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MCQs

THE HINDU

The Mecca Pact and the rise of strategic hedging

Prelims: General Studies Paper 1

Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies 2

Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Why in Focus?

- The Mecca Pact signed by Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Pakistan in Mecca on August 7 marks a potential shift in West Asian geopolitics, signalling greater regional strategic autonomy and a move towards security arrangements led by regional powers.

Key Highlights

- The pact follows the principle that an attack on one member will be considered an attack on all three, creating a collective-security commitment.
- It does not end dependence on the United States; Saudi Arabia remains closely linked to Washington, Türkiye is a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member, and Pakistan retains ties with the U.S.
- Saudi Arabia contributes financial resources, energy power and political influence.
- Turkey brings strong conventional military capabilities and a growing indigenous defence industry.

- Pakistan contributes a large professional military and extensive defence cooperation with Saudi Arabia; its nuclear capability also adds strategic weight, though no formal nuclear guarantee has been extended.

Implications

- Turkey's continued support for Pakistan on Kashmir and defence cooperation remains a concern for India.
- India should seek reassurance from Saudi Arabia that the pact will not apply to India-Pakistan conflicts.
- Strengthens the possibility of a region-led West Asian security architecture.
- Alters the strategic calculations of Iran and Israel.
- Greater regional autonomy could reduce U.S. strategic leverage.

Way Forward

- India should pursue strategic engagement and diplomatic reassurance with Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan.
- Strengthen India's economic, energy, defence and diaspora partnerships with West Asian countries.
- Support an inclusive regional security architecture based on dialogue and strategic autonomy.
- Avoid bloc politics while maintaining India's traditional approach of multi-alignment and strategic autonomy.



Mains Question

“The Saudi Arabia–Türkiye–Pakistan defence pact reflects the growing trend of strategic hedging and regional security autonomy in West Asia. Examine its implications for regional geopolitics and India’s strategic interests.” (250 Words)

No path to peace: On Israel’s rejection of peace plan

Prelims: General Studies Paper 1

Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies 2

Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India’s interests, Indian diaspora.

Why in Focus?

- The article examines the continuing humanitarian crisis in Gaza despite the U.S.-brokered ceasefire and highlights disagreements over Hamas’s disarmament and Israeli withdrawal.

Key Highlights

- Nearly 1,300 Palestinians have reportedly been killed since the ceasefire, while Israel controls about 65% of Gaza.
- Around 2 million Palestinians remain amid widespread destruction, with schools and hospitals shut and humanitarian aid severely restricted.
- Hamas agreed to phased decommissioning and storage of heavy weapons, linked to a gradual Israeli withdrawal, but Israel rejected the proposed 15-point roadmap.
- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu insists on complete Hamas disarmament before any withdrawal, reflecting both security concerns and domestic political pressures.
- The proposed “Board of Peace” vision for a “New Gaza” includes a free-trade zone and privatised infrastructure but reportedly lacks meaningful Palestinian representation.

Board of Peace: A U.S.-led international body chaired by Donald Trump, established under his Gaza peace plan to oversee Gaza’s reconstruction, transitional governance and stabilisation, with a broader stated ambition of promoting peace in conflict-affected regions.

Implications

- Continued Israeli military control and restricted aid could deepen Gaza’s humanitarian crisis.
- Disagreement over Hamas’s disarmament and Israeli withdrawal remains the central obstacle to implementing the roadmap.
- The U.S. faces a dilemma between supporting Israel and using its leverage to secure a genuine and sustained withdrawal.

Way Forward

- Ensure a phased, reciprocal process linking Hamas disarmament with Israeli military withdrawal.
- Guarantee unhindered humanitarian assistance and reconstruction.
- Ensure meaningful Palestinian representation in Gaza’s political and reconstruction framework.
- The U.S. should use its diplomatic and military leverage to promote a durable ceasefire and negotiated settlement.

Mains Question

“Despite ceasefire arrangements, the Gaza conflict continues to pose serious humanitarian and diplomatic challenges. Examine the obstacles to a durable peace and the role of the United States in facilitating a sustainable political settlement.” (250 Words)

Ladakh’s giant ‘rivers of ice’ are slowing as the mountains warm

Prelims : General Studies Paper I

General issues on Environmental ecology, Biodiversity and Climate Change.



Mains: General Studies 3

Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

Why in Focus?

- A new study found that glaciers in **Zaskar, Ladakh** have been **slowing down** over the past three decades, providing evidence of changes linked to **climate change**.
- The study examined **12 glaciers** from **1992 to 2023** using **satellite data** to measure glacier surface velocity.

Key Highlights

- Zaskar** contains some of the largest and most extensive glaciers in the **Himalaya**.
 - ◆ Acts as a **freshwater reservoir** for rivers, ecosystems, agriculture, and local communities.
- Researchers found that glacier flow slowed by an average of **2.4 m/year per decade**.
- Glacier surface thinning accelerated from about **0.22 m/year (2000-05)** to **0.57 m/year (2015-20)**.
- As glaciers **lose ice and become thinner**, they **flow more slowly**, reducing the movement of ice from **higher to lower areas**.
- Glacier **response is not uniform**. Their shape, debris cover, and end conditions affect how fast they move.
- The study linked **mass loss, glacier thinning, and reduced glacier flow**, showing how warming can affect the physical movement of glaciers.
- Zaskar glaciers receive much of their snowfall from **mid-latitude westerly disturbances during winter**, making their climatic setting distinct from parts of the eastern and central Himalaya.
 - ◆ Western Disturbances (WDs) are **critical mid-latitude weather systems that influence winter precipitation** across northern India.

Implications

- Continued **glacier thinning and slowdown** could reduce long-term **glacier water storage**

in the Indus basin.

- Glacier melt **may initially increase river flow**, but as **ice reserves decline**, meltwater contribution may decrease.
- Changes in glacier water availability could affect **water security, agriculture, hydropower, and downstream ecosystems**.
- Findings should not automatically be applied to all Ladakh glaciers, as the study covered only **12 glaciers**, whereas the Zaskar basin has around **1,755 glaciers**.
- Satellite observations cannot directly capture processes beneath glaciers, such as **subglacial hydrology and basal sliding**, creating limitations in understanding glacier movement.

Way Forward

- Strengthen **long-term glacier monitoring** using both satellite and ground-based observations.
- Improve **high-altitude weather monitoring** to understand variations in mountain climate.
- Strengthen **climate action** through international cooperation and agreements such as the **Paris Agreement** to **limit the rise in global temperatures**.
- Expand **research and early-warning systems** to anticipate glacier-related hazards such as floods and long-term water stress.

Mains Question

"Glacier thinning and slowdown in the Himalaya have implications beyond cryospheric change." Discuss their potential impact on water security and the Indus basin. (150 Words)

India's rising dependence on U.S. LPG

Prelims : General Studies Paper I

Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies 2

Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.



Why in Focus?

- India has increased **LPG imports from the U.S.** amid disruptions in the **Strait of Hormuz**, highlighting the need to diversify energy supplies.
- India, the **world's second-largest LPG importer**, traditionally depends heavily on **West Asian supplies**.

Key Highlights

- **67% of India's LPG** was reported to come from the **U.S.**, reflecting a major shift in sourcing amid the Hormuz crisis.
- India signed a long-term deal for **2.2 million tonnes of LPG from the U.S. in 2026, to be supplied** through State-run oil refiners.
- India's LPG imports from **West Asia fell by nearly 85%** between **February and June 2026**, while U.S. imports reached **0.77 million metric tonnes in June**.
- Traditionally, India has relied on the **Gulf region**, with about **60% of its LPG imports** coming from the region, nearly **90% of which pass through the Strait of Hormuz**.
- **U.S. LPG** takes about **25-35 days** to reach India, compared with **5-10 days from the Gulf**, making Gulf supplies **faster and more cost-efficient to transport**.
- During the crisis, **Saudi CP LPG prices** rose from about **\$543/tonne in February** to around **\$790/tonne in June**.
 - ◆ Making **U.S. supplies more competitive** despite higher transport costs.
- India's **LPG production** has struggled to keep pace with consumption.
 - ◆ In **Q1 FY27**, production was **4.3 MMT**, while consumption was **6.5 MMT**.
- Public-sector **Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs)** increased daily LPG production from **34,000 MT to 55,000 MT** at the peak of the crisis.
- As of **July 1, 2026**, PSU OMCs had **33.14 crore active domestic LPG customers**, with consumption estimated at **34,692 TMT for 2026-27**.

Implications

- **Overdependence on a single supplier** is risky, as the U.S. could use **energy supplies as a bargaining tool** in trade negotiations.
- The U.S. has used **sanctions and export controls** against countries including **Iran, Iraq, Cuba, Russia, and Syria**, posing risks to **energy security and trade**.
- India **remains exposed to fluctuations in global LPG prices**, even after reducing dependence on the Strait of Hormuz.
- Longer U.S. shipping routes increase exposure to **transport costs and disruptions**.
- LPG is a politically sensitive fuel; shortages can have significant **social and political consequences**.

Way Forward

- Increase **domestic LPG production** to reduce dependence on imports.
- **Diversify imports across multiple suppliers** rather than replacing one dominant supplier with another.
- Explore **alternative suppliers**, such as those in **Australia**, which lies outside the Strait of Hormuz.
- Strengthen **strategic LPG reserves** and build more resilient supply chains.
- Focus on ensuring that **no single country or route becomes indispensable** to India's LPG security.

Mains Question

"India's LPG security requires diversification rather than simply replacing one major supplier with another." Discuss the challenges facing India's LPG security and suggest measures to strengthen it. (150 Words)



KEYWORDS

Har Ghar Tiranga Campaign

- Har Ghar Tiranga **was launched in 2022 under the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav initiative to encourage citizens to hoist the National Flag at their homes.**
- The **campaign is coordinated by the Ministry of Culture, Government of India**, with participation from Central and State/UT governments.
- It **seeks to promote patriotism, national unity and a sense of collective ownership of the National Flag** among citizens.
- The **campaign is linked to Independence Day celebrations and encourages citizens to display the Tiranga with dignity** in accordance with the Flag Code of India, 2002.
- **Har Ghar Tiranga 2026 is being observed from 9–17 August 2026**, marking the fourth edition of the campaign.

Mekedatu Project

- Mekedatu Project is a **proposed multipurpose balancing reservoir across the Cauvery River near Kanakapura in Ramanagara district, Karnataka.**
- The **project is proposed near the confluence of the Cauvery and Arkavathi rivers, about 90 km from Bengaluru and close to the Karnataka–Tamil Nadu border.**
- It envisages a **99-metre-high and 735-metre-long concrete gravity dam with 400 MW of hydropower generation.**
- **The project is expected to submerge more than 5,000 hectares of protected area in the Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary, raising environmental concerns.**
- Tamil Nadu opposes the project as a lower-riparian State, arguing that it could affect the downstream flow and its share of Cauvery waters.

ICTP Dirac Medal

- The **Dirac Medal** is awarded annually by the **International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP)** to scientists who have made significant contributions to **theoretical physics.**
- It was **instituted in 1985** in honour of **P.A.M. Dirac**, one of the leading physicists of the 20th century.
- The medal is awarded every year on **8 August**, the **birthday of P.A.M. Dirac.**
- An **international committee of distinguished scientists** selects the winners from nominated candidates.
- **Theoretical physicist Deepak Dhar** received the **2026 Dirac Medal** for his contributions to **statistical physics.**
- **Deepak Dhar** is the **second Indian** to receive the honour; **Ashoke Sen** was the first Indian recipient in **2012.**
- The award is presented by **ICTP**, headquartered in **Trieste, Italy**, and has previously honoured scientists including **Stephen Hawking.**

Polymer Banknotes

- The **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** plans to introduce **polymer banknotes** from the beginning of **FY28 (2027-28).**
- **Polymer notes are more durable** than paper currency and can have a lifespan around **2-4 times longer.**
- The RBI will first test the notes for **durability and adaptability to Indian conditions** before full circulation.
- The RBI's trial of plastic notes will see **100 crore pieces of Rs 10 and Rs 20 notes each being introduced, totaling Rs 3,000 crore.**
- RBI's subsidiary **Bharatiya Reserve Bank Note Mudran Pvt. Ltd. (BRBNMPL)** has floated a global tender for **3.4 crore polymer sheets.**



- **Australia was the first country to issue polymer banknotes in 1988.**
 - ◆ Today, they are used in **more than 50 countries**, including the **UK, Canada, New Zealand, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore**.
- Polymer **notes are costlier to make**, but they last longer, so fewer notes need to be printed, replaced and destroyed, **reducing overall costs and environmental impact**.