

## Mains Master

### Discussed 'peace formula' with India: Ukraine Foreign Minister

#### Context

- Ukraine's Foreign Minister, Dmytro Kuleba, visited India seeking support for a peace initiative to end the ongoing conflict with Russia.
- India, while maintaining connections with both Ukraine and Russia, has avoided direct condemnation of Russian actions.

#### Background

- Kuleba and India's External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar, discussed a 'peace formula' during Kuleba's visit.
- India has a history of diplomatic neutrality and good relations with both Russia and Ukraine.

#### Switzerland's Proposal

- Switzerland is organizing a 'Global Peace Summit' with the aim of facilitating peace talks between Russia and Ukraine.
- It's unclear how Switzerland's plan addresses the discrepancies between Ukraine's peace formula and Russia's position.

#### Russia's Stand

- Russia has dismissed plans for the Switzerland-led peace talks.
- Moscow maintains that it won't participate in discussions that don't take its own security concerns into account.

#### India as a Potential Mediator

- Possible Advantages:** India's non-aligned stance and historical ties with both parties could make it an acceptable mediator.
- Challenges:** India's dependence on Russia for defense equipment and its reluctance to criticize Russia openly could hinder its ability to act as a truly neutral broker.

#### Critical Outlook

It's difficult to assess the peace plan's chances of success due to the following factors:

- Unclear details:** The specifics of the Ukrainian peace formula and Switzerland's peace summit plan remain somewhat undefined.
- Rigid Positions:** Both Russia and Ukraine maintain seemingly inflexible positions, making compromises difficult.
- India's Stance:** Whether India can maintain enough neutrality to be a persuasive mediator is an open question.

### Bonds, big money and an imperfect democracy

#### Context

- India struggles with the use of massive amounts of illegal money ("black money") to fund political campaigns and influence policy.
- This erodes democracy as elected officials prioritize wealthy donors, not the needs of ordinary citizens.

#### Background

- Politicians require huge sums to win elections because:
  - Votes are often based on identity (caste, religion, etc.), not policy positions.
  - Parties bribe voters and mobilize crowds with money, food, and favors.
  - Grand campaigns create a need for enormous spending, far beyond official limits.

#### Issues with Election Funding

- Vast amounts of illegal cash are used to gain power.

This creates a system where policies benefit the wealthy backers, not regular people, leading to:

- Persistent poverty, inequality, and inadequate public services.
- Businesses profiting illegally, requiring collusion from officials.
- A weakened democracy where accountability is low and

citizens feel powerless.

#### Electoral Bonds

- Introduced as a solution to end "black money" influence, bonds allow anonymous donations to parties.

#### Criticism:

- Lack of Transparency: Voters don't know who funds

politicians, obscuring motives.

- Increased Corporate Power: Businesses with vast resources

can manipulate policy more easily.

- Failed to Stop Illegal Funding: Cash bribes and illegal

financing continue.

#### Legalizing Corruption

- Data reveals donations linked to policy favors or as protection against prosecution.

- This institutionalizes cronyism, where businesses pay for preferential treatment, and extortion of businesses through regulatory threats becomes normalized.

Supreme Court on Electoral Bonds

- Though recently declared unconstitutional, the scheme

#### reveals:

- The depth of corruption in India's electoral system.
- How money, not democratic principles, may dictate who gets

elected and what policies are enacted.

#### Conclusion

India needs fundamental reforms. Elections must be less costly and centered on issues, not bribes. Until accountability is restored, a true democracy for the benefit of all citizens seems distant.

### TFR is predicted to fall to 1.29 by 2050

#### Context

- India faces a rapidly aging population in the coming decades.
- This is caused by a declining total fertility rate (TFR).

#### Background

- The Lancet medical journal and UN Population Fund reports highlight the extent of India's aging population.
- In 2050, one in five Indians will be over 60 years old.
- India's TFR is predicted to fall to 1.29 by 2050, well below the replacement rate.

#### Finding of the Lancet

- India's window for maximizing its "demographic dividend" (large working-age population boosting economic growth) is limited.

#### Key Concerns

- Shrinking workforce with fewer young people to support an aging population.
- Increased economic strain on healthcare and social security systems.
- Policy shifts needed to address the specific needs of a growing elderly population..



### Immediate Steps for India

- Urgent investment in education and skills training to create a high-quality workforce.
- Focus on generating jobs in the knowledge economy and transitioning workers away from low-wage sectors.

### Way Forward

- Develop robust healthcare and social security plans specifically designed for the elderly.
- Create initiatives to actively utilize the skills and experiences of older citizens.
- Address uneven aging rates across different Indian states with tailored policies

## AFRICA AT THE CENTRE

### Context

- **President Murmu's Mauritius Visit:** Inaugurated projects likely included infrastructure (housing, roads, hospitals), or social development (schools, community centers). The forensic science lab reflects India's expertise transfer and could be linked with regional security cooperation. India strategically strengthens ties with IOR nations as key partners against the backdrop of China's influence.
- **Championing the Global South:** This term arose post-Cold War to replace outdated "Third World." It focuses on solidarity among developing nations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America to push for fairer trade, climate justice, and a greater voice in institutions like the UN Security Council.

### Background

- **Debates around the 'Global South':** Critics argue the term lumps together countries with very different economies and challenges, from Brazil to Burundi. However, it's useful in highlighting shared frustrations with power imbalances in the current world order.
- **India's Leadership Push:** India advocates for expanding permanent seats in the UN Security Council for itself and an African nation. At the G20, it pushes for issues like tech access for developing nations and vaccine equity.

### Why Africa is Important

- **Beyond Demographic Data:** Africa's minerals are vital for global industries, it represents a huge future market for Indian goods and services, and its position on issues like climate change is diplomatically crucial for India.
- **Historical Bonds:** India and many African nations shared the experience of European colonialism and fought for independence. These struggles laid the foundation for the Non-Aligned Movement and ongoing solidarity on many issues.

### Converging India-Africa Interests

- **Economic Partnership:** Indian companies are involved in building railways, hospitals, and telecom networks across Africa. Indian NGOs provide affordable healthcare, solar-powered solutions for rural areas, and vocational training.
- **Shared Influence:** India supported the African Union getting observer status in the G20. Both regions push for fairer terms in international agreements, and collaboration amplifies their voices.
- **Sustainable Development:** Africa has cobalt, lithium, and other minerals India needs for batteries and solar energy. India offers training programs on agriculture techniques, water management, and IT skills, in demand across Africa.

### India as a Credible Partner

- **Historical Support:** India provided funding, training, and diplomatic support to anti-colonial movements in nations like South Africa and Namibia. In the post-independence era, India has been a major provider of developmental aid.
- **Global South Focus:** India's emphasis on building its own manufacturing, investing in tech, and finding solutions relevant to its conditions resonates with many African leaders looking to avoid traditional donor-recipient models.

### Challenges

- **Complexity:** Africa comprises 54 very diverse nations each with specific economic priorities and political alliances. India needs to tailor its approach, balancing regional players within the continent and individual government priorities.
- **Competition:** China has made significant inroads in Africa with infrastructure projects. The US and Europe are renewing their focus on the continent. India's advantage lies in offering a different partnership model based on South-South knowledge-sharing and self-reliance.

### Way Forward

- **Prioritize Africa:** More summits, trade delegations, and scholarships for African students will deepen ties. India's "Africa First" policy shows a commitment to moving away from ad-hoc engagement.
- **Build on Success:** Highlight a project like the Pan-African e-network (connecting educational institutions across Africa via satellite) as a model for how India offers tech-based solutions. Expanding on similar wins will earn trust.
- **Maintain Momentum:** Competition means India needs to consistently deliver on promises, demonstrate tangible results from partnerships, and be seen as a reliable ally for African nations for the long term.

## Prelims Booster

### Kuttanad the 'Rice Bowl of Kerala'

#### Unique Geography of Kuttanad:

Kuttanad, known as the 'Rice Bowl of Kerala', is characterized by interconnected lakes, rivers, and vast paddy fields spread across Alappuzha, Kottayam, and Pathanamthitta districts.

#### Engineering Marvel:

Dykes and Bunds: Intricate network of earthen dykes to hold back seawater and protect fields, dividing the land into manageable units.

Sluice Gates: Strategically placed gates prevent saltwater intrusion and manage water levels during different seasons.

Waterways as Highways: Canal system serves as irrigation channels and primary transportation routes, forming a unique aquatic network.

#### Farming Techniques:

Seasonal Sync: Farming cycle aligned with monsoons, with post-harvest flooding to combat soil salinity.

Specialized Rice Varieties: Development of salt-tolerant rice strains for thriving in below-sea-level conditions.

Aquaculture Integration: Utilization of water-rich environment for fish and duck farming, creating a self-sustaining ecosystem alongside agriculture.

#### Resilience and Ingenuity:

Kuttanad stands as a testament to human resilience and innovation, showcasing how farmers not only survive but thrive in challenging environments, defying geographical odds.

### LRS transfers abroad hit a record \$27 b in FY24 till Jan

#### RBI's Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS):

- The utilization of LRS by globe-trotting Indians has surged, with a record-high outflow of \$27.4 billion during April 2023-January 2024, surpassing the previous fiscal year's remittance of \$27.1 billion.

#### Utilization Breakdown:

- Foreign Travel: Accounting for 54% ,Overseas Education: Making up 11%

#### Remittance Limit:

The LRS scheme allows a maximum outward remittance of USD 250,000 per financial year for a resident individual, applicable cumulatively for all permissible transactions throughout the year.

#### Permissible Transactions:

Current Account Transactions: Involve the exchange of goods and services between residents and non-residents, covering expenses like travel, education, medical treatment, and support for relatives abroad.

Capital Account Transactions: Include the transfer of asset ownership between residents and non-residents, such as investments in foreign stocks, bonds, mutual funds, and property purchases abroad.

### Rajasthan leads India's green energy shift; Gujarat close on heels

#### Rajasthan's Renewable Energy Leadership:

Rajasthan leads India's green energy transition with over 26,800 MW of installed renewable energy capacity, contributing to 64.5% of its power generation from renewable sources.

#### Gujarat's Rising Profile:

Gujarat aims to surpass Rajasthan in renewable energy, with plans to operationalize a 30,000 MW renewable energy park in Kutch, positioning itself as a top player in solar energy.

#### Renewable Energy Production:

Rajasthan produced 39,300 million units of green energy in the first 10 months of 2023-24, marking a significant increase from previous years. Gujarat, the second-largest producer, generated 36,184 million units during the same period.

