

## Current Affair (11 January, 2022)

### **(1) Developing Country Tag to China: WTO**

**News :-** Recently, China got the 'developing country' status at the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

It has become a contentious issue with a number of countries raising concerns against the decision. Earlier in 2019, the South Korean Government decided not to seek any special treatment as a developing country from future negotiations at the WTO.

#### **Key Points**

##### **About:**

The WTO has not defined 'developed' and 'developing' countries and therefore member countries are free to announce whether they are 'developed' or 'developing'.

However, other members can challenge the decision of a member to make use of provisions available to developing countries.

The WTO lacks a proper definition of a developing nation although two-thirds of its 164 members classify themselves as developing.

As WTO members can declare themselves developing nations, this provides an advantage to nations like China to expand their dominance in global trade even while classifying themselves as developing and thereby obtaining Special and Differentiated Treatment (S&DT).

##### **China's Case:**

Given the rise in China's per capita income to become an upper middle-income country according to the World Bank and the country's alleged use of unfair trade practises, a number of nations have called on China to either refrain from seeking benefits available to developing countries or forgo its classification as a developing country altogether.

Some of China's unfair trade practises include preferential treatment for state enterprises, data restrictions and inadequate enforcement of intellectual property rights.

Prima facie, it does appear anomalous that the world's second-largest economy—which accounted for a quarter of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth in 2021—considers itself as the largest developing country.

##### **World Bank's Classification of Countries**

The World Bank assigns the world's economies to four income groups—low, lower-middle, upper-middle, and high-income countries.

The classifications are updated each year on 1st July and are based on Gross National Income (GNI) per capita in current USD of the previous year.

GNI is the total amount of money earned by a nation's people and businesses.

In its latest classification (2020-21), the World Bank has classified India as a lower-middle-income country.

##### **Concerns Raised:**

China's status as a 'developing country' at the WTO has become a contentious issue with a number of countries raising concerns over the upper middle-income nation deriving benefits reserved for developing countries under WTO norms.

One way for China to show leadership would be by refraining from claiming benefits that would correspond to a developing country in ongoing negotiations," the European Union (EU) said in a statement on the latest review of China's Trade Policy conducted in October 2021. The United States Trade Representative also released a similar statement.

Australia too had recommended that China relinquish "its access to S&DT". China's per capita income was USD 10,435 in 2020 according to the World Bank while that of India was USD 1,928.

India has also questioned China's claim that it was a developing country, since, going by the World Bank's definition, its per capita income belongs to that of an upper middle income country.

Moreover, concerns have been raised over the Least-Developed Country (LDC), with Bangladesh potentially losing this tag after surpassing India in terms of GDP per capita.

##### **Benefits of Developing Country Status:**

Certain WTO agreements give developing countries special rights through S&DT provisions, which can grant developing countries longer timeframes to implement the agreements and even commitments to raise trading opportunities for such countries.

S&DT allows developing and poor countries certain benefits, including longer transition periods for implementing commitments.

It also provides measures to increase trading opportunities for developing countries, provisions requiring all WTO members to safeguard the trade interests of developing countries, support to help developing countries build the capacity to carry out WTO work, handle disputes, and implement technical standards, and provisions related to LDC Members.

WTO pacts are often aimed at reduction in government support to certain industries over time and set more lenient targets for developing nations and grant them more time to achieve these targets compared to developed ones.

The classification also allows other countries to offer preferential treatment.

#### **Note**

At a time when developed nations are pushing WTO-reforms that would dilute S&DT provisions, India has indicated that it will fight for preserving S&DT for the developing world.

Given India has earlier said it is open to discussions on which country should be considered developing, it must take the lead in this regard.

#### **China's Stand:**

China has consistently maintained that it is the "world's largest developing economy" but has recently indicated that it may be willing to forego many benefits of being a developing country.

It has reportedly informed that the country may forgo all exemptions available to developing countries in negotiations aimed at cutting fishing subsidies to curb overfishing.

#### **Way Forward**

WTO must clearly define a developing nation at the earliest so that only such nations can claim S&DT.

New approaches to strengthen the multilateral trading system", the way forward is to adopt a procedure wherein each nation, keeping its national interests in mind, makes withdrawal strategies to claim S&DT benefits and ultimately from developing nation status.

Another idea is 'graduation' whereby as and when member nations meet certain objective criteria, they won't be subject to developing country status.

#### **(2) Guidelines for Universal Accessibility**

**News :-** Recently, the Central Public Works Department (CPWD) released the new Harmonised Guidelines and Standards for Universal Accessibility in India 2021.

The new rules envisage changes from the design plan to the implementation.

Apart from this, various aspects of the built environment have been covered under the new guidelines for universal accessibility.

Earlier, in 2021 the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting had issued draft guidelines for new accessibility standards.

#### **Central Public Works Department of India**

The Central Public Works Department of India (CPWD), is a premier Central Government authority in charge of public sector works.

It comes under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA).

It deals with buildings, roads, bridges, flyovers, complicated structures like stadiums, auditoriums, laboratories, bunkers, border fencing, border roads (hill roads), etc.

It was established by Lord Dalhousie in 1854.

#### **Key Points**

##### **About the New Guidelines:**

The guidelines are a revision of the Harmonised Guidelines and Space Standards for Barrier-Free Built Environment for Persons with Disabilities and Elderly Persons released in 2016.

Earlier, the guidelines were for creating a barrier-free environment, but now we are focusing on universal accessibility.

Universal Accessibility refers to the degree to which the environment, products, and services are accessible to people with disabilities.

The term barrier-free design used to describe the effort of removing physical barriers from the "built environment" for people with disabilities.

The guidelines are not just for Persons with Disabilities (PwD), but for those involved in planning projects, from the construction of government buildings to master-planning cities.

Nodal Ministry: Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA).

**Constitutional and Legal Framework for Disabled People:**

Article 14: The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India.

In this context, Persons with Disabilities should have similar and equal rights in the eyes of the Constitution.

UN Convention the Right of Persons with Disabilities: India is a signatory to the United Nations Convention the Right of Persons with Disabilities, which came into force in 2007.

The Convention recognizes accessibility as a human right and requires signatories to adopt appropriate measures to ensure access by persons with disabilities.

Accessible India Campaign: The 'Accessible India Campaign' also known as the Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan to enable Persons with disabilities to gain universal access, equal opportunity for development.

The campaign seeks to enhance accessibility by making significant changes to the infrastructure, information and communication systems.

Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016: The Government of India enacted The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, which is the principal and comprehensive legislation concerning persons with disabilities.

The Act defines the responsibilities of the Central and State governments with regard to the services for persons with disabilities.

The Act also recommends creating a barrier-free environment by removing all types of discrimination against persons with disabilities where they can share the development benefits which a normal person enjoys.

**Other Related Initiatives:**

- DeenDayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme
- National Fellowship for Students with Disabilities.
- Unique Disability Identification Project
- International Day of Persons with Disabilities
- Disability

**About:**

Disability is a term associated with some specially-abled people who sustain a condition that prevents him/her from doing things in the same way as the other people around him.

**Types of Disability:**

Intellectual disability: A person having an intellectual disability (ID) is seen to have low intelligence or rational ability which is evident in their lack of skills for the basic day to day activities.

Neurological and Cognitive Disorders: People acquire this type of disability throughout their lifetime, either by a bad brain injury or multiple sclerosis.

In multiple sclerosis, the cells in a body are attacked by its immune system, thus creating a problem in communication between a body and its brain.

Physical Disability: It is the most common type of disability found among specially-abled people.

These issues can range from the circulatory system to the nervous system and also the respiratory system. Cerebral palsy is one such disability that happens because of brain damage and results in problems in movement. The symptoms of such a disability can be seen from birth.

Psychiatric Disability: Such disorders in a person give rise to anxiety disorders, depression, or various kinds of phobias in a person.

**(3) Survey of Defence Land using Modern Technology**

**News :-** Recently, the Ministry of Defence has concluded a survey of nearly 18 lakh acres of defence land scattered across 4,900 pockets across the country for effective land use and planning, and preventing encroachments.

**Key Points**

**About:**

It is a remarkable achievement since for the first time after independence, entire defence land has been surveyed by using latest survey technology and in a large number of pockets in association with the Revenue authorities of various State Governments.

**Use of Modern Technology:**

Modern survey technologies like Electronic Total Station (ETS) and Differential Global Positioning System (DGPS) were used in the survey.

ETS is integrated with Electronic Distance Measurement (EDM) to measure both vertical and horizontal angles and the slope distance from the instrument to a particular point, and an on-board computer to collect data and perform triangulation calculations.

DGPS is an advanced form of GPS navigation which provides greater positioning accuracy than the standard GPS.

Drone imagery and Satellite imagery based surveys were leveraged for reliable, robust and time bound outcomes.

For the first time, Drone imagery based survey technology was used for survey of lakhs of acres of defence land in Rajasthan.

Besides this, Satellite Imagery based survey was done for the first time for certain defence land pockets.

3D Modelling techniques for better visualisation of defence land in hilly area have also been introduced by utilising Digital Elevation Model (DEM) in association with Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC).

A Digital Elevation Model (DEM) is a representation of the bare ground (bare earth) topographic surface of the Earth excluding trees, buildings, and any other surface objects.

### **Significance of this Achievement:**

This mammoth exercise of survey of nearly 18 lakh acres of defence land is a unique example of leveraging emerging technologies for land survey in a short time in line with the Central Govt's emphasis on Digital India.

Conducting this exercise after 75 years of Independence, also makes it a part of celebrations under the Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav.

### **Capacity Building for Land Survey:**

A Centre of Excellence (CoE) on land survey and Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping has also been established in National Institute of Defence Estates Management for capacity building of Defence Estates officials in the field of latest survey technologies.

The CoE aims to be an apex survey institution capable of imparting training of various levels to the officers of central and state government departments.

### **(4) Veer Baal Diwas**

**News :-** Recently, the Prime Minister of India has declared that 26th December shall henceforth be marked as "Veer Baal Diwas" to pay homage to the courage of the "Sahibzades", four sons of Guru Gobind Singh, the last Sikh guru.

While all four were martyred, the date has been chosen as it was the day observed as the martyrdom day of the Sahibzadas Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh, who were killed at the tender age of six and nine in Sirhind (Punjab) by Mughal forces.

### **Key Points**

#### **About Sahibzadas Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh:**

Sahibzada Zorawar Singh and Sahibzada Fateh Singh are among the most revered martyrs in Sikhism.

A combination of Mughals soldiers besieged Anandpur Sahib on the orders of emperor Aurangzeb (1704).

The two sons of Guru Gobind Singh were captured.

They were offered safe passage if they became Muslims.

They both refused, and so they were sentenced to death and were bricked alive.

These two greats preferred death instead of deviating from the noble principles of Dharma.

#### **About Guru Gobind Singh:**

The last of the ten Sikh Gurus, Guru Gobind Singh was born on 22nd December 1666 in Patna, Bihar.

His birth anniversary is based on the Nanakshahi calendar.

He became the Sikh guru at the age of nine, following the demise of his father, Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Sikh Guru.

He was assassinated in 1708.

### **Contributions:**

#### **Religious:**

He is known for his significant contributions to the Sikh religion, including the introduction of the turban to cover hair.

He also founded the principles of Khalsa or the Five 'K's.

The Five K's are kesh (uncut hair), kanga (wooden comb), kara (iron or steel bracelet), kirpan (dagger) and kachera (short breeches).

These were the five articles of faith that a Khalsa must always adorn.

He also laid down many other rules for the Khalsa warriors to follow like abstaining from tobacco, alcohol, halal meat, etc. The Khalsa warrior was also duty-bound to protect innocent people from persecution. He named Guru Granth Sahib, the religious text of the Khalsas and the Sikhs, as the next Guru of the two communities.

**Martial:**

He fought against the Mughals in the battle of Muktsar in 1705. In the Battle of Anandpur (1704), the Guru lost his mother and two minor sons who were executed. His eldest son also died in battle.

**Literary:**

His literary contributions include the Jaap Sahib, Benti Chaupai, Amrit Savaiye, etc. He also wrote the Zafarnama which was a letter to the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb.

**(5) Pravasi Bharatiya Divas 2022**

**News :-** Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) is celebrated on 9th January every year to mark the contribution of the Overseas Indian community in the development of India.

**Key Points**

**Background:**

9th January was chosen as the day to celebrate PBD since it was on this day in 1915 that Mahatma Gandhi, the greatest Pravasi, returned to India from South Africa, led India's freedom struggle and changed the lives of Indians forever.

This day came into effect in 2003, but in 2015 it was revised and was decided to be celebrated every two years. It was then a theme-based conference that was set up every year during the interim period.

PBD Conventions are held once every two years.

PBD 2021: The 16th PBD Convention was held virtually in New Delhi. The theme was "Contributing to Atmanirbhar Bharat".

On this day, the Government also confers Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award.

It is the highest honour conferred on a Non-Resident Indian, Person of Indian Origin; or an organisation or institution established and run by Non-Resident Indians or Persons of Indian Origin, who have made significant contribution in better understanding of India abroad, support India's causes and concerns in a tangible way.

**Significance:**

This day plays a significant role as the overseas Indian community gets a shared platform to get themselves engaged with the government and the native people of the land.

The conventions are very useful in networking among the overseas Indian community residing in various parts of the world and enable them to share their experiences in various fields.

**Government Initiative related to Overseas Indians**

Pravasi Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PKVY): To institutionalize the process of skill development of emigrant Indian workers.

Scholarship Programme for Diaspora Children (SPDC): 100 scholarships per annum are granted to Persons of Indian Origin (PIO) and Non Resident Indians (NRI) students for undergraduate courses.

Know India Program' (KIP): It familiarizes Indian-origin youth (18-30 years) with their Indian roots and contemporary India.

E-migrate system: It is a foreign employers database. It ensures the welfare and check on exploitation met to emigrants.

VAJRA (Visiting Advanced Joint Research Faculty) scheme: It formalizes a rotation program wherein top NRI scientists, engineers, doctors, managers and professionals serve Indian public sector organizations for a brief period, lending their expertise.

**(6) Gateway of Hell: Turkmenistan**

**News :-** Recently, Turkmenistan has decided to find a way to extinguish a fire in a huge natural gas (Mixture of methane, carbon dioxide, nitrogen, hydrogen sulphide and helium) the Darvaza gas crater also known as the 'Gateway to Hell'.

Turkmenistan has been at the centre of methane leakages. Out of the 50 most severe methane gas leakages onshore oil and gas operations in 2019, 31 were in Turkmenistan.

In addition to this, one of these leakages, "had a climate impact roughly equivalent to the annual emissions of all the cars in Arizona".



**Severity of Methane Leaks**

Methane is the primary contributor to the formation of ground-level ozone, a hazardous air pollutant and greenhouse gas, exposure to which causes 1 million premature deaths every year.

Methane is also a powerful greenhouse gas. Over a 20-year period, it is 80 times more potent at warming than carbon dioxide.

**Key Points****About:**

Located in the Karakum desert, 260 kilometres away from Turkmenistan's capital, Ashgabat, the crater has been burning for the last 50 years.

The crater has become a significant tourist attraction in the country. In 2018, the country's president officially renamed it as the "Shining of Karakum".

**Origin of Crater:**

The details of the origin are not actually known but it has been said that the crater was created in 1971 during a Soviet drilling operation.

Soviet geologists were drilling for oil in the Karakum desert when they hit a pocket of natural gas by mistake, which caused the earth to collapse and ended up forming three huge sinkholes.

A sinkhole is a depression in the ground that has no natural external surface drainage. These are regions formed when underlying limestone bedrock is dissolved by groundwater.

Locals have also said that the crater was formed in the 1960s but wasn't lit on fire until the 1980s.

It has also been said that since oil and gas were very expensive commodities during Soviet rule, the formation of the crater has remained a confidential piece of information.

**Reason for Closing:**

It negatively affects both the environment and the health of the people living nearby.

Loss of valuable natural resources for which they can get significant profits and use them for improving the wellbeing of people.

Hinders the accelerated industrial development of the subsoil riches of central Karakum.