International Solar Alliance

Why in news?

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More than 20 countries signed a Framework Agreement on International Solar Alliance which will take the shape of a separate international treaty once it is operationalized.

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What is ISA?

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- The International Solar Alliance is an alliance of more than 120 countries, **most of them being sunshine countries**, which come either completely or partly between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn.
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- The primary objective is to collectively work for efficient exploitation of solar energy to reduce dependence on fossil based fuels.
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- This initiative was proposed by our Prime Minister of India first during his speech at Wembley Stadium, London.
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- This initiative was launched at the India Africa Summit and a meeting was held among them before the conclave of 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris on November 2015.
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- This is a **treaty-based inter-governmental organization**. The alliance will take the shape of an international treaty once its rules are worked out.
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- The **Headquarters is in India** with its Interim Secretariat being setup in Gurgaon.
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- The agreement will become operational after **at least 15 countries** have ratified it.
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- The framework agreement says that the members of ISA would take coordinated actions through programmes and activities that will aggregate

the demands for solar finance, solar technologies, innovation, research and development, and capacity building.
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- The ISA aims to develop **cost-efficient solar technologies** and applications.
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- It is also expected to **mobilise $1 trillion** for funding solar energy projects by 2030.
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What is the working plan of ISA?

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- The countries within the tropics also happen to be the ones in which the most growth in energy demand is expected in the years to come.
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- The ISA is an effort to ensure that as these countries increase their electricity production, they should predominantly use solar energy and avoid fossil fuels.
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- However, this can happen **only if the costs of solar energy are competitive** as compared to the traditional sources of power.
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- The ISA seeks to do three things to bring down the costs of technology as well as of finance needed for a solar project.\n
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    - It seeks to **boost global demand**, which will result in further reduction in the prices of solar energy deployment.
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    - It seeks to **promote standardisation** in the use of equipment and processes for generating electricity. Standardisation will make the manufacturing of equipment and other hardware cheaper.
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    - And it seeks to **boost research and development**, particularly in areas of efficient storage systems.
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Is ISA part of UN program?

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- Strictly speaking, the ISA agreement is separate from the United Nations-mandated climate change talks that are held every year.
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- But it was proposed at the Paris Climate Conference last year, and has become a reality at the Marrakesh meeting now, in the process getting linked closely with the UN climate process.
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Can ISA be successful?

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- The revolution in the deployment of solar energy over the last several years has been made possible by a sharp drop in the costs of production of electricity through solar cells. **The costs have come down by 80%-85% over the last 7 years**, due to a rapidly growing demand.
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- The total installed capacity of solar energy across the world has **risen by almost 8 times** during the same time.
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- In the light of these, the ISA has over the last year received solid support from a large number of countries, including those that are not exactly tropical countries.
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- The US has repeatedly expressed its desire to join the Alliance, and France actually did so on Tuesday.
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- More countries are likely to sign up during the remaining days of the conference, and also later. The signing has to be followed by ratifications by the signatory countries.
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How significant is ISA to India?

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- The ISA gives India an opportunity to take global leadership in the fight against climate change.
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- The secretariat of the ISA is to be located in India. It will also host a meeting of ISA assembly every year.
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- India has promised to contribute $27 million for creating building infrastructure and recurring expenditure for five years, till 2020-21.
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- A part of this money will also go towards creating a corpus fund that will generate revenues for the budget of ISA.
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What are the difficulties?

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- **Raising a large amount of money**, like $1trillion, is going to be difficult given that developed countries have historically been stingy in funding renewable energy projects in developing countries.
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- Also such a large sum cannot be raised from public sources alone. The ISA will have to devise mechanisms to **mobilise private finances**.
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- The new alliance will also have to work in tandem with other bodies such as the International Renewable Energy Agency and the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Partnership to bring a **co-ordinated effort**.
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