

1. India is keeping an eye on Central Asia

Why in News?

- The Government is inviting the leaders of the five Central Asian countries – Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan – as guests for Republic Day on January 26.

Significance of Central Asian region for India:

- **Return of Taliban in Afghanistan:** The Taliban takeover in Afghanistan has made Central Asia a region where great contestations for influence are unfolding.
- There is a Growing awareness that for leveraging influence in Kabul and harvesting that influence in the form of material gains, a firm footing in Central Asia is a prerequisite.
- **Economic Dimension:** Given the vast untapped mineral wealth of the region encompassing the five Central Asian countries and Afghanistan – estimated to be worth a few trillion dollars – there is a significant economic dimension to the unfolding saga.
- **Geopolitical Angle:** Washington hopes to create in Central Asia a vector of its Indo-Pacific strategy to contain China and Russia. At the same time, governments in Moscow and Beijing are circling the wagons.

Suggestions for India:

- India needs to work on an intricate network of relationships with the regional states while remaining mindful of the “big picture”.
- Delhi’s non-aligned mindset needs to be turned into a strategic asset to navigate its long-term interests.
- India’s membership of the BRICS and SCO will help.
- Cooperation of Russia and China: The deepening of the traditional Indo-Russian mutual understanding has injected dynamism into Delhi’s regional strategy on the whole.
- It is bound to have a calming effect on India’s tensions with China.
- Delhi cannot have an effective Central Asia strategy without the cooperation of these two big powers.
- Regional connectivity: India can use the card of regional connectivity to stimulate Partnerships.
- The time may have come to reopen the files on the TAPI and IPI gas pipeline projects. Both involve Pakistan.

- Normalisation of India-Russia ties: Russia is well-placed to act as guarantor and help build both these pipelines, while China too will see advantages in the normalisation of India-Pakistan ties.

New Geo-Economics Partnership:

- Recently concluded third meeting of the India-Central Asia Dialogue in Delhi served a purpose to sensitise the Central Asian interlocutors that it attaches primacy to Geoeconomics. But India will have a challenge on its hands to flesh out the “4Cs” concept that External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar presented at the event – commerce, capacity enhancement, connectivity, and contact being the four pillars of a new Geo-economics Partnership. The key areas are transit and transport, logistics network, regional and international transport corridors, free trade agreements, manufacturing industry and job creation. They ought to be front-loaded into India’s Central Asian strategy.
- Certainly, the EAEU integration processes must be speeded up.

2. J&K Delimitation Commission

Why in News?

- The J&K Delimitation Commission has proposed to increase six seats for the Jammu division and one for the Kashmir division evoking sharp reactions from the regional parties.

What is Delimitation and why is it Needed?

- Delimitation is the act of redrawing boundaries of an Assembly or Lok Sabha seat to represent changes in population over time.
- This exercise is carried out by a Delimitation Commission, whose orders have the force of law and cannot be questioned before any court.
- The objective is to redraw boundaries (based on the data of the last Census) in a way so that the population of all seats, as far as practicable, be the same throughout the State.
- Aside from changing the limits of a constituency, the process may result in a change in the number of seats in a state.

Delimitation in J&K:

- Assembly seats in J&K were delimited in 1963, 1973 and 1995.
- Prior to August 5, 2019, carving out of J&K’s Assembly seats was carried out under the J&K Constitution and Jammu and Kashmir Representation of the People Act, 1957.

- Until then, the delimitation of Lok Sabha seats in J&K was governed by the Constitution of India. However, the delimitation of the state's Assembly was governed by the J&K Constitution and J&K Representation of the People Act, 1957.
- There was no census in the state in 1991 and hence no Delimitation Commission was set up by the state until 2001 census.

Why is it in the News Again?

- After the abrogation of J&K's special status in 2019, the delimitation of Lok Sabha and Assembly seats in the newly-created UT would be as per the provisions of the Indian Constitution.
- On March 6, 2020, the government set up the Delimitation Commission, headed by retired Supreme Court judge Ranjana Prakash Desai, which was tasked with winding up delimitation in J&K in a year.
- As per the J&K Reorganization Bill, the number of Assembly seats in J&K would increase from 107 to 114, which is expected to benefit the Jammu region.
- Factors considered during Delimitation
- The number of districts had increased from 12 to 20 and tehsils from 52 to 207 since the last delimitation. The population density ranged from 29 persons a square km in Kishtwar to 3,436 persons a square km in Srinagar.

3. The Remoteness of the Place, Inaccessibility etc are also Considered during the Exercise.

What's News?

- For the first time, in Jammu and Kashmir, nine seats are proposed to be allocated for Scheduled Tribes out of 90 seats on the basis of population.
- Seven seats are proposed for Scheduled Castes.

Concerns Raised over Delimitation:

- Jammu vs. Kashmir: Concerns had been expressed over how the delimitation process may end up favoring the Jammu region over Kashmir in terms of the seats.
- Under-representation of Ladakh: Arguments have been made on how Ladakh has been underrepresented, with demands for statehood/sixth schedule.
- Non-proportionate reservations: It is argued that seats for STs should've been divided in both Jammu province & Kashmir province, as the ST population is almost equal.

4. Aurobindo Ghose

Why in News?

- The Prime Minister has recently set up a 53-member committee to mark the 150th birth anniversary of spiritual leader Sri Aurobindo on 15th August 2022.

Highlights:

- He was born in Calcutta on 15th August 1872. He was a yogi, seer, philosopher, poet, and Indian nationalist who propounded a philosophy of divine life on earth through spiritual evolution.
- He died on 5th December 1950 in Pondicherry.
- His education began in a Christian convent school in Darjeeling.
- He entered the University of Cambridge, where he became proficient in two classical and several modern European languages.
- In 1892, he held various administrative posts in Baroda (Vadodara) and Calcutta (Kolkata).
- He began the study of Yoga and Indian languages, including classical Sanskrit.
- From 1902 to 1910 he partook in the struggle to free India from the British. As a result of his political activities, he was imprisoned in 1908 (Alipore Bomb case).
- Two years later he fled British India and found refuge in the French colony of Pondichéry (Puducherry), where he devoted himself for the rest of his life to the development of his “integral” yoga with an aim of a fulfilled and spiritually transformed life on earth.
- He founded a community of spiritual seekers, which took shape as the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1926.
- He believed that the basic principles of matter, life, and mind would be succeeded through terrestrial evolution by the principle of super mind as an intermediate power between the two spheres of the infinite and the finite.

5. Depreciation of Currency

Why in News?

- Recently Indian currency has declined 2.2% in the Sep-Dec 2021 quarter. This depreciation of currency is due to Global Funds worth \$4 billion having been pulled out of the country’s stock market.

Highlights:

- This downfall of currency makes the Indian rupee as Asia's worst-performing currency.
- Currency depreciation is a fall in the value of a currency in a floating exchange rate system.
- Rupee Depreciation means that the rupee has become less valuable with respect to the dollar.
- It means that the rupee is now weaker than what it used to be earlier.
- **For example:** USD 1 used to equal to Rs. 70, now USD 1 is equal to Rs. 76, implying that the rupee has depreciated relative to the dollar i.e. it takes more rupees to purchase a dollar.

Impact of Depreciation of Indian Rupee:

- Depreciation in rupee is a double-edged sword for the Reserve Bank of India.
- **Positive:** While a weaker currency may support exports amid a nascent economic recovery from the pandemic.
- **Negative:** It poses risk of imported inflation, and may make it difficult for the central bank to maintain interest rates at a record low for longer
- India's trade deficit widened to an all-time high of about \$23 billion in November amid higher imports.
- This growing trade deficit is driven by a rebound in oil prices.
- The strengthening of USD in line with expectations of better growth in the US economy and favorable interest offered by the Federal Reserve (US' Central bank).
- The RBI has been continuously buying dollars to build its reserves and prepare itself for any volatility.
- Foreign capital exodus from stocks have led to the benchmark S&P BSE Sensex Index falling by about 10% below an all-time high touched in October 2021

6. Multi State Cooperative Societies (MSCS) Act, 2002

Why in News?

- The Centre has recently decided to amend the Multi State Cooperative Societies (MSCS) Act, 2002 to "plug the loopholes in the Act".

Highlights:

- Earlier, a new Ministry of Cooperation was formed.

- Although Cooperatives is a state subject, there are many societies such as those for sugar and milk, banks, milk unions etc whose members and areas of operation are spread across more than one state.
- For example, most sugar mills along the districts on the Karnataka-Maharashtra border procure cane from both states.
- Maharashtra has the highest number of such cooperative societies at 567, followed by Uttar Pradesh (147) and New Delhi (133).
- The MSCS Act was passed to govern such cooperatives.
- **Legal Jurisdiction:** Their board of directors has representation from all states they operate in.
- Administrative and financial control of these societies is with the central registrar, with the law making it clear that no state government official can wield any control on them.
- The exclusive control of the central registrar was meant to allow smooth functioning of these societies, without interference of state authorities.
- While the system for state-registered societies includes checks and balances at multiple layers to ensure transparency in the process, these layers do not exist in the case of multi state societies.
- The central registrar can only allow inspection of the societies under special conditions.
- Further, inspections can happen only after prior intimation to societies.
- The on-ground infrastructure for central registrar is thin — there are no officers or offices at state level, with most work being carried out either online or through correspondence.
- Due to this, the grievance redressal mechanism has become very poor.
- This has led to several instances when credit societies have launched ponzi schemes taking advantage of these loopholes.
- **Strengthening Institutional Infrastructure:** The Centre government after consultation with various Stakeholders should strengthen necessary institutional infrastructure to ensure better governance of the societies.
- Technology shall be used to bring in transparency. The administrative control of such societies should be vested in the state commissioners.