

## TOPICS COVERED

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2. 14 injured in Fire at Mahakal Temple in Madhya Pradesh (GS Paper I: Art and Culture)
3. EU probe into tech giants for 'violation' of new law may trigger hefty Fines (GS Paper II: Governance)
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## United Nations calls for ceasefire in Gaza during month of Ramzan (GS Paper II: IR)

- The UN Security Council demanded a ceasefire in Gaza during the Muslim holy month of Ramzan.
- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu protested the UN vote, **accusing the US of retreating from its position by not linking the ceasefire to the release of hostages held by Hamas.**
- **The resolution passed with a 14-0 vote after the US abstained, also demanding the release of hostages taken during a previous attack by Hamas.**
- **The resolution did not connect the demand for hostage release to the ceasefire during Ramzan.**
- Netanyahu cancelled a planned visit to Washington and intended to present plans for a ground invasion of Gaza's Rafah town, where many Palestinian civilians sought shelter.
- The US abstained from the **UN Security Council vote** because the **resolution did not condemn Hamas.**
- The US warned that the resolution approved on Monday might harm negotiations for a ceasefire involving the **US, Egypt, and Qatar**, potentially leading to another US veto.
- Over 32,000 Palestinians in Gaza have been killed during the conflict, according to the Gaza Health Ministry.
- **The ceasefire demand during Ramzan would last for two weeks, with the draft aiming for a permanent sustainable ceasefire.**
- Monday's resolution, backed by Russia, China, and the Arab Group at the UN, was finally supported by the council after the word "permanent" was dropped from the demand for a lasting ceasefire.

# 14 injured in Fire at Mahakal Temple in Madhya Pradesh (GS Paper I: Art and Culture)

## Mahakal Temple

- **Location:** It is located in the ancient city of **Ujjain**, Madhya Pradesh.



- **Significance:** One of the twelve Jyotirlingas, which are considered the most sacred abodes of Lord Shiva.
- **Deity:** The presiding deity is **Lord Shiva, worshipped in the form of a Swayambhu lingam** (self-manifested). The lingam is believed to derive power (Shakti) from within itself.
- **Architecture:** The temple **reflects the Maratha style of architecture, with intricate carvings, imposing gateways, and a spacious courtyard.** The five-level temple complex includes a majestic **shikhara (spire)** soaring towards the sky.

### History

- **Ancient Origins:** References to the Mahakal Temple are found in ancient scriptures and poetry, including the **works of Kalidasa**, indicating the temple's antiquity.
- **Repeated Destruction & Rebuilding:** The temple was **destroyed and rebuilt** several times over the centuries due to invasions and religious conflicts.
- **Current Structure:** The existing temple structure primarily dates back to the Maratha era.

### Religious Practices

- **Bhasma Aarti:** The Mahakal Temple is famous for its unique Bhasma Aarti ritual, performed at dawn. During this ritual, the lingam is bathed with sacred ash, signifying the ephemeral nature of life.



- **Other Rituals:** Daily worship, aartis, and special offerings are made to Lord Shiva throughout the day.
- **Festivals:** Mahashivratri is the major festival celebrated at the Mahakal Temple with great devotion and enthusiasm.

#### Recent Development

- **Mahakal Corridor Project:** The temple complex recently underwent a significant expansion and beautification project called the "Shri Mahakal Lok." This project aims to enhance the pilgrim experience and showcase the temple's grandeur.



## EU probe into tech giants for ‘violation’ of new law may trigger hefty Fines (GS Paper II: Governance)

- The European Union (EU) has launched investigations into tech giants Apple, Alphabet (parent company of Google), and Meta (formerly known as Facebook) to determine if they violated the **Digital Markets Act (DMA)**.
- The **DMA is a new law aimed at regulating large online companies, known as 'gatekeepers,' whose products and services are used by approximately 450 million EU users.**
- Under the DMA, **companies found in violation could face fines of up to 10% of their global revenues and 20% for repeat infringements.**
- This move by the EU reflects **a trend of governments worldwide seeking greater control over big tech companies' operations.**

- The investigations were initiated just over three weeks after the **EU fined Apple over €1.84 million (USD 2 billion) for anti-competitive behavior** related to the **distribution of streaming music apps**.
- Additionally, the U.S. Department of Justice filed a case against Apple for **allegedly stifling competition and maintaining high prices in the smartphone market**.
- The DMA came into full effect on March 7 and targets companies like **Alphabet, Amazon, Apple, ByteDance (owners of TikTok), Meta, and Microsoft, designating them as 'gatekeepers.'**
- Two of the investigations announced by the EU focus on Alphabet and Apple's alleged **"anti-steering" practices, which may restrict user choice by preventing app manufacturers from directly communicating and contracting with end-users.**
- The probes aim to determine if these companies are violating DMA provisions **by inhibiting app manufacturers' ability to engage with end-users directly.**

## Question of choice

- The EU has initiated a third probe to investigate whether Apple provides users with enough choice, particularly regarding uninstalling apps and changing default settings.
- Concerns were raised about Apple's web browser choice screen, which may prevent users from making fully informed choices. Additionally, **certain Apple apps like 'Photos' are not uninstallable, and users cannot change default settings like Cloud storage**, as required by the DMA.
- Apple has expressed confidence that its plan complies with the DMA, stating that they have developed new developer capabilities, features, and tools to adhere to the regulation.
- A fourth investigation is focused on **Meta's "pay or consent" policy**, where **users must pay to use Facebook and Instagram without targeted advertising**. However, the DMA mandates that **gatekeepers must obtain users' consent for using their personal data across different services, and this consent must be freely given.**
- The fifth inquiry targets **Alphabet, Google's parent company**, to determine **if it is prioritizing its own services in Google Search**. This may include **Google Shopping, Google Flights, and Google Hotels**, potentially benefiting from preferential treatment.
- The investigation is expected to be completed within 12 months.

## Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar

- **Full Name:** Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar
- **Birth:** October 19, 1910, in Lahore, British India (now in Pakistan)
- **Death:** August 21, 1995, in Chicago, Illinois, United States
- **Nationality:** Indian-American
- **Contributions:**
  - Chandrasekhar made significant contributions to various areas of astrophysics, including stellar structure, stellar dynamics, radiative transfer, and the quantum theory of the hydrogen spectrum.
  - He is best known for his discovery of the **Chandrasekhar limit**, which is the maximum mass of a stable white dwarf star.

- His work laid the foundation for understanding the later evolutionary stages of massive stars and the **mathematical theory of black holes**.
- **Awards and Honors:**
  - **Nobel Prize in Physics in 1983** (shared with William A. Fowler) for his theoretical studies of the physical processes of importance to the structure and evolution of stars.
  - Gold Medal of the Royal Astronomical Society, the National Medal of Science (USA), and the Bruce Medal.
- **Career:**
  - Chandrasekhar held various academic positions throughout his career, including at the **University of Chicago**, where he spent the majority of his professional life.
  - He published numerous papers and several books on **astrophysics** and related subjects.

## El Nino impact leaves Malawi and region on the edge of a hunger crisis (GS Paper II: IR)

- **Malawi has declared a state of disaster** due to drought in 23 out of its 28 districts.
- The president of Malawi has requested over \$200 million in humanitarian aid to address the crisis.
- **Zambia**, a neighboring country, has also appealed for assistance due to similar drought conditions.
- **Zimbabwe is considering declaring a drought disaster as well**, as much of its crops have been destroyed.
- The **United Nations World Food Programme (WFP)** had previously warned about a hunger crisis in southern Africa due to the El Niño weather phenomenon.

United Nations World Food Programme (WFP)

### Key Roles and Functions

- The WFP is dedicated to fighting **hunger and improving nutrition worldwide**.
- It provides lifesaving food and nutrition assistance **in conflict zones, natural disaster areas, and other humanitarian emergencies**.
- **Development and Resilience Building:** Works to improve long-term food security by supporting school meal programs, nutrition interventions, and projects that help communities adapt to climate change and build resilience.

### Organizational Structure

- The WFP is part of the United Nations system, **governed by its Executive Board with representatives from 36 member states**.
- **Headquarters:** The headquarters are located in **Rome, Italy**.
- **Global Operations:** The WFP operates in over 80 countries with a vast network of staff, partners, and resources.

**Nobel Peace Prize Laureate (2020)**

- The WFP was awarded the **Nobel Peace Prize in 2020** for its efforts to combat hunger, contribute to peace in conflict zones, and its role in preventing the use of hunger as a weapon of war.

#### Activities and Focus Areas

- **Food Distribution:** Provides direct food aid and cash-based transfers to those in need.
- **School Feeding Programs:** Supports school meals and nutrition programs for children, promoting both health and education.
- **Resilience Building:** Helps communities develop long-term solutions against food shortages through projects like asset creation and climate-resilient agriculture.
- **Early Warning and Response:** Monitors vulnerable regions and prepares for rapid response to food crises.
- **Logistics and Supply Chain:** Manages complex supply chains to deliver aid to the most difficult-to-reach areas.

- Before the drought, nearly 50 million people in southern and central Africa were already facing food insecurity.
- Last month, Zambia and Zimbabwe experienced their driest February in 40 years, according to the WFP.
- **Malawi, Mozambique, and parts of Angola** also suffered severe rainfall deficits.
- Millions of people in southern Africa rely on locally grown food for survival, particularly **corn**, which has been severely affected by the drought.
- **El Niño is a natural weather phenomenon that affects global weather patterns, including causing below-average rainfall in southern Africa.**
- Some scientists believe that **climate change is making El Niños stronger** and their impacts more extreme.
- The **2015-2016 El Niño resulted in a severe drought in southern Africa**, considered the region's worst in 35 years.
- **The World Food Programme (WFP) and USAID had already initiated a program to feed 2.7 million people in rural Zimbabwe facing food shortages.**
- **Oxfam** reported that over 6 million people in Zambia, comprising 30% of the population, are currently facing acute food shortages and malnutrition.
- Malawian President Lazarus Chakwera conducted a tour of his country to assess the extent of the drought crisis. A preliminary assessment found that about **44% of Malawi's corn crop had failed or been affected**, impacting 2 million households directly.
- Malawi has faced repeated weather extremes in recent years, including tropical storms and floods in early 2022, leading to the **worst cholera outbreak** in the country's history. Over 1,200 people died in the outbreak, which lasted for months.
- Zambia is also grappling with a major cholera outbreak at present.

#### Cholera

- Cholera is an acute diarrheal infection caused by ingestion of food or water contaminated with the **bacterium *Vibrio cholerae***.
- **Severity:** It can **lead to severe dehydration and death if not treated promptly**.
- **Transmission:** Primarily spread **through contaminated water or food**. Poor sanitation and hygiene practices increase the risk.
- **Global Impact:** Cholera remains a major public health threat in countries with limited access to clean water and sanitation, particularly during humanitarian crises and natural disasters.

### Symptoms

- The hallmark symptom of cholera is sudden **onset of large volumes of watery diarrhea**, often described as "**rice-water stools**."
- **Vomiting**: Can accompany diarrhea.
- **Rapid Dehydration**: Loss of fluids and electrolytes can quickly lead to severe dehydration, including signs like **dry skin, sunken eyes, rapid heart rate, and low blood pressure**.
- It can result in **muscle cramps** and potentially life-threatening complications.

### Diagnosis

- **Clinical Suspicion**: In endemic areas, severe watery diarrhea raises suspicion of cholera.
- **Stool Culture**: Confirms diagnosis by **identifying *Vibrio cholerae* in stool samples**.
- **Rapid Diagnostic Tests**

### Treatment

- **Oral Rehydration Solution (ORS)**: The cornerstone of treatment is immediate replacement of fluids and electrolytes with oral rehydration solution (ORS).
- **Intravenous Fluids**: May be required for severe dehydration.
- **Antibiotics**: Shorten the duration and severity of the illness, especially in severe cases.
- **Zinc Supplementation**: Can reduce the duration and severity of diarrhea in children.

### Prevention

- **Safe Water and Sanitation**: Access to clean drinking water and proper sanitation systems are crucial for preventing cholera outbreaks.
- **Food Hygiene**: Thorough cooking of food, especially seafood, and washing hands before meals are important preventive measures.
- **Cholera Vaccination**: Oral cholera vaccines offer protection for several years and are used in high-risk areas and during outbreaks.

## Sordid scheme: On the electoral bond scheme, electoral financing (GS Paper II)

### Matching electoral bond purchasers and donors reveals cronyism, corruption

- The Supreme Court of India ordered the release of the final tranche of data from the State Bank of India (SBI), providing insights into electoral financing.
- The SBI had initially hesitated to release this data and sought an extension till June 30, 2024, but was compelled by the Court to do so.
- The data includes unique numbers for electoral bonds purchased by corporate and individual donors, which were later encashed by political parties.
- News organizations quickly conducted a data-matching exercise to connect the donors with the parties, **revealing the inefficacy of the argument for the need for opacity of electoral bonds**.
- There appears to be a **clear correlation between large donations to certain political parties and bond purchasers receiving high-value infrastructure contracts**.
- **Some donors who purchased these bonds later faced actions or probes by the Enforcement Directorate and the Income-Tax Department, indicating potential irregularities.**

- The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is linked to many donors who purchased these bonds, raising questions about transparency and accountability in political funding.
- The top 19 firms, based on the size of donations made, consistently funded the BJP and other parties from mid-2019 to February 2024.
- **22 firms donated ₹100 crore or more during this period**, indicating **significant financial influence in politics**.
- This suggests that electoral bonds **were used as a means to gain favor** with the ruling establishment.
- The State Bank of India (SBI) held unique identifiers for these bonds, enabling an audit trail of transactions.
- The **Finance Ministry allowed certain bonds to be encashed even after their expiry date, within 15 days of purchase, creating an advantage for the ruling party**.
- The **scheme heavily favored the ruling party, distorting campaign and party financing**.
- It also obscured the true motivations behind the donations.
- **Civil society must educate the electorate about the scheme and raise concerns about the unequal nature of donations**.
- This is the first step towards reforming the system and ensuring transparency in political funding.

## Terror in Moscow: On concerns over the Islamic State (GS Paper II: IR)

### The Islamic State poses security challenges for the Eurasian region

- A terror attack occurred at **Crocus City Hall near Moscow** on March 22, resulting in the **death of at least 137 people**.
- The attack highlights concerns about **the resurgence of the Islamic State (IS)**, even though its physical caliphate in Syria and Iraq was destroyed six years ago.
- In January, the **IS-Khorasan (IS-K)** carried out **twin bombings in Kerman, Iran**, killing at least 80 people during a memorial event for General Qassem Soleimani.
- IS has since targeted **Turkey, Syria, and Afghanistan**, indicating its growing terror capabilities.
- Russian authorities have charged **four Tajik nationals** in connection with the Moscow shooting.
- IS-K, established in **Afghanistan's Nangarhar province in 2015**, consists mainly of Central Asian militants.
- This branch gained prominence after the Taliban regained power in Afghanistan in August 2021.
- **IS-K has targeted Afghanistan's Shia minority and aims to build a network of cells with radicalized youths from Central Asia and Afghanistan's Tajik and Uzbek minorities**.
- These networks are gaining strength, posing a threat to regional security.

- IS-K has been running propaganda videos targeting Russia and President Vladimir Putin, accusing them of spilling "the blood of Muslims" in Afghanistan, Chechnya, and Syria.
- **Russia's intervention in Syria in 2015 supported President Bashar al-Assad's regime, which IS aimed to overthrow.**
- **IS-K now utilizes anti-Russian and anti-Iranian propaganda to recruit among Central Asians, Afghans, and Pakistanis, shifting from previous anti-western narratives.**
- Previously controlling territories in Syria and Iraq, IS has transformed into a traditional terrorist group operating within chaos and targeting civilians.
- The recent attacks pose a significant security challenge to the Eurasian region, particularly for Russia, due to **its large population of Central Asian migrant laborers.**
- President Putin faces the task of addressing security vulnerabilities, but **tackling IS requires addressing underlying geopolitical conditions.**
- **Continued Pashtun-only rule by the Taliban in Afghanistan and instability in parts of West Asia provide conditions for IS and similar groups to thrive and expand.**

## A dissonant chord in the world of Carnatic music (GS Paper I:A&C)

The polarisation over the conferment of a title is unfortunate as music can become a many-splendoured offering only through a cross-fertilisation of ideas and cultures

- T.M. Krishna is a prominent figure in Carnatic music, having recently won **The Music Academy, Madras's Sangita Kalanidhi award.**
- He is known for his traditional roots in music but also for his innovative vision, pushing boundaries and exploring new horizons.
- Krishna is both an artist and an activist, advocating for societal and civic issues alongside his musical pursuits.

### Beijing's aims

- His concerts are captivating, often provocative, and aim to awaken and challenge audiences.
- While admired by purists, avant-garde enthusiasts, and pantheistic believers, **he faces criticism from religious fanatics for his irreverence toward long-held beliefs.**
- Atheists and agnostics appreciate his boldness in challenging conservative norms.
- Despite being unconventional, Krishna has a large fan base, including older connoisseurs of classical music, modern youth, and students.
- He is gifted, charismatic, and daring, known for his iconoclastic views and eclectic interests.
- Krishna is also an author, speaker, and activist, addressing issues related to classical music, art, and contemporary societal concerns.
- While his works receive critical acclaim, they also attract controversy and criticism.
- T.M. Krishna is known for his ability to mesmerize audiences with his music, even when **singing devotional songs at temple festivals, despite being an unbeliever.**
- He is regarded as an innovator and disruptor in the realm of music, challenging cultural and social norms such as gender bias and casteism.
- Krishna's repertoire includes various genres such as folk, puranic, classical, Dasa and Vachana sahitya, ancient and navodaya, Dalit poetry, Tamil songs, Sanskrit hymns, and Sufi music.

- **In his concerts, Krishna often blends diverse compositions, including those from different languages and regions of India, sparking debate and controversy among orthodox audiences.**
- Despite facing criticism for his unorthodox approach, Krishna believes that music is universal and seeks to celebrate diversity through his performances.
- **He is recognized as a serious student of music, proficient in singing major ragas and compositions,** while also experimenting and pushing boundaries in each concert.
- Krishna's mastery in rendering various elements of Carnatic music, such as **kritis, ragas, alapanas, tanam, pallavis, kalpanaswaras, and neravals, captivates and enthralls** his audience.

1. **Kritis:** Kritis are musical compositions in Carnatic music, typically consisting of lyrics set to a particular raga (melodic framework), tala (rhythmic cycle), and composed by renowned composers such as Tyagaraja, Muthuswami Dikshitar, and Syama Sastri. These compositions often express devotional themes and are central to a Carnatic music performance.
2. **Ragas:** Ragas are **melodic frameworks or scales used in Indian classical music**, including Carnatic music. Each raga is characterized by **a unique set of ascending and descending notes, specific melodic phrases, and associated emotive qualities.** Ragas form the foundation of Carnatic music and serve as the basis for improvisation and composition.
3. **Alapanas:** Alapana, also known as Raga Alapana or Ragam Alapana, is an elaborate and improvised exposition of a raga in Carnatic music. It involves exploring the nuances of the raga through **free-flowing melodic phrases without the rhythmic accompaniment.** Alapanas **showcase the unique characteristics and mood of the raga, setting the stage for further development in the performance.**
4. **Tanam:** Tanam is a rhythmic and melodic exploration of a raga in Carnatic music, typically performed after the alapana and before the composition (kritis). It involves singing or playing instrumental phrases with rhythmic patterns, gradually increasing in complexity and intensity. Tanam showcases the virtuosity of the musician and builds anticipation for the composition to follow.
5. **Pallavi:** Pallavi is a prominent section within a Carnatic music composition, **often occurring at the beginning and recurring throughout the piece.** It consists of a **thematic line or phrase that serves as the focal point of the composition.** Pallavi is elaborated upon through improvisation, with variations in melody, rhythm, and ornamentation, showcasing the performer's creativity and skill.
6. **Kalpanaswaras:** Kalpanaswaras, also referred to as swara kalpana, are improvised sequences of musical notes sung or played with rhythmic precision in Carnatic music. They typically follow the pallavi or anupallavi section of a composition and involve the repetition of melodic patterns in different octaves and rhythmic cycles. Kalpanaswaras demonstrate the artist's ability to navigate complex rhythmic structures while embellishing the musical phrases.
7. **Neravals:** Neraval, **also known as Sahitya Vinyasa, is a form of improvisation in Carnatic music where a specific line of the composition's lyrics (usually from the pallavi or anupallavi) is elaborated upon melodically and rhythmically.** The singer or instrumentalist explores various facets of the chosen line, incorporating intricate ornamentation, rhythmic variations, and dynamic expression. **Neraval adds depth and complexity to the performance,** highlighting the lyrical and musical intricacies of the composition.

## Polarization in Music Community

- The Sangita Kalanidhi title awarded to T.M. Krishna has sparked controversy among musicians and music enthusiasts.
  - Social media is exacerbating polarization among musicians along political and ideological lines.
  - **Right-wing politics and religiosity are pitted against the ideological left and liberals.**
  - **Supporters of Brahminical ways and 'Hindutva' ideology clash with followers of Periyar's ideology.**
  - Chennai, particularly, sees conflict between the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).
- **Reactions in Music Community:**
    - **Popular classical singers Ranjani and Gayatri** publicly announced their withdrawal from an annual conference hosted by the Music Academy.
    - They cited **Mr. Krishna's admiration for anti-Brahmin figures like EVR (Periyar)** as a reason.
    - **Sangita Kalanidhi recipient N. Ravikiran declared his intention to return the award**, accusing Mr. Krishna of destabilizing Indian classical music.
    - Some authors aligned with BJP and RSS ideologies supported the dissenting artists and criticized the Music Academy.
  - **Response from Music Academy:**
    - The President of The Music Academy, Madras, N. Murali, defended the choice of Sangita Kalanidhi, emphasizing musical excellence as the sole criterion.
    - He stated that T.M. Krishna was chosen based on his musical excellence over a long career, without consideration of extraneous factors.
  - **Nurturing Creativity:**
    - Emphasized the importance of evolving and nurturing creativity in the arts, rather than clinging to past traditions rigidly.
    - Compared music to a river, ever old and ever new, highlighting the need for evolution and growth.
  - **Reflections on Actions:**
    - Suggested that both T.M. Krishna's boycott of the Music Academy and the withdrawal of artists from festivals might hinder the growth and evolution of music.
    - Acknowledged the complexity of the situation and the potential for mistakes on both sides.

### **Dual Role of an Artiste:**

- Some artistes solely focus on their art, while others take on the role of bold activist reformers.
  - Activist artistes challenge traditional art forms, fight societal inequities, prejudices, and injustices.
  - Historical examples show many great poets, artists, and philosophers were rebels who transcended their chosen fields.
- **Artistes as Men and Artists:**

- Quoting Camus, artistes have a role as individuals to serve both suffering and beauty.
- They may not have a role as artists in the world, but as individuals, they must serve humanity and its aesthetic sensibilities.
- **Unity in Enriching Art:**
  - **All stakeholders in music and the arts, including academies, sabhas, and artistes, should unite despite differences.**
  - Spiritual quest to enrich music through dialogue, debate, and assimilation is crucial.
  - The goal is to leave a richer inheritance for future generations by promoting cross-fertilization of ideas and cultures.
- **Avoiding Churlish Responses:**
  - Boycotting and responding with chauvinism from both sides of the divide are immature.
  - **Quoting Tagore, “The role of an artist is to take a creative part in the festival of life, to give expression to the infinite in man.”**

## China, a ‘want-to-be’ superpower (GS)

Paper II: IR: India-China Relations)

**Other than dangling a cheque book, Beijing seems risk averse and has few answers to long-standing geopolitical flashpoints**

- China facilitated détente between Saudi Arabia and Iran in March 2023.
- The first anniversary of this event passed quietly amidst the Gaza war.
- **China's Position:**
  - China maintains a pro-Palestine stance, historically aligning with the Palestinian cause.
  - This stance has strained relations with Israel.
- **Chinese Media Coverage:**
  - Chinese state-controlled media hailed President Xi Jinping's success in mediating peace between Riyadh and Tehran.
  - Xinhua, a Chinese media outlet, highlighted China's institutional position promoting peace in the Middle East.
- **Regional Analysts' Views:**
  - Regional analysts mentioned a weariness with the West's conditional relations.
  - They noted China's continued advocacy for peace, which resonates with Middle Eastern countries.
- **China's Mediation Initiative:**

- Wang Yi endorsed a plan to establish a China-backed international mediation organization.
- The organization is planned to be headquartered in Hong Kong.
- Initial signatories to the initiative include **Algeria, Belarus, Cambodia, Djibouti, Indonesia, Laos, Pakistan, Serbia, and Sudan.**
- **Link to Belt and Road Initiative (BRI):**
  - China aims to connect the mediation initiative with its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
  - The BRI has significant involvement in West Asia, with countries like Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE participating in China's economic projects.
- **Israel's Position:**
  - Israel, heavily reliant on the United States for security, is not a signatory to China's mediation initiative.
  - However, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu mentioned being invited by China for a state visit, indicating potential diplomatic engagement.

#### **China's Role in Red Sea Crisis:**

- China has not been actively involved in the crisis in the Red Sea.
- Western naval forces have been trying to ensure trade flow in this area.
- Reports suggest Yemen-based Houthis are not targeting Chinese and Russian ships.
- China's diplomacy seems aimed at protecting its interests rather than brokering peace.

#### **China's Geopolitical Role in West Asia:**

- China supports the Palestinian cause without criticizing Hamas.
- This aligns with the larger Arab posture against U.S. support for Israel.
- China's mediation diplomacy in high-stake conflicts is minimal.
- China aims to position itself against perceived Western interventionist policies.
- It seeks to increase its geopolitical weight as a responsible international actor.
- China's stance aims to counter long-standing American influence and exploit regional diplomatic shifts.

#### **China's Approach to Hegemony:**

- China aims to displace American hegemony without necessarily replacing it.
- It prefers being **perceived as a 'soft hegemon'** rather than openly challenging Western dominance.
- Beijing capitalized on the 'war on terror' era to strengthen ties with the U.S. and address its own security concerns.

#### **Focus on Internal Security:**

- China prioritizes the political security of regimes over external security concerns.
- This approach is highlighted in its mediation efforts, focusing on partners' internal stability.

#### **Challenges in Gaza Conflict:**

- The war in Gaza exposes China's aspirations as a 'want-to-be' superpower.
- Beijing lacks viable alternatives to Western-centric policies, which it criticizes as harmful to global security.

- Despite its economic size, China's influence is seen as hollow, offering little beyond financial support.

#### **Status as a Utilitarian Superpower:**

- China is perceived as a utilitarian superpower for other nations to hedge against.
- It is not yet seen as a traditional superpower with comprehensive solutions to geopolitical challenges

#### **MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION: GS Paper II: IR**

**Question:** Critically assess China's role as a rising superpower in West Asia and its influence on regional geopolitics. How does China's engagement with the region shape its foreign policy objectives and international standing? (250 Words/15 Marks)

#### **ANSWER APPROACH**

- Introduce the answer with China's growing strategic, economic, and diplomatic footprint in West Asia.
- Then examine how China navigates the traditional rivalry by maintaining ties with both.
- Further discuss how engagement with West Asia supports China's vision of a multipolar world order and offers leverage to decrease reliance on US-dominated systems.
- Also, acknowledge challenges posed by the region's complex conflicts
- Conclude by underscoring that its influence is still evolving, and its long-term impact on regional stability and power balance remains to be seen.

#### **ANSWER**

China's emergence as a rising superpower in West Asia has significantly impacted regional geopolitics, shaping its foreign policy objectives and international standing. China's engagement in West Asia is primarily driven by its economic interests.

China's approach to West Asia involves maintaining ties with both traditional rivals, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia. Despite their differences, China strategically engages with these countries to secure access to vital energy resources and expand its economic interests.

- By fostering economic cooperation and infrastructure development through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China seeks to enhance its connectivity with the region and strengthen its geopolitical foothold.
- As the world's largest importer of oil, China heavily depends on the region for energy resources to fuel its economic growth.
- This reliance has led China to adopt a policy of non-interference in regional conflicts, focusing instead on economic cooperation and infrastructure development through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
- By investing in projects such as ports, railways, and pipelines, China aims to enhance its connectivity with the region and secure access to vital resources.

#### **China's vision of a multipolar world order**

- China's engagement with West Asia aligns with its vision of a multipolar world order, where emerging powers like itself play a more significant role in global governance.

- By actively participating in regional affairs and supporting diplomatic initiatives, China aims to assert its influence and contribute to shaping the international agenda.
- By actively participating in regional affairs and supporting diplomatic initiatives, China aims to assert its influence and reduce its reliance on US-dominated systems.
- This approach offers China leverage in international negotiations and enhances its status as a global power.

### Challenges posed by the region's complex conflicts

- However, China's involvement in West Asia is not without challenges.
- The region's complex conflicts, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the war in Yemen, pose significant obstacles to China's efforts to maintain stability and balance competing interests.
- Moreover, China's policy of non-interference and reluctance to take sides in regional disputes may limit its effectiveness in addressing security challenges and promoting conflict resolution.

Thus, China's influence in West Asia is still evolving, and its long-term impact on regional stability and power balance remains to be seen. While its engagement supports its vision of a multipolar world order and offers economic opportunities, challenges posed by regional conflicts and geopolitical rivalries highlight the complexities of China's role in the region. As China continues to navigate these challenges, its influence in West Asia will likely continue to shape global geopolitics in the years to come.

### PRELIMS PRACTICE QUESTIONS:

**Question 1:** The Mahakal Temple, dedicated to Lord Shiva, is located in which Indian state?

- (a) Gujarat
- (b) Maharashtra
- (c) Madhya Pradesh
- (d) Rajasthan

**Question 2:** Which of the following terms describes the Shivling at the Mahakal Temple?

- (a) Jyotirlinga
- (b) Swayambhu
- (c) Panchamukhi
- (d) Both (a) and (b)

**Question 3:** The Mahakal Temple is known for a unique ritual performed at dawn. This ritual is called:

- (a) Shiv Tandav
- (b) Rudrabhishek
- (c) Bhasma Aarti
- (d) Maha Shivaratri

**Question 4:** The Chandrasekhar limit refers to the:

- (a) Maximum size of a planet orbiting a star
- (b) Minimum temperature required for nuclear fusion in stars
- (c) Maximum mass of a stable white dwarf star
- (d) Maximum distance a black hole can influence its surroundings

**Question 5:** Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics for his contributions to:

- (a) Development of the atomic bomb
- (b) Discovery of gravitational waves
- (c) Theoretical studies of stellar structure and evolution
- (d) Observation of the Cosmic Microwave Background radiation

**Question 6:** Cholera is caused by:

- (a) A virus
- (b) A bacterium
- (c) A parasite
- (d) A fungus

**Question 7:** The primary mode of transmission for cholera is:

- (a) Mosquito bites
- (b) Contaminated water or food
- (c) Air droplets
- (d) Blood transfusions

**Question 8:** Which of the following is the most characteristic symptom of cholera?

- (a) High Fever
- (b) Profuse watery diarrhea
- (c) Skin Rash
- (d) Swollen lymph nodes