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DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS 04-09-2024

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Brunei

Syllabus: GS-1; Geography- Mapping

Context

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi is on a historic state visit to Brunei, marking the first ever bilateral trip by an Indian prime minister to the southeast Asian nation.



Geography

- **Location:** Southeast Asia, on the northern coast of the island of Borneo. It is bordered by the South China Sea to the north and the Malaysian state of Sarawak, which divides the country into two parts.
- **Area:** 5,765 square kilometers, making it one of the smallest countries in the world.
- **Topography:** Brunei's landscape is mostly flat coastal plains that rise to mountains in the east. The highest point is Bukit Pagon, at 1,850 meters.

- **Climate:** Equatorial climate with high humidity and rainfall throughout the year. The average temperature ranges between 24°C and 32°C.

Political System

- **Government Type:** Absolute monarchy (Sultanate). The Sultan of Brunei is both the head of state and the head of government.
- **Sultan:** Hassanal Bolkiah, who has ruled since 1967. The Sultan holds full executive authority, including emergency powers.
- **Capital:** Bandar Seri Begawan.
- **Administrative Divisions:** Four districts – Brunei-Muara, Belait, Tutong, and Temburong.
- **Legal System:** Based on English common law, but Islamic Sharia law is also applied, especially for Muslims.

Economy

- **Economic Overview:** Brunei has a high-income economy, with a GDP per capita among the highest in the world. The economy is heavily dependent on oil and gas exports, which account for over 90% of government revenue.
- **Currency:** Brunei Dollar (BND), which is pegged to the Singapore Dollar.
- **Major Industries:** Oil and gas, petrochemicals, financial services, and agriculture.
- **Economic Diversification:** Efforts are being made to diversify the economy, particularly in sectors like tourism, halal products, and financial services.

Society and Culture

- **Population:** Approximately 460,000 (as of 2023).
- **Ethnic Composition:** Predominantly Malay (around 66%), followed by Chinese (10%), indigenous groups, and others.
- **Language:** Malay (official language), English widely spoken, and several indigenous languages.
- **Religion:** Islam is the official religion, and the country follows a strict interpretation of Sunni Islam. Other religions practiced include Christianity, Buddhism, and indigenous beliefs.
- **Social System:** Brunei is known for its high standard of living, with extensive social welfare programs provided by the government, including free education and healthcare.

History

- **Early History:** Brunei has a rich history dating back to the 7th century, when it was part of the Srivijaya and Majapahit empires. It became an Islamic sultanate in the 14th century.
- **Colonial Era:** Brunei became a British protectorate in 1888 and gained full independence from the United Kingdom on January 1, 1984.
- **Modern Era:** Since independence, Brunei has maintained political stability and economic prosperity under the rule of Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah.

Foreign Relations

- **ASEAN Membership:** Brunei is a founding member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).
- **International Relations:** Brunei maintains a policy of neutrality and non-interference, while actively participating in regional and global organizations like the United Nations, Commonwealth of Nations, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).
- **Defense:** Brunei has a small but well-equipped military and relies on defense ties with countries like the United Kingdom and Malaysia for additional security.

Current Issues

- **Economic Diversification:** The heavy reliance on oil and gas is a concern, and the government is working on diversifying the economy.
- **Environmental Conservation:** Efforts are ongoing to protect Brunei's rich biodiversity, especially its rainforests, which are among the oldest in the world.
- **Human Rights:** Brunei has faced international criticism for its strict Sharia-based penal code, which includes harsh penalties for offenses like theft, adultery, and same-sex relations.

Significance for India

- **Bilateral Relations:** India and Brunei share warm bilateral relations, with cooperation in areas like defense, trade, and culture. Indian expatriates form a significant part of Brunei's workforce.
- **Economic Ties:** India is one of Brunei's important trading partners, especially in the energy sector.
There are also opportunities for Indian businesses in sectors like IT, education, and healthcare.

KPSC

Syllabus: GS-2; Constitutional Bodies

Context

- *Karnataka CM Siddaramaiah announced that he had directed the Karnataka Public Service Commission (KPSC) to reconduct the Gazetted Probationers' examination, in light of reports emerging that there were 'inappropriate Kannada translations of questions'.*

About

- *The Karnataka Public Service Commission (KPSC) plays a vital role in the recruitment process for various state government services in Karnataka.*

Composition of KPSC

- **Chairperson:** *The KPSC is headed by a Chairperson appointed by the Governor of Karnataka.*
- **Members:** *The Commission consists of a Chairperson and other members appointed by the Governor. The number of members, including the Chairperson, is determined by the state government.*
- **Tenure:** *The members of KPSC, including the Chairperson, hold office for a term of six years or until they reach the age of 62, whichever is earlier.*
- **Eligibility:** *Members are chosen based on their experience in civil services, education, administration, or related fields, ensuring they possess the required expertise for the role.*

Members of KPSC

- **Appointment:** *The members are appointed by the Governor of Karnataka. The selection is generally made from experienced civil servants, educators, or individuals with significant administrative experience.*
- **Duties:** *Members assist the Chairperson in carrying out the various functions of the KPSC, including conducting examinations, interviews, and providing advice to the state government on matters related to recruitment and service conditions.*

Powers of KPSC

- **Autonomy:** *KPSC operates as an autonomous body, free from direct influence by the state government in its day-to-day functioning, ensuring fairness and transparency in the recruitment process.*
- **Advisory Role:** *KPSC has the power to advise the state government on matters related to the recruitment, promotion, and disciplinary actions of civil servants.*

- **Regulatory Power:** KPSC can regulate its own procedure, including framing the rules for examinations and interviews, and deciding the eligibility criteria for various posts.
- **Disciplinary Powers:** KPSC advises the government on disciplinary actions against government servants. It also has the power to recommend penalties for employees who are found guilty of misconduct.

Functions of KPSC

- **Recruitment:**
 - Conducts competitive examinations for recruitment to various civil service posts in the Karnataka government.
 - Conducts interviews and personality tests to assess the suitability of candidates for specific posts.
 - Issues appointment recommendations based on merit.
- **Advisory Functions:**
 - Advises the state government on matters related to recruitment rules, promotions, transfers, and disciplinary actions.
 - Provides guidance on the methods of recruitment and eligibility criteria for various posts.
- **Framing and Amendment of Recruitment Rules:**
 - KPSC is involved in framing and amending the recruitment rules for different posts within the state services.
 - Ensures that the recruitment process remains fair and relevant to the needs of the state administration.
- **Departmental Examinations:**
 - Conducts departmental examinations for the promotion of existing government employees within various state departments.
 - Assesses the eligibility of candidates for promotions based on these exams.
- **Consultation:**
 - Consulted by the state government on matters of recruitment policies, personnel management, and other service-related issues.
- **Handling Service Matters:**
 - Deals with matters related to service conditions, promotions, and transfers of civil servants.
 - Plays a key role in ensuring that these processes are carried out in a transparent and merit-based manner.
- **Disciplinary Matters:**
 - KPSC advises the state government on disciplinary matters concerning civil servants, including recommending penalties or actions for misconduct.

Role in Governance

- **Ensuring Meritocracy:** KPSC ensures that the recruitment to state services is based on merit, thereby contributing to the effective governance of Karnataka.
- **Public Accountability:** As a constitutional body, KPSC maintains public trust by adhering to high standards of transparency and fairness in its recruitment processes.

Challenges and Reforms

- **Transparency and Efficiency:** KPSC continuously works to enhance the transparency and efficiency of its recruitment processes through the adoption of technology and best practices.
- **Addressing Grievances:** KPSC also handles grievances and disputes related to the recruitment process, ensuring fairness in its dealings.

Retired Sportsperson Empowerment Training' (RESET) Programme

Syllabus: GS-2; Government policies and Interventions

Context

- Union Minister of Youth Affairs & Sports and Labour & Employment, Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya launched "Retired Sportsperson Empowerment Training" (RESET) Programme on the occasion of National Sports Day in New Delhi.

About

- The Retired Sportsperson Empowerment Training (RESET) Programme is a government initiative aimed at empowering retired sportspersons by providing them with training and skill development opportunities.
- This program is designed to help former athletes transition smoothly into post-sporting careers, ensuring they can leverage their experiences and skills in new professional avenues.

Key Features and Significance

➤ **Skill Development:**

- *The program focuses on equipping retired sportspersons with new skills, particularly in areas like coaching, sports management, entrepreneurship, and other relevant fields.*
- *Tailored training modules are provided based on individual needs and career aspirations.*

➤ **Career Transition Support:**

- *RESET offers career counseling and guidance to help retired athletes identify suitable career paths.*
- *Partnerships with various organizations and industries facilitate job placements and entrepreneurial opportunities.*

➤ **Financial Assistance:**

- *The program may include financial support to help sportspersons during their transition period, covering costs for training, certifications, and initial entrepreneurial ventures.*

➤ **Psychological and Emotional Support:**

- *Recognizing the emotional challenges that retired athletes might face, RESET provides psychological counseling and support to help them adapt to life after sports.*

➤ **Networking and Mentorship:**

- *The program fosters a community where retired sportspersons can connect with each other, share experiences, and receive mentorship from successful individuals in various fields.*

➤ **Recognition of Contributions:**

- *RESET acknowledges the contributions of sportspersons to the nation and aims to harness their leadership and teamwork skills in their new careers.*

Dealings at a China-Africa forum that India must track

Syllabus: GS-2: International relations.

Context:

➤ *The ninth edition of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) is to take place from September 4-6, 2024, in Beijing.*

Overview

- **Event:** *Ninth Edition of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)*
- **Date:** *September 4-6, 2024*
- **Location:** *Beijing, China*
- **Context:** *African nations facing multiple challenges including:*
 - *High inflation and currency depreciation*
 - *Heavy debt burden*
 - *Unconstitutional military takeovers*
 - *Geopolitical challenges (Israel-Hamas conflict, Russia-Ukraine war)*
 - *Attacks by Houthi rebels on commercial shipping in the Mediterranean Sea*
 - *Summit fatigue among African leaders due to multiple recent Africa+1 summits (Türkiye, Russia, South Korea, U.S.-Africa Leaders' Summit)*

Challenges for African Nations

- **Strategic Ownership:**
 - *Need for Africa to set the agenda and take greater ownership of its strategic thinking in FOCAC.*
 - *Lack of African strategies and papers on engagement with China compared to Chinese documentation.*
 - *African governments struggle to utilize the cultural and linguistic expertise on China that exists on the continent.*
 - *Resulting asymmetry in negotiations, with the Chinese side often driving the agenda.*

African Priorities at FOCAC 2024

- **Economic Goals:**
 - *Progress on Beijing's goal to import \$300 billion worth of goods from Africa between 2022-24 has been modest.*
 - **Trade Statistics (January-July 2024):**
 - *China-Africa trade increased to \$167 billion.*
 - *Chinese exports: \$97 billion; African exports: \$69 billion.*

- *Two-thirds of this trade is dominated by raw materials.*

➤ **Agricultural Development:**

- *Focus on developing a sustainable and robust agricultural industry in Africa.*
- *Need for local processing of agricultural commodities, such as roasting raw cashew nuts.*
- *Potential collaboration with countries like China and India to develop crops, fertilizers, and pesticides suited to African conditions.*
- *Importance of developing satellite systems for improved weather forecasting.*

➤ **Green Energy and Industrial Development:**

- *Encourage international partners to establish more refining and processing hubs in Africa.*
- *Example: Chinese companies in Zimbabwe are required to do basic lithium refining to move up the value chain.*
- *Challenges: Chronic electricity shortages, lack of power generation, and significant ESG costs.*

China and African Debt

➤ **Debt Complexity:**

- *Chinese loans to African governments and institutions (2000-22): ~\$170 billion.*
- *China is not the main creditor in Africa, accounting for 12% of Africa's public and private debt.*
- *Concerns over Chinese 'debt trap diplomacy' and lack of transparency in Chinese loans.*

➤ **African Strategy:**

- *African governments aiming to develop a coherent strategy towards China for FOCAC 2024.*
- *Focus on trade facilitation and product value addition, rather than aid.*

Lessons for India from FOCAC

➤ **Continuity in Engagement:**

- *Need for India to resume the India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS), last held in 2015.*

- Consider setting up an India-African Union Track 1.5 Dialogue to address mutual interests.
- Host IAFS-IV in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the seat of the African Union Commission.

➤ **Supporting African Industrialization:**

- Indian companies should look for higher value-added investments in agriculture, pharmaceuticals, and manufacturing.
- Support initiatives like farm mechanization, food processing, irrigation, and cold storage infrastructure.

➤ **Innovative Financing Solutions:**

- Explore public-private partnerships and blended finance for projects in Africa.
- Support Indian banks and entrepreneurs with low-cost credit to develop bankable projects.
- Consider EXIM Bank's Trade Assistance Programme to build trust and expand banking relationships.

➤ **Technology Integration:**

- India's digital stack (biometrics, mobile connectivity, Jan Dhan technology) can enhance digital and physical connectivity with Africa.
- Expansion of UPI and RuPay services in Africa.
- Consider rupee-based lines of credit to reduce forex risk and make transactions currency-neutral.

Conclusion

➤ **African Strategic Thinking:**

- African nations are increasingly taking greater ownership of their strategic thinking and seeking to reposition the continent as an investment destination.
- Lessons from African engagement with China under FOCAC could inform and strengthen India's own partnership in Africa.

Operation Bhediya

Syllabus: GS-3: Wildlife – Man-animal conflict.

Context:

- In Bahraich, Uttar Pradesh, a series of tragic wolf attacks have created a wave of fear and anxiety within the local community.
- The most recent incident involved **the death of a three-year-old girl** and injuries to two women, underscoring the severity of the situation.

About Operation Bhediya

- The authorities have launched "**Operation Bhediya**," a targeted effort to capture the wolves responsible for these attacks.
- Despite successfully capturing four wolves, the threat persists, leaving the community on edge and frustrated by the ongoing danger.

Indian Gray Wolf (*Canis lupus pallipes*)

- The Indian Gray Wolf is a subspecies of the gray wolf found in the Indian subcontinent.



Conservation Status:

- **IUCN:** Listed as "Least Concern" due to its relatively wide distribution, though specific populations may face pressures from habitat loss and human conflict.
- **Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972:** Listed under **Schedule I**, providing it the highest level of protection in India, where hunting or capturing these wolves is prohibited.
- **CITES:** Included in **Appendix I**, which restricts international trade of the species to prevent exploitation that could threaten their survival.

