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B. GS 2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. India abstains from vote against Russia at UNSC

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

Prelims: Operation Ganga

Mains: India's stand on Russian aggression in Ukraine and criticism against it.

Context

India abstained from the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution sponsored by the U.S. against Russia.

Details

- The resolution was sponsored by the U.S. and Albania, and co-sponsored by about 80 countries that condemned Russian aggression and called for the withdrawal of the Russian military from Ukraine.
- Along with India, China and the UAE abstained from voting against Russia.
- However, the resolution was vetoed by Russia as it is one among the permanent members of the UNSC with veto powers.
- The U.S. has promised to take the issue to the UN General Assembly.

India's Stand

- India said it is deeply disturbed by the recent turn of events in Ukraine.
- India is also said to be concerned about the security of the Indian community in the region and has been in touch with both the countries to ensure safekeeping of the Indian citizens.
- India said it was a “matter of regret that the path of diplomacy was given up” and called on states to return to dialogue to settle differences.
- Officials suggest that India has been talking to all parties to return to the negotiation table.
- Though India has not yet spoken against Russia directly, the usage of statements like “sovereignty and territorial integrity of states” suggests that India is growing tougher on Russia.

Criticism on India's move

- The western countries are said to be unhappy and disappointed with India's move.
- Ukraine said that, for the safety of Indian nationals in Ukraine, India should be the first to vote and stop the war.
- Further, the western countries feel saddened by the fact that a “small handful of members” seemed to be tolerating the war.
- The U.S. had warned before the voting in the UNSC that any member to vote against the resolution or “Abstain” from voting would face charges as they do not uphold the UN charter and they align with the aggressive actions of Russia.

Operation Ganga

- India evacuated its stranded citizens from Ukraine via Romania and Hungary through “**Operation Ganga**”.
- The risky evacuation is taking place in the middle of a war, where Indian professionals are currently stranded in an underground bunker in Ukraine's capital Kyiv.

- Indian citizens entered Hungary from the Ukrainian at the Zahony crossing and reached Budapest for the Air India flight.
- A liaison unit was set up by the Indian Embassy, which is bringing stranded Indians in batches through the checkpoint at Zahony.
- Indians were advised not to use other checkpoints to enter Budapest as there were long queues and no embassy unit was present there to facilitate entry.

Read more about the issue in [CNA dated 25th Feb' 22](#)

Nut Graf

Considering the state of Indian nationals in Ukraine and acknowledging the mounting pressure by the Western world, India must call for an immediate cessation of violence and a return to dialogue and India must reiterate its willingness to contribute in any way towards the peace process.

2. Munich Security Conference

Syllabus: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries

Prelims: Facts about Munich Security Conference

Mains: Significance of Munich Security Conference

Historical background

- During the time of the Cold War in 1962, the U.S. placed the **Jupiter missiles** in Italy and Turkey, which bordered the Soviet Union as part of nuclear muscle flexing.
 - **Jupiter Missile:** is a medium range ballistic missile (MRBM) with a range of 2,400 km. It was aimed at key Russian cities.
- This coincided with the Bay of Pigs fiasco when the U.S. government attempted to overthrow the Fidel Castro-led communist government of Cuba.
- Angered by the direct intimidation through missiles and humiliation of Castro, the Soviets placed SS-4 missiles in Cuba.
- The U.S. government discovered the MRBMs in Cuban defense facilities through high altitude photography.
- The world was brought close to nuclear annihilation because of the standoff.
- After the dramatic event, there was a need to foster a culture of close consultation and dialogue within the Western countries.
- Ewald Heinrich von Kleist, in this backdrop began an annual conference to discuss international politics which would go on to become the Munich Security Conference.

Munich Security Conference

- Ewald Heinrich von Kleist, an anti-Nazi who actively took part in the Second World War, is the founder of the Munich Security Conference (MSC).
- **Objective:** To build trust and to contribute to the peaceful resolution of conflicts by sustaining a continuous, curated and informal dialogue within the international security community.

Significance of MSC

- With over sixty years of existence, the MSC has addressed the threats like terrorism, religious fanaticism, cyber warfare, electronic intelligence and has emerged as the leading platform for policy makers to exchange ideas in a friendly atmosphere.
- The MSC provides a platform for world leaders, decision-makers, and personalities from international and non-governmental organisations, industry, media, academia and civil society to engage and discuss various issues that have implications on peace and stability in the World.
- It provides a platform for official and non-official diplomatic initiatives, bringing together leaders and security experts from across the world and their ideas to address the world's most pressing security concerns.
- It publishes the **Munich Security Report**, an annual digest of relevant figures, maps, and research on crucial security challenges.

Nut Graf

The security conference set up by an anti-Hitler German has come a long way over the last sixty years and provides a platform for world leaders to discuss and brainstorm on threats to World peace.

Category: POLITY

1. Judiciary needs more HC judges, not just money

Syllabus: Structure, organization and functioning of the Judiciary

Mains: Need for more talents and betterment of infrastructure in judiciary.

Context

The Chief Justice of India said there is a need to increase the number of judges in High Courts and as well as urgently fill existing vacancies.

Details

- The CJI said that additional and new challenges like dealing with intellectual property rights (IPR) cases can be taken up by the High Courts only if more talent opts to join the judiciary.
- Ensuring better service conditions will attract more talents into the fold.
- Talking about the Judicial infrastructure, the CJI said that it is unfortunate that not even the basic minimum standards are being met in this area.

Need for coordination

- The CJI said the government has to do more than just mechanically allocate funds for the judiciary.
- The government along with the judiciary must endeavour to put in place an institutional mechanism to coordinate and oversee the improvements in judicial infrastructure.
- The government needs to be pursued to set up statutory authorities, both at the Centre and at the States, to oversee improvements in this regard.

Nut Graf

Mere allocation of funds or resources is not enough to see changes in the sorry state of Judicial infrastructure. The challenge is to put the available resources to optimum use that encourage more students to take up their career in the judiciary.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. Govt. tweaks FDI policy ahead of LIC public offer

Syllabus: Issues relating to planning, and mobilization, of resources.

Mains: Changes made by the government to facilitate foreign direct investment into insurance ventures.

Context

The Cabinet approved changes to India's foreign direct investment (FDI) policy to allow global investors to participate in the initial public offering of LIC.

Details

- According to the current FDI policy, the FDI ceiling for public sector banks is 20% on government approval routes.
- FDI in insurance ventures is allowed up to 74% under the automatic approval route, but the policy was mute on foreign equity investments into the LIC, a statutory corporation set up under an Act of Parliament.
- Foreign investors, post the changes, will be able to invest up to 20% in LIC shares under the automatic approval route.
- The changes are aimed at expediting the capital raising plan.

LIC IPO

- The amendments to the FDI policy were brought in as the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP) was filed with the stock market regulator.
- The government is offloading 5% of its stake in LIC; up to 10% of these shares will be reserved for LIC's policy holders. Another 5% has been kept for employees.
- The government is keen to complete the listing process of LIC, which has an embedded value of ₹5.4 lakh crore, as the receipts from the share sale are critical to meet the disinvestment target for the year.

To read more about – [LIC IPO](#)

Nut Graf

Since there has been a sense of uncertainty prevailing in the market since the LIC's DRHP was filed, the cabinet has tweaked the FDI policy ahead of the public offer to encourage more capital inflow.

Category: ENVIRONMENT

1. Trees on forest edges may grow faster than those inside

Syllabus: Conservation

Prelims: Carbon sequestration

Mains: Significance of natural forests and examining the potential of man-made forests/plantations to substitute natural forests.

Background

- The government-backed afforestation programmes to compensate for the destruction of dense forests are usually commissioned in alternate locations that are outside forest boundaries.
- Conservationists have pointed out that this is not the same because a loss of a section of forest would destroy an ecosystem that can not be easily substituted.

Significance of forests in Carbon Sequestration

- **Carbon sequestration** is the process of capturing and storing atmospheric carbon dioxide.
- The billions of square kilometres of forest in the world act as major storehouses of carbon.
- About 30% of carbon emissions emitted from fossil fuels are absorbed by the forest, making them a terrestrial carbon sink.
- Trees absorb carbon dioxide (CO₂), release oxygen by way of photosynthesis, and store carbon in their trunks.
- When trees shed their leaves, soil microbes decompose the leaves and other organic matter that releases the trapped carbon dioxide.

Difference between trees located at a forest edge and forest interiors

- The assumptions were that trees at forest edges release and store carbon at similar rates as forest interiors.
- Recent reports suggest that edge trees grew faster than their counterparts deep in the forest, and that soil in urban areas can hoard more carbon dioxide than previously thought.
- **Differential Growth** – Analysing the data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Forest Inventory and Analysis program,
 - The research team found that trees on the edges grow nearly twice as fast as interior trees.
 - This is because the trees on the edge don’t have competition with interior forest, and hence they get more light.
- **Soil behaviour** – Researches found differences even in the way soil in forests and outside released carbon dioxide,
 - Warmer temperatures at the edge of the forest caused leaves and organic matter to decompose faster, and release more carbon dioxide than the shaded places in the forest interior.

Indian context

- The India State of Forest Report (2021) released in January found that about 28% of the forest cover is outside the forest area.
- About 12% of the forests classified as ‘very dense’ are also outside the areas.
- The increase in forest cover between 2019 and 2021 was due to the growth outside the forest area and the sharpest increase was in ‘open forest’ where any patch over a hectare and having a canopy density more than 10% are considered as ‘forest.’
- This makes man-made plantations of cash crops such as tea and coffee plantations and mango orchards in cities being classified as ‘forest’.
- A research in the Western Ghats finds that,
 - Plantations deplete groundwater and also have higher surface water runoff, and poor soil infiltration compared to trees in natural forests.

- The carbon stocks in plantations such as teak and eucalyptus are 30% to 50% lower than in natural evergreen forests.
- Also the plantations are generally less stable and resilient compared to natural forests.

Read about [India State of Forest Report \(2021\)](#)

Nut Graf

Apart from having low carbon sequestration potential and being less stable and resilient, the plantations and man made forests that are monocultures, do not have the capacity to support a rich and biodiverse system to substitute a natural forest.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Russia-Ukraine conflict: what history shows

Syllabus: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries.

Mains: The disintegration of the USSR, Russia's influence on the former soviet states and the start of Russia's tensions with Ukraine.

Background

- Addressing the nation, the Russian President Vladimir Putin announced his decision to recognise the two breakaway republics of Ukraine Donetsk and Luhansk as independent states.
- In the speech, Putin blamed Soviet leaders, especially Lenin for the disintegration of “historical Russia”.
- Putin said that Lenin’s idea of building the country “on the principles of autonomisation” (right of self-determination, of secession) led to the fall of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

The USSR's collapse

- The fall of the Soviet Union started in the late 1980s with protests in the Eastern Bloc and in Soviet republics along with the Soviet exit from Afghanistan.
- The Soviet Union sent troops to Afghanistan in 1979. After 10 years of fighting the Mujahideen, who were backed by the U.S., Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, the Soviets had to withdraw in 1989.
- Later, the Soviet-backed communist regimes in Eastern Europe started collapsing, practically bringing the Cold War to an end.
- It started in Poland, which hosted the headquarters of the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact security alliance.
 - In June 1989, the anti-communist Solidarity movement, won elections in Poland, leading to the fall of communist rule.
 - Protests spread to Hungary, East Germany, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and Romania.
 - In November 1989, the Berlin Wall that had separated the capitalist West Berlin and the communist east, fell, leading to the German reunification.
- Domestically, the Soviet Union was going through an economic crisis,

- There was a fall in foreign trade.
- Lower oil prices led to a fall in state revenues and an explosion in debt.
- Although decentralisation and opening up of the economy for foreign trade were introduced that made the nationalists in the Soviet republics stronger, the reforms failed to revitalise the economy.

The Fall of the USSR

Thirty one years ago, in 1991, the Soviet Union ceased to exist, but the chain of events, leading up to the collapse was set in motion six years earlier by the sweeping reforms of Mikhail Gorbachev



Image source: The Hindu

Soviet disintegration

- The fall of communist states in the Eastern Bloc and the economic crisis in the country had weakened Russia's hold over the Union.
- In 1988, Estonia became the first Soviet administrative unit to declare sovereignty inside the Union
- In 1990, Lithuania became the first to declare independence from the USSR.
- After the German reunification, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) expanded to East Germany.

- The crisis spread across the Soviet republics as Russia planned to decentralise the central government's powers to the 15 republics through the New Union Treaty, which was also a bid to renegotiate the original treaty that established the USSR in 1922.
- In 1991, a group of communist leaders, including top military and civilian leaders, tried to take power in their hands by coup.
 - Even as the coup failed, this further weakened Russia's power.
- In December 1991, leaders of three Soviet republics of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus signed the **Belavezha Accords**, announcing that the USSR ceased to exist.

Belavezha Accords

- The Belovezh Accords is the agreement that declared that the **Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)** had effectively ceased to exist.
- The agreement was signed in Belovezh (Belarus) in December 1991.
- Belavezha Accords also announced the establishment of the **Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)** that would replace the USSR.
- The accord was signed by the leaders of three republics who had earlier signed the 1922 Treaty on the Creation of the USSR.

Russia's relations with the former Soviet States

- Russia retains huge influence on Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.
- Russia has formed a security organisation named the **Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO)**, with former Soviet republics.
 - Members of CSTO include Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and Russia.
- Russia maintains a military presence in Transnistria, a breakaway republic from Moldova
- Russia has dispatched troops to the borders of Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2020, to end a conflict between the two countries over **Nagorno Karabakh**.
- Out of the 15 countries that became independent after the fall of the Soviet Union,
 - The three Baltic countries Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, all sharing borders with Russia, became members of NATO in 2004.
 - Ukraine and Georgia were offered NATO membership in 2008.
- In 2008 Russia sent troops to Georgia to protect two breakaway republics South Ossetia and Abkhazia from Georgian troops.
- In 2014, Russia annexed the Crimean republic, a Black Sea Peninsula, from Ukraine.
- Russia also recently recognised Luhansk and Donetsk in the Donbas region of Ukraine as independent and sent troops.

Russia's tensions with Ukraine

- Post its independence in 1991, Ukraine adopted a neutral foreign policy.
- Ukraine was one of the founding members of the CIS, but did not join the CSTO.

- Though Ukraine stayed away from NATO, the offer of membership in 2008 started changing equations between Russia and Ukraine.
- Post the regime of pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovich in 2014, a pro-West government was established in Ukraine.
- Russia acted swiftly by annexing Crimea and by supporting separatist rebels in Donbass.
- Ukraine exited the CIS and added its desire to join NATO into its Constitution.
- These developments further escalated the tensions and eventually led to the current crisis.

Nut Graf

Along with several economic, geographical, geopolitical and strategic reasons, the historical factors such as the disintegration of the USSR and the developments that took place after the disintegration have had a huge influence in escalating the tensions between Russia and Ukraine, which now have resulted in a full-blown war.

Category: ECONOMY

1. Role of MIIs

Syllabus: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning and mobilization of resources.

Mains: Significance of Market Infrastructure Institutions and the need for regulation of MIIs

Context

Recently SEBI noted that the National Stock Exchange (NSE) is a systemically important market infrastructure institution (MII).

Market infrastructure institution (MII)

- Stock exchanges, depositories and clearing houses are together called Market Infrastructure Institutions and play a key role in the country's economic infrastructure.
- The **Bimal Jalan Committee** in its 2010 report said,
 - The term "infrastructure" means the basic, underlying framework or features of a system.
 - The term "market infrastructure" denotes such fundamental facilities and systems serving the market.
 - The primary purpose of the securities /capital market is to enable allocation of capital/financial resources.

Institutions in India that qualify as MIIs

- Among **stock exchanges**, the SEBI lists seven, including the BSE, the NSE, the Multi Commodity Exchange of India and the Metropolitan Stock Exchange of India.
- There are two **depositories** (charged with the safekeeping of securities and enabling their trading and transfer) that are tagged MIIs; they are the Central Depository Services Ltd. and the National Securities Depository Ltd.
- The regulator lists seven **clearing houses** (help validate and finalise securities trades and ensure that both buyers and sellers honour their obligations) including the Multi Commodity Exchange Clearing Corporation.

Significance of MII

- Well-functioning MIIs form the core of the capital allocation system and are crucial for economic growth as they have a net positive effect on society like any other infrastructure institution.

- MIIs are systemically important in India as they have seen extraordinary growth in terms of market capitalisation, capital raised and the number of investor accounts.
- As the number of stock exchanges, depositories and clearing corporations in an economy is limited, any failure of such MIIs could lead to bigger collapses that may result in an overall economic downfall potentially extending beyond the boundaries of the securities market and the country.

The need for norms to regulate MIIs

- A technical glitch in the NSE in 2021 resulted in Investors not being able to trade for about four hours.
- The Finance Minister stated that the loss for the country was 'immense' due to the delay in the resumption of trading on the platform.
- Markets regulator SEBI set out norms stipulating timelines within which exchange has to take action if its technology fails, including rules for switchover to backup servers as part of the disaster recovery in an institution that enables transactions running into thousands of crores of rupees daily.
- The average daily turnover at the NSE in January 2022 was about ₹64,178 crore.

To read more about the [Recent issue with the SEBI](#)

Nut Graf

Given the potential for a domino effect that a failure of an MII could have on the wider market and economy, governance and oversight are critical and need to be at the highest standard.

F. Prelims Facts

Nothing here for today!!!

G. Tidbits

Nothing here for today!!!

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. With respect to Cheetah, which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. Cheetahs are the world's fastest land animal
2. Cheetahs in India went extinct long back in 1952 due to reckless hunting activities
3. Asiatic Cheetahs are listed as critically endangered species in the (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species.

Options:

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. 1 and 3 only
- d. 1, 2 and 3

Answer: d

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 is correct**, Cheetah is the fastest land animal, which has the fastest running speed record of 93 to 98 km/h.
- **Statement 2 is correct**, Cheetahs in India went extinct in 1952 due to reckless hunting activities.
- **Statement 3 is correct**, Asiatic Cheetahs have a very small population base and are listed as **critically endangered** species in the (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species.

Q2. The Golden Fibre Revolution in India is related to

- a. Jute
- b. Coir
- c. Silk
- d. Cotton

Answer: a

Explanation:

Jute is a natural fibre with a golden, soft, long, and silky shine. It is the cheapest fibre procured from the skin of the plant's stem. Because of its colours and high cash value, Jute is known as a golden fibre. Hence, the **Golden Fibre Revolution** in India is related to jute production.

Q3. Arrange the following events in the chronological order:


1. The first animals evolved
2. The dinosaurs went extinct
3. The first vertebrates (fish) evolved
4. The first land plants evolved

Options:

- a. 1-2-3-4
- b. 1-3-4-2
- c. 3-4-1-2
- d. 4-1-3-2

Answer: b

IMPORTANT EVENTS IN THE EARTH'S HISTORY



4600 mya (million years ago) – Planet Earth formed. Dust left over from the birth of the sun clumped together to form planet Earth. The other planets in our solar system were also formed in this way at about the same time.

4500 mya – Earth's core and crust formed. Dense metals sank to the centre of the Earth and formed the core, while the outside layer cooled and solidified to form the Earth's crust.

4400 mya – The Earth's first oceans formed. Water vapour was released into the Earth's atmosphere by volcanism. It then cooled, fell back down as rain, and formed the Earth's first oceans. Some water may also have been brought to Earth by comets and asteroids.

3850 mya – The first life appeared on Earth. It was very simple single-celled organisms. Exactly how life first arose is a mystery.

1500 mya – Oxygen began to accumulate in the Earth's atmosphere. Oxygen is made by cyanobacteria (blue-green algae) as a product of photosynthesis. For 2,200 million years this oxygen was removed from the atmosphere as it reacted with iron, sank to the bottom of the sea and became trapped in rock layers. 1,500 million years ago the free iron ran out and oxygen began to be released into the atmosphere.

700 mya – The first animals evolved. These were simple single-celled animals.


530 mya – The first vertebrates (fish) evolved.

400 mya – The first land plants evolved. Oxygen in the atmosphere reacted to form ozone, which formed a layer. This served as a protective barrier to the harmful rays coming from space and which allowed plants to colonise the land.

350 mya – The first land vertebrates evolved. With plants present on the land to provide a food source, animals rapidly followed. The first to venture onto the land were primitive amphibians, and reptiles evolved soon afterwards.

225 mya – The first dinosaurs evolved from lizards.

65 mya – The dinosaurs went extinct. The dinosaurs, and many other species with them, were wiped out by the after-effects of a meteorite impact, or perhaps several impacts. The impact(s) set off chains of earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanic eruptions, which threw lots of dust and acid into the atmosphere, creating an impact winter. The dust blocked out the sunlight so plants could no longer photosynthesise, and food chains collapsed. After the extinction of the dinosaurs, mammals evolved rapidly and filled the evolutionary niches they left behind.



130,000 years ago (0.13 mya) – Modern humans evolved. *Homo sapiens* evolved in Africa from earlier humans. They left Africa around 35,000 years ago and spread around the globe. Human evolution is still pretty mysterious, due to gaps in the fossil record.

Q4. Okinawa Island is under the control of

- China
- Japan
- South Korea
- Philippines

Answer: b

Explanation:

- **Okinawa** is a Japanese island in the East China Sea.
- Hence **option b** is correct.

Q5. According to Portuguese writer Nuniz, the women in Vijayanagar Empire were experts in which of the following areas? (UPSC CSE 2021)

1. Wrestling
2. Astrology
3. Accounting
4. Soothsaying

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- a. a) 1, 2 and 3 only
- b. b) 1, 3 and 4 only
- c. c) 2 and 4 only
- d. d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Vijayanagara Kingdom had women wrestlers, astrologers, sooth-sayers, clerks and accountants.
- Hence, **option d** is correct.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Critically examine the fall of USSR which brought the Cold War to an end. Analyse how it affects current geo-politics in Eurasia. (250 words; 15 marks)[GS-2, International Relations]
2. What is the Munich Security Conference? Illustrate its role in global geo-politics. (250 words; 15 marks)[GS-2, International Relations]