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INDEX

	Page No.
Polity	3-5
Muslim Women's Right to Maintenance	
Economy	6
Bharat Bill Payment Systems	
International Relations	7-13
BIMSTEC	
India-Russia	
Environment	14-18
Glacial Lake Outburst floods	
Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction	
Culture	19-21
Mask Making Tradition of Assam**	
At A Glance	22-25
Awards	
1. Man and Biosphere Programme (MAB) Young Scientist Award**	
Important Days	
2. World Population Day	
Defence	
3. Zorawar	
Exercises	
4. Exercise Nomadic Elephant	
5. Exercise Sagar Kavach	
Schemes	
6. Apun Bahan Scheme**	
Miscellaneous	
7. Project PARI	
8. Sonai Rupai Wildlife Sanctuary**	
9. Shigella infection	
10. Karbi Anglong Tiger Reserve**	
District At a Glance	

Muslim Women's Right to Maintenance

Syllabus: GS-II- Government Policies & Interventions

Why in the News?

The Supreme Court recently ruled that a divorced Muslim woman is entitled to a claim of maintenance from her former husband under Section 125 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), 1973.

About the Case

- A SC bench heard a special leave petition filed by a husband challenging the grant of interim maintenance to his wife.
- The husband argued that a divorced Muslim woman must seek maintenance under the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act 1986, instead of Section 125 CrPC, claiming that the 1986 Act is more beneficial.
 - The SC dismissed the petition.

About Section 125 of Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), 1973

- The **law governing maintenance for destitute wives, children, and parents** has been **codified** under Section 125 of the CrPC.
- It holds that a **divorced woman** has the **right to seek maintenance**/monthly allowance from her former husband **until her remarriage**.
- The **maintenance amount** is **determined** by a **magistrate** based on the specific circumstances of each case.
- It is a **secular provision** which is applicable to all women irrespective of their religion.

Key Highlights of the Judgement

- **Social Justice Measures Insulated from Personal Laws:** The apex court stated that Section 125 CrPC was introduced as a measure of social justice, to protect women and children.

- It highlighted that the provision manifested the **constitutional commitment** under **Article 15(3)**.
- A claim under Section 125 CrPC is maintainable regardless of the personal laws governing the parties.
- **Equivalent rights of maintenance:** The court concluded that equivalent rights of maintenance under both - the secular provision of Section 125 and the personal law provision of the 1986 Act, parallelly exist in their distinct domains and jurisprudence.
- **Harmonious Interpretation-** The SC advocated that the two conflicting statutes should be harmoniously and purposively interpreted. SC stated that a divorced Muslim woman is entitled to seek recourse to either or both the provisions.
- **Muslim women divorced through triple talaq entitled to relief:** The SC clarified that Muslim women divorced through illegal methods such as triple talaq are entitled to maintenance under Section 125 of the CrPC.

Triple talaq was declared **unconstitutional** by the Supreme Court in 2017 and was later **criminalized** under the **Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019**.

Thus, divorced Muslim women in India have two options:

- **The Muslim Women Act, 1986:** Offers maintenance during the iddat period, with the amount linked to mahr.
- **The CrPC Section 125:** Provides for maintenance as long as the woman remains unmarried and financially dependent.

Evolution of Law on Maintenance

<p>Mohd. Ahmad Khan v. Shah Bano Begum, 1985</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the Shah Bano case, SC upheld the Muslim woman's right to seek maintenance from her divorced husband under Section 125 of the CrPC. • It emphasized that Section 125(3) of the CrPC had overriding powers over any personal law. • The verdict was, however, perceived by many to be an infringement to religious personal laws.
<p>The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a religion-specific law that provides a procedure for a Muslim woman to claim maintenance during divorce. • The act overturned the SC verdict in the Shah Bano Case. • It guarantees the payment of maintenance to a divorced Muslim woman by her former husband only during the period of iddat. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Iddat is a period of three months, which a woman must observe after the death of her husband or a divorce before she can remarry.</i> • The amount of maintenance was tied to the mahr (dowry) received during marriage. • The Act also allows women to seek maintenance under the CrPC after iddat if they remain unmarried and financially dependent.
<p>Danial Latifi v. Union of India, 2001</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Constitution Bench of the SC in the Danial Latifi v. Union of India (2001) case upheld the constitutional validity of the 1986 Act. • It, however, interpreted that a reasonable and fair provision and maintenance must be made and paid during the iddat period.
<p>Shabana Bano v. Imran Khan, 2009</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the 2009 case of Shabana Bano v. Imran Khan, the SC reaffirmed a divorced Muslim woman's right to claim maintenance under the CrPC for as long as she remains unmarried, even beyond iddat.
<p>Patna High Court judgment, 2019</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2019 the Patna High Court emphasized that a muslim divorced woman has the option to avail maintenance both under the CrPC and the 1986 Act.

Implications of the Supreme Court's Rulings

- **Clarification of Legal Ambiguities:** The verdict ended the decade old confusion over the applicability of Section 125 CrPC to divorced Muslim women.
- **Affirmation of Rights:** It upheld their right to claim maintenance under a secular law (Section 125 CrPC), widening the legal options for divorced Muslim women beyond the 1986 Act.
- **Ensure Social Justice:** The rulings align with the constitutional mandate of social justice, thereby supporting divorced Muslim women right to a dignified life.
- **Harmonization:** The SC's ruling harmonizes personal religious laws with secular legal provisions, ensuring that personal laws do not undermine the basic human rights guaranteed by the Constitution.
- **Equality Before the Law:** By upholding Section 125 CrPC's applicability, the Court ensures that divorced Muslim women are not discriminated against based on their religion, promoting equality before the law.
- **Precedent for Lower Courts:** These rulings provide a clear precedent for lower courts to follow, ensuring consistency in judicial decisions regarding maintenance claims by divorced Muslim women.

- **Judicial Activism:** The decisions reflect the judiciary's active role in interpreting laws in a manner that upholds constitutional values and protects vulnerable sections of society.
- **Financial Security:** It will ensure that divorced Muslim women are provided with more substantial and sustained financial support compared to the provisions of the 1986 Act.
- **Legal Awareness:** The rulings may lead to increased legal awareness among divorced Muslim women about their rights, encouraging them to come forward and claim maintenance.
- **Empowerment:** The ruling is expected to empower divorced Muslim women, reinforcing their legal rights and enhancing their financial independence.
- **Policy Influence:** These decisions may influence future legislative and policy measures aimed at protecting the rights of women from all communities, contributing to broader gender justice reforms.

Q. Discuss the implications of the Supreme Court's rulings on Muslim women's right to maintenance under Section 125 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) in light of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986. **(150 words/10 marks)**

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Bharat Bill Payment Systems

Syllabus: GS-III Indian Economy & Development

Why in the News?

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has recently mandated that all banks process credit card bill payments through the Bharat Bill Payment System (BBPS).

About Bharat Bill Payment Systems (BBPS)

- BBPS is an **integrated online platform developed** by the **National Payments Corporation of India** for all kinds of bill payments.
- The platform **intends to build an interoperable service** through a network of agents, enabling multiple payment modes along with instant generation of receipts of payments.
- It would connect the **utility service companies** on one end and all **payments service providers** on the other.
- **It operates as a tiered structure** with NPCI Bharat Bill Pay Ltd (NBBL) as a Central Unit (BBPCU), Bharat Bill Payment Operating Units (BBPOUs), and agent networks of BBPOUs.
- **NBBL, a wholly-owned subsidiary** of NPCI, is the entity authorized as the Payment System Provider for BBPS.

Significance of using BBPS

- **"Anytime Anywhere" Bill:** The biggest advantage is that the bill can be paid anywhere and anytime.

- **Unified Platform for All Payments:** There would be retail points for bill payments across the country that would be able to accept all kinds of bills payments made through Internet banking.
- **Convenient and User-Friendly:** The BBPS payments would be made securely through the NPCI network with instant receipts getting generated.
- **Timely Reminders:** Customers receive notifications about upcoming due dates, reducing the risk of late payments and associated penalties.
- **Enhanced Security:** BBPS adheres to stringent security protocols, safeguarding customers' financial data and transactions, building trust in digital payment methods.
- **Multiple Payment Modes:** BBPS offers a wide range of payment modes like UPI, net banking, debit card etc., thus enhancing convenience.

Highlights of the New Guidelines

- RBI has **introduced the framework in exercise of powers** conferred by the **Payment and Settlement Systems Act, of 2007**.
- It aims to **enhance security, reduce fraud, and standardize grievance redressal processes**.
- The RBI's directive also aims to **regulate and monitor peer-to-peer (P2P) credit card transactions** conducted through third-party applications.
- This move will **tighten regulations** and aims to **centralize and streamline the bill payment process** across India.

National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI)

- NPCI is an **umbrella organization** for operating retail payments and settlement systems in India.
- It is an **initiative of RBI and Indian Banks' Association (IBA)** under the provisions of the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007, for creating a robust Payment & Settlement Infrastructure in India.
- NPCI helps in **promoting financial inclusion** in the country.
- NPCI operates payment systems like National Financial Switch (NFS), Immediate Payment System (IMPS), Aadhaar-enabled Payments System (AEPS) and National Automated Clearing House (NACH).
- NPCI has also **launched products** including **RuPay, Bharat Interface for Money (BHIM), and Unified Payments Interface (UPI)**.

BIMSTEC

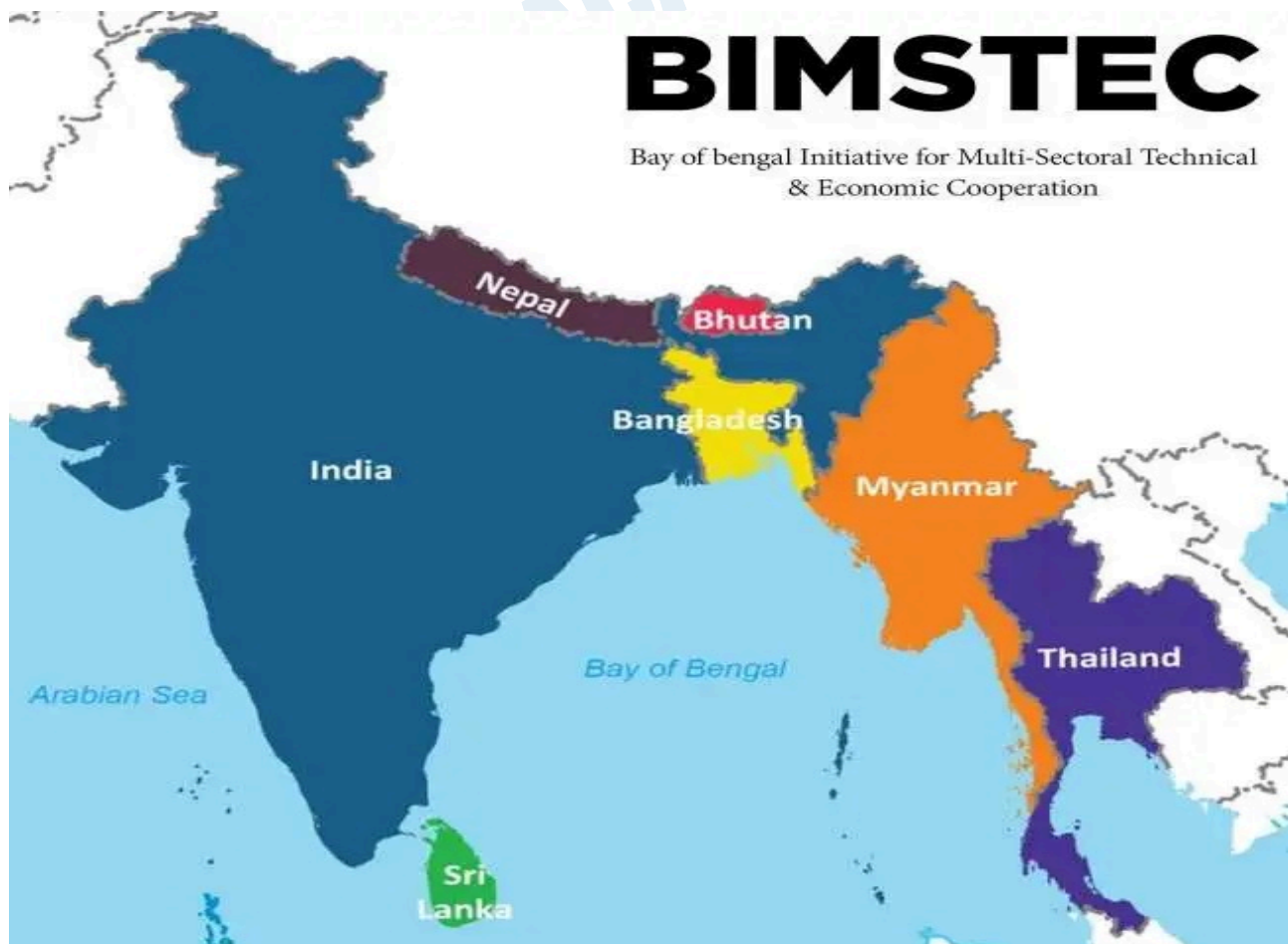
Syllabus: GS-II International Organisation

Why in the News?

India, recently hosted the second Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) foreign ministers' retreat in New Delhi. The first edition was hosted by Thailand in 2023.

What is BIMSTEC?

- The BIMSTEC is a **regional multilateral organization** focused on fostering shared growth and cooperation among countries in the Bay of Bengal region.
- It has a total of **seven members**, **five** from **South Asia** including **Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka** and **two** from **Southeast Asia** namely, **Thailand** and **Myanmar**.
- It was **founded** in **1997** as **BIST-EC** (Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand Economic Cooperation) with the **adoption** of the **Bangkok Declaration**.
- It was **renamed** as **BIMST-EC** after **Myanmar** joined in late **1997**.
- **BIMSTEC** adopted its current name in **2004** when **Nepal** and **Bhutan** became **members**.
- Its **objective** is to **accelerate shared growth** and **enhance cooperation** across multiple sectors among littoral and adjacent countries in the Bay of Bengal region.
- It is **headquartered** in **Dhaka**, Bangladesh and **Thailand** is the **current chair** of BIMSTEC.



Significance of BIMSTEC

- **Connectivity Bridge:** BIMSTEC acts as a link between South Asian nations and Southeast Asian and represents a reinforcement of relations among these countries.
- **Economic importance:** BIMSTEC region hosts 22% of the world population and the member states have a combined GDP of US\$3.697 trillion/per year.
- **Regional Cooperation:** It promotes collaboration in six major areas i.e. trade, technology, transport, tourism, energy, and fisheries, benefiting all member countries.
- **Geopolitical Advantage:** BIMSTEC is important owing to the fact that one-fourth of the world trade is carried through the Bay of Bengal (BOB) region.
- **Strengthens Security:** BIMSTEC enhances cooperation on issues like maritime security and counter-terrorism helps address regional security threats in the BOB region via its Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime (JWG-CTTC).
- **Humanitarian Cooperation:** BIMSTEC's joint efforts in humanitarian aid and disaster relief (HADR) initiatives like PANEX, bolster preparedness and response among member states.
- **Enhanced Regional Stability:** BIMSTEC promotes regional cooperation in some key sectors, fostering regional stability in the region.
- **Divergent Significance:** BIMSTEC's benefits different member States in different ways. For instance:
 - **For Bangladesh:** BIMSTEC is a platform to strengthen its much-needed economic development.
 - **Sri Lanka:** It leverages BIMSTEC to establish itself as a maritime trade hub in the Indo-Pacific.
 - **Nepal and Bhutan:** These two landlocked, mountainous nations view BIMSTEC as a crucial "gateway to the sea."
- **Myanmar and Thailand:** BIMSTEC offers an opportunity for Myanmar and Thailand to diversify their economic partnerships, potentially reducing their over-reliance on China.

Significance of BIMSTEC for India

- **Regional Cooperation:** BIMSTEC aligns with India's 'Act East' and 'neighborhood first' policy for greater regional cooperation in southeast Asia.
- **Connectivity:** Enhance India's connectivity in the region by supporting infrastructure projects like Asian Trilateral Highway and Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project.
- **Alternative Platform:** It provides an alternative to SAARC for regional cooperation, given the challenges in SAARC's functionality due to political tensions between India-Pakistan.
- **Security Cooperation:** Enhances India's ability to address security challenges in the BOB and Indian Ocean regions (IOR) and is in line with its SAGAR (security and growth for all in the region) initiative.
- **Strategic Interests:** Strengthens India's strategic influence in the BOB and IOR region and counterbalances China's presence in the region.
- **Economic Integration:** BIMSTEC fosters economic integration between India and other member states, boosting a shared economic growth in the region.
- **Enhanced Cultural Diplomacy:** Strengthens India's cultural diplomacy and people-to-people connections with neighboring countries.
- **For instance:** In 2018 & 2019, India organized a pilgrimage visit for Sri Lankan Armed forces and their families to Bodh Gaya in June 2019.

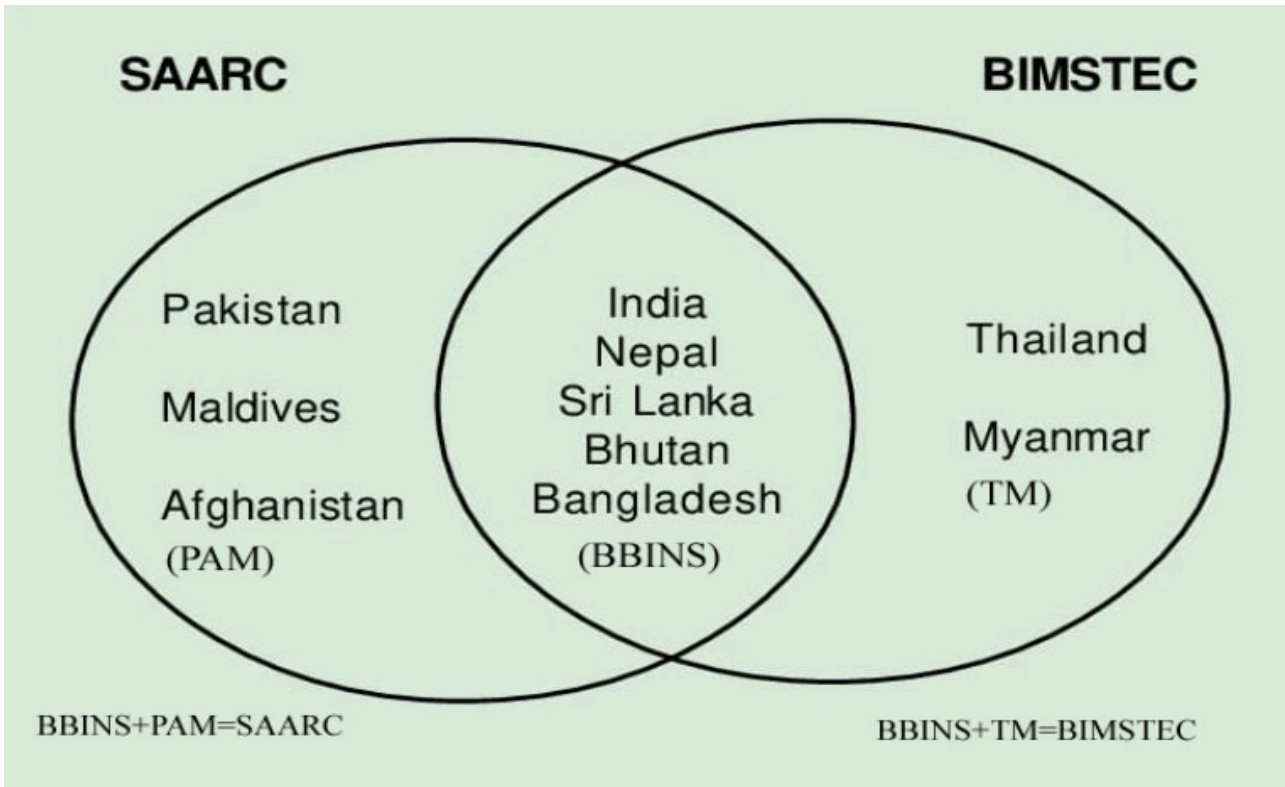
SAARC v/s BIMSTEC

SAARC

1. A regional organisation looking into South Asia
2. Established in 1985; a product of the Cold War era
3. Member countries suffer for mistrust and suspicion
4. Suffers from regional politics
5. Asymmetric power balance
6. Intra-regional trade only 5%

BIMSTEC

1. Interregional organisation connecting South Asia and South East Asia
2. Established in 1997 in the post-Cold War
3. Members maintain reasonably friendly relations
4. Core objective is the improvement of economic cooperation among countries
5. Balancing of power with the presence of Thailand and India on the bloc
6. Intra-regional trade has increased around 6 percent in a decade



Challenges and Criticisms of BIMSTEC

- **Lack of Efficiency:**
 - Sluggish progress and inconsistency in policy-making, operational meetings, inadequate financial and manpower support to BIMSTEC secretariat.
- **Selective Interest:**
 - India views BIMSTEC as a secondary option to other regional forums. This lack of full commitment can hamper progress.
- **Transborder Connectivity:**
 - Significant gaps in transborder connectivity among member countries.
 - For Instance: The India-Myanmar border remains one of the least open in Asia.
- **Low Trade Volume:**
 - India's trade with BIMSTEC countries was only 4% of its total foreign trade in 2020. Moreover, there is no Free Trade Agreement among BIMSTEC members yet.
- **Political and Diplomatic Issues:**
 - Tensions such as Bangladesh-Myanmar relations over the Rohingya crisis, the

India-Nepal border issue, and Myanmar's military coup impact BIMSTEC's progress.

- **External Dependencies:**
 - BIMSTEC countries often import goods from non-member countries instead of trading within the region.
- **Overlapping Initiatives:**
 - The existence of other regional cooperation initiatives like ASEAN and BCIM can lead to overlapping efforts and dilute BIMSTEC's focus.

BIMSTEC has the potential to be a game-changer for sub-regional collaboration in the Bay of Bengal. However, addressing challenges and ensuring consistent engagement are crucial for its success. By prioritizing key areas, promoting infrastructure development, and fostering a spirit of cooperation, BIMSTEC can pave the way for a more secure, prosperous, and interconnected Bay of Bengal region.

Q. Discuss the importance of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) in enhancing sub-regional cooperation among its member countries. **(250 words/15 Marks)**

India-Russia

Syllabus: GS-II International Relations

Why in the News?

The Indian Prime Minister recently visited Russia. This is the first visit of the PM to Russia, since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. The two sides outlined several key areas for future cooperation, aiming to enhance bilateral trade and economic relations.

Highlights of the Visit

- **Economic Cooperation:** Both the countries agreed to
 - **Eliminate non-tariff barriers and negotiate** on establishment of **EAEU-India Free Trade Area**.
 - **Achieve a trade volume** of more than **\$100 billion by 2030**.
 - Development of a **bilateral settlement system** using **national currencies**.
 - **Strengthen ties in infrastructure development, transport engineering, automobile production, shipbuilding, and space.**
- **Transport Corridors:** Increase cargo turnover via the North-South International Transport Corridor, the Northern Sea Route, and the Chennai-Vladivostok Sea Line and **digitized customs procedures**.
- **Energy Cooperation:** Enhance cooperation in **nuclear energy, oil refining, and petrochemicals** along with **energy infrastructure, technologies, and equipment**.
- **On Russia- Ukraine Conflict:** Both sides highlighted the need for a **peaceful resolution** of the “conflict around Ukraine”.
- **Military Cooperation:** Both sides agreed to **promote joint manufacturing** of spare parts, components, and other products for maintaining **Russian-origin defense equipment in India** under the Make-in-India program.

Other Dimension of India-Russia Relations

Historical Background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • India-Russia signed the “Declaration on the India-Russia Strategic Partnership” in 2000 which was elevated to the level of a “Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership” in 2010.
Multilateral Cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both countries advocate for a multipolar world and have cooperated through multiple forums like BRICS, RIC, SCO and G20. • Russia also supported India’s bid for a UNSC permanent seat, and the inclusion of India in the Nuclear Suppliers’ Group.
Defense and Security Cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • India-Russia defense cooperation involves joint research, development, technological transfer, marketing and selling. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BrahMos Missile, SU-30 aircraft, MiG-29 and T-90 tanks, are examples of such flagship cooperation. • Both the sides also participate in various bilateral and multilateral exercises like INDRA, Vostok,
Economic Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bilateral trade between both the countries was around \$ 65.70 billion in FY 2023-24. • Bilateral investments between the two countries surpassed the previous target of \$30 billion in 2018, leading to a revised target of \$50 billion by 2025.
Energy Corporation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russia built the Kudankulam nuclear reactors in India, adopted a strategic vision in nuclear energy, offered oil, gas and provide investment opportunities in the fuel sector of Russia e.g., Sakhalin- I etc.
People-to-People Ties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The people-to-people ties remain strong with gradual increase in bilateral tourism. • The size of the Indian Community in Russia is estimated at 14,000.

Challenges in India-Russia Relations

- **China's Influence:** Russia's growing strategic partnership with China, particularly in the context of India-China border tensions, creates a complex dynamic.
- **Western Sanctions:** The impact of Western sanctions on Russia affects its ability to engage economically with India, limiting the scope of bilateral trade and investment.
- **Trade Imbalance:** Indian exports to Russia are much lower compared to imports, primarily involving energy and defense equipment.
 - India has **\$57 billion trade deficit** with Russia
- **Over-Reliance on Defense Imports:** India's heavy reliance on Russian defense equipment raises concerns about diversification of defense procurement and the need for indigenization.
 - Russia supplied about **65% of India's weapons purchases.**
- **Indo-US Relations:** India's growing strategic partnership with the United States, including defense agreements and QUAD involvement, sometimes causes friction with Russia.
- **Russia-Pakistan Ties:** Russia's increasing engagement with Pakistan, particularly in defense and counter-terrorism, is viewed with apprehension in India.
- **Delays in Projects:** Delays and inefficiencies in executing joint energy and connectivity projects, such as the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), hinder the India-Russia partnership.

About Russia

- Russia, the **largest country** in the world, occupies one-tenth of all the land on Earth.
- It spans **11 time zones** across **two continents** (Europe and Asia) and has **coasts on three oceans** (the Atlantic, Pacific, and Arctic).
- Russia became an independent country after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991.
- It contains **Europe's longest river**, the **Volga**, and its **largest lake, Ladoga.**
 - Russia also is home to the **world's deepest lake, Baikal.**
- Russia is bounded to the north and east by the Arctic and Pacific oceans.
- To the south Russia borders North Korea, China, Mongolia, and Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Georgia.
- To the southwest and west it borders Ukraine, Belarus, Latvia, and Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Finland and Norway.



Q. Examine the key areas of cooperation between India and Russia. How have these areas shaped the bilateral relationship over the past decade? **(150 words/10 marks)**

Glacial Lake Outburst floods

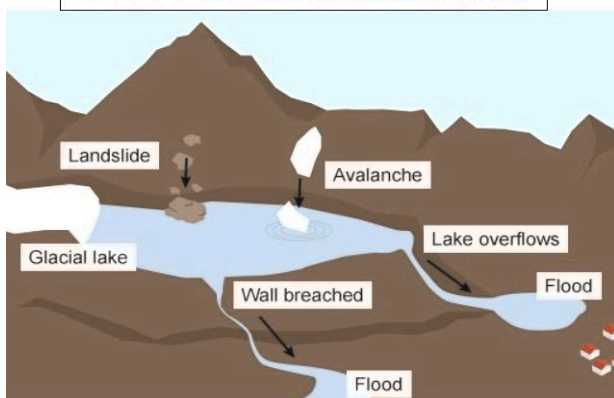
Why in the News?

The Sikkim government, recently demanded the establishment of a Regional Centre for Glaciology in the state to better study the Himalayan glaciers and to tackle the pressing issue of Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs).

What is Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOF)?

- A glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) is a release of meltwater from a moraine or ice-dam glacial lake, due to dam failure, causing catastrophic flooding in the downstream areas.
- GLOFs have three main features:
 - They involve **sudden releases of water**.
 - They tend to be **rapid events**, lasting hours to days.
 - They result in **large downstream river discharges** (which often increase by an order of magnitude).

GLACIAL LAKE OUTBURST FLOODS (GLOF)



Impact of GLOFs

- Some of the largest **floods** in Earth's history have been **due to GLOFs**.
- In 2021, Chamoli district, Uttarakhand witnessed flash floods caused by GLOFs.
- GLOF has caused **large-scale landscape change**, and even **altered regional climate** by releasing huge quantities of freshwater to the oceans.
- GLOFs pose a huge **risk to downstream communities and infrastructure**.
- They have killed hundreds to thousands of people in mountain regions like the Himalayas, and destroyed roads, bridges, and hydroelectric developments.

- In 2023, a GLOF from South Lhonak Lake in North Sikkim destroyed the 1,200 MW Teesta III dam downstream, resulting in 40 lives lost, 76 missing, and extensive damage to infrastructure.
- GLOF can cause severe environmental damage, including habitat destruction, erosion, and pollution.

Causes of Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs)

- **Rapid Slope Movement into the Lake:** Landslides or avalanches can rapidly deposit a large volume of material into a glacial lake, causing a sudden displacement of water and triggering an overflow.
- According to the Geological Survey of India, the 2021 GLOF in Chamoli district was caused due to an avalanche.
- **Heavy Rainfall or Snow Melting:** Intense rainfall or rapid melting of snow can significantly increase the water volume in a glacial lake, leading to overtopping and potential dam failure.
- In June 2013, Uttarakhand received an unusual amount of rainfall leading to the melting of the Chorabari glacier and the eruption of the Mandakini River.
- **Cascading Processes:** A flood from an upstream lake can flow into a downstream lake, increasing its water volume abruptly and causing it to overflow or breach.
- **Earthquake:** Seismic activity can destabilize moraine dams or cause landslides into lakes, leading to sudden breaches and the release of stored water.
- **Melting of Ice in the Dam:** Ice incorporated in or forming the dam can melt due to climatic warming or volcanic activity, weakening the dam structure and triggering a burst.
- **Blocking of Subsurface Outflow Tunnels:** For lakes with subsurface drainage, blockage of these tunnels can cause water levels to rise and exert pressure on the dam, leading to overtopping or structural failure.
- **Long-term Dam Degradation:** Over time, natural processes like erosion can weaken moraine dams, making them more susceptible to failure under increased water pressure or other triggers.

Proneness Of the Himalayan Region to GLOF

- The **Himalayan region** is highly **susceptible** to **GLOF** due **extensive glacial coverage**
- The **eastern Himalaya** is identified as a **hotspot** of GLOF hazards, which are likely to shift westward in the Himalaya in the future, posing both hazards and risks.
- NDMA has identified **188 glacial lakes** in the Himalayan states that can potentially be **breached**.
- In the Indian Himalayan region, the first GLOF was reported in 1926 in Jammu and Kashmir.
- Moreover, the extensive **melting of glaciers** due to global warming and **increasing anthropogenic footprint** has led to the increasing threat of GLOFs in the region.
- Satellite images from ISRO of the catchments of Indian Himalayan River basins from 1984 to 2023 reveal significant change in the prevalence of glacial lakes.
 - Of 2,431 lakes larger than 10 ha identified in 2016-2017, 676 have notably expanded since 1984.
- **Places Vulnerable to GLOF:**
 - **Vasudhara Tal** in the Dhauliganga basin of Chamoli district, **Maban Lake** in Lassar Yangti Valley, **Pyungru Lake** in the Darma basin of Uttarakhand
 - **Gephang Ghat** glacial lake in Himachal Pradesh
 - **Kolahoi**, the largest glacier of Kashmir valley's Jhelum Basin

Steps Taken

- The Centre is working on **setting up** an **early warning system (EWS)** across 188 **critical lakes** identified in the Indian Himalayan Region vulnerable to GLOF-like events.
- **ICIMOD** (International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development) has partnered with national institutions and international agencies like ESA, GLIMS, GlobGlacier, NOAA, and USGS to establish an **Inter-country Regional GLOF Risk Monitoring Network**.

Mitigation Solutions for GLOFs

- **Structural Measures:**
- **Controlled Drainage Systems:**
 - Installing drainage channels or tunnels to gradually release water from glacial lakes, reducing pressure on moraine dams.
- **Siphoning Systems:**
 - Using siphons to lower lake levels by continuously draining water in a controlled manner.
- **Dam Reinforcement:**
 - Strengthening moraine dams with concrete, rock, or other materials to enhance their stability and reduce the risk of failure.
- **Spillways:**
 - Constructing spillways to allow excess water to flow out safely without causing damage to the dam structure.
- **Check Dams and Debris Basins:**
 - Building small check dams or debris basins downstream to trap and reduce the impact of floodwaters and debris flow.

Non-Structural Measures:

- **Early Warning Systems:**
 - Implementing advanced monitoring and warning systems to detect changes in lake conditions and provide timely alerts to communities at risk.
- **Risk Assessment and Mapping:**
 - Conducting detailed hazard assessments of existing glacial lakes to identify potentially dangerous glacial lakes and creating detailed maps to guide mitigation efforts.
- **Community Preparedness:**
 - Educating and training local communities on GLOF risks, emergency response procedures, and evacuation plans.
- **Policy and Regulation:**
 - Developing and enforcing policies and regulations that promote safe land use and construction practices in areas vulnerable to GLOFs.
- **Research and Monitoring:**
 - Deploying Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) technology to monitor glacial lakes and surrounding areas.
 - Continuously researching glacier dynamics to understand evolving risks and improve mitigation strategies.
- **Climate Change Mitigation:**
 - Implementing climate change mitigation efforts and keeping warming under 1.5 degree Celsius can reduce the rate of glacial melt and associated risks.

Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction

Syllabus: GS Paper- III-Conservation

Why in the News?

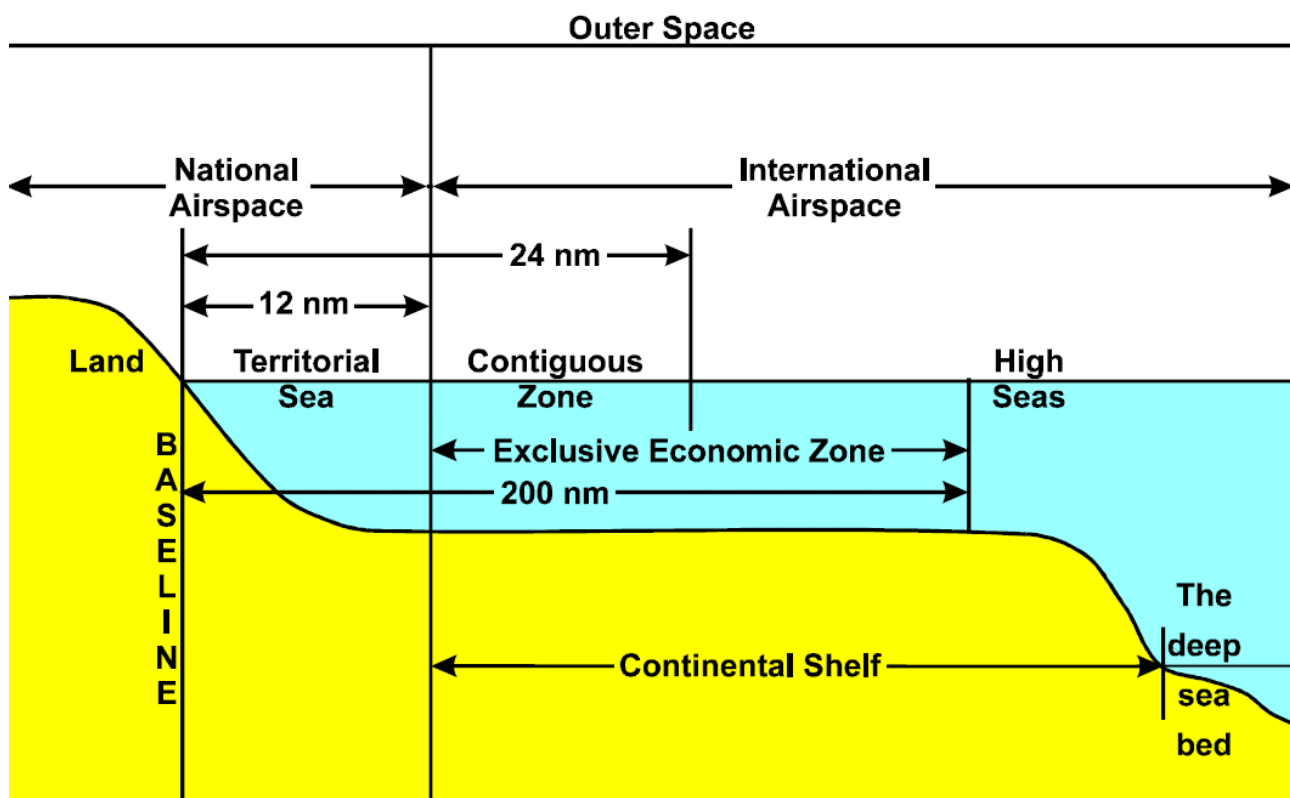
The Indian government recently stated that it would soon sign and ratify the High Seas Treaty, a new international legal architecture for maintaining the ecological health of the oceans.

About High Sea

- **High seas** or international waters are areas **outside** the **national jurisdiction** of any country.

- They **constitute about 64%**, roughly two-thirds, of the total ocean area and are considered global commons.
- Global Commons refers to **those areas** which are **beyond** the **national jurisdiction** of states and **requires common governance** by the **international community**.
- **For example:** Earth's atmosphere, Antarctica, the high sea and outer space.
- According to **IUCN**, these areas account for **“almost half of the Earth’s surface.”**
- They belong to no one and **everyone enjoys equal rights** for navigation, overflight, economic activities, scientific research, or laying of infrastructure like undersea cables.
- As these areas belong to no one, they are also no one’s responsibility.
- Only **1%** of these areas are **under protection**.
- Due to which **these areas suffer** from **overexploitation** of **resources, biodiversity loss, pollution** and many other problems.
- According to **UN estimates**, about **17 million tonnes of plastics** were **dumped** in the **oceans** in 2021.
- It is not that there is **no international governance mechanism** for the **oceans**.
- The 1982 UN Convention on Laws of the Seas, or **UNCLOS** is the main international agreement **governing human activities at sea** that is also known as the “constitution of the ocean”.
- UNCLOS lays down the broad frameworks for legitimate behavior on, and use of, seas and oceans everywhere.
- It defines the rights and duties of nations regarding activities in the oceans, and also addresses issues such as sovereignty, passage rights, and rights of exclusive economic usages.
- Demarcations of territorial waters, and EEZs are a result of UNCLOS.

- According to UNCLOS:
 - A **coastal state** has the right to establish the breadth of its **territorial sea** up to a limit not exceeding **12 nautical miles**, measured from baseline determined in accordance with the convention.
 - Ships of all States, whether coastal or land-locked, have the right of innocent passage through the territorial sea.
- UNCLOS has defined an **EEZ** as an area that shall **not extend beyond 200 nautical miles** from the baselines.
- The EEZ is measured from the breadth of the territorial sea.



About Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) treaty

- It is also known as the “**Treaty of the High Seas**”, and ‘**Paris Agreement for the Ocean**’.
- It is formally called the **Agreement on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction**.
- It is an **international agreement** on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction.
- It was **developed** within the framework of the **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)**.
- So far, **ninety-one countries** have signed the treaty and **eight countries** have ratified it.
 - *Belize, Cuba, Chile, Mauritania, Micronesia, Monaco, Palau* and *Seychelles* have **ratified it**.
- The BBNJ will **come into force** when at least **60 countries** ratify it.
- The treaty would become **international law 120 days** after the **60th ratification** is submitted.
- **India**, was a party to the nearly 20 years of negotiation that resulted in the finalization of the treaty last year. However, it is **yet to sign** and **ratify** the treaty.

Significance of the Treaty

- **Conservation and Protection of Marine Ecology:** It aims to conserve and protect Marine Ecology by:
 - Establishment of **Marine Protected Areas** (MPAs) similar to national parks or wildlife reserves.
 - Activities in MPAs would be regulated, and conservation efforts also taken up.
- **Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits:** It will ensure that benefits from marine genetic resources are shared equally among all nations and prohibits proprietary rights of any single country over marine genetic resources.
- **Conduct Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs):** The treaty makes it mandatory to carry out a prior EIA to identify activities that are potentially polluting/damaging to the marine ecosystems, or to conservation efforts.
- **Capacity Building and Technology Transfer:** It aims to build capacity and transfer marine technologies to developing countries to help them utilize ocean benefits while contributing to conservation efforts.

The treaty therefore aims to protect marine ecosystems, ensure equitable use of marine resources, and promote sustainable development and conservation practices on the high seas.

Mask Making Tradition of Assam**

Syllabus: GS Paper- V- Art & Culture

Why in the News?

Mask making tradition of Assam (Mukha Shilpa) was recently in news highlighting its importance in the tradition of Assam and their relevance in the present day.

About the tradition of Mask Making in Assam

- The tradition of mask making was **introduced** by **Sankaradeva** as a part of **bhaona performances** in the 16th century.
- The various **satras** under neo-vaishnavism, **inherited** the **mask-making culture** across the sects (Sanghati).
- The **tradition** was further **enriched** and carried forward by the **successors** of **Sankaradeva**.
- It is a **deep-rooted** aspect of the **intangible cultural heritage** of **Majuli**.
- The **art of mask making** is intricate artistry and craftsmanship is **passed down** through **generations**.
- **Sri Sri Samaguri Satra of Majuli** is a major centre of attraction for tourists for its unique mask making tradition.

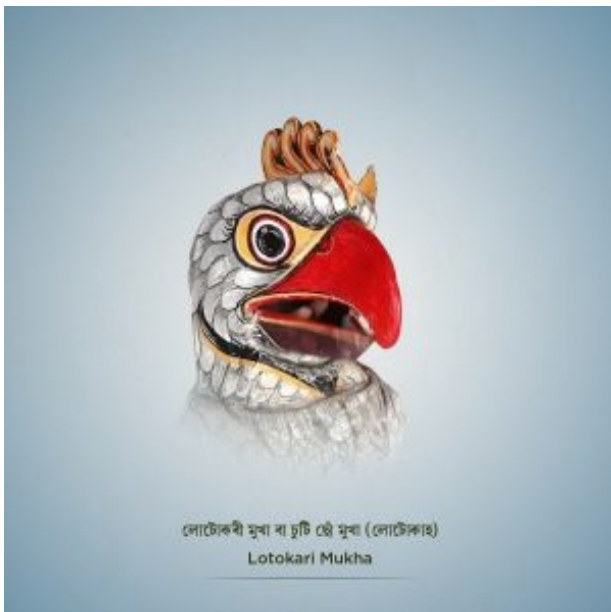
Types of Masks

Traditionally, masks are divided into three types. They are:

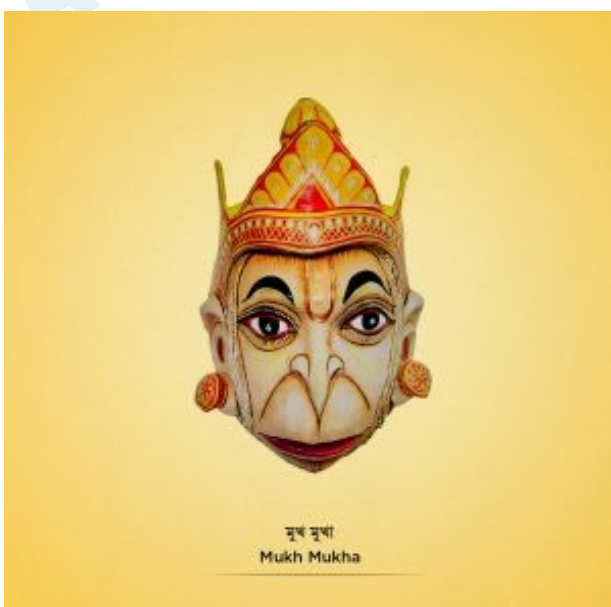
- **Barmukha (Great Mask):** These masks are made in two parts – part of the torso and part of the head.
- The performer wears both torso and head parts during the act.
- This mask is at least 10-12 feet high and hence called Barmukha.



- **Lotokari Mukha (Hanging Mask):** These masks are smaller than Barmukha, but the torso and head parts are made in the same way as Barmukhas.
- The only difference is that the head mask is flexible, making it easier for the artist to move his head and body.
- Examples: Putana, Taraka, Maricha, Subahu, etc.



- **Mukh Mukha (Face Mask):** This mask covers only the performer's face while the rest of the body is decorated with attractive costumes that match the mask.
- Since they supplement the dress, these masks are also said to be ornamental.



Categorization of Masks:

- **Loukik (Worldly) Mask:** These masks are designed to represent characters from the worldly land, encompassing both human beings and animals.
- **Oloukik (Supernatural) Mask:** These masks are exclusively crafted for characters with supernatural attributes and mythological significance. Deities, mythological creatures, and other supernatural beings.

Material used in Mask Making

- Materials ranging from **terracotta, bamboo** to **wood, pith, and metals** are used in mask making.
- Naturally available **materials** like **cow dung, cloth, mud, jute, coconut sap** and **aatha** (natural gum) are **essential constituents** of the craft.
- The masks are detailed using '**kaamkathi**' or knives made of bamboo.
- The **kuhila** (pith) is a soft natural thermocol-like local material which lends shapes for the ears and the teeth.
- **Organic colors** that are used here are Khorimat (white), Hengul (red), charcoal (black) and Haital (yellow)

Evolution of the Art of Mask Making (Mukha Shilpa)

- **Early Beginnings (Pre-16th Century):** Evidence suggests the use of wooden and sholapith (Indian cork) in mask making, before the introduction of bamboo.
- **Sankaradeva's Influence (16th Century):** Srimanta Sankaradeva played a pivotal role in promoting Mukha Shilpa.
 - He introduced masks in theatrical performances, particularly in Bhaona.
 - 'Cihna Yatra', (first play of Sankardev) was the first to feature masks for characters which otherwise cannot be showcased by human face, such as Garuda, four-headed Brahma, Lord Shiva, etc.

- Sankaradeva's innovation expanded the scope of mask usage beyond traditional rituals.
- **Flourishing in Satras (16th Century Onwards):** Later on, satras became hubs for performing arts and cultural preservation.
- **Expansion of Themes and Characters:** Initially, masks were used for characters not easily portrayed by human faces such as gods, goddesses and mythological creatures.
 - In the present time masks are also used in other dramas and plays called Mukha Bhaona.
 - This expansion enriched the storytelling and visual appeal of Bhaona performances.
- **Innovations and Adaptations:** Mask artists like Dr. Hemachandra Goswami introduced innovations such as lutukori mukhas (hanging masks) and puppet-like flexibility.
 - These innovations allowed for more dynamic facial expressions and greater mobility for performers.

Contemporary Significance

- Mukha Shilpa has **gained global recognition** for its intricate craftsmanship and expressive capabilities.
- At present, masks are not only used in bhaona but also for other purposes such as **gift, festivals, meetings, house decorations**, etc.
- The art form has now been **commercialized, empowering artists and attracting new learners**.
- Traditional masks from Assam have been **exhibited internationally** including the British Museum in London, showcasing their cultural value and artistic excellence.
- Recently it was **granted GI tag** to ensure that this art form gets global recognition.

Challenges Associated with the Art of Mask Making (Mukha Shilpa)

- The **financial challenges** associated with mask making can discourage aspiring artists from pursuing it as a full-time

profession.

- Moreover, the **lack of financial support from the government**, coupled with the **absence of a stable income source** for established artists, creates an environment that discourages the sustainability of the art form.
- **Monsoon season restricts mask-making activities** as the masks are to be dried under sunlight, restricting the livelihood activity of mask makers.
- Other challenges faced by artisans engaged in mask making are **lack of exposure to quality products, tools, technology, packaging, and market linkages**.

Way Forward

- The government should take the initiative to **financially promote the mask-making industry**.
- **Modern tools and technology** should be provided to enhance the quality and efficiency of mask production like solar-powered drying units or indoor drying facilities.
- The product must be made **economically viable and market oriented** so that it can become more sustainable.
- The mask may be presented in such a **modernized** way that commercial theatre groups also intend to hire mask artists.
- The government and NGOs should engage expert mask artists in **training and awareness programmes**.
- The **department of the museum** also has to take the **initiative to preserve** and display the mask to draw wider public attention.
- The school and colleges should have a **department to teach Assamese indigenous crafts** including the art of mask making.
- **Training in marketing, branding, and packaging** should be provided to improve product appeal and reach.

Q. Examine the significance of the mukha shilpa tradition of Assam. (150 words/10 marks)

Awards

1. Man and Biosphere Programme (MAB) Young Scientist Award**

- **Brinda Kashyap** from Guwahati, has been selected to **receive UNESCO's MAB Young Scientist Award**.
- This recognition highlights her **dedication to conservation efforts** and **innovative approach to addressing environmental challenges**.
- Her work mainly involves **rhino habitat restoration** at **Manas National Park**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Assam.
- In addition to **developing a habitat suitability model** and **assessing land use pattern changes**, Brinda's research will also focus on **evaluating the impact of climate change on rhino habitats**.

Important Days

2. World Population Day

- World Population Day is annually **observed on 11 July** to highlight the importance of population issues globally.
- World Population Day was **established by the United Nations Development Programme** in 1989.
- On this day in **1987**, the **world's population reached five billion**.
- The theme for World Population Day 2024 is **"Empowering Youth for a Sustainable Future"**.

Defence

3. Zorawar

- India's **indigenously developed light tank**, Zorawar is **undergoing trials** at Hazirka, Gujarat and is expected to be inducted by 2027.
- It was **developed by DRDO** in collaboration with Larsen & Toubro Limited and will be **deployed at the China border**.
- With its **amphibious credentials**, it can **traverse steep climbs** in mountains and **cross rivers** and other water bodies much more easily than its predecessors.
- The tank **features** a critical component i.e. the **105 mm gun**.

- It will **weigh less than 25 tonnes** with a high power-to-weight ratio as well as superior firepower and protection.

Exercises

4. Exercise Nomadic Elephant

- The **16th edition** of the **India-Mongolia Joint Military Exercise**, Nomadic Elephant 2024, recently concluded at **Umroi, Meghalaya**.
- It is an **annual training event conducted alternatively** in India and Mongolia.
- The aim of the Exercise is to **enhance joint military capability** of both sides to undertake counter insurgency operations.
- The exercise will also **facilitate developing interoperability, bonhomie and camaraderie** between the two armies.

5. Exercise Sagar Kavach

- A two-day **coordinated coastal security exercise "Sagar Kavach- 01/24"** for **Andhra Pradesh** was **conducted** recently.
- The **aim** of the exercise was to **assess the effectiveness** of the **coastal security mechanism** and **strengthen it further**.
- Various stakeholders, including the **Indian Navy, Indian Coast Guard, CISF, Customs, RPF** and other **state agencies** actively took part in the exercise.

Schemes

6. Apun Bahan Scheme**

- The 'Apun Bahan' scheme was recently approved by the Assam government.
- The programme is designed to **provide interest discounts on auto loans**, making it simpler for qualified staff to buy vehicles.
- The State Government would offer **interest subsidies** under the "Apun Bahan" programme on **motor vehicle loans** obtained through **scheduled commercial banks, RRB's** and the RBI-recognized **Assam Cooperative Apex Bank**.
- **Regular State Government employees** between the **ages of 21 and 53** are eligible for the programme.

Miscellaneous

7. Project PARI

- The **Ministry of Culture initiated Project PARI** (Public Art of India) during the 46th Session of the World Heritage Committee Meeting held in New Delhi.
- The Project PARI **aims to bring forth public art that draws inspiration from India's artistic heritage** (lok kala/lok sanskriti) while incorporating modern themes and techniques.
- Over 150 **visual artists** from across the country are invited to **create various artworks** including **wall paintings, murals, sculptures**, and installations for the beautification of public spaces.
- The sculptures will pay tribute to nature, ideas from the Natyashastra, Gandhi, toys of India, ancient knowledge, Naad or Primeval Sound, Harmony of life, and the Kalpataru (divine tree).

8. Sonai Rupai Wildlife Sanctuary**

- The Army handed over the 'Lama Camp' in Sonai Rupai Wildlife Sanctuary to the Wildlife Division of Assam Forest.
- The Sonai Rupai Wildlife Sanctuary is located in the **foothills of Himalaya** in the **Sonitpur district** with an area of 220 sq. kms.
- The sanctuary is one of the prominent ones among the **eighteen wildlife sanctuaries in Assam**.
- The sanctuary is **famous for Indian bison, elephants and one-horned rhinoceros** which are the main attractions of the region.
- It also houses **tiger, barking deer, hog deer, leopard, wild boar, squirrel, wild pig, gaur, fox, pygmy hog, swamp deer** etc.
- **Pelican, white slender-billed vulture, white-winged wood duck and rufous-necked hornbill** are often seen in the

sanctuary.

9. Shigella infection

- Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) to develop the first ever vaccine against shigella soon.
- Shigella infection (shigellosis) is an **intestinal infection** caused by a family of **bacteria** known as **shigella**.
- Shigella infection is the **second leading cause of diarrhea** globally.
- **Children** are **particularly vulnerable to shigella infections** because of their immature immune systems.
- It is mainly **transmitted** to humans through the **faecal-oral route**.
- There are **no approved vaccines** against shigella in the world,

10. Karbi Anglong Tiger Reserve**

- The Assam Government is likely to create its **fifth tiger reserve, covering an area of 502 sq.km**, by combining three existing protected areas, namely:
 - **North Karbi Anglong Wildlife Sanctuary, East Karbi Anglong Wildlife Sanctuary** and the **Kaliani Reserve Forest**.
- The proposed Karbi Anglong Tiger Reserve is expected to **boost long-term conservation goals** in the **Kaziranga-Karbi Anglong landscape** which is rich in flora and fauna.
- **Kaziranga-Karbi Anglong landscape** is also the **main corridor** for the **migrating animals**, such as:
 - Wild elephants tiger, gaur, sloth bear, common leopard, Chinese pangolin, wild boar, black panther, Himalayan black bear, slow loris, flying squirrel, goral (wild goat), capped langur, hoolock gibbon, etc.
- At present Assam has **four tiger reserves** and they are- **Manas, Nameri, Orang** and **kaziranga**.

- **Tiger Reserves** are **notified by State Governments** as per provisions of the **Wildlife (Protection) Act (WPA), 1972** on advice of the **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)**.
 - **NTCA** is a **statutory body** under the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, constituted under WPA**.
- As of 2024, there are 55 tiger reserves in India.



Tiger Reserves in Assam

District At a Glance

Geography of Goalpara

- The district is situated in the western part of Assam, along the southern bank of Brahmaputra.
- **District Boundary:**
 - **North:** Bongaigaon & Barpeta District
 - **South:** East Garo Hill District of Meghalaya
 - **East:** Kamrup District
 - **West:** Dhubri District
 - **South West:** South Salmara-Mankachar
- **Geographical Area:** 1824 sq. km.
- **Population Density:** 547 persons per sq. km
- **Sub-Division:** Goalpara

- **Revenue Circle:** Lakhipur, Baliana, Matia Dudhnoi and Rangjuli.
- The mighty **Brahmaputra flows from east to west** on the Northern boundary of the district along with the tributaries of **Dudhnoi, Krishnai, Jinjiram and Jinary.**

History of Goalpara

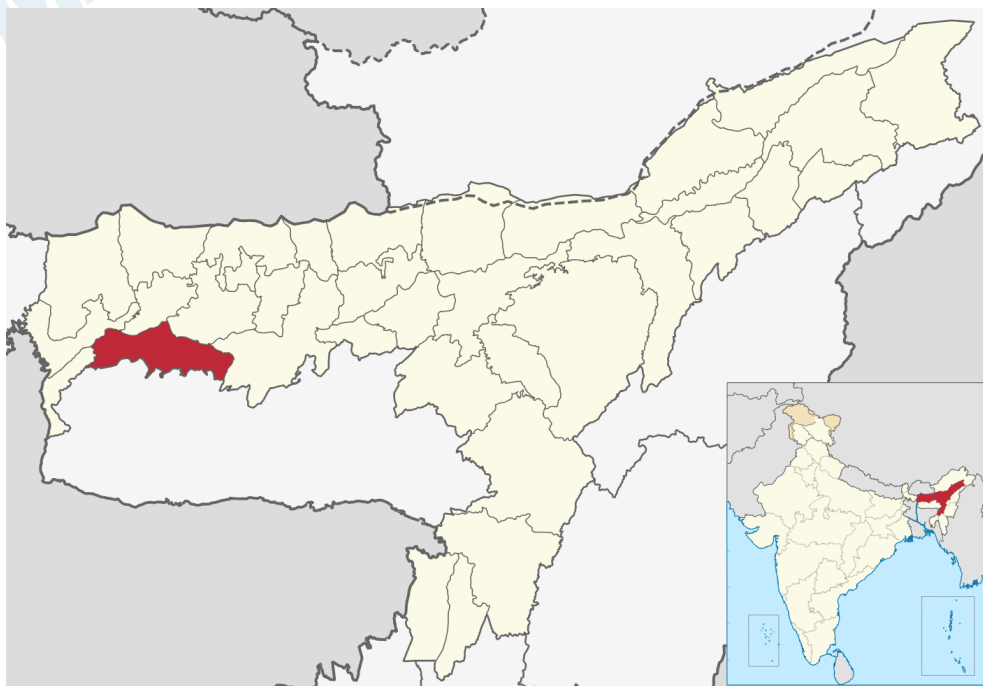
- The original Goalpara district was first created in 1822 A.D. by **David Scott**- an employee of East India Company.
- The name Goalpara is said to have originated from the word "Gwaltippika" meaning the village of milk men.

Places of Interest

- **Sri Surya Pahar:** It is a site famous for archaeological remains, lies in the Goalpara district. Composed of 7 peaks, the site also gets the name of "Hateli".

- It is under the protection of the Archeological Survey of India (ASI).
- It is also famous for its terracotta, rock-cut sculpture depicting deities of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism.
- **Dadan Hillock:** Dadan hill having a Shiva Temple on its top was established by DADAN, General of King Bana of Sonitpur.
- **Majar - Sharif of Pir Saheb:** It belongs to Sufi Saint Shah Sayed Nasiruddin Kaderi, commonly known as "BAGDADI."
 - The saint is said to have come from Baghdad, the capital of Iraq and therefore he was called Bagdadi.
- **Pir Majhar:** The tomb of Hazarat Sayed Abul Kasem Kharasani, is a place much revered by the people of all religious faiths.
- **Sri Sri Shyamrai Satra:** The Satra was established in the centre of the town, Goalpara about 366 years ago.
 - The Satra has preserved the "ASTHI" (a piece of bone) of Sankardeva which is exhibited in the Satra during the Sankar Jayanti period (during September-October).
- **Sri Sri Chaitanya Gaudiya Math:** It was established at Goalpara in 1969 in order to protect, preserve and expand Sri Krishna Chaitanya culture.
- **Buraburi Than:** It is located on the bank of the River Brahmaputra near Jaleswar is a prominent religious spot.
- **Sri Sri Joybhum Kamakhya:** It is one of the Saktisthals located in this district on the bank of the river Brahmaputra.
 - There is a Shiva temple also by the side of the Joybhum Kamakhya Temple.
- **Nandeswar Devalaya:** It is one of the oldest devalayas (Shiva Temple) established on the top of Nandeswar hill which stands by the side of the river Dudhnoi.
- **Tukreswari Temple:** It is a famous religious spot located by the side of NH 37.
 - There are two temples located at the top of Tukreswari hill, one is a Shiva Temple and the other one is Joya- Vijoya Temple.
- **Beels:** Urpod beel, Hasila Beel, Kumuri Beel and Dhamar Risen beel are some other attractions of the district.

Q. Locate the neighboring districts surrounding **Goalpara district** in the given map.





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