance aviation safety worldwide.
  - **Air Navigation Capacity and Efficiency:** Improve air traffic management and infrastructure.
  - **Security and Facilitation:** Ensure secure and efficient air travel.
  - **Economic Development of Air Transport:** Promote the growth and sustainability of the aviation sector.
  - **Environmental Protection:** Address the environmental impact of aviation.

➢ **Themes of Discussion**

- **Regional and Global Coordination:** Focus on aligning aviation matters of both regional and global significance.
- **Collaboration:** Foster collaborative efforts on a common platform for regional aviation growth.
- **Harmonisation:** Promote consistent and synchronised development within the region.
- **Post-Pandemic Recovery:** Work towards creating a safe, resilient, and dynamic air transport system for the Asia Pacific region in the aftermath of the pandemic.

➢ **Aviation Growth in India**

- **Surge in Aircraft Numbers:** India's aviation market is the fastest-growing globally, with aircraft numbers doubling from 400 to over 800. Over 1,200 aircraft were ordered in the past year.
- **Expansion of Airports:** Airports in India increased from 74 to 157, enhancing regional connectivity and accommodating more passengers.
- **Government Initiatives:** The UDAN scheme improves air travel access for remote areas, integrating them into the national network and boosting economic development.

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NEWS IN BETWEEN THE LINES

Ladakh Zanskar Festival

The 9th edition of the Ladakh Zanskar Festival will be held on September 13-14, 2024, in Sani Village, Zanskar Valley, Ladakh.

About the Ladakh Zanskar Festival:

- The Ladakh Zanskar Festival is an **annual two-days cultural celebration of Zanskar's culture**, **tradition** and unity.
- The festival **aims to promote tourism in the Zanskar region** while preserving and showcasing its unique spiritual and artistic legacy.
- The **Cham dance**, performed by monks in **elaborate costumes** and **folk dances** by local communities are major attractions.
- The dance is also performed on **Tsechu Festival** which is the yearly spiritual festival carried out in many **monasteries in Ladakh**.
- Traditional Zanskari dishes, including **thukpa** (a noodle soup) and **butter tea**, are offered to visitors.

Vertical Launch Short Range Surface-to-Surface Air Missile

Recently, the Vertical Launch Short Range Surface-to-Air Missile was successfully test-fired from the Integrated Test Range (ITR) at Chandipur in Balasore district, Odisha.

About the Vertical Launch Short Range Surface-to-Air Missile:

- The Vertical Launch Short Range Surface-to-Air Missile (VL-SRSAM) is a **ship-borne, short-range surface-to-air missile.**
- This test aimed to validate multiple updated elements of the weapon system, including the **Proximity Fuse** and **Seeker**.
- It has been indigenously developed by the **Defence Research and Development Organisation** (DRDO) in collaboration with the **Indian Navy.**
- The missile is designed to **neutralize various aerial threats** at short ranges, including enemy aircraft and **sea-skimming missiles**, which are low-altitude, radar-evading threats often used in anti-ship warfare.

NITI Aayog

The Recently, NITI Aayog released the report "Future Pandemic Preparedness and Emergency Response: A Framework for Action," outlining a blueprint for strengthening India's public health infrastructure and rapid response to future emergencies.

About the NITI Aayog:

- The National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog) is a **policy think tank** and **government organization** that advises the Indian government on policies and programs.
- It was **established in 2015 to replace the Planning Commission**.
- It is based on the 7 pillars of effective governance-**Pro-People**, **Pro-Activity**, **Participation**, **Empowering**, **Inclusion of all**, **Equality** and **Transparency**.
- The composition of NITI Aayog includes the **Prime Minister as Chairperson, the Vice-Chairperson appointed by the Prime Minister**, a **Governing Council comprising Chief Ministers of all states and Lt. Governors of Union Territories.**
- NITI Aayog has launched various initiatives and campaigns, such as: **Atal Innovation Mission (AIM)**, **Startup India**, **Digital India**, **Transforming Urban India** (AMRUT, Smart Cities Mission), **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs) localization, etc.

Place in News

Gaza Strip

Recently, the World Health Organisation (WHO) reported that a quarter of Gaza war injuries are "life-changing," with 22,500 people needing long-term rehabilitation.

Location: Gaza Strip is situated on the **eastern coast** of the **Mediterranean** Sea.
Political Boundaries: Gaza Strip is bordered by **Israel** to the **north** and **east** and **Egypt** to the **south**.

Physical Features:

- The highest point in the Gaza Strip is **Mount al-Muntar**, also known as Mount Gerizim.
- The Gaza Strip has a **Mediterranean climate** with hot, dry summers and mild, wet winters.

Historical Background:

- After Israel declared its statehood in **1948**, the Gaza Strip was controlled by **Egypt** for nearly two decades.
- In **1967**, Israel gained control of Gaza during the **Six-Day War**.
- In **2005**, Israel withdrew around **9,000** Israeli settlers and its military forces from the Gaza Strip, leaving it to be governed by the internationally recognized **Palestinian Authority**.

Current Governance:

- The Gaza Strip is currently governed by Hamas, a Palestinian Islamist organization that took control in **2007** after winning elections.
- Hamas does not recognize Israel's right to exist.

Blockade: Israel has imposed a **land**, **air** and **sea blockade** on Gaza since **2007**.

POINTS TO PONDER

- Which reference app was launched recently by Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) in collaboration with Bhashini to make e-commerce inclusive? **– Saarthi**
- Which ministry recently launched the Trade Connect e-Platform to assist India in achieving its ambitious export goals? **– Ministry of Commerce and Industry**
- Which project has recently received approval by the central government for the transfer of 256 acres of salt pan land in Mumbai from the Centre? **– Dharavi Redevelopment Project**
- Which scheme recently received approval from the Union Cabinet, chaired by the Prime Minister of India, and is associated with the Ministry of Heavy Industries? **– PM E-DRIVE Scheme**
- What portal was launched under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Kisan Samridhi Sah-Yojana during the 4th anniversary of PMMSY? **– National Fisheries Development Program Portal**