

1. What has been the recent trend of Indo-Nepal relations? Discuss. What are the major irritants creating problems for the relationship?

Approach

A straightforward question where in the candidate needs to address the question in two parts with first part discussing the recent trend of Indo-Nepal relations while in the second part, candidate needs to elaborate upon the major irritants creating problems for the relationship.

Introduction

Nepal is an important neighbour of India and occupies special significance in its foreign policy because of the geographic, historical, cultural and economic linkages/ties that span centuries. However, certain differences crop up in the relations between the two countries, from time to time, like in the year 2020 when ties between the two soured.

Body

Recent Trend of Indo-Nepal relations –

- Last year in 2020, ties between the two soured after both India and Nepal — one after the other — published maps in which they included Kalapani, Lipulekh, and Limpiyadhura region in their side of the territory. This became a flashpoint in the relations between the two close neighbours and led to deterioration of relations.
- But recently, there was a thaw in relationship with the Nepalese and Indian authorities reviewing an all-important gamut of bilateral issues in the Sixth Meeting of the Nepal-India Joint Commission (JC) in New Delhi on 15 January 2021. Further, the air services between Nepal and India were resumed.
- **Vaccine Diplomacy:** India provided one million doses of Oxford-AstraZeneca's Covishield vaccine to Nepal as grant assistance to generate goodwill among the Nepalese people. This came after the JC.
- Further, Nepal expressed support for India's permanent membership of an expanded UN Security Council (UNSC) to reflect the changed balance of power. Also, close cooperation between the two sides in combating the COVID-19 pandemic has been in place.
- **Development Partnership:** Expansion of the Motihari-Amlekhganj petroleum products pipelines to Chitwan and the establishment of a new pipeline on the eastern side connecting Siliguri to Jhapa in Nepal.
- The joint hydropower projects, including the proposed Pancheshwar Multipurpose Project, is getting a positive momentum along with the recently inaugurated Integrated Check Posts (ICPs) at Birgunj and Biratnagar have helped in the seamless movement of people and trade between the two countries.

But at the same time, there have been major irritants in the relationship, like –

- Nepal's new constitution and its aftermath: A new constitution was promulgated in Nepal in 2015. It gave extensive political privileges to the ruling hill tribes and discriminated against the people living in plains including Madhesis. This issue has emerged as a contentious issue between India and Nepal that was seen in form of economic blockade including blockade of gas supply, fuel etc. by India.
- Border issues: Nepal and India have some contentious issues relating to the border, including the two major areas of dispute at Susta and Kalapani (India-China-Nepal tri-junction). Countries agreed to start talks at the foreign secretary-level in order to resolve the problem.
- Nepal's growing proximity to China: In recent times China's presence has increased in Nepal that has heightened India's security concerns. China plans to extend the Tibet railway to Kathmandu across the border in the next few years. Nepal signed the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) Framework agreement with China last year. Nepal use of China as a counterforce against India has been a major irritant.
- Big Brother attitude: There is a widespread perception in Nepal that India does not respect the country's sovereignty and that it often intervenes in Nepal's domestic affairs. India has been perceived to be playing a role of big brother in the region.
- Peace and friendship treaty: The India-Nepal treaty of 1950 has been criticised by the Nepali political elite as an unequal one. Treaty obliged Nepal to inform India and seek its consent for the purchases of military hardware from third countries. Nepal wants to change this provision.
- Demonetisation: Demonetisation has badly affected Nepali nationals because those notes were legal tender in Nepal too. Nepal has time and again requested that the Indian government make arrangements for the exchange of those notes held by Nepali nationals and its central bank.

Way Forward –

- India should also try to convey to Nepal's leadership about the congenial and friendly environment. Therefore, any thoughtless erosion of this centuries old togetherness may prove difficult for both countries.
- The existing bilateral treaties between India and Nepal should take the shifting of Himalayan Rivers into consideration.

Conclusion

Centuries of social, cultural, political, strategic, and economic ties can only remain strong if they can remain relevant to changing times. The governments of India and Nepal must reset the narrative, modernize their policies, and get out of the way so that the ties between people thrive again.

2. In your opinion, what is the most suitable strategic response to China's confrontationalist policy towards India? Substantiate your views.

Approach

Candidates are expected to write about India's strategic response towards China in recent times and then express what will be most suitable strategic response to confrontationalist policy of China.

Introduction

There have been plenty of warnings about the consistent Chinese opposition to India: the 2017 Doklam confrontation, China's continuing insistence on opposing India's entry into the Nuclear Suppliers Group, and the neighbour's stand on Masood Azhar are the prominent ones but not the only examples.

Body

Indian response:

- India's response to all these friction points was based on the assumption that they were all misunderstandings, something that could be corrected through dialogues and 'informal summits'.
- The informal summits in Wuhan (April 2018) and Mamallapuram (October 2019) between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping were the result of this assumption.
- Indian and Chinese troops scuffled at Pangong Tso in Ladakh on 5/6th May. India has moved in additional divisions, tanks and artillery across the LAC to match Chinese deployments.
- The preference given recently to summit diplomacy over traditional foreign policy-making structures proved to be a severe handicap. Summit diplomacy cannot be a substitute for carefully structured foreign office policymaking.
- Personal bonhomie with leaders will not result in friendly ties with countries. Prime Minister Nehru had a good equation with Premier Zhou En-lai.

The internal pressures that have been generated within China — in part due to the COVID-19 pandemic, are also influencing Chinese behaviour. Therefore India must have holistic strategy rather than just responding strategically such as:

- India could choose to leverage the sensitivity of the Chinese to the one-China policy and other vulnerabilities like the Tibet issue and Hong Kong protests, to force a change in China's attitude. This would allow India to signal to China that it has options, and that China would be wise not to escalate these situations too far.
- A closer alignment with the U.S. represents India's opportunity to counter China, while efforts to foster regional partnerships and cultivate domestic military capabilities, although insufficient by themselves, could play a complementary role.

- The events in Galwan Valley should be a wake-up call to many of India's Asian friends and partners enabling a high-resolution envisioning of Chinese aggressiveness and confrontation policy.
- India cannot continue to remain in a "reactive mode" to Chinese provocations and it is time to take an active stand. Since India's choices vis-à-vis China is circumscribed by the asymmetry in military power, resort must be sought in realpolitik.
- India can't deter China from using Himalayan skirmishes unless it goes on the offensive elsewhere. New Delhi's message must be 'Do not poke us here and we won't poke you there'.
- India should demonstrate that it is willing and capable of influencing the maritime balance in East Asia, where China faces off a combination of the United States, Vietnam, Australia, Indonesia and sometimes Malaysia and the Philippines as well.

Conclusion

We have to deter China from using Himalayan skirmishes to throw us off balance unless we go on the offensive elsewhere. The South China Sea/Indian Ocean Region maritime domain presents us with the best options they are far from our borders but not too far we have the military capabilities to pursue the option naval power is flexible and the regional geopolitical context is favourable.

3. For India's trade to flourish, strengthening ties ASEAN must become a priority. Comment.

Approach- Candidate can outline the opportunities in increasing the trade with ASEAN region while stating the challenges. In the second part of the body, way ahead can be given factoring the China aspect.

Introduction

The economic relationship between India and ASEAN began in 1992 as both regions recognized each other's trade capabilities. ASEAN is India's fourth largest trading partner with about \$86.9 Billion in trade between India and the ten ASEAN nations: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Body

Why India- ASEAN trade relations must become a priority?

- The Association of Southeast Asian Nations is a regional organization which was established to promote political and social stability amid rising tensions among the Asia-Pacific's post-colonial states.

- India's relationship with ASEAN is a key pillar of her foreign policy and the foundation of Act East Policy. The two regions share similarities in their levels of economic development; they are home to rapidly expanding markets and aim to address infrastructure challenges.
- Economic engagement in terms of the free movement of goods, services, and capital, thus, offers mutual benefits for India and ASEAN. This was the rationale that propelled the signing of the ASEAN-India Free Trade Agreement (AIFTA) in 2009.
- India's merchandise exports to ASEAN increased from \$23 billion in 2010 to US\$36 billion in 2018 at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of about five percent, while its merchandise imports from the 10-member bloc increased from \$30 billion in 2010 to \$57 billion in 2018, at a CAGR of about eight percent. India's exports to ASEAN in 2019-20 were worth \$31.49 billion while its imports from the bloc reached \$55.37 billion.
- In 2019, 47.8 percent of India's exports by value were delivered to fellow Asian countries; 19.3 percent were sold to European importers and 18.8 percent worth of goods were shipped to North America.

What are the issues in trade relations?

- In its trade with ASEAN, India has moved to eliminate tariffs on up to 75 percent of 12,000 tariff lines. A report from the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog) found that this had led to the trade balance worsening in 13 out of 21 sectors.
- India's trade deficit with ASEAN countries is currently around \$24 billion and is why New Delhi remains keen to renegotiate the terms of the ASEAN-India FTA to ensure a more level playing field for Indian exports to ASEAN.
- India wants strict rules of origin to prevent Chinese goods from flooding the country through ASEAN member countries that may have lower or no duty levels.
- India dropped out of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) in November 2019 at ASEAN+3 summits, because of increasing trade deficits with partner nations and increasing China-India tensions.

What can be done?

- An immediate review of the agreement and the effective utilisation of the ASEAN-India Free Trade Agreement will contribute to the realisation of the 2020 trade target of 200 billion USD set by India and ASEAN.
- Over dependence of India and other countries on China can be decreased by developing a common forum/platform with ASEAN countries.
- ASEAN is one of the fastest growing economic region in the world, staying out of the opportunities can hamper India's prospects of integration with the region.
- The importance of maintaining and promoting peace, stability, safety and security in the South China Sea in particular freedom of navigation and over flight is in interest of both India and ASEAN hence we must strive to maintain the dialogue and sort out differences.

Conclusion

In India- ASEAN trade relations, it is a win game for both of the partners. China dumping products in India through ASEAN route is major cause of concern, platform to address the same is already making progress. Reducing trade deficit and increasing trade with the region will further strengthen our goal of look east and act east.

4. How has the COVID pandemic affected global trade? Illustrate. What course Corrections would be required in the post pandemic world?

Approach

Since the question is asking you to illustrate you have to demonstrate knowledge of the subject of the question and to further explain or clarify your answer with several examples.

Introduction

The fact that COVID-19 is affecting international trade patterns should not surprise anyone. The scale of the COVID-19 pandemic is a consequence of international trade and globalisation, with the virus spreading along established trade and travel routes. However, the pandemic also affects international trade through reductions in both supply and demand.

Body

HOW HAS THE COVID PANDEMIC AFFECTED GLOBAL TRADE

- The COVID-19 pandemic represents an unprecedented disruption to the global economy and world trade, as production and consumption are scaled back across the globe.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has had an immediate and negative impact on foreign direct investment (FDI) in 2020. The outlook remains dire, with further deterioration projected in 2021. The exceptional global circumstances as a result of the pandemic led to delayed implementation of on-going investment projects and the shelving of new projects, as well as the drying up of foreign affiliate earnings of which normally a significant share is reinvested in host countries.
- Global production and employment have been slashed.
- In the past, remittances have been countercyclical, where workers send more money home at times of crisis and hardship back home. This time, however, the pandemic has affected all countries, creating additional uncertainties.

- Microenterprises and SMEs constitute the backbone of the global economy, accounting for over two thirds of employment globally and for 80 to 90 per cent of employment in low-income countries and they are unfortunately amongst the most vulnerable groups to pandemic-related shocks for several reasons.
- The COVID-19 pandemic is primarily a health crisis, but it has become clear that it has ramifications that extend to many aspects of the international order. International trade is especially hard hit.
- Global merchandise trade recorded its largest ever one-period decline in the second quarter of 2020, falling 14.3% compared with the previous period.
- Although there has since been a partial rebound as lockdowns eased during summer in the northern hemisphere, total global merchandise trade for 2020 fell by 9% in 2020, and a recovery to the precrisis trend is unlikely for several years.
- These changes to the global trading landscape have wide-ranging consequences for physical and mental health, as they affect supplies of drugs and medical equipment, nutrition and food security, and government income necessary to pay for health services.

WHAT COURSE CORRECTIONS WOULD BE REQUIRED IN THE POST PANDEMIC WORLD

- In the future, policy makers engaged in the use of trade instruments to mitigate the health effects of the trade collapse induced by COVID-19 should consider carefully the wide-ranging links between trade, trade policy, and the determinants of health and health inequalities that this Viewpoint has discussed.
- Effective global governance of trade and health will be crucial, and there might be fresh hope for a more co-ordinated global response, given President-elect Joe Biden's favourable view of multilateralism.
- These deliberations should be done in a transparent manner, using participative trade governance structures that give health experts a seat at the table, and with meaningful public participation. Otherwise, the world will face even greater health risks in future.
- National governments and global institutions should be preparing to create a pathway for post-pandemic recovery after the collapse of the global economy and trade.
- Looking ahead, there should be great pressure to further liberalise rules on trade to encourage economic recovery, but it is essential that trade policy be informed by its many consequences for health to ensure that the benefits are maximised and threats are minimised through active identification and mitigation.
- As part of this recovery, there should be a precious opportunity to reform trade arrangements in ways that ensure healthy and sustainable lives for all—something that governments committed to do when they signed up to the increasingly fragile UN 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. With the

lives and livelihoods of billions of people globally now hanging in the balance, the opportunity must not be squandered.

Conclusion

The scope of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is captured by the “5 Ps” – people, planet, prosperity, partnership and peace. While trade is an important instrument for achieving prosperity through economic recovery, trade policy alone would not be able to ensure that the recovery would contribute concurrently to people and planet. A comprehensive recovery package for building a stronger, fairer, more inclusive, and greener (and bluer) economy would require cooperation-oriented trade policy and effective competition policy and consumer protection policy, with the aspiration of green growth at the centre of a long-term objective.

5. What is vaccine passport? Explain its need and associated issues.

Approach

Since the question is straight forward and has two parts each part needs to be addressed equally.

Introduction

As the nations across the globe are focussed on vaccination and breaking the transmission chain, governments and airlines suggest 'vaccine passports' as a feasible coronavirus vaccine certificate that would make travelling amid the pandemic era hassle-free. As sales of fake Covid-19 negative test results become more widespread, experts have also pointed out that it is important to develop digital passes that are secure and reliable at the same time. For decades, people travelling to some countries have had to prove that they have been vaccinated against diseases such as yellow fever, rubella and cholera.

Body

- A vaccine passport is an e-certificate that stores and records jobs and Covid-19 test status. It can be kept in a smartphone app or in other digital formats. Its contents can be flashed at security checkpoints when people travel across borders.
- Vaccination against the novel coronavirus has been considered to be the inflection point at which life would start to get back to normal. Israel's “vaccine passport” is meant for public facilities such as restaurants, gyms, and hotels in the country — but certification of this kind has a bearing on the full resumption of international air travel as well.
- The idea is modelled on the proof of vaccination that several countries required even before the pandemic. Travellers from many African countries

to the US or India are required to submit proof that they have been vaccinated against diseases such as yellow fever.

- Even though the nomenclature comes from passports, most vaccine passports have been envisaged as digital documents. They are supposed to function as proof that the holder has been vaccinated against Covid-19 and is, therefore, “safe”.

Need of vaccine passport-

- As countries are in lockdown phase because of covid-19 pandemic global economies have been hit hard also income levels have gone down vaccine passport will allow having a safe virus free environment which will allow economies to function.
- The primary benefit will be to the tourism and the hospitality industries, which are both seen as being at the heart of Covid-19 spread and are the worst hit by the pandemic.
- The international air travel, which suffered massively because of the outbreak.
- It will also help to have a virus free environment which will stop trans boundary spread of the new mutant strains.

Issues associated with vaccine passports-

- The World Health Organisation (WHO) is against the introduction of Covid-19 vaccination proofs as a requirement for international travel.
- Lack of Uniformity: The major difficulty in implementation will be the lack of uniformity across jurisdictions in requirement and issuance of proofs of vaccination.
- Inadequate Availability of Vaccines: Preferential vaccination of travellers could result in inadequate supplies of vaccines for priority populations considered at high risk of severe Covid-19 disease.
- Introducing a requirement of vaccination as a condition for travel has the potential to hinder equitable global access to a limited vaccine supply and would be unlikely to maximize the benefits of vaccination for individual societies and overall global health.
- Perpetuate Discrimination and Inequality: Experts argue that vaccine passports, in any form, might make travel inequitable. Adoption of these digital passports can perpetuate discrimination and inequality, increasing the divide between socioeconomic groups.
- Privacy Concerns: These are mainly digital certificates that are accessed by a particular service provider to check for proof of vaccination; there is a possibility that they would be used by authorities to track the movement of their holders.

Conclusion

Immunity passports promise a way to go back to a more normal social and economic life. But the strategy raises the prospect of further dividing the world along the lines of wealth and vaccine access, experts warn, creating ethical and logistical issues that have alarmed decision-makers around the world.