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GS 1: ART & CULTURE, HISTORY, INDIAN SOCIETY AND GEOGRAPHY

1. The story of Chagos

Context: Chagos has long been the Subject of dispute between Mauritius and the UK, which held on to these islands for decades after granting independence to Mauritius in 1968. It was only last year that London officially recognised Mauritius sovereign rights over all Chagos, although it retained control over Diego Garcia, the largest island in the archipelago and home to a strategically important joint UK-US military base.

Key points

- **Geography of the Chagos Archipelago:** It consists of 58 islands and is located approximately 500 km south of the Maldives in the Indian Ocean.
- **History of the Chagos Archipelago:** The French were the first to colonize Mauritius along with the Chagos Islands in 1715.
- **Mauritius' Claims Over Chagos:** Chagos was attached to Mauritius, another British colony in the Indian Ocean, for administrative purposes.
- **Strategic Importance of Chagos and Diego Garcia:** In 1966, Britain signed an agreement with the United States to use the BIOT for military purposes.
- **International Pressure on the UK:** In 2019, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued an advisory opinion that asked the United Kingdom to unconditionally withdraw its colonial administration from the area within six months.

UK-Mauritius Agreement

- **Sovereignty Over Chagos:** The deal grants Mauritius full sovereignty over the archipelago except Diego Garcia Island.
- **Resettlement of Chagossians:** Mauritius can now resettle people on the Chagos Archipelago, except Diego Garcia, where Britain evicted 2,000 islanders for a US naval base.
- **Trust Fund:** The UK has also promised to create a new trust fund for the benefit of the people of Chagos.

Q. Discuss the political developments in Maldives in the last two years. Should they be of any cause of concern to India? (যোৱা দুবছৰত মালদ্বীপৰ ৰাজনৈতিক পৰিৱৰ্তনৰ বিষয়ে আলোচনা কৰক। সেইবোৰ ভাৰতৰ বাবে কোনো চিন্তাৰ কাৰণ হোৱা উচিত নেকি?)

2. Resolving the vexatious fishing dispute

Context: Last week, a key leader in the Sri Lankan government recently urged India and Tamil Nadu to take decisive action against illegal fishing in Sri Lankan waters. This is the first time that a high-ranking dignitary from Sri Lanka has spoken so strongly about the festering Palk Bay fisheries dispute, which should have been resolved long ago. In March 2015, the then Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, defended the response of the Sri Lanka Navy to Indian fishermen and termed it as legitimate to “shoot fishermen” trespassing into Sri Lankan waters.

Key points

- **Concerns:** Many Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu and Puducherry cross the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) in search of better fishing grounds. Bottom trawling is responsible for nearly half of all discarded fish and marine life globally.
- **Challenges faced Indian fishermen:** Indian fishermen have limited fishing areas due to rocky seabeds and coral reefs in their waters. The Tamil Nadu Marine Fishing Regulation Act, 1983, further restricts fishing activities. Deep-sea fishing, an alternative to fishing in Palk Bay, requires longer voyages of around three weeks and involves high operational costs.
- **Suggested Solutions:** Governments should promote alternative livelihoods like seaweed cultivation, open sea cage farming, and sea/ocean ranching. The Indian government could merge the ₹1,600-crore Palk Bay deep-sea fishing scheme with the ₹20,050-crore Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana to provide higher financial support for deep-sea fishing vessels.
- **Katchatheevu Island Issue:** The small islet of Katchatheevu, hitherto used by the fishermen for sorting their catch and drying their nets, fell on the other side of the IMBL.
- **Way Forward:** The fishing equipment that is prohibited in Sri Lanka must be banned by India in the Palk Bay. India can transform the Palk Bay from a contested territory to a common heritage. The damage to the Indian fishermen could be ameliorated if the announcement is followed by two steps –
 - The trawlers can be used in the Odisha coast where waters are very deep.
 - Trawlers could, with certain modifications, be used as smaller fishing vessels that cater to the mothership.
- **Conclusion:** The annual two-month fishing ban in eastern India, starting in mid-April, provides a suitable period for holding talks. A high-level visit from India in April presents an opportunity for Sri Lanka to push for a resolution to the dispute through direct discussions.

Q. India is an age-old friend of Sri Lanka. Discuss India's role in the recent crisis in Sri Lanka considering the preceding statement. (ভাৰত শ্ৰীলংকাৰ যুগ যুগৰ পুৰণি বন্ধু। পূৰ্বৰ বিবৃতিৰ পৰিপ্ৰেক্ষিতত শ্ৰীলংকাৰ শেহতীয়া সংকটত ভাৰতৰ ভূমিকাৰ বিষয়ে আলোচনা কৰক।)

3. Our Trump 2.0 Opportunity

Context: Tariffs and a potential global slowdown are likely to hurt India's economy in the short term. The possible reciprocal import tariffs levied by the US could cut GDP growth by 0.3%. India's economy over two periods, the 'high growth' decade of 2000-01 to 2009-10 and the 'lower growth' decade of 2010-11 to 2019-20 showed a key differentiating factor of import tariffs which fell in the former but rose in the later. India's tariff rates are amongst the highest globally and have been hurting imports even before the Trump administration.

Key points

- **Impact of US Tariffs:** Reciprocal US tariffs could reduce India's GDP growth by 0.3 percentage points. Agriculture, Autos, Pharmaceuticals. These are the sectors with highest tariff differential with the US.
- **Indirect Impacts:** Global uncertainties may reduce Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows. Rising protectionism and competition for FDI limit India's ability to attract capital.
- **Opportunities:** *Historical Precedent* - India has historically implemented reforms during crises (e.g. 1991 liberalization). Current challenges could spur structural reforms to boost growth.
Potential Catalysts - A second Trump presidency might rejig global supply chains, offering India a chance to attract diverted FDI. Vietnam's success during Trump's first term (e.g. electronics, apparel) highlights opportunities for India.
- **FDI Trends and Challenges:** *Post-Pandemic FDI Decline* - FDI inflows surged during COVID-19 (driven by high-tech sectors) but fell sharply afterward.
Key FDI Insights - High-Tech FDI (e.g. electronics, IT): are volatile due to global competition (e.g. US incentives under CHIPS Act). Mid-Tech FDI (e.g. apparel, furniture) stagnated India lagged ASEAN nations like Vietnam.
Opportunity - Focus on labour-intensive mid-tech sectors to leverage wage competitiveness.
- **Policy Reforms and Strategic Shifts:** *Tariff Reductions* - Recent cuts in import duties for consumer goods (e.g. motorcycles) and inputs (e.g. solar cells, smartphone components). Potential further cuts in autos, chemicals, and pharmaceuticals.
FDI Liberalization - Focus on attracting mid-tech FDI in labour-intensive sectors (e.g. textiles, toys).
Currency Flexibility - A more flexible rupee enhances export competitiveness.
- **Risks and Limitations:** *Global Competition* - Advanced economies (e.g. US) attract 25% of global FDI, limiting India's share.
Domestic Challenges - High tariffs and non-tariff barriers (e.g. Quality Control Orders) hinder export growth. Need for deeper reforms beyond initial tariff cuts.
- **Conclusion:** It is critical for India to lower tariffs and non-tariff barriers, prioritize mid-tech FDI and trade deals, and leverage supply chain shifts to compete with ASEAN and China. Success depends on sustained reforms and learning from past growth strategies.

4. Byrnihat: Northeast industrial hub that has 'world's worst air'

Context: The World Air Quality Report 2024 by IQAir highlights severe pollution in India, with 13 of the world's 20 most polluted cities located in the country. Byrnihat (Assam) is the most polluted city globally, while Delhi remains the most polluted capital. India ranked fifth in air pollution in 2024, improving from third place in 2023. The report looked at the data from over 40,000 air quality monitoring stations across 138 countries, territories, and regions, and was analysed by IQAir's air quality scientists.

Key points

- **Delhi - The World's Most Polluted Capital for Six Consecutive Years:** While some NCR cities previously recorded worse pollution levels, Delhi emerged as the most polluted regional city in South Asia. In 2024, Delhi was the second most polluted city in the world and in Central and South Asia.
- **Decline in Average PM2.5 Levels:** India's average PM2.5 concentration in 2024 was $50.6 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, reflecting a 7% decrease from 2023 ($54.4 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$).
- **Most Polluted Cities:** Byrnihat recorded the highest pollution levels globally, with an annual PM2.5 concentration of $128.2 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$. Six Indian cities ranked among the world's 10 most polluted.
- **Severe Pollution Episodes in Northern India:** January 2024 witnessed poor air quality in Delhi and Himachal Pradesh. November 2024 saw extreme pollution in Delhi, Punjab, Chandigarh, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh.
- **Major Pollution Sources:** Crop stubble burning accounted for 60% of PM2.5 pollution during peak periods. Vehicular emissions, industrial discharges, and construction dust were other significant contributors.
- **Widespread Exposure to Dirty Air:** In 2024, most of the global population was breathing polluted air. Only 12 countries, regions, and territories met the WHO's recommended PM2.5 limit of $5 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$. These regions were primarily in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Oceania.
- **Most Polluted Countries:** The five most polluted countries, based on annual average PM2.5 concentrations, were –
 - Chad – $91.8 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$
 - Bangladesh – $78 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$
 - Pakistan – $73.7 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$
 - Congo – $58.2 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$
 - India – $50.6 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$
- **Severe Air Quality Violations:** Only 17% of the 8,954 cities worldwide met WHO's PM2.5 guidelines. The 20 most polluted cities, located in India, Kazakhstan, Chad, Pakistan, and China, exceeded WHO limits by over 10 times.
- **Challenges in Pollution Control Efforts:** The latest report highlighted persistent challenges due to inconsistent policy implementation and inadequate infrastructure. Environmental analysts argue that while Delhi has introduced policies like BS-VI fuel and advanced transportation technology, poor implementation has led to persistently high pollution levels.
- **Way ahead:** The National Clean Air Programme (NCAP), introduced in 2019, aimed to reduce pollution. Strengthening NCAP and ensuring sustained action will be crucial for long-term improvement.

5. The dangerous illusion cast by development rankings

Context: California was burning once again. The recent wildfires were so severe that the damage was estimated at \$250 billion—almost as much as Greece's economy in 2023. These fires show the real price of how rich countries have developed. If every country used resources like the U.S. or the EU, we would need several Earths to support our lifestyle. Yet, global rankings like the UN's HDI still present these countries as ideal models of development. This gap between praised standards and environmental limits is dangerous.

Key points

- **Overview:** Indicators like the United Nations' HDI and PHDI fail to account for the constraints of Earth's finite resources.
- **Environmental Cost of High HDI Countries:** Top-ranked countries like Ireland, Norway, and Switzerland are among the biggest resource consumers and carbon polluters per person.
- **High-Income Countries & Environmental Damage:** These nations have already crossed planetary boundaries in Greenhouse gas emissions, Ecological destruction, Pollution.
- **Introduction of Planetary Pressures-adjusted HDI (PHDI):** It adjusts HDI scores for countries with high environmental impact. However, it still ranks nations relative to each other, not against absolute ecological limits.
- **Limitations of the Nordic Model:** The Nordic model, often praised for its success, may not be globally replicable. At best, it remains a local success; at worst, it is an unsustainable illusion when applied worldwide. Countries like India, with a vast population of 1.4 billion, cannot adopt the high-consumption patterns of affluent nations.
- **Alternative Development Approaches:** India must explore sustainable alternatives that balance growth with ecological responsibility. Costa Rica and Sri Lanka, despite their imperfections, provide valuable insights for a new development pathway. A sustainable model should respect environmental boundaries while ensuring social and ecological justice.
- **Way ahead:** The traditional notions of "progress" and "development" must be redefined in the 21st century. Current metrics like the Human Development Index (HDI) and Planetary Health Development Index (PHDI) prioritize growth without considering planetary limits. A new framework is needed, one that acknowledges environmental constraints and promotes long-term sustainability.
- **Conclusion:** For India and other developing countries, real progress is not just about increasing GDP or improving HDI rankings. It means building a society where everyone lives with dignity and within the limits of nature. This is not just an idealistic goal—it is essential for survival in the 21st century.