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## **1. EAM Jaishankar Addresses SCO Foreign Ministers' Meet; Calls for Action on Cross-Border Terrorism, Source: The Indian Express**

**Context:** External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, addressing the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Council of Foreign Ministers in Astana, Kazakhstan, made a strong case for concerted action against cross-border terrorism and its financing. Without naming any country, he stated that there can be no justification for terrorism and that the credibility of the SCO rests on its ability to tackle this threat effectively. He also emphasized the importance of respecting sovereignty and territorial integrity and promoting connectivity projects that are transparent and financially viable.



### **Significance:**

- India's consistent and firm stance on terrorism at multilateral forums like the SCO is a core part of its foreign policy.
- The SCO is a particularly important platform for this, as two of its members, China and Pakistan, have often been seen as obstructing global efforts to counter terrorism.
- The EAM's remarks on connectivity were a clear reference to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), particularly the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which passes through Indian-claimed territory.

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**Analysis:**

- India uses the SCO platform to balance its strategic interests.
- While it engages with China and Russia on continental issues, it simultaneously uses the forum to voice its core security and sovereignty concerns.
- This dual approach allows India to remain a key player in the Eurasian security architecture while holding firm on its principles.
- The challenge for India is navigating the complex geopolitics within the SCO, where the interests of Russia, China, and the Central Asian Republics often diverge.
- By advocating for a rules-based order and secure connectivity, India positions itself as a responsible stakeholder in the region, offering an alternative vision to a purely Sino-centric model.

**UPSC Syllabus Relevance:**

**GS Paper 2:** Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

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## **2. India, UK Finalise 'Early Harvest' Trade Agreement; Focus on Services and Mobility, Source: The Economic Times**

**Context:** After several rounds of intense negotiations, India and the United Kingdom have finalised an 'early harvest' trade agreement, paving the way for a full-fledged Free Trade Agreement (FTA). The announcement was made following a meeting between the Commerce Ministers of both countries in London. The interim deal focuses on liberalizing trade in specific goods, enhancing cooperation in the services sector, particularly financial and legal services, and includes a significant chapter on mobility for students and professionals.



### **Significance:**

- This agreement is a major diplomatic and economic victory for both nations. For the UK, it is a key part of its post-Brexit "Global Britain" strategy, deepening ties with one of the world's fastest-growing major economies.
- For India, it provides enhanced market access for its skilled professionals and service industry exports.
- The mobility chapter is particularly crucial, potentially easing visa norms for Indian students and skilled workers, a long-standing demand from New Delhi.
- This sets a positive tone for the more complex negotiations on the comprehensive FTA.

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**Analysis:**

- An 'early harvest' deal is a strategic choice to lock in gains in less contentious areas while continuing negotiations on more difficult subjects like agricultural tariffs, intellectual property rights, and data rules.
- The success of this interim deal will build political momentum for the larger FTA.
- The focus on services is a win-win, playing to the UK's strength as a global financial hub and India's strength as an IT and services powerhouse. However, the final FTA will require both sides to make difficult concessions.
- India will need to navigate demands for lower tariffs on products like Scotch whisky and automobiles, while the UK will face pressure on its immigration policies.

**UPSC Syllabus Relevance:**

**GS Paper 2:** Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

**GS Paper 3:** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, and development.

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### **3. Supreme Court Upholds Primacy of Delimitation Commission in J&K; Dismisses Petitions, Source: The Hindu**

**Context:** A five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court today unanimously upheld the validity of the delimitation exercise conducted in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. The court dismissed a batch of petitions that had challenged the constitutionality of the Delimitation Commission, which was set up in March 2020 to redraw parliamentary and assembly constituencies in the region following the abrogation of Article 370. The petitioners had argued that the exercise was unconstitutional as it was based on the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019, the legality of which is pending before a larger bench.



#### **Significance:**

- This verdict is a major milestone in the political landscape of J&K.
- It effectively clears the final legal hurdle for holding Assembly elections in the Union Territory, a promise made by the central government.
- The judgment gives constitutional sanctity to the newly drawn constituencies, which have increased the number of seats in the Jammu region, a move that has been politically contentious.
- This will significantly alter the electoral dynamics of the region whenever elections are held.

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**Analysis:**

- The Court's decision to separate the issue of delimitation from the larger question of Article 370's abrogation is a pragmatic judicial approach.
- It focuses on the immediate administrative and electoral process, stating that delimitation is a constitutional mandate that cannot be indefinitely stalled. For the government, it's a political victory that legitimizes its roadmap for J&K.
- However, for regional political parties in Kashmir, this is a setback, as they had hoped the court would link the two issues.
- The judgment now shifts the focus squarely onto the Election Commission of India to announce a timeline for the long-overdue assembly polls.

**UPSC Syllabus Relevance:**

**GS Paper 2:** Indian Constitution, Federalism, Functioning of the Judiciary, Government Policies and Interventions.

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#### **4. NGT Panel Recommends 'Eco-Sensitive Zone' Moratorium in Himalayan States**

**Source: The Hindu**

**Context:** An expert committee constituted by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) has submitted a report recommending an immediate moratorium on the declaration of new eco-sensitive zones (ESZs) and large-scale infrastructure projects in the fragile Himalayan states. The panel, formed in the aftermath of the severe land subsidence crisis in Joshimath and other areas, has highlighted the region's low carrying capacity. It calls for a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary 'Cumulative Impact Assessment' and a 'Carrying Capacity Study' for the entire Indian Himalayan Region before any new projects are approved.



#### **Significance:**

This report is a stark warning about the unsustainable model of development being pursued in the Himalayas. It puts scientific weight behind the concerns long raised by environmentalists and local communities. If the NGT accepts these recommendations, it could lead to a temporary halt on major projects like hydropower dams and highway expansions in the region, forcing a fundamental rethink of development strategy.

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**Analysis:**

- The panel's recommendations represent a crucial call for a paradigm shift from project-centric approval to a region-centric planning approach.
- The concept of carrying capacity is central here, recognising that an ecosystem can only support a certain level of human activity without irreversible damage.
- The challenge will be immense, pitting environmental conservation against developmental and strategic imperatives, as many of these projects are crucial for national security and connectivity.
- Implementing a moratorium will face strong resistance from state governments and project developers. However, the recurring disasters in the Himalayas, exacerbated by climate change, make it imperative to heed such expert advice to prevent future catastrophes.

**UPSC Syllabus Relevance:**

**GS Paper 3:** Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment.

**GS Paper 1:** Geographical features and their location changes in critical geographical features (including water bodies and ice-caps).

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## **5. India Crosses 180 GW Renewable Energy Capacity; Solar Power Leads the Charge, Source: Hindustan Times**

**Context:** The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) announced today that India's total installed renewable energy capacity has crossed the 180 Gigawatt (GW) milestone, excluding large hydro. Solar energy is the primary driver of this growth, accounting for over 55% of the total renewable capacity. The announcement comes as India pushes to achieve its ambitious target of 500 GW of non-fossil fuel energy capacity by 2030, as part of its updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).



### **Significance:**

Crossing the 180 GW mark is a significant achievement, demonstrating India's strong commitment to its climate goals and energy transition. It showcases the success of government policies like the PLI scheme for solar modules, solar park development, and competitive bidding for projects, which have driven down costs and scaled up installations. This increasing share of renewables in the energy mix is crucial for reducing India's carbon footprint and its dependence on imported fossil fuels.

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**Analysis:**

- While the progress is commendable, the road to 500 GW by 2030 is steep and requires an accelerated pace of deployment.
- Several challenges remain. Grid integration of intermittent renewable energy sources requires significant investment in grid modernization and energy storage solutions, such as battery storage and pumped hydro.
- Land acquisition for large-scale solar and wind parks continues to be a bottleneck. Furthermore, the financial health of power distribution companies (Discoms) remains a concern, as their ability to pay for renewable power is critical for investor confidence.
- Addressing these challenges through consistent policy, technological innovation, and financial reforms will be key to sustaining the momentum.

**UPSC Syllabus Relevance:**

**GS Paper 3:** Infrastructure: Energy, Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation.

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## **6. First Performance Audit of Women's Reservation Act Implementation Tabled in Parliament, Source: The Indian Express**

**Context:** The first-ever performance audit report on the initial phase of the implementation of the Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, 2023, commonly known as the Women's Reservation Act, was tabled in Parliament today. The report, prepared by a parliamentary standing committee, assesses the preparedness of the Election Commission and state governments for the Act's implementation, which is contingent on the completion of the delimitation exercise based on the first census post-2026.



### **Significance:**

- The tabling of this report is significant as it brings the focus back on the ground-level preparedness for one of India's most transformative legislative reforms.
- It aims to ensure that the process is on track and identifies potential roadblocks in advance.
- The report's findings will guide the government in creating a clear roadmap and timeline for providing 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.

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**Analysis:**

- The report likely examines key issues such as the methodology for rotating the reserved constituencies, the impact on incumbent male politicians, and the readiness of political parties to find and field a sufficient number of capable women candidates.
- Analysts suggest the report might recommend capacity-building programs for aspiring women politicians and awareness campaigns to foster a more inclusive political culture.
- The real test of the Act lies not just in its legislative passage but in its effective implementation, ensuring that it leads to genuine empowerment and not just the installation of proxies.
- This report is the first step in ensuring accountability in that long process.

**UPSC Syllabus Relevance:**

**GS Paper 2:** Parliament and State Legislatures, Salient features of the Representation of People's Act, Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population.

**GS Paper 1:** Role of women and women's organizations.

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## **7. ASI Discovers Mauryan-Era Settlement Near Sannati, Karnataka**

**Source: The Hindu**

**Context:** The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has announced the discovery of a significant Mauryan-era urban settlement near the ancient Buddhist site of Sannati in Kalaburagi district, Karnataka. The excavation has unearthed remnants of a planned settlement, including brick structures, terracotta ring wells, pottery, and beads dating back to the 3rd century BCE. An Ashokan rock edict was discovered in this region decades ago, and this finding provides crucial context to that discovery.



### **Significance:**

- This discovery is of immense historical importance.
- It provides concrete archaeological evidence of Mauryan influence and administration extending deep into the Deccan plateau.
- The finding of a planned settlement, rather than just isolated artefacts, suggests a more established Mauryan presence than previously thought.
- It can help archaeologists understand the trade routes, administrative structures, and cultural fusion between North and South India during that period.

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**Analysis:**

- The site of Sannati has long been considered important, especially after the discovery of the only known portrait sculpture of Emperor Ashoka.
- This new finding of an associated settlement enriches our understanding of the region as a major provincial center of the Mauryan Empire.
- Further excavation and analysis of the artefacts will be crucial to piece together the economic and social life of the people who lived there.
- It highlights the untapped archaeological potential of the Deccan region and reinforces the need for continued exploration and conservation efforts to uncover more about India's rich past.

**UPSC Syllabus Relevance:**

**GS Paper 1:** Indian Culture - Art Forms, Literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times; Salient aspects of Art Forms.

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## **8. Defence Ministry Approves 'Positive Indigenisation List' for High-Tech Drones** **Source: PIB (Government of India)**

**Context:** The Ministry of Defence has approved a new 'Positive Indigenisation List' (PIL) comprising 50 high-technology drone systems and their critical components. This means these items will be procured only from domestic manufacturers after a specified timeline. The list includes Medium Altitude Long Endurance (MALE) drones, loitering munitions, counter-drone systems, and advanced surveillance payloads. This is part of the government's Aatmanirbhar Bharat initiative in the defence sector.



### **Significance:**

- This is a major policy boost for India's burgeoning domestic drone industry and defence-tech startups.
- By creating a protected market for Indian companies, the government is ensuring sustained demand, which is critical for investment in R&D and manufacturing capacity.
- This move will reduce India's heavy reliance on imported drones (especially from Israel and the US) and build self-reliance in a critical area of modern warfare.

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**Analysis:**

- The effectiveness of this policy will depend on the Indian industry's ability to meet the military's stringent quality and technological requirements within the specified timelines.
- The government and DRDO will need to actively partner with private firms, providing them with technology transfers and testing infrastructure.
- While the PIL is a strong demand-side signal, supply-side challenges like access to critical imported components (e.g., semiconductors, engines) still need to be addressed through diplomatic and industrial efforts.
- This move is a clear strategic signal that India is serious about becoming a drone manufacturing hub.

**UPSC Syllabus Relevance:**

**GS Paper 3:** Indigenization of technology and developing new technology, Security challenges and their management, Defence.

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## **9. Report by National Commission for Safai Karmacharis Highlights Gaps in 'NAMASTE' Scheme, Source: The Indian Express**

**Context:** A new report by the National Commission for Safai Karmacharis (NCSK) has highlighted significant gaps in the implementation of the NAMASTE (National Action for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem) scheme. The scheme, aimed at eradicating hazardous manual cleaning of sewers and septic tanks, has seen slow progress in the adoption of mechanised equipment and the rehabilitation of sanitation workers. The report points to a lack of awareness at the municipal level and insufficient skilling opportunities for workers.



### **Significance:**

- The report is a critical reality check on a scheme that is vital for upholding the dignity and safety of sanitation workers.
- Despite the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013, hazardous cleaning continues, leading to preventable deaths.
- The findings underscore the urgent need to bridge the gap between policy intent and ground-level implementation.

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**Analysis:**

- The problem is not merely technological but also social and administrative.
- The report suggests that many Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) lack the financial resources and technical expertise to procure and maintain sewer cleaning machines.
- The social stigma attached to the work makes it difficult for sanitation workers to transition to alternative, dignified livelihoods.
- The commission's recommendations likely include stricter enforcement of the law against employing manual scavengers, a time-bound plan for 100% mechanisation in all cities, and a more robust framework for providing capital subsidies and skill training to the workers and their families.

**UPSC Syllabus Relevance:**

**GS Paper 2:** Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions, and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

**GS Paper 1:** Social empowerment.

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## **10. India Posthumously Awards Bharat Ratna to Agricultural Scientist Dr. M.S. Swaminathan, Source: The Hindu**

**Context:** The President of India, in a ceremony at Rashtrapati Bhavan, posthumously conferred the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honour, on Dr. M.S. Swaminathan. The award was accepted by his daughter, Dr. Soumya Swaminathan. Dr. Swaminathan, widely hailed as the 'Father of the Green Revolution in India, passed away in 2023. The award recognizes his unparalleled contribution to India's agricultural science, food security, and the welfare of millions of farmers.



### **Significance:**

- This is a long-overdue recognition for a scientist whose work transformed India from a food-deficient nation to a self-sufficient one.
- The Green Revolution, spearheaded by Dr. Swaminathan, introduced high-yield variety seeds of wheat and rice, saving India from famine in the 1960s.
- His work went beyond just productivity; he was a lifelong advocate for the "evergreen revolution" – increasing productivity in perpetuity without associated ecological harm.

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**Analysis:**

- The timing of the award is also symbolic, coming at a time when Indian agriculture is at a crossroads, facing challenges of climate change, degrading soil health, and farmer distress.
- Honouring Dr. Swaminathan brings his holistic vision for agriculture back into the national discourse.
- His formula for fixing Minimum Support Price (MSP) at C2+50% (total cost of production plus 50%) continues to be a central demand of farmer organizations.
- This award is not just a tribute to a great Indian but also a reminder of the urgent need to build a scientifically sound, environmentally sustainable, and economically viable agricultural future, a vision for which Dr. Swaminathan dedicated his entire life.

**UPSC Syllabus Relevance:**

**GS Paper 3:** Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Public Distribution System- objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; issues of buffer stocks and food security; Technology missions; economics of animal-rearing.

**GS Paper 1:** Post-independence consolidation and reorganization within the country.