UPSC CURRENT AFFAIRS NOTES

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PM addresses G20 Trade and Investment Ministers' Meeting

The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi addressed the G20 Trade and Investment Ministers' Meeting held in Jaipur, Rajasthan via video link today.

Addressing the gathering, the Prime Minister extended a warm welcome to the Pink City of Jaipur and said that the region is known for its dynamic and enterprising people.

He underlined that trade has led to the exchange of ideas, cultures, and technology while also bringing people closer throughout history. "Trade and globalization have also lifted hundreds of millions out of extreme poverty", Shri Modi added.

Highlighting the global optimism and confidence in the Indian economy, the Prime Minister stated that today, India is seen as a combination of openness, opportunities, and options. During the last nine years, the Prime Minister asserted that India has become the fifth-largest global economy as a result of the sustained efforts by the government. "We embarked on the journey of "Reform, Perform, and Transform" in 2014".

The Prime Minister remarked as he gave examples and mentioned increased competitiveness and enhanced transparency, expanding digitization and the promotion of innovation. He further added that India has established dedicated freight corridors and built industrial zones. "We have moved away from red tape to red carpet and liberalized FDI flows", Shri Modi said. He also touched upon initiatives like Make in India and Aatma Nirbhar Bharat that have given a boost to manufacturing and also mentioned policy stability in the country. The Prime Minister underlined that the government is committed to making India the third-largest global economy in the next few years.

Throwing light on the current global challenges, from the pandemic to geo-political tensions, the Prime Minister said that it has tested the world economy and stated that it is our responsibility as G20 nations to rebuild confidence in international trade and investments. The Prime Minister emphasized on building resilient and inclusive global value chains that can withstand future shocks. In this context, the Prime Minister highlighted the importance of India's proposal to create a Generic Framework for Mapping Global Value Chains to assess vulnerabilities, minimize risks and enhance resilience.

"Technology's transformative power in trade is undeniable", the Prime Minister remarked and gave the example of India's shift to an online single indirect tax - the GST which helped create a single internal market boosting inter-state trade. He also touched upon India's Unified Logistics Inter-face Platform that makes trade logistics cheaper and more transparent. He also mentioned 'Open Network for Digital Commerce' and termed it as a game-changer that will democratize the digital marketplace eco-system. "We have already done that with our Unified Payments Interface for payment systems", he added. The Prime Minister observed that digitizing processes and the use of e-commerce have the potential to enhance market access. He expressed delight that the group is working on the 'High-Level Principles for the Digitalization of Trade Documents'. These principles, the Prime Minister said, can help countries in implementing cross-border electronic trade measures and reduce compliance burdens. Highlighting the challenges of the growth in cross-border e-commerce, the Prime Minister suggested working collectively to ensure equitable competition between large and small sellers. He also emphasized the need to address the problems faced by consumers in fair price discovery and grievance handling mechanisms.

Concluding the address, the Prime Minister underlined that it is the collective responsibility of G20 members as One Family to restore confidence in international trade and investment processes. He expressed confidence that the working group will move forward collectively to ensure the global trading system gradually transitions into a more representative and inclusive future.

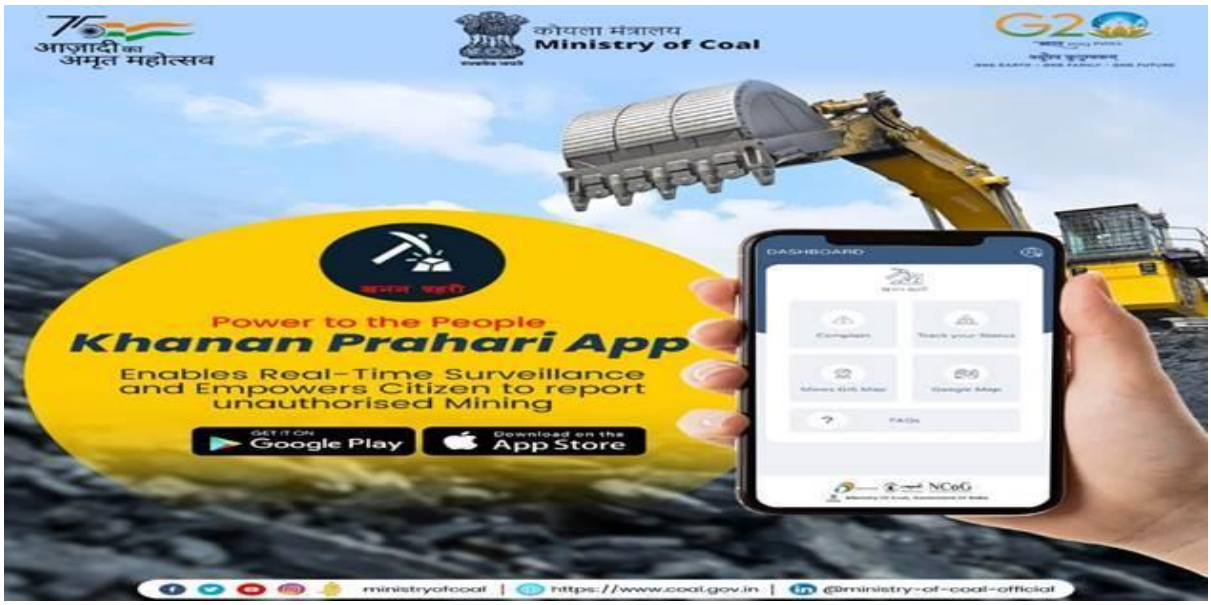
Khanan Prahari App Helping to Curb Illegal Coal Mining Activities Through Public Participation

The mobile app Khanan Prahari, which allows citizens to report incidents of illegal coal mining through geo-tagged photographs and textual information, is a significant step taken by the Ministry of Coal towards curbing illegal coal mining activities.

The corresponding web portal called as Coal Mine Surveillance & Management System (CMSMS) has been developed in association with the Bhaskaracharya Institute of Space Application & Geoinformatics, Gandhinagar, and CMPDI, Ranchi.

Illegal coal mining poses a threat to the environment, the lives of those involved in illegal mining, and the general decay in the traditional subsistence base and the country's economy.

The government aims to take transparent action against illegal mining, using space technology, as an e-Governance initiative. The government recognizes the importance of public participation in combating this menace. The Khanan Prahari mobile app serves as a powerful tool for citizens to contribute to the fight against illegal coal mining.



The objective of the Khanan Prahari mobile app and CMSMS web portal is to encourage public participation through reporting about illegal coal mining.

Key features of the Khanan Prahari mobile app include:

Reporting Incidents: Users can easily report incidents of illegal mining by taking photographs and providing comments on the incident. The app allows for the geotagging of photographs by enabling the GPS location feature.

Confidentiality: The user's identity is kept confidential, ensuring privacy and security.

Complaint Tracking: Complainants receive a complaint number, which they can use to easily track the status of their reported complaints on the Khanan Prahari mobile app.

So far, the Khanan Prahari mobile app has received a significant response, with a total of 483 complaints registered. Out of these, 78 complaints have been verified as accurate and appropriate actions have been taken accordingly.

The Khanan Prahari mobile app is available for download on Google's Play Store for Android-based mobile phones and the Apple Store for iOS-supported iPhones.

54th Network Planning Group Meeting under PM GatiShakti recommends four infrastructure projects

The 54th Network Planning Group (NPG) meeting chaired by Special Secretary, Logistics, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Smt. Sumita Dawra was held yesterday in New Delhi.

The meeting saw active participation from member Departments and Ministries of Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, Ministry of Railways, Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, and Ministry of Power.

During the meeting, two projects of the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways and two projects of the Ministry of Railways with a total cost of Rs 7, 693.17 crore were assessed.

Smt. Dawra stressed upon the importance of utilising the GatiShakti National Master Plan portal and adopting the 'whole of government' approach for infrastructure planning and execution. She emphasized upon the critical importance of the projects in terms of connectivity to economic and social nodes of the area and accentuated on following an Area Development Approach.

NPG examined four-lane Thiruvananthapuram Outer Ring Road (ORR), under Bharatmala Pariyojana, in Kerala worth Rs 4,767.20 Crore. This project corridor is a part of Mumbai-Kanyakumari Economic Corridor.

Another road project, Dahod-Bodeli-Vapi Corridor with a project outlay of Rs 1,179.33 Crore was assessed by the NPG. The project road starts at the junction of the new Vadodara-Delhi Expressway and ends at post Mumbai-Vadodara expressway. It forms an important connectivity with Bodeli, Devaliya, Rajpipla, Netrang, Vyara, Dharampur, Vapi and further Southwards to Mumbai via Vadodara-Mumbai Expressway under implementation. The project will improve road network, benefiting the local people by reducing travel time, travel distance as well as transportation cost. It will also boost socio-economic development and tourism along the project road.

NPG also deliberated on a new broad gauge railway Line between Pushkar – Merta in Rajasthan with a project cost of Rs 799.64 Crores. The proposed new line will provide direct connectivity from Central India to Northern India as well as to Western border. Further, it will decongest and reduce pressure on Highways.

Another rail project in Rajasthan, a new broad-gauge line between Merta City-Ras Railway Stations worth Rs 947 Crore was assessed by the NPG. The project holds significant importance in facilitating quicker movement of goods and promoting industrial and overall development in the region encompassing Pali and Nagaur districts of Rajasthan.

Dr Jitendra Singh says, Digital healthcare can be an effective preventive tool against a host of diseases ranging from lifestyle disorders like Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus to infectious diseases like Covid

Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) Science & Technology; MoS PMO, Personnel, Public Grievances, Pensions, Atomic Energy and Space, Dr Jitendra Singh, who is also a renowned Diabetologist, said today that Digital healthcare can be an effective preventive tool against a host of diseases ranging from lifestyle disorders like Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus to infectious diseases like Covid.

The Minister was speaking on the topic of “India's digital roadmap for Healthy India for accessible and affordable healthcare” at the 3rd Healthcare Leaders Summit in New Delhi.

He said, digital healthcare with a focus on prevention will be the focus in the years to come.

Dr Jitendra Singh said, public-private partnership (PPP) model for healthcare services is the need of the hour especially to put an end to the urban-rural dichotomy in healthcare services.

"So, I think, larger integration not only helps in technology sharing, in digital sharing, in financial resource sharing, in human (resource) sharing, (but) it also acts as a huge mutual stimulant of energies, of the positive vibes flowing and also learning from each other and also at the same time gives a feeling of belonging and the ownership to the goal you have taken up whether it is innovation to health or any other sector," he said.

"We can leverage science and technology to bridge disparities between the urban and rural divide with a dedicated focus on affordability, inclusivity, and accessibility," he added.

Lauding Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi for the high priority given to healthcare, Dr Jitendra Singh said that it was because of the personal interest and intervention of PM Modi that within two years, India not only managed the Covid pandemic successfully better than much smaller countries, but also succeeded in coming out with a DNA vaccine and providing it to the other countries as well.

Dr Jitendra Singh said, India has made progress over the years in bettering the overall healthcare infrastructure of the country, and that there has been "a transition over the entire disease spectrum as well as the evolution of therapeutic and the preventive modalities available to us over the last half a century or so".

"After the Eighties, there was globalization or the so-called 'democratization' of diseases, so we also started having the lifestyle diseases, coronary diseases, etc, and coupled with that also the change in life expectancy," he said, pointing out that the life expectancy has gone up close to 70 years of age.

FIDE WORLD CUP

Rameshbabu Praggnanandhaa from India secured the second-place position, and Magnus Carlsen achieved victory in the FIDE World Cup final.

Rameshbabu Praggnanandhaa finished second in the FIDE World Cup after an intense final against Magnus Carlsen.

Magnus Carlsen won the FIDE World Cup for the first time in his career after a closely contested final.

Carlsen defeated Praggnanandhaa in the final, with the outcome being decided in a tiebreaker.

Praggnanandhaa, at 18, was the youngest-ever World Cup finalist

- Praggnanandhaa achieved the title of Grandmaster (GM) at the age of 12.
- Praggnanandhaa honed his skills during the COVID-19 pandemic through online tournaments.
- He became an international master at 10 and a grandmaster at 12, showcasing his prodigious talent.
- Praggnanandhaa set a record by defeating then-world champion Magnus Carlsen in 2022 at the age of 16.

The Chess World Cup 2023 was a single-elimination chess tournament that took place in Baku, Azerbaijan, from July 30 to August 24, 2023. This edition marked the 10th iteration of the Chess World Cup.

NATIONAL CONSUMER DISPUTES REDRESSAL COMMISSION

Cloudtail India Pvt. Ltd., a prominent online retailer, has lost its appeal against the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) over the sale of substandard pressure cookers.

The CCPA had ordered the company to recall 1,033 units of domestic pressure cookers that did not meet the mandatory BIS standards and posed a risk to the consumers. The company was also fined ₹1, 00,000 for violating consumer rights and the Quality Control Order (QCO).

Cloudtail India Pvt. Ltd. challenged an order from the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) regarding its violation of consumer rights by selling domestic pressure cookers that did not conform to mandatory Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) standards.

According to the Quality Control Order (QCO) that was implemented on 01.02.2021, domestic pressure cookers must comply with the Indian Standard (IS) 2347: 2017 and display the standard mark with a license from the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) as per Scheme-I of Schedule II of Bureau of Indian Standard (Conformity Assessment) Regulations, 2018.

The National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (NCDRC) upheld the CCPA's order and dismissed the company's appeal, stating that the company had failed to exercise due diligence and care in ensuring the quality and safety of the products sold.

The NCDRC also observed that the company had not disputed the fact that the pressure cookers were non-compliant with the BIS standards and that it had sold them without obtaining a valid license from the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS).

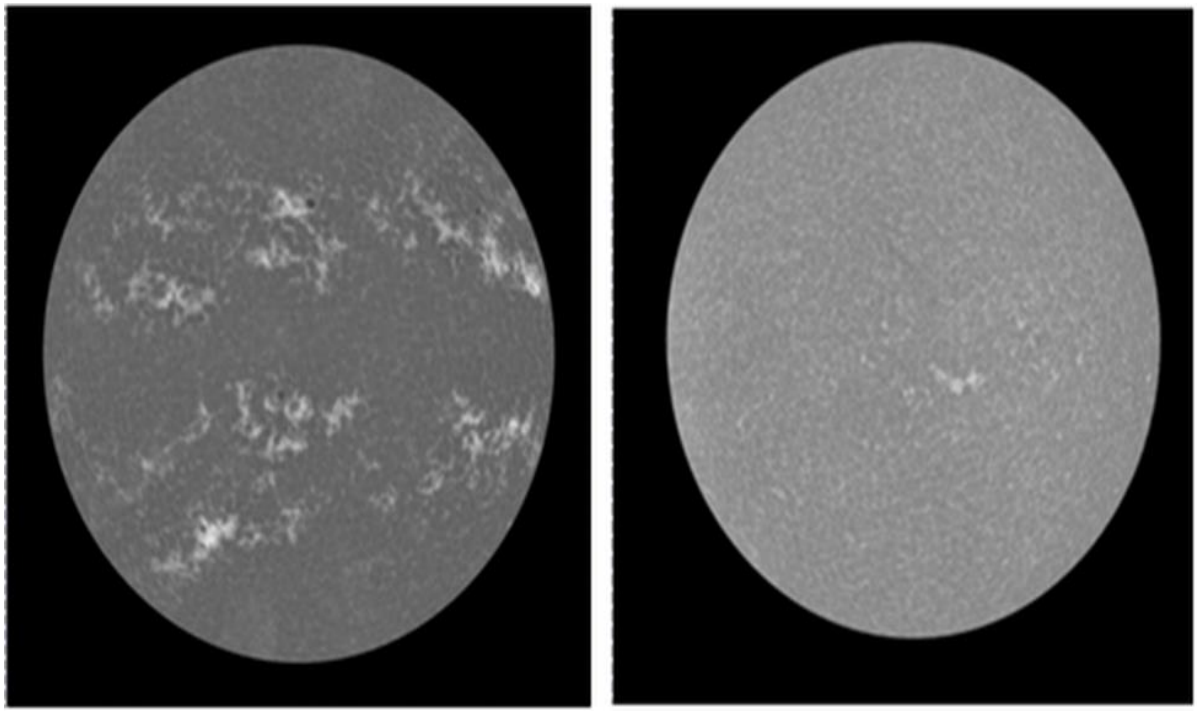
The NCDRC further noted that the company had not taken any steps to recall the defective pressure cookers or to inform the consumers about the potential hazards. The NCDRC said that the company had acted negligently and irresponsibly and had caused harm to the consumers' health and safety.

The NCDRC's decision is a significant one as it reinforces the accountability of online retailers for ensuring the quality and safety of the products sold by them. It highlights the importance of complying with the BIS standards and QCO, which are meant to protect consumers from substandard and hazardous products. The decision sends a strong message to consumers to be vigilant and aware of their rights and remedies in case of defective or unsafe products.

EQUAL CONTRAST TECHNIQUE

A new methodology has been developed to analyze images of the Sun in white light, addressing issues related to temporal and latitudinal variations in observations.

This innovative technique, known as the Equal Contrast Technique (ECT), holds the potential to provide accurate analysis of the historic time series of images of the Sun.



It offers insights into the dynamics of the Sun, solar cycle variations, dynamo processes in the convection zone, and their impact on Earth's long-term climatic variations.

Observations related to the Sun often suffer from temporal and latitudinal variations due to instrument and sky conditions.

The Sun exhibits numerous regions of weak magnetic field that vary over time, which can be studied using magnetograms and Ca-K line images.

The Ca-K line intensity correlates strongly with the magnetic field intensity in the Sun's regions.

Challenges with Traditional Methods

- **Temporal Limitations:** Magnetograms have a limited availability for short periods, and instrument characteristics change over time, hindering the study of long-term variations.
- **Data Inconsistencies:** Different observatories around the world provide data with varying instrument configurations, leading to diverse results.
- **Scattering of Results:** Day-to-day variations in instrument settings and sky conditions result in scattered data, affecting the accuracy of analysis.
- **Long-Term Variation Impact:** Changing emulsions used to record images introduce long-term variations in the results.

Equal Contrast Technique (ECT)

- The ECT methodology, developed by scientists from the Indian Institute of Astrophysics, addresses the challenges associated with instrument and sky conditions.
- This technique compensates for temporal and latitudinal variations, ensuring more accurate and reliable results.

Applications and Benefits

- **Solar Dynamics Study:** ECT enables accurate analysis of long-term Ca-K line images, offering insights into the Sun's dynamics, magnetic field variations, and solar activity patterns.
- **Solar Cycle Variations:** By correlating derived plage area (bright regions in the sun's chromosphere) from Ca-K images with sunspot numbers, ECT can help unravel solar cycle variations and their implications.
- **Dynamo Processes Exploration:** The methodology aids in understanding dynamo processes in the convection zone of the Sun, contributing to solar physics research.
- **Earth's Climate Impact:** Accurate analysis of historic solar data assists in studying the effect of solar variatins on Earth's climatic conditions over extended periods.
- **Long-Term Correlation:** The ECT's application to Ca-K images from the Kodaikanal observatory demonstrated excellent correlation between derived plage area and sunspot numbers over a century, even on a daily basis.

Magnetograms: Understanding Earth's Magnetic Field

- Magnetograms are graphical representations that depict the variations in Earth's magnetic field strength and direction over time.
- These recordings are vital tools for studying the Earth's internal processes, its interactions with the solar wind, and their impacts on various terrestrial and space phenomena.

Importance of Magnetograms

- **Geomagnetic Field Monitoring:** Magnetograms provide crucial information about the Earth's geomagnetic field, which is generated by the movement of molten iron in its outer core. This field not only plays a role in guiding navigation but also shields the planet from harmful cosmic radiation and solar wind particles.
- **Space Weather Prediction:** The variations in Earth's magnetic field are closely tied to space weather phenomena. Magnetograms help in predicting geomagnetic storms, which can disrupt power grids, satellite operations, communication systems, and navigation equipment.
- **Understanding Earth's Interior:** By studying changes in the magnetic field, scientists gain insights into the Earth's internal processes, such as the movement of molten iron and the dynamics of the outer core. This contributes to our understanding of plate tectonics, the Earth's magnetic reversals, and its overall geological evolution.

- **Solar Wind Interaction:** The Earth's magnetic field interacts with the solar wind – a stream of charged particles emanating from the Sun. Magnetograms aid in understanding these interactions, including how the solar wind affects the magnetosphere, ionosphere, and other atmospheric layers.

Components of a Magnetogram

- **Magnetic Field Strength:** The vertical axis of a magnetogram represents the strength of the magnetic field, usually measured in nanoTesla (nT) or gamma (γ). Distinct fluctuations indicate changes in geomagnetic activity.
- **Time Axis:** Magnetograms are plotted over time, typically in hours or days. Regular readings help identify short-term fluctuations and long-term trends.
- **Directional Information:** Magnetograms may include arrows or lines to indicate the direction of the magnetic field vector. This provides insights into the orientation of the field.

Recording and Data Sources

- **Observatories:** Ground-based magnetic observatories worldwide continuously monitor Earth's magnetic field using magnetometers. These observatories are part of global networks contributing to the study of geomagnetism.
- **Satellites:** Many satellites equipped with magnetometers orbit the Earth, capturing magnetic field data from space. These data help create a comprehensive picture of the Earth's magnetic field from various perspectives.

Technological Advancements

- **Superconducting Magnetometers:** These highly sensitive instruments measure tiny changes in magnetic field strength. They are used in both ground-based observatories and space missions.
- **Satellite Arrays:** Constellations of satellites provide more extensive coverage of Earth's magnetic field variations. The Swarm mission by the European Space Agency is a notable example.
- **Real-time Monitoring:** Advanced magnetometers and satellite networks enable real-time monitoring of space weather conditions, contributing to timely warnings about potential geomagnetic storms.

The Equal Contrast Technique (ECT) marks a significant advancement in analyzing historic time series of images of the Sun. By mitigating challenges related to instrument and sky conditions, this methodology opens avenues for reliable and accurate investigations into solar dynamics, solar cycle variations, and their implications on Earth's climate. The ECT's successful application underscores its potential for shaping our understanding of the Sun's behavior and its far-reaching effects on our planet.

Magnetograms serve as a window into the Earth's dynamic relationship with the Sun and its internal processes. By studying variations in Earth's magnetic field, scientists gain insights into geological and atmospheric phenomena, aiding in space weather prediction, understanding Earth's core dynamics, and safeguarding technological infrastructure. As technology continues

to advance, magnetograms will remain a cornerstone of geophysical research and our understanding of the interconnected systems that shape our planet.

BRICS Summit 2023

The 15th BRICS summit was held from the 22nd to 24th August at the Sandton Convention Centre in South Africa.

A major outcome of the BRICS Summit was the decision of the BRICS leaders to expand its membership to include six new members.

- BRICS decisions are unanimous, that is, all members have to agree for any move to go ahead.
- This year's summit was hosted by South Africa.
- South Africa became Chair of BRICS on 1 January 2023.

Theme

BRICS and Africa: Partnership for Mutually Accelerated Growth, Sustainable Development and Inclusive Multilateralism5

Five priorities for 2023

- Developing a partnership towards an equitable Just Transition
- Transforming education and skills development for the future
- Unlocking opportunities through the African Continental Free Trade Area
- Strengthening post-pandemic socio-economic recovery and the attainment of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development

- Strengthening multilateralism, including working towards real reform of global governance institutions and strengthening the meaningful participation of women in peace processes

Outcome Document

At the end of summit, member countries adopted Johannesburg II Declaration.

The outcome document called upon member countries to work on following themes

- Partnership for Inclusive Multilateralism
- Fostering an Environment of Peace and Development
- Partnership for Mutually Accelerated Growth
- Partnership for Sustainable Development
- Deepening People-to-People Exchanges
- Institutional Development

News Summary: BRICS Summit 2023

The 15th BRICS Summit, held in South Africa, invited six countries to join the alliance.

This is significant as this move can strengthen BRICS' claim of being a 'voice of the Global South'.

These countries are - Iran, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Argentina, Egypt, and Ethiopia. Their membership will begin in January 2024.

Significance of this move

- Spokesperson of the developing world
- Adding new members strengthens the group's heft as a spokesperson of the developing world.
- Increased weight of the organisation
- BRICS currently represents around 40% of the world's population and more than a quarter of the world's GDP.
- With the additions, it will represent almost half the world's population, and will include three of the world's biggest oil producers, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Iran.

China's increasing dominance on the other

This move also raises concerns about China's increasing dominance on the other as China is driving the expansion of the group.

The fact that regional rivals Saudi Arabia and Iran are now part of BRICS is in itself remarkable.

China happens to be the biggest buyer of Saudi Arabia's oil, and had recently brokered a peace deal between Tehran and Riyadh.

Need for expansion of BRICS

Anti-US sentiment and support for multipolarity

- As per experts, there is considerable anti-US sentiment in the world, and all these countries are looking for a grouping where they can use that sentiment to gather together.
- Also, there is a lot of appetite for multipolarity, for a platform where countries of the Global South can express their solidarity.
- Aspiring bloc that can challenge the western geopolitical view
- The war in Ukraine has brought the West together on the one hand and strengthened the China-Russia partnership on the other.
- This war has turned BRICS into an aspiring bloc that can challenge the western geopolitical view, and emerge as a counterweight to Western-led fora like the Group of 7 and the World Bank.

The new members of BRICS

The invitation to Iran, whose ties with the West are strained, seems to have a strong China-Russia imprint.

While Saudi Arabia has traditionally been a US ally, it has been increasingly striking out on its own, and the BRICS membership is in line with that.

For Iran and Russia, this membership is a signal to the West that they still have friends globally.

Both Egypt and Ethiopia have had longstanding ties with the US too.

Argentina, facing an economic crisis, will hope for financial aid from BRICS.

What BRICS expansion means for India?

If India's presence at the recent G7 summit in Hiroshima, where PM Modi also participated in an informal Quad summit, was seen as a sign of New Delhi's US tilt, it continues to attach importance to the "anti-West" BRICS.

India is also part of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), and despite problems, it has relations with Russia, with China.

While China does want BRICS to be an anti-western group, the Indian view is that it is a non-western group and should stay that way.

Among the new members, while India looks at all of them as partnerships worth developing.

However, concerns have been raised that the group could become more pro-China and sideline New Delhi's voice and interests.