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WTO Ministerial Meeting

Why in News?

A WTO Ministerial meeting of developing countries is being hosted by India in New Delhi on 13-14 May 2019.

About the Meeting:

Sixteen developing countries, Six Least Developed Countries (LDC)(Argentina, Bangladesh, Barbados, Benin, Brazil, Central African Republic (CAR), Chad, China, Egypt, Guatemala, Guyana, Indonesia, Jamaica, Kazakhstan, Malawi, Malaysia, Nigeria, Oman, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, Uganda)and DG, WTO are participating in the meeting.

The two-daymeeting will be interactive in order to provide an opportunity to the Ministers to discuss various issues and the way forward.

The meeting is being held at a time when the multilateral rule-based-trading system is facing serious and grave challenges.

Reasons of Meeting:

- In the recent past, there have been increasing unilateral measures and counter measures by members, deadlock in key areas of negotiations and the impasse in the Appellate Body, which threaten the very existence of Dispute Settlement Mechanism of the WTO and impacts the position of the WTO as an effective multilateral organisation.
- The current situation has given rise to demands from various quarters to reform the WTO.
- This meeting at New Delhi is an effort to bring together the developing countriesand Least Developed Countries on a platform for sharing common concerns on various issues affecting the WTO and work together to address these issues.

Expected Benefits:

- The two-day meeting also provides an opportunity to the developing countries and LDCs to build consensus on how to move forward on the WTO reforms, while preserving the fundamentals of the multilateral trading system enshrined in the WTO.



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- The deliberations will aim at getting a direction on how to constructively engage on various issues in the WTO, both institutional and negotiating, in the run up to the Twelfth Ministerial Conference of the WTO to be held in Kazakhstan in June 2020.

ABHYAS

Why in news?

Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) conducted successful flight test of ABHYAS - High-speed Expendable Aerial Target (HEAT) from Interim Test Range, Chandipur in Odisha today.

The flight test was tracked by various RADARS & Electro Optic Systems and proved its performance in fully autonomous way point navigation mode.

About ABHYAS:

- The configuration of ABHYAS is designed on an in-line small gas turbine engine and uses indigenously developed MEMS based navigation system for its navigation and guidance.
- The performance of the system was as per simulations carried out and demonstrated the capability of ABHYAS to meet the mission requirement for a cost effective HEAT.
- The Abhyas is launched from a mobile launcher with the help of two 68 mm booster rockets (being manufactured at ordinance factories). At the end of its launch phase the burnout booster rockets are jettisoned.
- Thereafter, the main gas-turbine engine powers the vehicle during cruise phase.
- Abhyas's [radar cross-section](#) (RCS) as well as its visual and [infrared signatures](#) can be augmented to simulate a variety of aircraft for air-defense weapon practices.
- It can also function as a jammer platform and decoy.



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- The HEAT system is utilized to do away with the post-launch recovery mode, which is time-consuming and difficult in a scenario as the sea.

Environment Impact Assessment (EIA):

Why in News?

The Ministry of Environment and Forest (MoEF) has granted the Terms of Reference (ToR) to Vedanta Ltd's Cairn Oil & Gas, to carry out Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) for drilling a total of 274 offshore and onshore oil and gas exploration wells in the Bay of Bengal, Nagapattinam, Karaikal, Villupuram and Puducherry.

About EIA:



- The ToR for carrying out an EIA is the first in a series of steps that need to be completed and certified for setting up a project.
- The EIA will study the environmental impact of the project, explain the consequences and the mitigation measures to be undertaken.
- Approval for carrying out the EIA is no guarantee of a project being granted the final nod, but generally, it is granted clearance, unless the reasons are too difficult to justify.
- "Under the provisions of the EIA Notification 2006, as amended, the Standard ToR for the purposes of preparing the environmental impact assessment report and the environment management plan for obtaining prior environmental clearance is prescribed with public consultation.

MLA Disqualification Issue:

The story so far:

On May 6, the Supreme Court stayed the proceedings initiated by Tamil Nadu Assembly Speaker P. Dhanapal for the disqualification of three MLAs of the ruling All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) — E.



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Rathinasabapathy (representing Aranthangi constituency), V.T. Kalaiselvan (Virudhachalam) and A. Prabhu (Kallakurichi) under the anti-defection law.

How did it come about?

The rebel MLAs made two arguments in the Supreme Court.

- One, they accused the Speaker of having “acted in a partisan and biased manner”
- Two, they contended that Mr. Dhanapal should not act on the disqualification matter while a motion of no-confidence against him was pending.
- Apparently, the AIADMK’s plan was to establish that by supporting Mr. Dhinakaran, the three MLAs had “voluntarily given up” membership of the party. It was the same ground on which 18 pro-Dhinakaran MLAs were disqualified in September 2017.

Why does it matter?

- The show-cause notice was issued about 10 days after polling took place for 38 Lok Sabha constituencies and 18 Assembly seats, for which by-elections were held. Four more Assembly constituencies will also see by-polls on May 19.
- This means the Assembly will be at its full strength of 234 once the results are out.
- If all the 22 vacancies are filled, the ruling party has to show 118 members on its side.
- Had the court not stayed the disqualification proceedings, the three MLAs could have been disqualified, and the House’s strength brought down to 231.
- In that case, the AIADMK would need only 116 members, just two more than its present strength.

What are the rules on disqualification?

- As per Paragraph 2 of the Tenth Schedule to the Constitution, a Member of Parliament or Legislative Assembly or Legislative Council can be disqualified on two grounds: if the member voluntarily gives up membership of the



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party on whose ticket he or she got elected; or, if the member votes or abstains from voting in the House contrary to any direction of such party.

- However, disqualification may be avoided if the party leadership condones the vote or abstention within 15 days.
- The procedure for disqualification is laid down in the Members of the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly (Disqualification on Ground of Defection) Rules, 1986. Each State has similar rules.

What lies ahead?

- After the Supreme Court's notice is served on the Assembly Speaker and his office, the normal practice is that the Assembly Secretary will file a response.
- The results of the by-elections to 22 Assembly constituencies will also have a bearing on what happens from now on.
- If the ruling AIADMK wins a comfortable number of seats, it won't mind if the motion against the Speaker is taken up first.
- This will have the effect of rendering redundant one of the arguments of the rebel legislators: the Speaker facing a motion for his own removal should not adjudicate disqualification issues.
- There are at least two more MLAs against whom the party may initiate action for going against the AIADMK leadership.
- If the DMK wins in all 22 seats, there can be a regime change, which may be followed by the election of a new Speaker. In that case, the disqualification proceedings may not be pursued at all.

Moon Shrinkage:

Context:

The Moon is shrinking as its interior cools — getting over 50 metres skinnier through the last several hundred million years — and causing quakes on the lunar surface, a study has found. Just as a grape wrinkles as it shrinks down to a raisin, the Moon gets wrinkles as it shrink.



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Mechanism:

Unlike the flexible skin on a grape, the Moon's surface crust is brittle, so it breaks as the Moon shrinks, forming "thrust faults" where one section of crust is pushed up over a neighbouring part.

These faults are still active and likely producing moonquakes today as the Moon continues to gradually cool and shrink.

Some of these quakes can be fairly strong, around five on the Richter scale.

These fault scarps resemble small stair-step shaped cliffs when seen from the lunar surface, typically tens of metres high and extending for several kilometres.

How was it Detected?

- The study, published in the journal *Nature Geoscience*, analysed data from four seismometers placed on the Moon by the Apollo astronauts using an algorithm, or mathematical programme, developed to pinpoint quake locations detected by a sparse seismic network.
- The algorithm gave a better estimate of moonquake locations.
- Seismometers are instruments that measure the shaking produced by quakes, recording the arrival time and strength of various quake waves to get a location estimate, called an epicentre.
- Astronauts placed the instruments on the lunar surface during the Apollo 11, 12, 14, 15, and 16 missions.
- Other evidence that these faults are active comes from highly detailed images of the Moon by NASA's Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter (LRO) spacecraft.
- The Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter Camera (LROC) has imaged over 3,500 of the fault scarps.
- Some of these images show landslides or boulders at the bottom of relatively bright patches on the slopes of fault scarps or nearby terrain.



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Global warming:

Introduction:

- The Earth and the atmosphere surrounding it receive radiation from the Sun, and get "heated".
- Some of the gases in the atmosphere, notably carbon dioxide (CO₂) absorb this heat radiating from the earth's surface and bounce it back. T
- This is what keeps the earth- land and seas- at a temperature range "comfortable" for us humans and the other organisms inhabiting the earth today. We thus live in a large "green house".

Why Global warming?

- What happens when the level of these greenhouse gases increases?
- The temperature will rise. And this rise has been due to increases in the levels of CO₂ and other gases, produced upon burning carbon-rich fuels (coal, wood, petroleum products).
- Over the last 100 years alone, the global temperature has risen by close to 2 degree.
- And if we do not reduce or stop these fuels and use alternate sources of energy (solar, wind and others), the global temperature will rise further.

Threats Posed :

- We already see it in the form of the melting of ice caps and glaciers, causing a rise in sea level.
- This can submerge small island countries such as Maldives and Mauritius.
- It has also led to a change in the global climate, causing errant monsoons, cyclones, tsunamis, El Nino and so on, affecting life on earth and in the oceans (fish, algae, coral reefs).
- Temperature rise and climate change affect not just some countries but the entire globe, on which all species live- humans, animals, plants, fish, microbes.
- And if it is left uncontrolled, disaster looms for all life across the globe.
- Climate change, plus relentless industrial farming and fishing are leading to the extinction of 1 million species from Mother Earth within decades.

Action Taken:



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- It is for acting against this catastrophe that the UNO brought countries across the world get together and in 2015 came up with what is called the Paris Agreement 2015 wherein they decided to make all efforts contain the temperature rise to no more than 1.5 degrees.
- While 195 countries across the globe signed the Paris Agreement and promised to take steps towards it, some oil producing/ importing) countries such as Turkey, Syria, Iran and USA have not. President Trump says climate change is "fake"!

Measures Required:

- We need to do two urgent things.
- One is to reduce, indeed replace carbon-based fuels, with other forms of energy generation that do not generate greenhouse gases; hence solar power, wind power and others.
- The second is to enhance all natural methods which absorb CO₂.
- Forests and plants do this best. Photosynthesis is done by all varieties of plants- algae in water, mangroves on the coast, crops and forests on land.
- They absorb atmospheric CO₂ and produce oxygen for us to breathe. Tropical forests do this best; hence, deforestation in the Amazon, tropical Africa and in India must end.
- These regions also house over 200 million species of plants, animals and fungi. They are thus termed as Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs); likewise are Marine Protection Areas (MPAs).
- They restore and protect biodiversity, increase yields and enhance ecosystem protection and defense.
- They alone help us preserve over 17% of land realm and 10% of marine areas by 2020, and preserve millions of species from extinction. But we need to do more beyond next year.

Global Deal for Nature

It is with all this in mind that a diverse group of scientists and ecologists from across the world have come up with a companion pact to the Paris Agreement, called: "A Global Deal for Nature: Guiding Principles, Milestones and Targets".

This policy document is published on 19 April 2019 in the journal *Science Advances*, which should be read by every concerned citizen and government.



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Global Deal for Nature (or GDN) has five fundamental goals:

- (1) representation of all native ecosystem types and stages across their natural range of variation;
- (2) maintain viable populations of all native species in natural pattern of abundance and distribution – or “saving species”;
- (3) maintain ecological functions and ecosystem services;
- (4) maximize carbon sequestration by natural ecosystems and
- (5) address environmental change to maintain evolutionary processes and adapt to the impact of climate change.

These five goals of GDN have three Priority themes.

- Theme 1 is on protecting biodiversity.
- Theme 2 is on mitigating climate changes by conserving carbon storehouses or climate stabilization areas (CSAs) and Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs).
- Theme 3 is on reducing threats to ecosystems, and concerns reducing major threats (such as overfishing, wild life trade, laying new roads cutting across forest lands, and building major dams).

Is it Economically Viable?

- And in order to do all this, the gross cost is estimated to be \$ 100 billion per year.
- Considering that these are over 200 nations across the world (plus the private sector, which too should also be involved), this is a sum well worth achievable if we are to leave the world livable for our children, and all the flora and fauna that have enriched our earth since the last 550 million years.
- And if one wishes count the pennies gained for this investment, as biodiversity conservation can actually offer \$ 50 billion annual profit for the sea food industry and save the insurance industry \$52 billion annually through reducing flood damage losses!