Prelim Bits 08-03-2022 | Daily UPSC Current Affairs

Humanitarian Corridors

Russia announced humanitarian corridors would open in several Ukrainian cities, after civilians came under fire in two previous attempts of the Moscow's forces pummelling cities across the country.

- The United Nations considers humanitarian corridors to be one of several possible forms of a temporary pause of armed conflict.
- They are **demilitarized zones**, in a specific area and for a specific time - and both sides of an armed conflict agree to them.
- Humanitarian corridors have been put in place since the mid-20th century.
- **Purpose** - Via these corridors, either food or medical aid can be brought to areas of conflict, or civilians can be evacuated.
- The corridors are necessary when cities are under siege and the population is cut off from basic food supplies, electricity and water.
- In cases where a humanitarian catastrophe unfolds because the international law of war is being violated humanitarian corridors can provide crucial relief.
- **Setting up -** In most cases, humanitarian corridors are negotiated by the United Nations. Sometimes they're also set up by local groups.
- Since all sides need to agree to set up the corridors, there is a risk of military or political abuse.
- **Accessibility** - Access to humanitarian corridors is determined by the parties to the conflict.
- It's usually limited to neutral actors, the UN or aid organizations such as the Red Cross.
- They also determine the length of time, the area and which means of transport - trucks, buses or planes - are allowed to use the corridor.
- These corridors can also be used by UN observers, NGOs and journalists to gain access to contested areas where war crimes are being committed.

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'Donate a Pension' Scheme

Ministry of Labour and Employment launched the "donate a pension" scheme under the Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan Scheme.

Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan Scheme allows unorganised sector workers, who earn up to Rs. 15,000 a month, to enroll by paying a premium amount between Rs. 55 and Rs. 200, depending on their age, which would be matched by the government.

- “Donate a pension” scheme allows a citizen to “donate the premium contribution of their immediate support staff such as domestic workers, drivers, helpers, care givers, nurses, in their household or establishment.
- The donor can pay the contribution for a minimum of one year, with the amount ranging from Rs. 660 to Rs. 2,400 a year, depending on the age of the beneficiary.
- The premium amount can be paid through maandhan.in or by visiting a Common Service Centre anywhere in the country.

Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan Scheme

- Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan (PM-SYM) Scheme was launched in 2019.
- It is a 50:50 voluntary and contributory pension scheme for the workers of the unorganised sector for their old age protection and social security.
- This pension scheme allows the unorganised sector workers between the age of 18 and 40, who earn up to Rs. 15,000 a month, to enroll by paying a premium amount between Rs. 55 and Rs. 200, depending on their age.
- The beneficiary should pay the premium amount till the age of 60.
- This premium amount would be matched by the government too.
- **Eligibility** - The unorganised workers mostly engaged as home based workers, street vendors, mid-day meal workers, etc whose monthly income is up to Rs 15,000/ per month.
- These workers must also belong to the entry age group of 18-40 years.
- They should not be covered under New Pension Scheme (NPS), Employees’ State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) scheme or Employees’ Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO).
- Further, he/she should not be an income tax payer.
- **Features** - Under the PM-SYM, the subscriber would receive the following benefits.
- Each subscriber under the PM-SYM shall receive minimum assured pension of Rs 3000/- per month after attaining the age of 60 years.
- During the receipt of pension, if the subscriber dies, then their spouse shall be entitled to receive 50% of the pension received by the beneficiary as family pension. Family pension is applicable only to spouse.
- If a beneficiary has given regular contribution and died due to any cause (before age of 60 years), his/her spouse will be entitled to,
    1. To join and continue the scheme subsequently by payment of regular contribution or
    2. To exit the scheme as per provisions of exit and withdrawal.
- **Implementation** - The Labour Ministry will oversee PM-SYM, which will be implemented by Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) and CSC eGovernance Services India Limited (CSC-SPV).
- The Pension Fund Manager will be LIC, and they will be in charge of paying out the pensions.
- Money collected under the PM-SYM pension system would be invested according to the Government of India's investment pattern.

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Reconnaissance Satellite

North Korea is preparing to launch a reconnaissance satellite, a move that may prove as controversial as the nuclear-armed country's weapons tests, because they use the same banned ballistic missile technology.

- **Reconnaissance satellite** is an artificial satellite launched by a country to provide intelligence information on the military activities of foreign countries.
- It is an Earth observation satellite or communications satellite.
- It is also known as a spy satellite or intelligence satellite.
- The United States, Russia (before 1991, the USSR), and other nations have launched numerous reconnaissance satellites since 1960.

Types of Reconnaissance Satellites

- *Early-warning satellites* detect enemy missile launchings.
- *Nuclear-explosion detection satellites* are designed to detect and identify nuclear explosions in space.
- *Photo-surveillance satellites* provide photographs of enemy military activities, e.g., the deployment of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). There are two subtypes:
    - Close-look satellites provide high-resolution photographs that are returned to earth via a reentry capsule,
    - Area-survey satellites provide lower-resolution photographs that are transmitted to earth via radio.
- Later satellites have combined these two functions.
- *Signals intelligence (SIGINT) satellites or Electronic-reconnaissance (ferret) satellites* pickup and record radio and radar transmissions while passing over a foreign country.
- They are optimized either for characterizing ground-based radar systems or for eavesdropping on communications.

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North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

Ukraine becoming part of NATO poses an existential threat to Russia that is serious enough for it to start a war of the scale that Europe has not seen since the end of World War II in 1945.

- North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) is a mutual-defense and political alliance was established in 1949, after World War II.
- It was set up in 1949 by the US, Canada, and several western European nations to ensure their collective security against the Soviet Union.
- Headquartered in Brussels, Belgium, NATO was the US's first peacetime military alliance outside the western hemisphere.

The European Recovery Programme or the Marshall Plan promoted the idea of shared interests and cooperation between the US and Europe.

- Members of NATO are committed to **mutual defence** in response to an attack by any external party.
- **Collective defence** lies at the very heart of NATO, "a unique and enduring principle that binds its members together, committing them to protect each other and setting a spirit of solidarity within the Alliance".
- This is laid out in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, the founding treaty of NATO.
- **Members** - Currently, 30 countries are members of NATO.
- In addition to the United States and Canada, 10 other countries became part of NATO in 1949: Belgium, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal and Britain.
- Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia joined in 2004, Albania and Croatia in 2009, Montenegro in 2017, and North Macedonia in 2020, taking the membership of the alliance to 30.
- Over the years, the some European countries including Sweden and Finland avoided joining NATO.

No-fly Zone

Russia said that it would view any Western attempts to impose a no-fly zone over Ukraine as "participating in the armed conflict" against Russia.

- A no-fly zone bans aircraft from certain areas.
- Ukraine is asking that aircraft be barred from its skies, which would, in theory, stop aerial bombardment by Russia.
- No-fly zones are used over government buildings or public places for security reasons.
- In the United States, for example, aircraft are prohibited from flying over the White House, the National Mall and the vice president's residence in Washington. No-fly zones like this are not controversial.
- However, they can be contentious if they are used to stop military aircraft from engaging in hostile actions as they were in Iraq.

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Impact of Spike in Oil Prices

The Indian rupee plummeted to 77.01 against the US dollar and the stock markets have plunged as crude oil prices flared up to a 14-year high of $138 per barrel level amid the escalating Russia-Ukraine war.

There is a 10% increase in crude oil prices raises wholesale inflation by 9% and retail inflation by 5%.

- The parabolic rise in crude oil prices towards multi-year highs will add to India's import bill and push up inflation.
- This price rise is prompting safe-haven flows into the dollar.
- The rupee has been falling with rising commodity prices that are raising inflation.
- [Inflationary risk is a key headwind for the rupee-dollar exchange rate.]
- Surging crude oil prices and weak GDP data appear to be creating the grounds for stagflation in India.
- Significant outflows from the domestic equities, tracking global cues, are also weighing on the domestic currency.
- But, India's significant buffer of foreign exchange reserves is providing some cushion.
- Also, the RBI is likely to intervene to curb excessive volatility.
- **Investors -** Analysts said investors should stay invested if they have a long-term investment plan, and mutual fund investors should continue their SIP plans without breaking the investment.
- It is advisable that all investors should follow a wait-and-watch strategy and avoid any fresh entry at the current juncture.

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