Mains Master

India's growing neighbourhood dilemmas

I. Background:

- Indian foreign policy aims for global leadership but faces challenges in its neighborhood.
- South Asia poses unique dilemmas, including anti-India regimes and China's rising influence.

II. Dilemmas Faced by India:

Political Challenges:
- Rise of politically anti-India regimes, as seen in the Maldives.
- Potential ideological challenges, such as a Khaleda Zia-led government in Dhaka.

Structural Challenges:
- Growing influence of Beijing in South Asia.
- China's deep pockets and outreach through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
- China's strategy to settle border disputes to gain regional favor.

Geopolitical Buffer:
- Diminishing presence of the United States in South Asia.
- China's aggressive rise acts as a geopolitical buffer, impacting India's influence.

III. Causes of Dilemmas:

Regional Geopolitical Architecture:
- Changing dynamics with the departure of the U.S.
- China's rise as a non-resident power.

Policy Stance:
- Status quo bias in dealing with regional politics.
- Overreliance on engaging with those in power, leading to alienation.

Mistaken Assumptions:
- Belief that South Asia minus Pakistan would align with Indian geopolitical interests.
- Assumption that India's cultural ties would be more advantageous than China's approach.

IV. Recommendations for Action:

Adapt to Fundamental Changes:
- Acknowledge the fundamental shift in the balance of power in South Asia.
- Recognize China as a serious contender for regional primacy.

Involvement of External Actors:
- Actively involve friendly external actors to balance China's influence.

Flexible Diplomacy:
- Engage with multiple actors within neighboring countries.
- Focus on lessening anti-India sentiment rather than dismissing anti-India elements.

Increase Diplomatic Resources:
- Recognize the shortage of diplomats as a crucial challenge.
- Address the need for more personnel to effectively implement foreign policy.

No fait accompli

1. Political Timeline:

- Collapse of elected government, imposition of Governor's rule, and subsequent dramatic changes.
- Removal of Article 370 providing special status, leading to bifurcation into Union Territories.

2. Recent Legislation:

- Lok Sabha passed two bills: J&K Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill, 2023, and J&K Reservation (Amendment) Bill, 2023.
- Proposed changes increase Assembly seats from 107 to 114, with reserved seats for Scheduled Tribes.
- Replacement of terminology in the J&K Reservation Act, 2004, to align with "Other Backward Classes" declared by the UT.

3. Concerns Raised:

- Questioning the propriety of legislative changes pending the Supreme Court's verdict on the constitutional amendments.
- Lack of involvement of elected representatives from J&K, presenting changes as fait accompli to citizens.
- Highlighting issues: suspension of political and civil liberties, arrests, communication shutdowns, media restrictions, and power cuts over the past 5.5 years.

4. Calls for Restoring Democratic Processes:

- Emphasis on restoring democratic processes through popular elections and reinstating Statehood.
- Need to address citizen alienation and prioritize citizen engagement amidst regional challenges of separatism and terrorism.

Conclusion:

- Urgent need for restoration of democratic processes and Statehood in J&K to address immediate voids and work towards resolving longstanding issues contributing to regional instability.

Regulating deepfakes and AI in India

Deepfake Technology:

- **Definition:** Deepfakes employ Artificial Intelligence (AI) algorithms to manipulate digital media, including videos, audio recordings, or images. By leveraging machine learning, deepfake technology generates hyper-realistic alterations that blur the line between reality and fiction.
- **Impactful Manipulation:** Notably, a viral video featuring Rashmika Mandanna utilized deepfake technology, sparking widespread concern due to its potential to damage reputations, fabricate evidence, and erode trust in democratic institutions.
- **Political Sphere:** Deepfakes have been wielded in political campaigns, as seen in the circulation of videos depicting politicians like BJP's Manoj Tiwari and MP Congress Chief Kamal Nath, raising alarm over the manipulation of political narratives.

· **Global Influence:** This technology has impacted international events, demonstrated through its use in Argentina's presidential polls and a deepfake video purportedly portraying Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, highlighting its wide-ranging global implications.

Gendered Impact of Deepfakes:

· **Disproportionate Misuse:** Deepfakes, primarily focused on pornographic content, predominantly target women, with alarming statistics indicating that a significant majority (96%) of these manipulated videos involve women (99%).

· **Weaponization of Technology:** Abusive partners have exploited deepfake technology to shame women who reject advances, inflicting psychological trauma and subjecting victims to social stigma.

Legal Framework and Proposed Reforms:

· **Current Legal Landscape:** Existing laws, including sections under the IT Act and IPC, attempt to address deepfake-related offenses. However, gaps exist in preventive measures, and these laws were not specifically designed to tackle emerging AI-driven technologies like deepfakes.

· **Challenges and Responses:** Current legislation places the onus on victims to file complaints, while a lack of comprehensive understanding about generative AI technology hampers effective legal action.

· **Government Initiatives:** Governmental proposals include drafting regulations aimed at ensuring accountability for deepfake creation and labeling, emphasizing the responsibility of both creators and social media platforms. Opinions differ on the sufficiency of current laws.

Judicial Perspective and International Examples:

· **Judicial Outlook:** The Delhi High Court expresses reservations about issuing directives, suggesting that the government might be better equipped to address deepfake-related issues in a balanced manner.

· **Global Efforts:** Countries like the US, China, and the EU adopt various regulations to combat deepfakes, emphasizing measures such as labeling, tracing, and imposing penalties for misuse.

Future Strategy:

- **Comprehensive Approach:** Governance must extend beyond mere legal amendments, encompassing the establishment of safety standards, heightened awareness, and institution-building to effectively navigate the challenges posed by AI technologies like deepfakes.
- **Indian Context:** Striking a balance between innovation and regulation is crucial, considering India's developing economy and thriving startup ecosystem, ensuring that legislative responses foster technological advancements without stifling progress.
- **Innovative Policy Considerations:** Suggestions encompass exploring innovative policy tools like regulatory sandboxes for AI, learning from other sectors, and avoiding curtailing free speech under the guise of regulating AI technology.

Limits to pushing renewables

The Global Scenario:

- **IEA's Urgent Call:** The IEA urges countries globally to triple renewable capacity by 2030, with 118 nations pledging support at COP28 in Dubai, yet major players like India, China, Russia, and Saudi Arabia have abstained.
- **Projections:** IEA projects renewables to rise to 80% in global power generation by 2050, with coal's contribution dropping to 3%. Primary sources include hydroelectric (16.1%), wind (5.6%), and solar (3.8%).

Challenges Across Renewable Sources:

Hydroelectric Power:

- **Barriers:** Challenges in constructing large dams due to environmental concerns, necessitating suitable water bodies, regulatory hurdles, and opposition from advocacy groups.
- **Feasibility:** Tripling hydroelectric capacity seems improbable by 2030, being 57% of renewable energy.

Solar and Wind Energy:

- **Growth Requirement:** To meet the 2030 target, solar and wind energy output must increase by at least fivefold.

- **Concerns:** Solar faces limitations due to daylight dependency, land use conflicts, environmental impacts, and reliance on imports. Wind energy's efficiency is weather-dependent, and turbine production generates significant emissions.

Fossil Fuel and Renewable Balance:

- **Pledge Ambiguity:** COP28's focus on boosting renewables lacks clarity on reducing overall fossil fuel reliance, possibly allowing countries like the US to increase fossil fuel production despite being 80% of energy generation.

Technology and Financial Constraints:

- **Technical Limitations:** Intermittency challenges for solar and wind power demand backup sources or expensive energy storage solutions, impacting reliability and cost.
- **Global Investment:** Transitioning to renewables requires substantial investment, placing financial strain, particularly on less affluent countries.

India's Progress and Economic Challenges:

- **Renewable Strides:** India has significantly augmented its renewable capacity, yet budget constraints hinder a swift transition, despite ongoing efforts in energy transition.

Global Imperatives:

- **Overlooked Realities:** Discussions often sideline technological limitations, financial support needs, import reliance, and financial constraints in less affluent nations.
- **Transition Complexity:** The shift from dense energy sources to less concentrated renewables poses technical and wealth generation challenges, necessitating unproven or yet-to-be-invented technologies.

Conclusion:

Amidst global efforts to increase renewable energy, a pragmatic approach addressing technological challenges, financial support, and innovative solutions is critical. Balancing these challenges will pave the way for substantial emissions reduction and a sustainable energy future.

Mining for critical minerals: what is the auction process, why is it important?

Introduction:

- **Bidding On:** The auction of 20 critical mineral blocks, including lithium ore, crucial for batteries and electric vehicles, commenced on November 29, aiming to cut imports and bolster self-reliance.
- **Minerals and Uses:** These blocks house essential minerals like nickel, copper, molybdenum, and rare earth elements vital in vehicle batteries, energy storage, electronics, and industries.

Geographical Distribution and Rights Auctioned:

- **Block Distribution:** Spread across eight states with varied mineral deposits: Tamil Nadu (7 blocks), Odisha (4), Bihar (3), Uttar Pradesh (2), and one each in Gujarat, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Jammu & Kashmir.
- **Mining Licences (ML) and Composite Licences (CL):** 4 blocks auctioned for ML (mining rights) allowing immediate operations; remaining 16 blocks for CL enabling geological exploration before seeking ML conversion.

Clearances and Pre-Operation Requirements:

- **Land Status:** Approximately 17% (1,234 hectares) of the concession area falls under forest land status.
- **Pre-Operation Clearances:** 15 clearances, including forest and environmental clearances, Gram Sabha consent, etc., required before commencing operations.

Estimated Reserves in Key Minerals:

- **Lithium:** 2 blocks for CL in J&K and Chhattisgarh; the J&K block estimates inferred reserves of bauxite containing 3,400 tonnes of lithium metal and 70,000 tonnes of titanium metal.
- **Nickel and Copper:** Nickel ore reserves found in Bihar, Gujarat, and Odisha; Odisha block offers 2.05 mt of nickel ore and 6.09 mt of copper ore among other metals.

Current Imports and Reliance:

- **Import Statistics:** India's reliance on imports: 100% for lithium, 100% for nickel, and 93% for copper.
- **FY23 Import Costs:** Imported 2,145 tonnes of lithium carbonate and oxide, 32,000 tonnes of unwrought nickel, and 1.2 million tonnes of copper ore.

Post-Auction and Future Prospects:

- **Auction Outcome:** Auction based on highest mineral dispatch value; second tranche of auctions anticipated post this round.
- **Upcoming Exploration:** Geological Survey of India involved in 125 projects for critical minerals; the Committee recommends establishing a Center of Excellence for Critical Minerals.
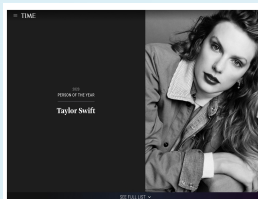
Conclusion:

The ongoing auction signifies a pivotal step towards resource independence, aiming to reduce import dependence and bolster domestic mineral extraction, pivotal for India's growth, self-reliance, and strategic control over essential minerals.

Prelims Booster

PM to launch first India Art, Architecture and Design Biennale at Red Fort today

📌 The first India Art, Architecture & Design Biennale (IAADB) is set to launch, spearheaded by the Ministry of Culture and inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Delhi's Red Fort.

📌 The IAADB aims to position itself as a flagship global cultural event, aligning with renowned initiatives in Venice, Sao Paulo, and Dubai.

📌 In addition to IAADB, the Aatmanirbhar Bharat Centre for Design and the Student Biennale, Samunnati, will also be inaugurated at the Red Fort.

Taylor Swift named Time's 'Person of the Year'.

Taylor Alison Swift is an American singer-songwriter. She has been recognized for her songwriting, musical versatility, artistic reinventions, and influence on popular culture and the music industry.

UN chief invokes rare article for Gaza ceasefire, angers Israel

📌 Article 99 of the UN Charter empowers the Secretary-General to bring matters threatening international peace and security to the attention of the Security Council.

📌 The Security Council is composed of five permanent member countries and ten non-permanent members.

📌 Article 99 requires the Secretary-General to exercise the highest qualities of political judgment, tact, and integrity.

📌 Past examples of Article 99 invocation include the upheaval in the Republic of the Congo in 1960 and Tunisia's demand in 1961.

📌 Secretary-General Guterres invoked Article 99 due to the appalling human suffering and destruction in Israel and the Occupied Palestine Territory.

📌 More than 15,000 people, including 40% children, have been killed since Israel's military operation began.

📌 The UAE has presented a draft resolution to the Security Council demanding an immediate humanitarian ceasefire.

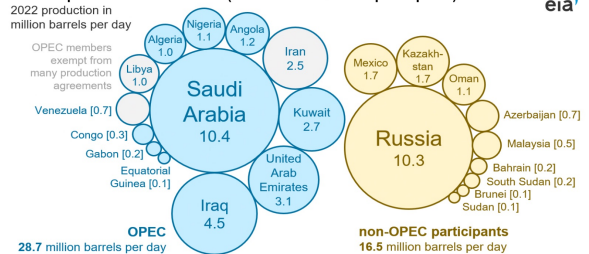## Russia, Saudi urge OPEC+ powers to join oil cuts after Putin-MbS meet

As of September 2021, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) has 13 member countries. These countries are:

1. Algeria
2. Angola
3. Congo
4. Equatorial Guinea
5. Gabon
6. Iran
7. Iraq
8. Kuwait
9. Libya
10. Nigeria
11. Saudi Arabia
12. United Arab Emirates
13. Venezuela

These member countries collectively account for a significant portion of the world's oil reserves and production.

Govt provided over ₹6,100 cr for RE via green bonds in FY23

💰 **Fundraising**: The government raised ₹16,000 crore through sovereign green bonds in the last fiscal year, providing affordable funds for renewable energy projects. (💸)

🌿 **Allocation to Renewable Energy:** Out of the total amount raised, ₹6,186 crore was specifically allocated to support renewable energy initiatives. This highlights the government's commitment to promoting clean and sustainable energy sources. (🌱)

🏛 **Sovereign Green Bonds Club:** The Government of India joined the Sovereign Green Bonds Club on January 25, 2023, by issuing an INR 80 billion (USD 1 billion) two-tranche deal. The bond was split equally between five and ten-year tenors, showcasing the government's dedication to green financing. (🏛)

Sovereign green bonds are financial instruments issued by national governments to raise funds specifically for environmentally friendly projects and initiatives. These bonds are similar to traditional government bonds but have a specific focus on financing projects that promote sustainability, climate change mitigation, and environmental conservation.

Total oil production from OPEC+ (OPEC and non-OPEC participants)
2022 production in million barrels per day

OPEC members exempt from many production agreements

Algeria 1.0, Nigeria 1.1, Angola 1.2, Libya 1.0, Iran 2.5, Saudi Arabia 10.4, Kuwait 2.7, Venezuela [0.7], Congo [0.3], Gabon [0.2], Equatorial Guinea [0.1], United Arab Emirates 3.1, Iraq 4.5

Mexico 1.7, Kazakhstan 1.7, Oman 1.1, Russia 10.3, Azerbaijan [0.7], Malaysia [0.5], Bahrain [0.2], South Sudan [0.2], Brunei [0.1], Sudan [0.1]

OPEC 28.7 million barrels per day

non-OPEC participants 16.5 million barrels per day

Data source: U.S. Energy Information Administration, *Short-Term Energy Outlook*, April 2023
Note: OPEC oil totals are crude oil; OPEC+ oil totals are crude oil and lease condensate.