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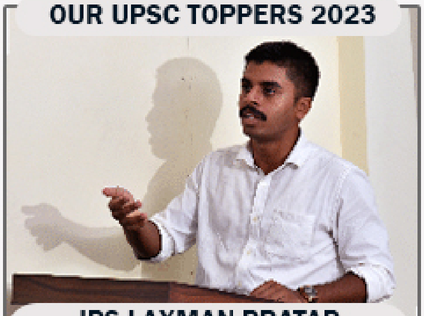
OUR UPSC TOPPERS 2023



IPS LAXMAN PRATAP
RANK - 597
FORMER ASST. COMMANDANT IN BSF
CITY COLLEGE KOLKATA

OUR UPSC TOPPERS 2024

IRS SARLA JAKHER
AIR 593
CITY COLLEGE KOLKATA

IRS TANMAY
AIR 346
IIT KHARAGPUR

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1.India's Opportunity to Put BRICS Back Together

Source: The Hindu

Why in News?

Ahead of the **18th BRICS Summit in New Delhi**, concerns have emerged over growing internal divisions within the expanded grouping. India faces the challenge of preventing BRICS from becoming an anti-Western bloc and instead restoring its original emphasis on **Global South cooperation, strategic autonomy and reformed multilateralism**.

BRICS: Changing Character

- BRICS was created to strengthen the voice of emerging economies in global governance and seek greater representation in institutions such as the **UN, IMF and WTO**.
- It has expanded from the original five members to **11 full members**, with **10 partner countries**.
- The expanded grouping represents about **45% of the world's population** and around **30% of global nominal GDP**.
- Two broad approaches are emerging:
  - **India:** BRICS as a *non-West* platform based on strategic autonomy, multi-alignment and reform of existing institutions.
  - **China-Russia:** BRICS as an increasingly *anti-West* geopolitical counterweight with alternative global institutions and mechanisms.

Major Challenges

- **Geopolitical divisions:** The Ukraine war and West Asian conflicts have intensified differences among members.
- **Regional rivalries:** New members have brought bilateral and regional disputes into the grouping, making consensus difficult.
- **Common currency debate:** China has supported greater monetary integration, including a possible common clearing currency, while India and Brazil favour **national-currency settlements** rather than a renminbi-dominated system.

- **Parallel institutions:** China's initiatives such as the Digital Silk Road and mBridge reflect an approach of creating alternative structures rather than simply reforming existing institutions.
- **UN reform:** Although BRICS promotes Global South representation, China has not explicitly supported permanent UNSC membership for India, Brazil and South Africa.
- The **May 2026 BRICS Foreign Ministers' meeting in New Delhi** reportedly struggled to produce a joint communiqué, highlighting the weakening of consensus.

What Should India Do?

India can use its BRICS chairship to refocus the grouping on reformed multilateralism rather than anti-Western geopolitics.

- Restore unanimous consensus for major declarations and initiatives.
- Promote interoperable payment systems, local-currency settlements and CBDC linkages instead of a common BRICS currency.
- Push for concrete reforms of the UN Security Council, IMF and WTO.
- Establish norms preventing bilateral territorial disputes from paralysing BRICS proceedings.
- Prioritise people-centric cooperation in areas such as disaster-resilient infrastructure, agriculture and digital public infrastructure.
- Maintain strategic autonomy while continuing engagement with Western groupings and partners.

Prelims Practice

Q. With reference to BRICS, consider the following statements:

1. BRICS was originally established to strengthen the voice of emerging economies in global governance.
2. India favours using BRICS primarily as an anti-Western geopolitical bloc.
3. India has advocated greater use of national currencies for trade rather than necessarily adopting a common BRICS currency.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 1 and 3 only
(c) 2 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (b)

Mains Practice

Q. BRICS is facing a tension between becoming an anti-Western geopolitical bloc and remaining a platform for reformed multilateralism. Discuss India's role in preserving the strategic relevance and cohesion of BRICS.
(15 marks, 250 words)

2.ISRO's New Space Model: Expanding Private Participation Without Privatisation

Source: Business Standard

Why in News?

ISRO has clarified that the ongoing expansion of private-sector participation in India's space sector does **not amount to privatisation of ISRO**. Under the reforms initiated in 2020 and institutionalised through the **Indian Space Policy 2023**, routine manufacturing and operational activities are being opened to private companies and PSUs, while ISRO increasingly focuses on frontier research, advanced missions and strategic technologies.

India's New Space Ecosystem

- **ISRO:** Focuses on frontier R&D, planetary and deep-space missions, human spaceflight and strategic national-security payloads.
- **IN-SPACe:** Functions as an autonomous, single-window body for **authorising, promoting and supervising Non-Government Entities (NGEs)** in the space sector.
- **NSIL:** Acts as the commercial arm, responsible for technology commercialisation, demand aggregation and transfer of mature technologies to industry.
- The Indian space economy is estimated at **$8.4–9 billion**, with an ambition to reach **$44 billion by 2033**.
- Space-tech startups have grown from **1 in 2014 to over 440 by mid-2026**.
- FDI is permitted through the automatic route up to **74% in satellites, 49% in launch vehicles/spaceports and 100% in components**.

How the Model Works?

India is moving towards a division of responsibilities rather than complete privatisation:

Area	Role
Routine/operational systems	Increasingly manufactured by private industry and PSUs
Frontier R&D	Led by ISRO
Regulation & authorisation	IN-SPACe
Commercialisation & technology transfer	NSIL
Mature launch vehicles	Transfer to domestic industrial consortia
Next-generation technologies	ISRO continues development

Mature systems such as **PSLV, SSLV and LVM3** are being opened for greater industrial participation, while ISRO continues work on next-generation systems such as the **NGLV**.

India vs NASA Model

- **NASA:** Primarily functions as an anchor customer, purchasing commercial space services through contracts with private companies.
- **India:** ISRO continues to retain a stronger developer-operator role, while **NSIL transfers mature technologies** and **IN-SPACe regulates private participation**.
- Both models seek to prevent public scientific institutions from being burdened by routine manufacturing and commercial activities.
- India's key difference is that it is still **building and incubating its private space ecosystem**, whereas the U.S. already has a mature commercial aerospace industry.

Challenges and Way Ahead

- Indian startups face comparatively limited access to large-scale private capital.
- MSMEs need to move from component manufacturing to **full-fledged aerospace systems integration**.
- India needs stronger frameworks for **third-party liability, space insurance and orbital debris management**.
- Faster and standardised **technology-transfer mechanisms** can help private firms commercialise ISRO technologies.

- Government departments can provide predictable demand through **long-term procurement and anchor contracts**.
- A comprehensive statutory **Space Activities Bill** could provide greater legal certainty for private space activities.

Prelims Practice

Q. With reference to India's space-sector reforms, consider the following statements:

1. IN-SPACe acts as a single-window body for authorising and promoting Non-Government Entities in the space sector.
2. NSIL is responsible for commercialising publicly funded space technologies.
3. The reforms envisage complete privatisation of ISRO's frontier research and strategic space missions.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 2 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (a)

Mains Practice

Q. India's space-sector reforms seek to expand private participation without privatising ISRO. Examine how the ISRO–IN-SPACe–NSIL framework can help India build a globally competitive space industry.
(15 marks, 250 words)

3.India's Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS)

Source: TOI

Why in News?

The UK has recognised India's Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS) as a qualifying carbon-pricing framework under its Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM).

About CCTS

- Notified in June 2023 under the Energy Conservation (Amendment) Act, 2022.

- Aims to create an Indian Carbon Market and promote industrial decarbonisation.
- Uses tradable Carbon Credit Certificates (CCCs), with 1 CCC representing 1 tonne of CO_2 equivalent.
- Administered by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE).
- The National Steering Committee for the Indian Carbon Market (NSCICM) is co-chaired by the Ministry of Power and MoEFCC.

Key Features

- Has a compliance mechanism for obligated energy-intensive industries and a voluntary offset mechanism.
- Gradually transitions from the Perform, Achieve and Trade (PAT) scheme towards emission-intensity targets.
- Entities performing better than their emission-intensity targets can earn CCCs, while underperforming entities need to purchase them.
- Covers direct (Scope 1) and indirect (Scope 2) emissions.

Significance

- Supports India's NDC commitments under the Paris Agreement.
- Encourages investment in cleaner technologies and low-carbon industries.
- Recognition under the UK's carbon-pricing framework can help Indian exporters reduce exposure to carbon-border costs.

4.Luxembourg

Source: The Times of India (TOI)

Why in News?

During an official visit to India, Luxembourg's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister **Xavier Bettel** strongly supported India's candidature for a **permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC)**. The visit highlighted growing India–Luxembourg diplomatic and economic relations.

About Luxembourg

- Luxembourg is a small, landlocked country in Western Europe.
- It is a constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy.
- Capital: Luxembourg City.

- Borders: Belgium, France and Germany.
- It is one of the world's smallest countries and has one of the highest GDPs per capita globally.
- Luxembourg is one of the three official capitals of the European Union, alongside Brussels and Strasbourg, and hosts several major EU institutions.

Physical Geography

- **Northern Luxembourg – Oesling:** Part of the **Ardennes** region; characterised by forested hills, rugged terrain and deep river valleys.
- **Southern Luxembourg – Gutland/Bon Pays:** Relatively lower and more fertile terrain, with agricultural land and rolling landscapes.
- **Major Rivers:**
  - **Sûre (Sauer) River** forms an important part of the eastern boundary.
  - **Alzette River** is a major tributary and flows through Luxembourg City.
  - **Moselle River** forms part of the southeastern border with Germany and supports **vineyards and wine production**.
- **Neighbouring countries:** Belgium to the west/north, Germany to the east and France to the south.

Strategic & Economic Significance

- Luxembourg is an important **financial centre**, particularly for investment funds.
- It hosts the **European Court of Justice, European Investment Bank and European Court of Auditors**.
- Its support for India's **UNSC permanent membership** is significant because India seeks greater representation for developing countries and the Global South in global decision-making.
- India–Luxembourg relations are also relevant to **investment, finance, technology and EU engagement**.

Prelims Practice

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding Luxembourg:

1. Luxembourg is a landlocked country in Western Europe.
2. It shares borders with Belgium, France and Germany.

3. The Moselle River forms part of its border with France.
4. Luxembourg City is the capital of Luxembourg.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

(a) 1, 2 and 4 only
(b) 1 and 3 only
(c) 2, 3 and 4 only
(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: (a)

Explanation: Luxembourg is landlocked and borders Belgium, France and Germany. The **Moselle forms part of Luxembourg's border with Germany**, not France. Luxembourg City is its capital.