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Daily Current Affairs

To The Point

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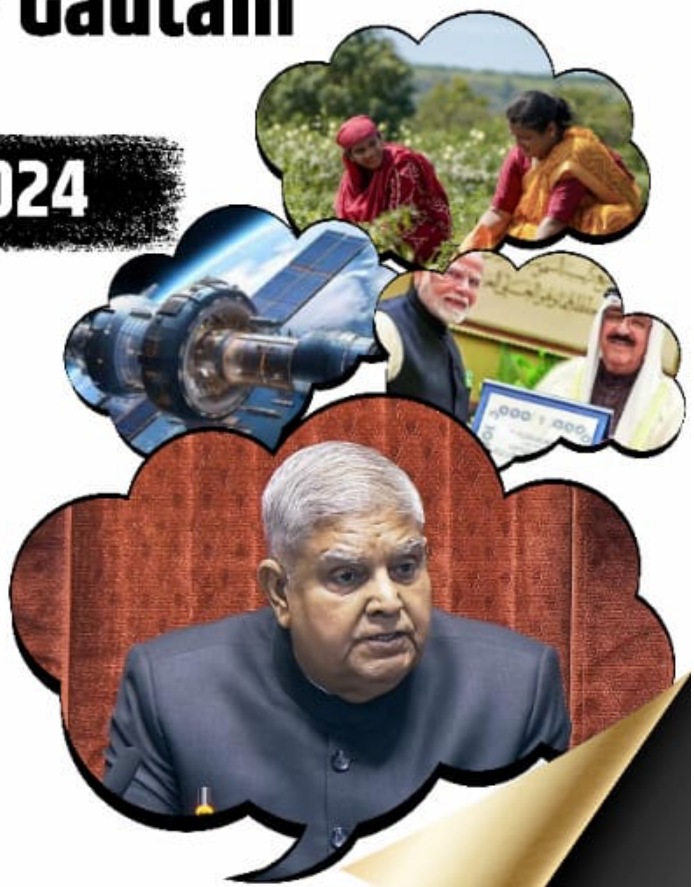

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GS Paper 2 – International Relations

1 India-Kuwait Ties Elevated to Strategic Partnership

Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to Kuwait marked a **historic milestone** in the bilateral relations between the two nations. This landmark event not only elevated the partnership to a **strategic level** but also highlighted India's growing influence in the Gulf region amidst shifting geopolitical dynamics.

Why is this Newsworthy?

- **Historic Visit:** PM Modi's visit is the first by an Indian Prime Minister to Kuwait in **43 years**, since Indira Gandhi's visit in 1981.
- **Strategic Upgrade:** The partnership between the two nations has now been officially elevated to a **strategic partnership**, signifying closer cooperation in **trade**, **defence**, and other key areas.
- **India's Rising Role:** This move underscores India's growing importance in the Gulf region.

India-Kuwait Relations: A Snapshot

Historical Ties:

- **Rooted in History:** India and Kuwait share a **long-standing friendship** that predates Kuwait's independence in 1961.
- **Trading Partners:** India was a **natural trading partner**, with the **Indian Rupee** once serving as legal tender in Kuwait.

Current Dynamics:

- **Energy Partnership:** Kuwait is India's **sixth-largest crude oil supplier**, meeting **3% of India's energy needs**.
- **Bilateral Trade:** Exports from India to Kuwait exceeded **$2 billion** for the first time, with total trade valued at **$10.47 billion (2023-24)**.
- **Investment Links:** The **Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA)** has invested over **$10 billion** in India.
- **Indian Diaspora:** With over **1 million Indians**, the Indian community is the **largest expatriate group** in Kuwait, contributing significantly to its economy.

Key Highlights of PM Modi's Visit:

Landmark Achievements:

1. **Historic Recognition:**
   - PM Modi was awarded Kuwait's highest civilian honour, **'The Order of Mubarak Al-Kabeer,'** for his efforts in strengthening bilateral ties.
2. **Bilateral Engagement:**
   - Meetings with top Kuwaiti leaders, including:
     - **Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah**
     - **Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah**

- **Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah**

3. **Strategic Agreements:**
   - A **comprehensive defence agreement** covering:
     - **Training** and exchange of personnel.
     - **Joint military exercises.**
     - Collaboration in **defence technology and supply chains**.
   - **Economic Cooperation:**
     - Modi invited KIA to explore opportunities in India's **energy**, **pharma**, **food parks**, and **infrastructure sectors**.
   - Signing of three MoUs in **sports**, **culture**, and **solar energy**.

Strategic Alignment:

- **Vision 2035:** PM Modi lauded Kuwait's developmental roadmap and emphasized **collaboration** to achieve shared objectives.
- **Expanded Focus Areas:** Strategic cooperation to grow in sectors such as **pharmaceuticals**, **IT**, **FinTech**, **infrastructure**, and **security**.

Impact on Bilateral Relations:

Strengthened People-to-People Ties:

- Acknowledgment of the **1 million-strong Indian diaspora**, celebrated for their **contributions** to Kuwait's development.

Regional and Global Implications:

- **Closer GCC Collaboration:**
  - India seeks to enhance ties with the **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)** under Kuwait's presidency.
  - Push for concluding the **India-GCC Free Trade Agreement**, which could further boost bilateral trade volumes, currently at **$184.46 billion (2022-23)**.
- **Shared Vision for West Asia:**
  - Joint emphasis on **peace, stability**, and **prosperity** in the volatile West Asia region.
  - Unified stance on **condemning terrorism** and dismantling terror networks.

Conclusion:

PM Modi's visit has paved the way for a **dynamic and robust partnership** between India and Kuwait. By strengthening **defence ties**, expanding **economic cooperation**, and aligning on strategic goals, this partnership promises substantial benefits for both nations and the broader Gulf region.

GS Paper 1 – Indian Culture

2 Rann Utsav: A Celebration of Culture and Heritage

Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi has extended an invitation to the public to witness the enchanting **Rann Utsav**, an annual cultural festival that continues until **March 2025**. This vibrant event showcases the rich cultural and artistic heritage of the **Great Rann of Kutch**, attracting visitors from across the globe.

About Rann Utsav:

- **Annual Cultural Extravaganza:** Organized by the **Gujarat Tourism Department**, the Rann Utsav takes place in the **Great Rann of Kutch**, India's largest **salt desert**.
- **Celebrating Heritage:** It highlights the diverse traditions, art, crafts, music, and dance of the **Kutch region**, offering an immersive experience for tourists.

The Great Rann of Kutch: An Overview:

Location and Divisions:

- **Geography:**
  - The **Rann of Kutch** is a vast expanse of **salt marshes**, located in **Gujarat**, India, and partially extending into **Sindh, Pakistan**.
  - It lies close to **sea level**, connected to the **Arabian Sea** through the **Kori Creek** (west) and the **Gulf of Kutch** (east).
- **Divisions:**
  - **Great Rann of Kutch:** The larger section, stretching east to west, bordered by the **Thar Desert** to the north and **Kutch Hills** to the south.
  - **Little Rann of Kutch:** Situated southeast of the Great Rann, extending to the **Gulf of Kutch**.

Climate:

- **Summers:** Temperatures average around **44°C**, often reaching up to **50°C**.
- **Winters:** The region experiences **freezing temperatures**, showcasing an extreme desert climate.

Ecological Significance:

Flora and Fauna:

- **Indian Wild Ass Sanctuary:** The **Little Rann of Kutch** is home to the endangered **Indian Wild Ass (Khur)** and forms part of India's largest wildlife sanctuary.
- **Ecosystems:**
  - The region supports **mangroves**, **desert vegetation**, and grass patches known as **baits**, which sustain diverse wildlife.
  - It is a unique ecological zone where **desert and marine ecosystems** coexist.

Biodiversity Hotspot:

- The **Rann of Kutch** hosts rare species of plants and animals, making it an **ecological treasure** within the **Indomalayan biogeographic realm**.

Historical and Cultural Legacy:

- **Ancient Settlements:** The Rann was home to **Neolithic communities** and later became an important center of the **Indus Valley Civilization**.
- **Historical Empires:** It has been part of major empires like the **Mauryas** and **Guptas**, reflecting a rich historical and cultural lineage.

The Kutch Desert: A Land of Natural Wonders:

Geographical Borders:

- The **Kutch Desert** is flanked by:
  - **Sindh (Pakistan)** to the northwest.
  - The **Arabian Sea** to the southwest.
  - **Rajasthan** to the northeast.

Geological Significance:

- The desert is a prime example of **Holocene sedimentation**, showcasing the dynamic interaction between geological and environmental factors.

Experience the Magic of Rann Utsav:

With its **mesmerizing landscapes**, **unique biodiversity**, and **rich cultural heritage**, the Rann Utsav offers an unforgettable experience. Don't miss the chance to explore the vibrant traditions of **Kutch** and witness the spectacular **salt desert** under the moonlight.

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GS Paper 2– Indian Polity and Governance

3 Vice President Removal: Process and Key Constitutional Provisions

Context: In a significant political development, opposition parties under the **INDIA bloc** have proposed a **no-confidence resolution** against Rajya Sabha Chairman and Vice President **Jagdeep Dhankhar**. This move brings attention to the constitutional provisions governing the removal of the Vice President and the broader implications of this high-ranking office.

About the Vice President of India:

Constitutional Status:

- The Vice President is the **second-highest constitutional office** in India, after the President.
- **Article 63** of the Constitution mandates the establishment of the office of the Vice President.
- The Vice President performs a **dual role**, similar to the **American Vice President**:
    - Acts as the **ex-officio Chairman of the Rajya Sabha**.
    - Steps in as the **acting President** during the President's absence or inability to perform duties.

Eligibility Criteria:

As per **Article 66**, a candidate must fulfill the following conditions to be eligible for the Vice President's office:

- Must be an **Indian citizen**.
- Should be at least **35 years old**.
- Must be qualified to be elected as a **member of the Rajya Sabha**.
- Should not hold any **office of profit** under the Union, state government, or any local/public authority.

Election Process:

- The Vice President is elected by an **electoral college** comprising:
    - **Elected and nominated members** of both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha.
    - Unlike the Presidential election, state legislative assemblies do not participate.
- The election follows the **proportional representation system** with a **single transferable vote**, conducted via **secret ballot**.
- Any disputes regarding the election are resolved by the **Supreme Court**, whose decision is final and binding.

Tenure and Removal:

Tenure:

- The Vice President serves a **five-year term** from the date of assuming office.
- Can continue in office beyond the term until a **successor assumes charge**.
- Eligible for **re-election** for subsequent terms.

Resignation:

- The Vice President can resign by submitting a formal letter to the **President of India**.

Removal Process:

- **Article 67(b)** outlines the procedure for removal:
    - A resolution for removal must be passed in the **Rajya Sabha** with an **effective majority** (majority of all then members).
    - The resolution must then be approved by the **Lok Sabha** with a **simple majority**.
    - A **14-day prior notice** is mandatory before introducing the resolution.

Conclusion:

The Vice President's office holds immense **constitutional and political significance**, acting as a crucial bridge between the executive and legislative branches. The ongoing no-confidence resolution highlights the importance of adhering to the **constitutional framework** in addressing political disagreements. It remains to be seen how this development will unfold in India's political landscape.

GS Paper 3 – Science and Technology

4 Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX): A Revolutionary Step by ISRO

Context: The **Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)** is gearing up for a historic mission under the **SpaDeX (Space Docking Experiment)** program. With **24 scientific experiments** on board the **POEM satellite**, this mission aims to achieve a significant breakthrough in **autonomous space docking technology**—a crucial capability for future space exploration.

About the SpaDeX Mission:

Mission Goals:

The **Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX)** is an ambitious initiative designed to:

- Develop **autonomous in-space docking technology**.
- Pave the way for critical projects like the **Bharatiya Antariksh Station (BAS)** and advanced **lunar missions**.

Key Features:

- **Launch Vehicle: PSLV-C60** will serve as the carrier for the mission.
- **Spacecraft Involved:**
  - **Chaser (SDX01)**
  - **Target (SDX02)**
- **Technology Demonstration:**
  - Achieving precise **in-orbit docking**.
  - Demonstrating **power transfer** between docked spacecraft.

Mission Details:

Launch and Orbit:

- **Orbit Details:**
  - Circular orbit at **470 km** altitude.
  - Inclination of **55 degrees**.

Docking Process:

- **Separation Dynamics:**
  - The Chaser and Target will separate with a controlled **velocity difference**, maintaining a **10-20 km distance** initially.
  - Propulsion systems will guide the spacecraft into alignment, leading to a **Far Rendezvous** phase.
- **Docking and Operations:**
  - After successful docking, the mission will showcase **electrical power transfer**.

- Post-demonstration, the spacecraft will undock to conduct additional payload operations.

What is POEM?

PSLV Orbital Experimental Module (POEM)

The **POEM** is an innovative platform created by the **Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC)** to utilize the fourth stage of the PSLV as an **orbital science station**.

Key Features:

- **First Used:** In the **PSLV-C53 mission (2022)** to reduce **space debris**.
- Equipped with a **Navigation Guidance and Control (NGC)** system for precise stabilization.
- Provides a cost-effective solution for conducting **scientific experiments** in orbit.

Historical Context:

- The concept of **space docking** dates back to **1967**, when the Soviet Union successfully docked **Kosmos 186** and **Kosmos 188**.
- If successful, **SpaDeX** will position India as the **fourth nation** globally to master this complex technology, joining the ranks of space giants.\

Conclusion:

The **SpaDeX mission** represents a monumental step for ISRO, showcasing India's growing expertise in cutting-edge **space technologies**. By mastering **autonomous space docking**, India is poised to play a pivotal role in **global space exploration** and ensure its presence in **future space stations and lunar missions**.

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GS Paper 3 – Economic Development

5 SMILE Programme: Transforming India's Logistics Ecosystem

Context: In a significant move to revolutionize India's logistics sector, the **Indian government** and the **Asian Development Bank (ADB)** have signed a **$350 million policy-based loan** under the second subprogramme of the **Strengthening Multimodal and Integrated Logistics Ecosystem (SMILE)** initiative. This groundbreaking partnership aims to bolster **supply chain resilience** and enhance the **manufacturing sector** in India.

What is the SMILE Programme?

Programme Overview:

The **Strengthening Multimodal and Integrated Logistics Ecosystem (SMILE)** is a strategic initiative designed to implement comprehensive reforms in India's logistics sector.

- **Objective:** To streamline **multimodal logistics** and support the growth of India's **manufacturing** and **trade operations**.
- **Collaborators:**
  - **Department of Economic Affairs (DEA)** under the Ministry of Finance.
  - **Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT)** under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
  - **Asian Development Bank (ADB)**.
- **Structure:** The programme follows a **programmatic policy-based loan (PBL)** approach, comprising two subprogrammes for phased implementation.

Key Pillars of the SMILE Programme:

1. Strengthening Institutional Frameworks:

- Developing robust **logistics capacities** at the **national**, **state**, and **city levels**.
- Focusing on seamless integration of **multimodal logistics infrastructure** to support efficient transportation.

2. Standardising Warehousing:

- Establishing **uniform standards** to optimize warehousing operations.
- Encouraging **private investment** by streamlining **supply chains** and improving their reliability.

3. Enhancing Trade Logistics:

- Improving the efficiency of **external trade operations** to boost India's competitiveness in global markets.
- Simplifying processes to reduce **logistical bottlenecks** in export and import activities.

4. Promoting Smart and Low-Emission Systems:

- Adopting **advanced technologies** to enhance logistics efficiency.
- Focusing on **environmentally sustainable practices** to minimize the carbon footprint of the logistics ecosystem.

Conclusion:

The **SMILE Programme** is a pivotal step in **modernizing India's logistics sector**, fostering economic growth, and ensuring **sustainable development**. By strengthening **institutional frameworks**, standardizing warehousing, improving trade logistics, and promoting smart systems, this initiative is set to position India as a global leader in **logistics and supply chain management**.

GS Paper 3 – Governance, Polity, and Social Justice

6 "Agritech for Women Farmers: A Business Case for Inclusive Growth" - A Report by WEF

Context: The **World Economic Forum (WEF)** has released a landmark report titled **"Agritech for Women Farmers: A Business Case for Inclusive Growth"**, shedding light on the transformative potential of **gender-inclusive AgriTech**. This report highlights how integrating women farmers into the **AgriTech ecosystem** can unlock their full potential, contributing to a more sustainable and inclusive agricultural future.

Need for Gender-Inclusive AgriTech for Women Farmers:

Feminization of Agriculture:

- In **India**, women account for nearly **50% of the workforce** in key agricultural value chains, including **cotton**, **sugarcane**, **tea**, **coffee**, and **cashews**.
- Despite their significant role, women earn up to **60% less** than their male counterparts and face **limited access to essential resources** like **finance**, **training**, and **technology**.

Efficiency Gains through AgriTech:

- **Data-driven planning** through AgriTech can dramatically reduce **food loss** and **waste**, making supply chains more efficient and **resilient** to external shocks.
- Transitioning to **AgriTech solutions** can not only empower women farmers but also improve **productivity** and **profitability** in the agricultural sector.

Business Imperative: Gender-inclusive **AgriTech** is not just a social responsibility but a **strategic business imperative** for the **private sector**. Supporting women farmers can unlock new opportunities, boost agricultural output, and contribute to **inclusive growth**.

Challenges Faced by Women Farmers in Adopting AgriTech:

Demand-Side Challenges:

1. **Sociocultural Barriers:**
    - **Gender norms** and societal biases limit women's mobility and access to agricultural opportunities.
    - Safety and security concerns also restrict their ability to fully engage with AgriTech innovations.
2. **Limited Access to Resources:**
    - **Land ownership** restrictions prevent women from accessing **formal credit**, which is crucial for adopting AgriTech solutions and improving farm productivity.
3. **Literacy Barriers:**
    - Low levels of **education** and **digital literacy** hinder women's ability to fully benefit from **AgriTech** tools and services, limiting their awareness and adoption of new technologies.

Supply-Side Challenges:

1. **Access to Gender-Disaggregated Data:** The **lack of gender-specific data** prevents a clear understanding of the unique challenges that women farmers face in utilizing **AgriTech services**.
2. **Support System Gaps:** Women farmers often lack **mentorship**, **peer learning opportunities**, and access to well-coordinated **agricultural research and extension services**, which are essential for maximizing the potential of AgriTech.

Framework for Agritech Solutions for Women Farmers:

The report proposes a **framework** for designing **Agritech solutions** that cater to women farmers, built around the **4Ps of marketing—Product**, **Price**, **Promotion**, **Place**, with an additional focus on **People**.

- **Product:** Tailored to meet the needs of women, focusing on **affordable** and **intuitive** designs.
- **Price:** Ensuring **affordability** and equitable access.
- **Promotion:** Strategic initiatives to **raise awareness** and challenge existing gender biases.
- **Place:** Creating **accessible platforms** for women farmers to engage with AgriTech.
- **People:** Empowering women through **training**, **capacity building**, and expanding their **role** in agricultural innovation.

Conclusion:

The **Agritech sector** holds immense potential for empowering women farmers, improving agricultural productivity, and driving **inclusive economic growth**. However, overcoming sociocultural barriers, improving access to resources, and addressing **gender-specific challenges** in AgriTech adoption are crucial steps toward realizing this potential. By prioritizing **gender-inclusive AgriTech** solutions, we can unlock new opportunities for **women farmers** and accelerate progress towards a more **equitable** and **sustainable agricultural future**.

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