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of your comfort zone.

Neale Donald Walsch

Important Issues of the Day

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- **In a changing world – Page No. 6, GS 2**
- **India and UAE – Page No. 10, GS 2**
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- **BRICS Plus naval exercise – Prelims**
- **High Seas Treaty – Prelims**

Include digital currency link on BRICS agenda: RBI to govt.

Reuters

MUMBAI/NEW DELHI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has recommended to the Centre that a proposal connecting the central bank digital currencies (CBDCs) of BRICS countries be included on the agenda for the 2026 summit of the grouping, two sources have said. They requested anonymity as they were not authorised to speak publicly.

The proposal seeks to make cross-border payments easier, in a move that could reduce reliance on the U.S. dollar as geopolitical tensions rise. The RBI's recommendation builds on a 2025 declaration at the BRICS summit in Brazil, which pushed for interoperability between members' payment systems to make cross-border transactions more efficient.

The RBI has publicly expressed interest in linking India's digital rupee with

Ease of payment

If the proposal is accepted, a plan to link digital currencies will be put forward at the 2026 BRICS summit in India

- The move could reduce reliance on the U.S. dollar as geopolitical tensions rise

- While none of the BRICS members have fully launched their digital currencies, all five main members have been running pilot projects

- India's digital currency - e-rupee - has attracted a total of 7 million retail users since its launch in December 2022



other nations' CBDCs to expedite cross-border transactions and bolster its currency's global usage. It has, however, said its efforts to promote the rupee's global use are not aimed at promoting de-dollarisation.

India will host the next BRICS summit later this year. If the RBI's recommendation is accepted, a proposal to link the digital currencies of BRICS members would be put forward for the first time. The BRICS includes Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, among oth-

ers. The initiative could irritate the U.S., which has warned against any moves to bypass the dollar. U.S. President Donald Trump has previously said the BRICS alliance is "anti-American" and he threatened to impose tariffs on its members.

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- **BRIC was formalised at the first meeting of BRIC Foreign Ministers on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in New York later that year. The inaugural BRIC Summit was convened in Yekaterinburg, Russia, in 2009.**
- **It was agreed to expand BRIC into BRICS with the inclusion of South Africa at the BRIC Foreign Ministers' meeting in New York in 2010. Accordingly, South Africa attended the 3rd BRICS Summit in Sanya in 2011.**
- **Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and UAE became full member of BRICS from January 2024 and Indonesia in January 2025.**
- **Belarus, Bolivia, Kazakhstan, Cuba, Malaysia, Nigeria, Thailand, Uganda, Uzbekistan and Vietnam joined BRICS as Partner Countries in 2025.**

Mains Question

Q. *In recent years, several countries have initiated efforts toward de-dollarization to reduce dependence on the US dollar in global trade and financial transactions.*

Critically examine the drivers of de-dollarization and analyze its potential implications for the global financial system and India's economic and strategic interests.

(250 words / 15 marks)

प्रश्न. *हाल के वर्षों में कई देशों ने वैश्विक व्यापार और वित्तीय लेन-देन में अमेरिकी डॉलर पर निर्भरता कम करने के लिए डी-डॉलराइजेशन (De-dollarization) की दिशा में पहल की है।*

डी-डॉलराइजेशन के प्रमुख कारणों का समालोचनात्मक परीक्षण कीजिए तथा वैश्विक वित्तीय प्रणाली और भारत के आर्थिक एवं रणनीतिक हितों पर इसके संभावित प्रभावों का विश्लेषण कीजिए।

(250 शब्द / 15 अंक)

BRICS Plus naval exercise



- **India's decision to skip the BRICS Plus naval exercise "Will for Peace 2026" has drawn attention as New Delhi clarified that such drills are not institutionalised BRICS activities and reflected a considered political choice amid evolving geopolitics.**
- **The BRICS Plus naval exercise is a host-led, non-institutionalised maritime drill involving selected BRICS members and invited partner countries, conducted outside the formal BRICS framework.**
- **South Africa**
- **Conducted off the coast of Simon's Town, near Cape Town.**
- **Member participants:**
- **Participating navies: China, Russia, Iran, United Arab Emirates, South Africa**
- **Observers: Brazil, Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia**
- **Non-participants: India, Brazil (opted out of active participation)**

- **Aim: To conduct joint maritime operations focused on the security of key shipping lanes and maritime economic activities, projected as cooperation among Global South nations.**
- **Key features:**
- **Theme: “Joint Actions to Ensure the Safety of Key Shipping Lanes and Maritime Economic Activities”.**
- **Operations covering maritime security, counter-terrorism, anti-sea strike drills, and search & rescue.**
- **China-led operational coordination, with participation of sanctioned states like Russia and Iran.**
- **Framed as part of a broader “BRICS Plus” outreach, beyond core BRICS membership.**

In a changing world, it is 'small tables, big dividends'

Page No. 6, GS 2

On January 26, 2026, Kartavya Path will send a signal that goes beyond ceremony. The chief guests at the Republic Day parade will be the European Union (EU)'s institutional leadership, representing a 27-member bloc rather than a single capital.

That break with tradition points to a wider truth about 2026. Bilateral diplomacy will remain demanding. The neighbourhood will require constant attention, and ties with Washington and Beijing will keep producing friction, from trade disputes to sharper strategic competition.

India's best openings may, therefore, lie in diplomatic white spaces. Think of them as gaps in global leadership. Problems need coordination, but no major power can credibly take charge. They are crowded rooms without a convenor. In such spaces, India can work through coalitions to shape rules and deliver global public goods, provided it chooses priorities that it can sustain.

Working with Europe

Europe is the first test. The presence of Ursula von der Leyen and António Luís Santos da Costa on January 26 signals the intent to push forward the long-pending India-EU Free Trade Agreement. While ties with Berlin, Paris or Rome matter, India's decisive engagement will be with the EU's collective trade, competition and climate policy. This is not only about customs duties. It is about market access rules, data standards and sustainability requirements. If India treats the agreement as a de-risking compact, the payoff is threefold. It strengthens access to Europe, positions India in reworked value chains, and offers some insurance against United States trade pressure. But it will raise compliance burdens for firms.

The European window is open because the EU wants to reduce exposure to China and hedge against U.S. unpredictability by deepening



Syed Akbaruddin

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With bilateral diplomacy remaining demanding, India's best chances lie in diplomatic white spaces

partnerships with India. Delhi needs to move quickly. Windows close.

The next is BRICS and the Quad

Europe is the technocratic test of India's white space diplomacy. BRICS is the political one. BRICS in 2026 is not what it was. Expansion has widened its reach but blurred its focus because members do not want the same things at the same speed. That raises the key question: what is BRICS actually for, and can India help define it?

The demands BRICS represents are real. Many members want a stronger voice for the Global South, fairer representation and credible alternatives in development finance. Yet, the group's direction is contested.

As chair and host in 2026, India can steer BRICS toward delivery through better use of New Development Bank guarantees and practical toolkits that turn communiqués into action.

External risks also matter. Washington's tariff threats against countries seen as aligning with BRICS raise the cost of careless signalling. India gains little by letting the group drift into anti-West rhetoric or a de-dollarisation crusade, which would undercut its effort to attract western capital and technology. India's task is to hold the balance. Reform is not the same as rejection.

The third white space is the Quad. If India hosts a Quad leaders' summit, it could be hosting U.S. President Donald Trump. That would add political weight and raise the stakes for delivery.

The Quad's agenda on maritime domain awareness and resilient ports matters to Indian Ocean littoral states that want capacity without being drawn into great power rivalries. India can make the Quad useful by turning capabilities into services that others can access.

India's Operation Sagar Bandhu following Cyclone Ditwah in Sri Lanka showed the value of having assets that can be retasked quickly without

diplomatic drama. Success, however, will depend on Washington managing trade differences with partners without disrupting broader cooperation.

All this underlines a hard truth about large forums. The United Nations remains essential for legitimacy and norm-setting, but it is a weak instrument for delivery when major powers are at odds. Outcomes are shifting to coalitions that can move even when the centre cannot.

The G-20 shows the same strain. In theory, it is the premier table for economic coordination. In practice, it is increasingly exposed to domestic politics and agenda fights. The U.S. boycott of the Johannesburg G-20 summit in 2025 and the push to narrow the agenda under the U.S. presidency in 2026 could sideline Global South priorities and make the forum feel less inclusive.

Amid global volatility, India's momentum in 2026 will come from turning white spaces into working arrangements. Europe is about standards, BRICS is about functionality, and the Quad is about public goods.

The message for India

The AI Impact Summit in Delhi (February 2026) is India's chance to get governments, companies and researchers together to bridge differences where interests overlap. As Washington experiments with new forums, including Mr. Trump's proposed 'Board of Peace' that is focused on peace building, Delhi will need to choose carefully. An invitation for India to join Pax Silica, a U.S.-led capability club for Artificial Intelligence and semiconductor supply chains, is reportedly in the works and shows how fast these new tables are multiplying.

In a divided world, it is rarely the biggest table that shapes the future. It is the smaller tables where things actually get done. In 2026, India's advantage will lie in making the tables that it chooses work.

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- **The next is BRICS and the Quad**
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- **The G-20 shows the same strain. In theory, it is the premier table for economic coordination. In practice, it is increasingly exposed to domestic politics and agenda fights.**
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In which one of the following groups are all the four countries members of G20?

(a) Argentina, Mexico, South Africa and Turkey

(b) Australia, Canada, Malaysia and New Zealand

(c) Brazil, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Vietnam

(d) Indonesia, Japan, Singapore and South Korea

Which one of the following launched the 'Nature Solutions Finance Hub for Asia and the Pacific'?

(a) The Asian Development Bank (ADB)

(b) The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)

(c) The New Development Bank (NDB)

(d) The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD)

Mains Question

Q. *The contemporary world is witnessing a shift from a unipolar to a multipolar and fragmented global order, marked by great power rivalry, regional conflicts, and economic decoupling.*

In this context, critically examine the changing global order and discuss the strategic, economic, and diplomatic options available to India to safeguard its national interests.

(250 words | 15 marks)

प्रश्न. *समकालीन विश्व व्यवस्था एकध्रुवीयता से बहुध्रुवीयता तथा खंडित वैश्विक व्यवस्था की ओर बढ़ रही है, जिसमें महाशक्तियों की प्रतिस्पर्धा, क्षेत्रीय संघर्ष और आर्थिक डिकप्लिंग प्रमुख विशेषताएँ हैं।*

इस संदर्भ में, बदलती वैश्विक व्यवस्था का समालोचनात्मक परीक्षण कीजिए तथा भारत के राष्ट्रीय हितों की रक्षा के लिए उपलब्ध रणनीतिक, आर्थिक और कूटनीतिक विकल्पों पर चर्चा कीजिए।

(250 शब्द | 15 अंक)

India signs Letter of Intent to elevate defence ties with UAE

The signing of the pact comes amid increasing Saudi-Pakistan defence cooperation in the Arabian peninsula and especially in Yemen; the two sides also ink energy deal during UAE President's visit

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

Against the backdrop of growing military tension in the Gulf region, the United Arab Emirates and India signed a "Letter of Intent for a Bilateral Strategic Defence Partnership" on Monday. The Letter of Intent was sealed during the three-hour visit by the President of the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, when the two sides set a goal of doubling bilateral trade to \$200 billion by 2032.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi received the UAE leader at the Palam airport and the two leaders discussed, among other issues, the situation in Gaza where U.S. President Donald Trump's peace plan will be tested in the coming weeks as well as the protests in Iran. In a press briefing after the departure of the dignitaries, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri said



PM Narendra Modi with UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan during a meeting, at the PM's residence in New Delhi. PTI

the two leaders also discussed the situation in Yemen over which Saudi Arabia's relation with the UAE has nosedived.

In response to a question on whether the India-UAE strategic defence partnership could drag India into a future conflict scenario in the Gulf region, Mr. Misri said the Letter of Intent was aimed at the "work on concluding a framework agreement for Strategic Defence Partner-

ship". "So I would really characterise it as a natural evolution from the already considerable defence cooperation between the two countries and not necessarily a response to any specific event that may have taken place in the region or of any intent to get involved in a hypothetical future scenario in the region," said Mr. Misri.

There has been greater involvement of Pakistani military in safeguarding

Saudi defence and security interests in the Arabian peninsula and especially in Yemen. The Saudi-Pakistan defence cooperation has intensified since the two countries signed a mutual defence agreement on September 17, 2025.

The Saudi-Pakistan military alliance has been active in the Yemen theatre and that has increased pressure on the UAE.

During the brief visit, the two sides also signed an energy deal involving the Hindustan Petroleum Company Ltd (HPCL) and Abu Dhabi National Oil Company Gas (ADNOC) that will allow purchase of 0.5 Million Metric Tonnes Per Annum (MMPTA) LNG by the HPCL from ADNOC over 10 years starting from 2028.

Another Letter of Intent was signed between the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre and the Space Agency of the UAE for the development of space industry in the UAE.

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- **The Saudi-Pakistan military alliance has been active in the Yemen theatre and that has increased pressure on the UAE.**

- **The names of 10.56 lakh voters have been deleted on the draft electoral rolls of Assam which were published on Saturday after a house-to-house verification of the voter lists during the special revision exercise conducted by the Election Commission in the State from November 22 to December 20.**
- **Of the voters whose names were deleted, almost 4.79 lakh are dead, over 5.23 lakh have shifted, and 53,619 were found to have duplicate entries.**
- **Hello – Page No. , GS 1**
- **Hello – Page No. , GS 1**
- **Hello – Page No. , GS 1**

Fractured Yemen

Saudi Arabia and the UAE must help all Yemeni factions come together

The flare-up in fighting between Yemen's Saudi-backed government and the Southern Transitional Council (STC), a separatist force backed by the UAE, has exposed the country's internal vulnerabilities and the Persian Gulf region's geopolitical fault lines. The crisis escalated in early December when the Aden-based STC launched a surprise offensive in the oil-rich Hadhramaut and al-Mahra governorates, which were under government control. It gained control of nearly half of the former South Yemen state, but the advances were short-lived. Government forces, covered by Saudi air power, swiftly recaptured the lost areas. On January 7, government forces entered Aden, forcing the STC to send a delegation to Riyadh for talks. In the Saudi capital, the STC announced its dissolution, while its leader, Aidarus al-Zoubaidi, who has been charged with treason, is believed to have fled to the UAE. The crisis also brought Saudi-UAE tensions into the open. Riyadh accused Abu Dhabi of transferring weapons to Yemeni separatists, and carried out air strikes on the port of Mukalla, reportedly targeting arms shipments. Following a rare public rebuke from Saudi Arabia, the UAE announced its withdrawal of forces from Yemen and an end to its "counterterrorism operations".

The UAE was a part of Saudi Arabia's military coalition when it began bombing the Houthis (Ansar Allah), the Shia militia that captured Sanaa, Yemen's capital, in 2014. But the years-long war did little to defeat the Houthis. The Saudi-backed government operated from Aden in the south, until the STC began challenging it. The UAE then began support to the STC. Saudi Arabia, facing a direct security threat from the Houthis along its southern borders, entered into a ceasefire with the group, and sought to stabilise southern Yemen through the government. Yet, Riyadh grew increasingly alarmed by the expanding military power and defiance of the separatists. As government forces and the STC fought for influence in the south, the Houthis entrenched their position in the north, encompassing key population centres. The true victims of this multi-layered conflict, however, have been Yemen's civilians. The country faces one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, with millions on the brink of famine, an economy in ruins and devastated infrastructure. For now, an uneasy calm prevails in the south. But STC representatives in the UAE have dismissed claims that the council has been disbanded. For peace to take hold, all Yemeni factions must together establish a federal governance structure, addressing present power dynamics and historical grievances. For this to happen, Saudi Arabia and the UAE must bury the hatchet and work jointly for stability in their impoverished neighbouring country.



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Consider the following statements:

Statement-I: Israel has established diplomatic relations with some Arab States.

Statement-II: The 'Arab Peace Initiative' mediated by Saudi Arabia was signed by Israel and Arab League.

Which one of the following is correct in respect of the above statements?

- (a) Both Statement-I and Statement-II are correct and Statement-II is the correct explanation for Statement-I**
- (b) Both Statement-I and Statement-II are correct and Statement-II is not the correct explanation for Statement-I**
- (c) Statement-I is correct but Statement-II is incorrect**
- (d) Statement-I is incorrect but Statement-II is correct**

The term "Levant" often heard in the news roughly corresponds to which of the following regions?

- (a) Region along the eastern Mediterranean shores**
- (b) Region along North African shores stretching from Egypt to Morocco**
- (c) Region along Persian Gulf and Horn of Africa**
- (d) The entire coastal areas of Mediterranean Sea**

Mains Question

Q. India's relations with the Gulf countries have acquired greater strategic and economic significance in recent years.

Discuss the importance of India–Gulf relations and examine the key opportunities and challenges for India in this region.

(150 words / 10 marks)

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भारत–खाड़ी संबंधों के महत्व की चर्चा कीजिए तथा इस क्षेत्र में भारत के लिए प्रमुख अवसरों और चुनौतियों का परीक्षण कीजिए।

(150 शब्द / 10 अंक)

SC stays Rajasthan HC order to move 1,102 liquor outlets

The court says the High Court's concern over drunk driving deaths is genuine; calls for closer scrutiny of 500-metre removal directive; State flags practical hurdles in towns along highways

Aaratrika Bhaumik
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday stayed the operation of a Rajasthan High Court order directing the State government to remove 1,102 liquor outlets located within 500 metres of highways within a period of two months, even as it acknowledged the growing toll of road fatalities resulting from drunk driving.

A Bench comprising Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta observed that while the concerns expressed by the High Court were "absolutely genuine", the sweeping directions merited closer judicial scrutiny.

'Genuine concern'

"The concern shown here is absolutely genuine...the fact is that many deaths have indeed taken place. Some decision or policy will have to be put in place to save lives," the Bench remarked.

The top court was hearing a petition filed by Ram Swaroop Yadav, who contended that the High Court had issued its directions without affording affected stakeholders an opportuni-



Road safety: The top court says concern expressed by the Rajasthan High Court are 'absolutely genuine'. FILE PHOTO

ty to be heard. He further submitted that the order had failed to take into account binding judicial precedents permitting the operation of liquor vends within municipal limits and certain local bodies.

Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for Mr. Yadav, argued that the High Court's November 24, 2025, order would have serious adverse consequences if allowed to operate.

He submitted that while the High Court was seized of a matter arising from a single village in Sujangarh, it went on to issue directions with Statewide effect

without hearing other affected parties.

"The judge has passed an order for the entire State without hearing anybody. The State is supporting me," he told the Bench.

'Practical difficulties'

Appearing for the Rajasthan government, Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta flagged the practical difficulties in enforcing the High Court's directions, highlighting that a significant number of cities and towns in the State lie along national and State highways. He submitted that a blanket enforcement of the

500-metre restriction would, in effect, remove liquor vends from vast urban areas. He also pointed out that in cities such as Chandigarh, which are located directly along highways, all liquor vends would have to be removed.

Accordingly, the Bench issued notice on the appeal and stayed the operation of the High Court's directions until further orders. It, however, clarified that it was not discounting the serious public safety concerns relating to highway accidents and deaths associated with alcohol consumption.

Justice Mehta also flagged the prevalence of surrogate advertising by liquor outlets along highways, observing that billboards often carry indirect references to the sale of alcohol. "They put up advertisements saying that liquor is available 500 metres away," he said.

Echoing this concern, the Solicitor-General noted that since direct hoardings advertising liquor vends are prohibited in some States, advertisers have turned to indirect signage. "Now, the only hoarding is an arrow. Those who know, know what the arrow means," he said.

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- **In India, attempts at prohibition have been influenced by the thinking of Mahatma Gandhi, who viewed alcohol consumption more as a disease than a vice.**
- **Following India's independence, Gandhians continued to push for a liquor ban.**
- **These efforts led to the inclusion of Article 47 in the Constitution.**
- **According to the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution, alcohol is a state subject, i.e., state legislatures have the right and responsibility to draft laws regarding it, including "the production, manufacture, possession, transport, purchase and sale of intoxicating liquors."**

- **The source of the concept of Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) is the Spanish Constitution from which it came in the Irish Constitution.**
- **The concept of DPSP emerged from Article 45 of the Irish Constitution.**
- **Constitutional Provisions: Part IV of the Constitution of India (Article 36–51) contains the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP).**
- **Article 37 of the Indian Constitution States about the application of the Directive Principles.**
- **These principles aim at ensuring socioeconomic justice to the people and establishing India as a Welfare State.**

- **Classification of Principles: The Directive Principles are classified on the basis of their ideological source and objectives. These are Directives based on:**
 - **Socialist Principles**
 - **Gandhian Principles**
 - **Liberal and Intellectual Principles**
- **Amendments in DPSP:**
 - **42nd Constitutional Amendment, 1976: It introduced certain changes in the part-IV of the Constitution by adding new directives:**
 - **Article 39A: To provide free legal aid to the poor.**
 - **Article 43A: Participation of workers in management of Industries.K1M**
 - **Article 48A: To protect and improve the environment.**

- **44th Constitutional Amendment, 1978:** It inserted Section-2 to Article 38 which declares that; “The State in particular shall strive to minimise economic inequalities in income and eliminate inequalities in status, facilities and opportunities not amongst individuals but also amongst groups”.
- It also eliminated the Right to Property from the list of Fundamental Rights.
- **86th Amendment Act of 2002:** It changed the subject-matter of Article 45 and made elementary education a fundamental right under Article 21 A.

The mind of the makers of the Constitution of India is reflected in which of the following?

(a) The Preamble

(b) The Fundamental Rights

(c) The Directive Principles of State Policy

(d) The Fundamental Duties

Mains Question

Q. *Several Indian states have experimented with liquor prohibition to address social and public health concerns.*

Critically examine the rationale behind liquor bans in India and analyze their socio-economic and administrative implications. Suggest measures to ensure effective implementation while minimizing unintended consequences.

(250 words / 15 marks)

प्रश्न. *भारत के कई राज्यों ने सामाजिक और सार्वजनिक स्वास्थ्य संबंधी समस्याओं से निपटने के लिए शराबबंदी (Liquor Prohibition) लागू की है।*

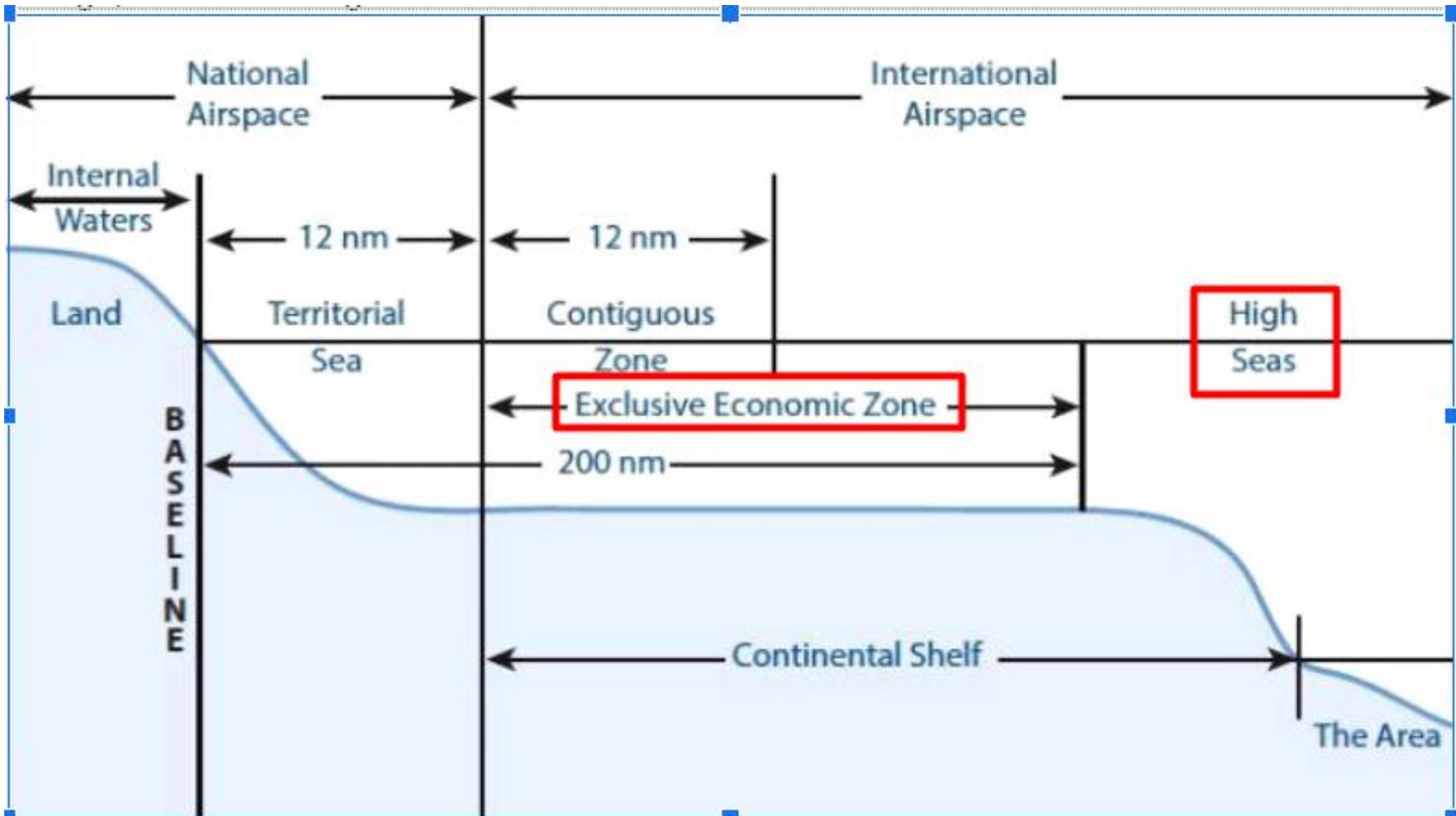
भारत में शराबबंदी के पीछे के तर्कों का समालोचनात्मक परीक्षण कीजिए तथा इसके सामाजिक, आर्थिक और प्रशासनिक प्रभावों का विश्लेषण कीजिए। साथ ही, प्रभावी क्रियान्वयन सुनिश्चित करने एवं अनपेक्षित परिणामों को कम करने के उपाय सुझाइए।

(250 शब्द / 15 अंक)

UN Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Treaty



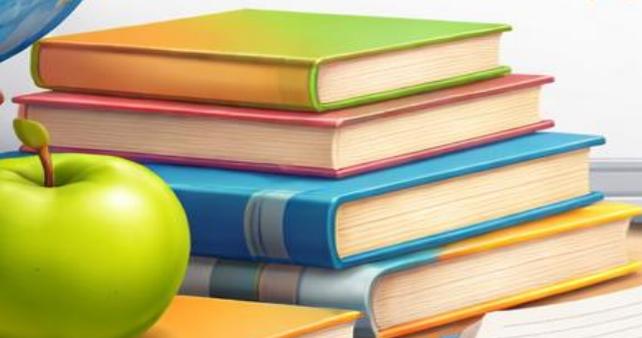
- **The UN Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Treaty, also known as the High Seas Treaty, has entered into force after crossing the required 60 ratifications, creating the first legally binding global framework to protect biodiversity in international waters.**
- **The BBNJ Agreement is a legally binding international treaty under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) to conserve and sustainably use marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction (the High Seas).**
- **Achieve the “30 by 30” goal: protect 30% of the global ocean area by 2030.**
- **Enable large-scale conservation across two-thirds of the ocean, which lies beyond national control.**



Key features:

- **Marine Protected Areas (MPAs):** Enables creation of a global network of MPAs in international waters to conserve fragile and previously unregulated ecosystems.
- **Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs):** Mandates prior assessment of activities that may significantly harm marine ecosystems in the high seas.
- **Marine Genetic Resources (MGRs):** Establishes fair and equitable sharing of benefits derived from genetic resources used in biotechnology and pharmaceuticals.
- **Capacity building and technology transfer:** Supports developing countries through training, access to data, scientific cooperation, and marine technologies.
- **Ecosystem-based and precautionary approach:** Promotes decision-making based on best available science, traditional knowledge, and the precautionary principle.

Thank You!



ABCs

