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News Analysis (12 Mar, 2019)

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Vice President Visit to Paraguay and Costa Rica

Recently, Vice President of India visited two countries Costa Rica and Paraguay.

Paraguay and Costa Rica are important partners of India in Latin American and Caribbean region respectively.

India-Paraguay



- **Political**

- **Diplomatic relations between India and Paraguay were established in 1961.**
- During the visit, it was decided to strengthen the relations even more.
- Paraguay has also condemned the terror attack on Indian security forces in

Pulwama.

- **Economic**

- Bilateral trade between India and Paraguay has been growing.
- **It was \$40 million ten years ago and today it stands close to \$375 million.**
- During the visit, it was decided that efforts will be made to diversify and expand the trade basket.
- Discussion on **India's engagement in MERCOSUR also took place during the visit.**

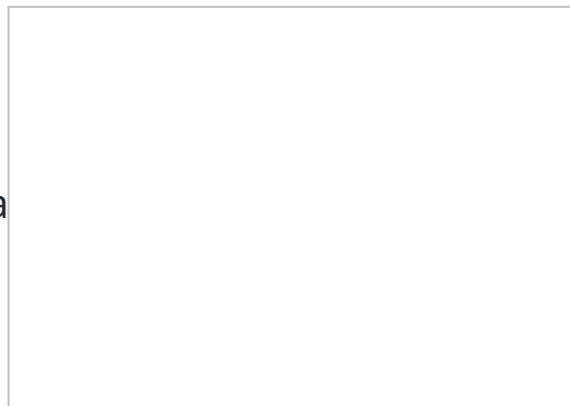
Cooperation & People-2-People Contact

- **New areas for collaboration were identified** between the two countries like renewable energy, health, ICT, space, biotechnology, railways, and tourism-related infrastructure.
- To build people to people contacts there was a **discussion on how to make travel easier** between two countries.

MERCOSUR

- The **Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR for its Spanish initials)** is a regional integration process, initially established by **Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay, and subsequently joined by Venezuela and Bolivia.**
- India has a **preferential trade agreement** with MERCOSUR.

India-Costa Rica



- India appointed an **Honorary Consul in San Jose, capital of Costa Rica in 1995.** Costa Rica reciprocated by opening an Honorary Consulate in New Delhi in 1996.
- India and Costa Rica enjoy long-standing relations of friendship and cooperation, which are being strengthened by the growing commercial engagement between the two countries.
- **Costa Rica is the 13th leading Trading Partner of India in the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) region.** Bilateral trade between India and Costa Rica is around USD 200 mn.
- **Costa Rica has set a target to become a carbon-neutral country by 2021** and has decided to join the **International Solar Alliance.**

India- Latin American and Carribbean (LAC) Region

- **Importance of LAC**

- **Food Security:** India is importing pulses and from South American countries.
- **Mineral Import:** Latin America is also very rich in minerals such as copper, lithium, iron ore, gold, and silver. India has an opportunity to increase investments for its extraction as well as for its imports at cheaper rates.
- **Energy Security:** Latin America has huge reserves of crude oil (20% of global reserves). Currently, India sources 15% of its crude oil from LAC countries. India which has emerged as the second largest importer of crude oil from the region is also important for Latin American countries.

- **Challenges**

- **Political Challenges:** India has good relations with countries like Brazil, Mexico, Chile but other countries lag behind. Rivalries between countries like Brazil and Argentina for regional dominance is also affecting India's relations with the region.]
- **Economic Relations:** Though trade has reached \$46 billion in 2012-13, it is nothing compared to the Chinese trade of \$250 billion. Bilateral investments between India and LAC are also relatively low. It is only four percent of India's total outward investment.

IIT-Mandi's Proposals Selected under SPARC Initiative

Seven research proposals from the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Mandi have been selected under '**Scheme for Promotion of Academic and Research Collaboration' (SPARC)**.

These research projects are in areas such as energy and water sustainability, advanced sensors, electronics and communication, infectious diseases and clinical research, humanities, and social sciences, nano, biotechnology and applications, and advanced functionality and metamaterials and basic sciences.

Benefits

- The SPARC grants will **help IIT-Mandi to collaborate with international universities in the US, France, Germany, UK, and Taiwan (Republic of China)**, and researchers from across the globe to undertake joint research.
- IIT Mandi will also be able to **offer short term courses to** students in these fields.

Scheme for Promotion of Academic and Research Collaboration (SPARC)

- “Scheme for Promotion of Academic and Research Collaboration (SPARC)” is an **initiative of the Ministry of Human Resource Development.**
- **Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur** is the National Coordinating Institute to implement the SPARC programme.

The Objective of the Scheme

- SPARC aims at **improving the research ecosystem of India’s higher educational institutions by facilitating academic and research collaborations between Indian institutions and the best institutions in the world.**
- **Institutes are selected from 28 selected nations** to jointly solve problems of national and international relevance.
- Under this Scheme, **600 joint research proposals will be awarded for 2 years** to facilitate research collaboration between Indian research groups with the best in class faculty and renowned research groups in the leading universities of the world, **in areas that are at the cutting edge of science or with direct social relevance to the mankind, specifically India.**

Thrust Areas

- A set of 5 Thrust Areas which are **Fundamental Research, Emergent Areas of Impact, Convergence, Action-Oriented Research, and Innovation-Driven and sub-theme areas** in each thrust area has been identified.
- A set of **Nodal Institutions (NI), from India, for each participating foreign country has been identified.**
 - IIT Mandi is the nodal institute for Germany.
- The role of a NI is to **help and coordinate with willing Participating Indian Institutions to forge an alliance with the Institutions of the concerned participating foreign country.**
- **Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)**
 - The IPR developed out of the project **will be decided as per norms of the participating Institutes.** The Indian Institute will get the benefits out of Patents / Royalty, rather than the foreign institute or the individual faculty.
 - **All disputes will have Indian jurisdiction.** Any special deviation will be resolved by MHRD through the SPARC Liaison cell and approved by the Apex Committee.

Strategy Against the Threat of Influenza

The World Health Organization (WHO) has launched a **Global Influenza Strategy for 2019-2030**, which aims to prevent seasonal influenza, control the virus’s spread from animals to humans and prepare for the next pandemic

The WHO warned that new pandemics are **“inevitable”**.

Pandemic

- A pandemic is the **worldwide spread of a new disease**.
- An influenza pandemic occurs when a new influenza virus emerges and spreads around the world, and most people do not have immunity. Viruses that have caused past pandemics **typically originated from animal influenza viruses**.
- Influenza epidemics are **largely seasonal** and affect around one billion people and kill hundreds of thousands annually making it one of the **world’s greatest public health challenges**. E.g.:
 - **H5N1 (called avian influenza or "bird flu")** is a type of influenza virus that causes a highly infectious, severe respiratory disease in birds.
- The new strategy is the most comprehensive and far-reaching that WHO has ever developed for influenza.
- The strategy meets one of WHO’s mandates to improve **core capacities for public health, and increase global preparedness**.
- It outlines a path to protect populations every year and helps prepare for a pandemic through strengthening routine programmes. **Features of the new strategy are:**
 - Every country should strengthen routine health programmes and develop tailor-made influenza programmes that strengthen disease surveillance, response, prevention, control, and preparedness.
 - WHO recommends annual flu vaccines as the most effective way to prevent the spread of the disease, especially for healthcare workers and people at higher risk of influenza complications.
 - Development of more effective and more accessible vaccines and antiviral treatments.
 - Due to its mutating strains, vaccine formulas must be regularly updated.
- The new influenza strategy builds on and benefits from successful WHO programmes like:
 - **Global Influenza Surveillance and Response System (GISRS)**: Launched in 1952, GISRS comprised of WHO Collaborating Centres and national influenza centres. It focuses on monitoring seasonal trends and potentially pandemic viruses. This system serves as the backbone of the global alert system for influenza.
 - **Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Framework** is a unique access and benefit sharing system that supports the sharing of potentially pandemic viruses, provides access to life saving vaccines and treatments in the event of a pandemic and supports the building of pandemic preparedness capacities in countries through partnership contributions from industry.

World Health Organisation

- The World Health Organisation (WHO) is a **specialized agency of the United Nations** that is concerned with international public health.
 - It is **headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland** and the WHO's constitution came into force on April 7, 1948—a date now celebrated every year as World Health Day.
 - The **World Health Assembly** is the **supreme decision-making body in WHO**. The assembly meets annually and is attended by delegations from 194 member states.
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World Gold Council

According to the latest report by the World Gold Council (WGC), India, which is the world's largest consumer of gold, has the 11th largest gold reserve, with the current holding pegged at 607 tonnes.

- India's overall position in terms of total gold holding would have been tenth had the list included only countries.
International Monetary Fund (IMF) is included and is third on the list with total gold reserves of 2,814 tonnes.
- The U.S. tops the list with gold reserves of 8,133.5 tonnes, followed by Germany with 3,369.7 tonnes.
- Among Asian countries, China and Japan have more reserves when compared to India.
- The demand for gold was concentrated among emerging market central banks, with diversification the key driver in the face of ongoing geopolitical and economic uncertainty.

World Gold Council

- The World Gold Council (WGC) is a nonprofit association of the world's leading gold producers.
- Headquartered in London, the WGC covers the markets which comprise about three-quarters of the world's annual gold consumption.
- It is a market development organization for the gold industry which includes 25 members and many gold mining companies as well.
- The WGC was established to promote the use of and demand for gold through marketing, research and lobbying.

Gold & Economy

- **As Currency:** Gold was used as the world reserve currency up through most of the 20th century. The United States used the gold standard until 1971.
 - The paper money had to be backed up by equal amount of gold in their

reserves.

- Although the gold standard has been discontinued, some economists feel that we should return to it due to the volatility of the U.S. dollar and other currencies.
- **As a hedge against inflation:** The demand for gold increases during inflationary times due to its inherent value and limited supply. As it cannot be diluted, gold is able to retain value much better than other forms of currency.
- **Strength of Currency:** When a country imports more than it exports, the value of its currency will decline. On the other hand, the value of its currency will increase when a country is a net exporter. Thus, a country that exports gold or has access to gold reserves will see an increase in the strength of its currency when gold prices increase, since this increases the value of the country's total exports.

Since, the central banks rely on printing more money to buy gold, they create an excess supply of the currency. This increases the supply and thereby reduces the value of the currency used to purchase it.

Important Facts For Prelims (12th March 2019)

Girnar Wildlife Sanctuary

- After declaring Gir Forests (Junagadh, Gujarat) as wildlife sanctuary in 1965, more lion habitats in adjoining regions were also declared sanctuaries and ultimately **Girnar Wildlife Sanctuary was created in 2007.**
- According to the last census of Asiatic lions, which was conducted in 2015, there were 523 lions in and around Gir wildlife Sanctuary in Saurashtra region of Gujarat.

Out of the total 523 lions, 33 lions were reported from Girnar Wildlife Sanctuary.
- Asiatic Lions are cousins of African Lions who are believed to be separated 1,00,000 years ago. They are slightly smaller and have a distinctive fold of skin along their bellies. **Gir sanctuary is the only wild population of Asiatic lions in the world.**

They are listed in Schedule I of Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972 and Appendix I of CITES and also have been categorized as 'Endangered' on IUCN Red List.
- India has launched "The Asiatic Lion Conservation Project" to strengthen the ongoing measures for conservation and recovery of Asiatic Lion with the help of state-of-the-art techniques/ instruments, regular scientific research studies, disease management, Modern surveillance/ patrolling techniques.

ITU's First ever Innovation Centre in India

- The **United Nations' telecom body 'International Telecommunication Union (ITU)** has planned to set up its **first ever Innovation Centre in India** to incorporate technologies from South Asian countries and emerging economies in standards for

technologies.

- The Innovation Centre is expected to give the opportunity to Indian technology firms to make their case for being part of global standards, which has been largely influenced by companies from developed countries and have huge influence on telecom businesses globally.
- The center will also **collaborate with firms for joint research in the field of standardization for 5G, artificial intelligence, and upcoming new technologies.**
- Besides the Innovation Centre, **ITU's first regional office for South Asia** will also get established in India.

International Telecommunication Union

- It is the United Nations specialized agency for information and communication technologies – ICTs. It is the oldest among all the 15 specialized agencies of UN.
- Founded in 1865 to facilitate international connectivity in communications networks, it allocates global radio spectrum and satellite orbits, develops the technical standards that ensure networks and technologies seamlessly interconnect, and strive to improve access to ICTs to underserved communities worldwide.
- Based in Geneva, Switzerland, it is also a member of the United Nations Development Group and has 12 regional and area offices in the world.
- ITU has remained an intergovernmental public-private partnership organization since its inception. Its membership includes 193 Member States and around 800 public and private sector companies and academic institutions as well as international and regional telecommunication entities.
- Recently, India got elected as a member of ITU Council for another 4-year term - from 2019 to 2022. India has remained a regular member since 1952.

Wood Snake

- A species of wood snake that **wasn't seen for 140 years (last seen in 1878)** has resurfaced in a survey conducted by scientists in the Meghamalai Wildlife Sanctuary. **Meghamalai Wildlife Sanctuary** in Meghamalai Wildlife Division spreads over 636 square kilometers in Theni district of Tamil Nadu bordering the Periyar Tiger Reserve in Kerala and thus **an important buffer zone for tiger population in addition to an important elephant corridor.**
- The species is **endemic to the Meghamalai forests (Tamil Nadu)** and the **Periyar Tiger Reserve landscape (Kerala).**
- The local population of wood snakes was last spotted and recorded by British military officer and naturalist Colonel Richard Henry Beddome in 1878, who went on to describe it as a new species, *Xylophis indicus*.

“Sirsi Supari” Gets GI Tag

- Arecanut (also known as supari or betel nut) is the latest entrant in the list of agricultural produce with a **geographical indication (GI) tag**.
- **'Sirsi Supari' grown in Uttara Kannada district of Karnataka has received the Geographic Indication (GI) tag.**
- The arecanut has unique **features like a round and flattened coin shape, particular texture, taste and has a hard seed.** These features are not seen in arecanut grown in any other regions.
- It is cultivated in Yellapura, Siddapura and Sirsi taluks in Karnataka
- Totgars' Cooperative Sale Society Ltd., Sirsi, is the registered proprietor of the GI.

Phased Manufacturing Programmes for Electric Vehicles

- The government has notified phased **increase in basic customs duty** on parts of electric passenger vehicles to be assembled in India and imported lithium-ion cells to promote domestic manufacturing of EVs.
- The notification is part of the road map under the **phased manufacturing programme (PMP)**.
 - The phased manufacturing programme is part of a road map wherein through **graded duty structure** indigenous manufacturing of **electric vehicles, its assemblies and parts or inputs of the sub-assemblies shall be promoted over a period of time.**
 - The intention is to substantially increase value addition and capacity building within the country.
- The government is also promoting the mass adoption of EVs through **schemes like FAME II.**
- Recently, the Union Cabinet has also approved the **'National Mission on Transformative Mobility and Battery Storage'** to drive clean, connected, shared and sustainable mobility initiatives in the country.

PINAKA

- **Defense Research and Defence Organisation (DRDO)** successfully test fired indigenously developed Guided PINAKA rockets from Pokhran ranges in Rajasthan.
- The weapon system is equipped with **state-of-the-art guidance kit** comprising of an advanced navigation and control system.
- It will significantly boost the capability of the artillery to make precision hits.

Central Electricity Regulatory Commission

- The **Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC)** has come up with revised regulations to encourage neighboring countries to buy more power from India's spot markets.

- **Bangladesh is the largest buyer of Indian power.**
- India signed a memorandum of understanding for establishing grid interconnection. between the members of the **Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)**.

About CERC

- CERC is a **statutory body** functioning under **section - 76 of the Electricity Act 2003.**
 - Functions:
 - to regulate the **tariff of generating companies.**
 - to determine **tariff and regulate the inter-State** transmission of electricity.
 - to issue licenses to persons to function as transmission licensee and electricity trader with respect to their inter-State operations.
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