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## 1. African Union

### Why in News?

- The African Union (AU) has recently suspended Burkina Faso's participation in the organization's activities until the country restores constitutional order after the military mutiny.

### About:

- The African Union (AU) is a continental union consisting of 55 countries of the continent of Africa, with exception of various territories of European possessions located in Africa.
- The bloc was founded on 26 May 2001 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and launched on 9 July 2002 in South Africa.
- The intention of the AU is to replace the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), established on 25 May 1963 in Addis Ababa by 32 signatory governments.
- The most important decisions of the AU are made by the Assembly of the African Union, a semi-annual meeting of the heads of state and government of its member states.
- The AU's secretariat, the African Union Commission, is based in Addis Ababa.
- **Key objectives:** To achieve greater unity and solidarity between the African countries and Africans.
- To defend the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of its Member States.
- To accelerate the political and social-economic integration of the continent.

## 2. Septemeranthus

### Why in News?

- Recently, a new genus (Septemeranthus) of a parasitic flowering plant has been discovered from the Nicobar group of islands.

### Highlights:

- In addition to Septemeranthus, four other genera on non-parasitic plants, Nicobariodendron (Hippocrateaceae), Pseudodiplospora (Rubiaceae), Pubistylis (Rubiaceae), Sphyranthera, (Euphorbiaceae) have also been discovered earlier from Nicobar group of islands, highlighting the ecological significance of the region.
- The plant that obtains all or part of its nutrition from another plant (the host) without contributing to the benefit of the host and, in some cases, causing extreme damage to the host.

- The defining structural feature of a parasitic plant is the haustorium, a specialised organ that penetrates the host and forms a vascular union between the plants.
- Parasitic plants differ from plants such as climbing vines, lianas, epiphytes, and aerophytes, though the latter are supported by other plants, they are not parasitic, because they use other plants simply as a structure on which to grow rather than as a direct source of water or nutrients.
- It grows on the plant species *Horsfieldiaglabra* (Blume) Warb. It is partially depends on its host but also has leaves capable of photosynthesis.
- It is endemic only to the Nicobar group of islands.
- The name *Septemeranthus* derived from the Latin word 'septem' meaning 'seven', referring to the arrangement of flowers.
- The genus belongs to the family Loranthaceae, a hemi-parasite under the sandalwood order Santalales and is of widespread importance.
- Plants which are hemi-parasites are partially dependent on their host plants for nutrition.
- The leaves of the plant are heart-shaped with a very long tip and the ovary, fruit and seeds are 'urceolate' (earthen pot-shaped).
- It has a modified root structure spread on the stem of the tree and is anchored inside the bark of the host tree.
- Hemi-parasites are commonly referred to as mistletoes that contain 18 families, 160 genera and over 2,200 species.
- They need a host tree or shrub in order to thrive and exhibit a worldwide distribution in tropical as well as temperate habitats that evolved approximately five times in the order and are important in forest ecology, pathology and medicine.
- They play an important role as they provide food for frugivorous (feeding on fruit) birds.

### **3. India and Oman**

#### **Why in News?**

- Recently, the Secretary General of the Ministry of Defence of the Sultanate of Oman is on a visit to India.

#### **Highlights:**

- He will be in Delhi to co-chair the Joint Military Cooperation Committee (JMCC) with India's Defence Secretary.

- Joint Military Cooperation Committee is the highest forum of engagement between India and Oman in the field of defence.
- The JMCC is expected to meet annually, but could not be organised since 2018 when the meeting of the 9th JMCC was held in Oman.
- The 10th JMCC is expected to comprehensively evaluate the ongoing defence exchanges and provide a roadmap for further strengthening defence ties in the coming years.
- Institutional mechanisms like Joint Commission Meeting (JCM) and Joint Business Council (JBC) oversee economic cooperation between India and Oman.
- India is among Oman's top trading partners.
- For Oman, India was the 3rd largest (after UAE and China) source for its imports and 3rd largest market (after UAE and Saudi Arabia) for its non-oil exports in 2019.
- Major Indian financial institutions have a presence in Oman. Indian companies have invested in Oman in sectors like iron and steel, cement, fertilisers, textile etc.
- India-Oman Joint Investment Fund (OIJIF), a JV between State Bank of India and State General Reserve Fund (SGRF) of Oman, a special purpose vehicle to invest in India, has been operational.
- There are about 6.2 lakh Indians in Oman, of which about 4.8 lakh are workers and professionals. There are Indian families living in Oman for more than 150-200 years.
- There are many Indian schools offering CBSE syllabus catering to the educational needs of about 45,000 Indian children.
- Oman is India's closest defence partner in the Gulf region and an important anchor for India's defence and strategic interests.
- Oman is at the gateway of Strait of Hormuz through which India imports one-fifth of its oil imports.
- Defence cooperation has emerged as a key pillar for the robust India-Oman strategic partnership. Defence exchanges are guided by a Framework MOU which was recently renewed in 2021.
- Oman is the only country in the Gulf region with which all three services of the Indian armed forces conduct regular bilateral exercises and staff talks, enabling close cooperation and trust at the professional level.
- Oman also provides critical operational support to Indian naval deployments in the Arabian sea for anti-piracy missions.

- Bilateral training cooperation between the two sides is also robust with Omani forces regularly subscribing to training courses in India both at professional as well as higher command level. Indian armed forces also subscribe to the Staff and Command courses conducted in Oman. Oman also actively participates in the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS). India has supplied rifles to Oman. Also, India is considering setting up a defence production unit in Oman.

#### **4. Foreign Exchange (Forex) reserves**

##### **Why in News?**

- Recently, India's Foreign Exchange (Forex) reserves posted a decline of USD 678 million during the week ended 21st January 2022 to reach USD 634.287 billion.

##### **Highlights:**

- The slip in the reserves was on account of a drop in the Foreign Currency Assets (FCA), a vital component of the overall reserves. FCA declined by USD 1.155 billion to USD 569.582 billion in the reporting week.
- Gold reserves saw an increase of USD 567 million to USD 40.337 billion in the reported week.
- The Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) fell USD 68 million to USD 19.152 billion.
- Foreign exchange reserves are assets held on reserve by a central bank in foreign currencies, which can include bonds, treasury bills and other government securities.
- It needs to be noted that most foreign exchange reserves are held in US dollars.
- Supporting and Maintaining Confidence in the policies for monetary and exchange rate Management. Provides the capacity to intervene in support of the national or union currency.
- Limits external vulnerability by maintaining foreign currency liquidity to absorb shocks during times of crisis or when access to borrowing is curtailed.
- Comfortable Position for the Government: The rising forex reserves give comfort to the Government and the RBI in managing India's external and internal financial issues.
- Managing Crisis serves as a cushion in the event of a Balance of Payment (BoP) crisis on the Economic Front.
- Reserves will provide a level of confidence to markets and investors that a country can meet its External Obligations.

## 5. Why UNSC joint statement on nuclear weapons is important

### Why in News?

- The statement made on January 3 by the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (P5) is important.

### Overview of the P5 Statement:

- This is a major statement. It is not a binding resolution and reiterates some of the core obligations of the NPT.
- The P5 statement reaffirms that a “nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought” because of its “far-reaching consequences”.
- The statement also expresses a commitment to the group’s Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) obligations and “to prevent the unauthorised or unintended use of nuclear weapons”.
- Declaring that an arms race would benefit none and endanger all, the P5 have undertaken to:
  1. Work with all states to create a security environment more conducive to progress on Disarmament with the ultimate goal of a world without nuclear weapons.
  2. Continue seeking bilateral and multilateral diplomatic approaches to avoid military Confrontations, strengthen stability and predictability, increase mutual understanding and Confidence”.
  3. Pursue “constructive dialogue with mutual respect and acknowledgement of each other’s security interests and concerns”.

### Bold Action on 6 Measures:

- Bold action on Six Fronts is necessary.
  1. **Chart a path for Nuclear Disarmament:** That member states should chart a path forward on Nuclear Disarmament.
  2. **Transparency and Dialogue:** They should agree to new measures of “transparency and dialogue”.
  3. **Address Nuclear Crises:** They should address the “simmering” nuclear crises in the Middle East and Asia.
  4. **Strengthen Global Bodies:** They should strengthen the existing global bodies that support non-proliferation, including the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

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5. **Peaceful of Nuclear Technology:** They should promote the peaceful use of nuclear Technology.
  6. **Elimination of Nuclear Weapons:** they should remind “the world’s people that eliminating nuclear weapons is the only way to guarantee that they will never be used.

### **Peace education and right to Peace:**

- Peace is necessary for rights, freedom, equality, and justice and for that reason, we need what Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. called “education in the obvious”— namely, peace Education.
- This is required at multiple levels, ranging across the planetary, global, supranational, regional, national, and local levels of social cognition and action.
- UN Resolution 39/11 (November 12, 1984) proclaims that the peoples of our planet have a sacred right to peace and equally solemnly declares that the “preservation of the right of peoples to peace and the promotion of its implementation constitute a fundamental obligation of each State”.
- The subsequent UN Resolution 53/243 B, declaring a programme of action for a culture of peace (1999) also owes a great deal to Gandhi’s legacy and mission.

### **Conclusion:**

- The statement is politically significant given the unimaginable danger posed by the 13,000 nuclear weapons currently believed to be held by a handful of countries, and the growing spectre of loose nukes, which may be deployed by armed terrorist groups for nefarious purposes.

## **6. How India can Adapt to Global Geoeconomic Churn**

### **Why in News?**

- As India returns to a High Growth path after a slowdown in the last decade, its Geopolitical Saliency in the world will Continue to rise.

### **India’s Growth Story:**

- Today, India’s GDP is \$3.1 trillion and could cross, according to some estimates, \$8 trillion by the end of this decade.
- India’s total trade, which was about \$38 billion in 1991-92, is expected to touch \$1.3 trillion this year.

- This is about 40 per cent of India's GDP and underlines the fact that India is more deeply tied to the world than ever before.
- But the GDP's journey from three to eight trillion will not be a linear process; nor would it be easy to secure India's interests amidst the deeper integration with the world.
- That the world itself is in a geo-economic churn makes the transition a challenging one.
- Geo-economic and geopolitical changes in the global order.

### **Geo-Economic Changes:**

- It was Edward Luttwak, the well-known American strategist, who triggered a global discourse on the idea of geoeconomics in a seminal article in 1990 amidst the end of the Cold War.
- Using economic dominance for political gain: The rapid economic rise of China in the last three decades and Beijing's success in leveraging its growing economic clout for political gain is widely seen as a classic example of geoeconomics.
- Economic interdependence: Luttwak's warning against illusions of economic interdependence and globalisation have been borne out by major changes in US-China relations in recent years.
- The dramatic expansion of economic interdependence between China and America over the last four decades — what some called "Chimerica" — was the principal evidence for the thesis that geopolitics and ideology no longer mattered.
- Chimerica was held up as an efficient economic fusion that underscored the virtues of Economic Globalisation.
- However, economic nationalism has re-emerged in both countries today.
- The US is also strengthening domestic research and industrial capabilities to compete more effectively with China.
- It is not the US alone that is backtracking from globalisation.
- China too has adopted the economic strategy of "dual circulation" that focuses on strengthening domestic capabilities and reducing exposure to external factors.

### **How Geopolitical and Geoeconomic changes are influencing India's free trade**

#### **Policies:**

- At the end of 2019, India has walked out from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) suggesting that the costs of joining a China-centred regional economic order are Unacceptable.

- After abandoning RCEP, Delhi has turned towards free trade agreements with countries like Australia, Britain, UAE, and Israel.
- Deepening engagement with complementary economies: This must be seen as the beginning of a process of deepening India's engagement with countries whose economies are Complementary.
- India is also arguing, much like the US and China, that no large country can simply abandon domestic manufacturing to other countries in the name of economic efficiency and Globalisation.
- India is now taking a number of initiatives to promote domestic manufacturing in a range of sectors under the banner of "Atmanirbhar Bharat".

### **Way Forward for India:**

- Until now, India had the luxury of treating its foreign, economic and strategic policies as Separate Domains.
- Integrated approach to policies: Adapting to the current global geo-economic churn demands that Delhi find better ways to integrate its financial, trade, technological, security and Foreign Policies.
- Above all India needs a strategy that can respond to the imperatives of building domestic capabilities, Developing geo-economic partnerships, and constructing geopolitical coalitions with like-minded Countries.