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Table of Content

India and the Arctic: From Scientific Presence to Strategic Engagement
Ladakh's Glaciers Are Slowing Down
India's Cultural Diplomacy: Towards a National Framework for Global Engagement
Ship Recycling in India

News In Short

Lake Mead
Container Manufacturing Assistance Scheme (CMAS)
Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY)
New Menu of PM-POSHAN
Moon Base programme

INDIA AND THE ARCTIC: FROM SCIENTIFIC PRESENCE TO STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT

Context

- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs recently released its report '**India's Role and Presence in the Arctic and Antarctic Regions**', reviewing India's polar engagement and highlighting major capability gaps in the Arctic.

About India's Arctic Engagement: Past & Present

- India's Arctic engagement has historically centred on **scientific research and climate studies**, but the region is now acquiring wider strategic, economic and geopolitical significance.
- India's engagement dates back to the **1920 Svalbard Treaty**, under which **Indians have rights to access Svalbard** and undertake commercial activities, subject to the treaty's provisions.
- India established its permanent Arctic research station **Himadri at Ny-Ålesund, Svalbard, in 2008**.
 - India became an **Observer in the Arctic Council in 2013**.
- Today, Indian institutions undertake research on **climate change, atmospheric science, glaciology, marine ecosystems and polar biology**.
 - However, India's presence remains concentrated around Svalbard and is constrained by limited infrastructure and funding.

India's Arctic Policy, 2022

- It provides a broad framework for engagement. Its key objectives include:
 - Enhance scientific research and monitoring.
 - Understanding Arctic Climate Processes and their Impact on India
 - Fostering economic and human development with due regard for environmental sustainability.
 - Strengthen collaboration with Arctic countries.
 - Strengthening India's role in Arctic governance.
 - Developing national capacity in polar research and logistics.

- The Parliamentary Committee has effectively highlighted the need to **translate this policy framework into institutional and material capabilities**.

India's Arctic Credentials

- India possesses several important credentials:
 - Signatory to the **Svalbard Treaty, 1920**.
 - Permanent research station **Himadri** at Svalbard.
 - Research vessel **Sagar Kanya** and other maritime scientific capabilities have supported polar research.
 - National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR)** coordinates India's polar programmes.
 - India has maintained diplomatic and scientific cooperation with Arctic states and participated in Arctic Council activities as an Observer.

Global Efforts & Engagements

- The Arctic is increasingly shaped by the interests of **Russia, the US, Canada and the Nordic countries**, while China has expanded its presence despite being a non-Arctic state.
- China refers to itself as a '**near-Arctic state**' and has invested in polar research, infrastructure and shipping.
- The **Arctic Council** is the **principal forum** for cooperation on issues of sustainable development and environmental protection, but geopolitical conflicts have hindered cooperation.
- For India, contact with **Russia, the US and Nordic nations**, and involvement in Arctic scientific and governance processes, give opportunities to balance strategic and developmental goals.

Significance for the World and India

- Climate Security:** The warming Arctic has global climate consequences. The emerging research relates **Arctic sea-ice variability with South Asian monsoon activity**.
 - The consequences of Arctic changes for **food and livelihood security** are important in light of the considerable dependence of agriculture and livelihoods in India on monsoon rainfall.
- Sea-Level Rise:** Melting Arctic ice adds to global sea-level changes, threatening low-lying coastal areas and island nations.
 - For India, this has ramifications for its **coastal population, infrastructure, ecosystems and disaster management**.

- **Strategic and Economic Importance:** Opening maritime channels, especially the Northern Sea Route, could alter global shipping patterns.
 - ♦ The Arctic has a wealth of **energy and critical minerals** and will become more important in future supply chains.
- **Geopolitical Importance:** Growing global involvement is making the Arctic a new theatre for geopolitical rivalry.
 - ♦ India therefore needs to see the region through both **climate-security and geopolitical lenses**.

Related Concerns & Issues

- **Institutional Fragmentation:** Arctic responsibilities are dispersed throughout various divisions of the Ministry of External Affairs.
- **No Dedicated Arctic Envoy:** India does not have a senior official solely responsible for polar diplomacy.
- **Poor Research Infrastructure:** India lacks a specialised **Polar Research Vessel (PRV)** of its own.
- **Resource Crunch:** The Committee observed that India allocated just roughly **₹17.53 crore for Arctic operations in 2024-25**, highlighting a discrepancy between stated aspirations and budgetary provisions.
- **Limited Pan-Arctic Access:** Reliance on foreign boats and partnerships limits prolonged research outside of Svalbard.
- **Geopolitical Uncertainty:** Tensions between Russia and the West, and increasingly fierce strategic competition, hamper collaboration in the Arctic.

Way Forward

- **Appoint a Polar Ambassador/Special Envoy** to head India's Arctic diplomacy and guarantee a whole-of-government approach.
- **Expedite the Polar Research Vessel** and consider an interim acquisition/chartering strategy to expand operational access.
- **Increase dedicated funding** for Arctic research, logistics, satellite monitoring and climate modelling.
- Strengthen collaboration with **Nordic countries, Russia, the US and other Arctic stakeholders**.
- Integrate Arctic observations into **Indian monsoon prediction, coastal development, and climate-risk assessment**.

- Develop knowledge in arctic shipping, vital minerals, governance of the ocean and Arctic technologies.
- Scientific collaboration, environmental sustainability and strategic interests.

Source: IE

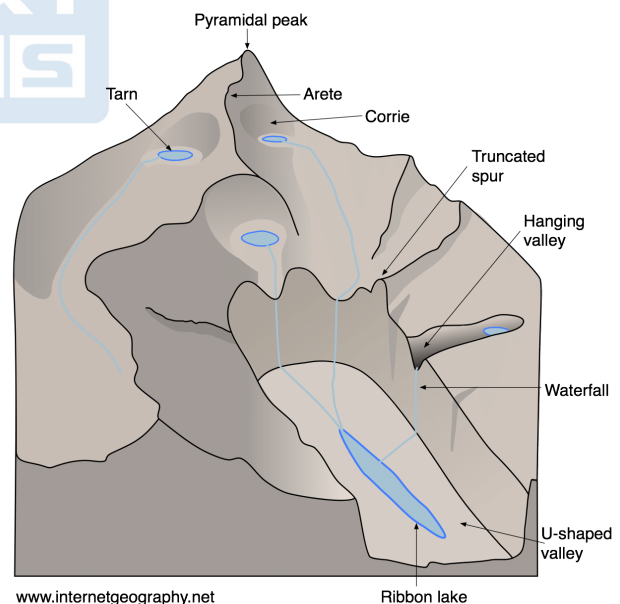
LADAKH'S GLACIERS ARE SLOWING DOWN

Context

- According to a new study, between 1992 and 2023, 12 glaciers in the Zaskar region of Ladakh slowed at an average rate of **2.4 m/year per decade**, along with increased glacier thinning.

What are Glaciers?

- They are **large and thick masses of ice** that are formed on land due to the accumulation of snow over centuries.
- They hold **70 per cent of the Earth's freshwater**, currently encompassing around **10 percent** of the planet's land area.
- Glacial processes of erosion, transportation, and deposition, creating distinct erosional and **depositional glacial landforms**.



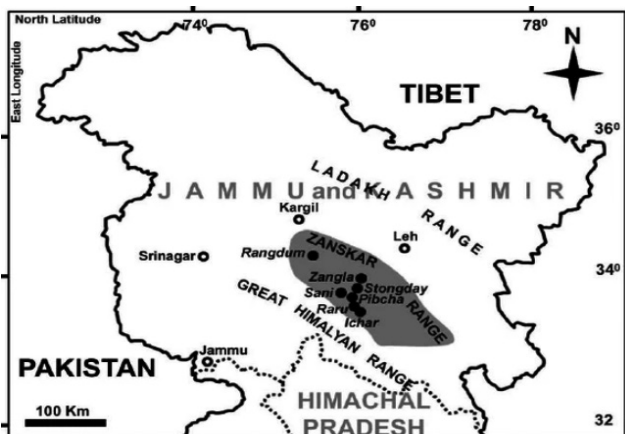
Key Findings of the Study

- **Glacier slowdown:** The research found that in the past three decades the surface velocity of glaciers has gone down.
- **Accelerating thinning:** The glacier surface thinned at a faster rate, from **0.22 m/year** in 2000–05 to **0.57 m/year** in 2015–20.

- ♦ **Reason:** Since warmer temperatures cause more loss and thinning of ice, when glaciers thin their driving stress decreases and this reduces the force, driving ice down slope.
- **Reduced ice transport:** Slower glaciers transfer less ice from the high elevation accumulation zones to lower elevation where melting occurs.
- **Regional variation:** Not all the glaciers reacted to warming in the same way. Factors influencing glacier flow speed include glacier geometry, debris cover, and conditions at the glacier terminus (snout).

Significance of Zaskar Glaciers

- The Zaskar region contains some of the **largest and most widespread glaciers** in the Himalaya. **Example:** Machoi Glacier, Parkachik Glacier etc.
- They are **natural reservoirs of fresh water** that release it as meltwater throughout the warmer months.
- This seasonal supply feeds the rivers, ecosystems, farms and local residents in the otherwise parched Ladakh area.



Implications for the Indus Basin

- Glaciers contribute to **Indus River flows** during the **dry summer** months, when rainfall is limited.
- Initially, accelerated glacier melting can increase river discharge, a phenomenon known as **peak water**. However, once glaciers lose a substantial share of their stored ice:
 - ♦ Meltwater contribution is expected to decline.
 - ♦ Long-term water availability may become more uncertain.
 - ♦ Risks may emerge for agriculture, hydropower, ecosystems and downstream water security.

Global Initiatives to Conserve glaciers

- **Paris Agreement 2015:** Aims to limit global warming to well below 2°C, preferably to 1.5°C, above pre-industrial levels.

- **High Mountain Summit (WMO):** Recognizes mountains and glaciers as climate sentinels and promotes early warning systems and enhanced data sharing.
- **International Cryosphere Climate Initiative (ICCI):** Established in **2009** as a result of the **COP-15**, it is a network of senior policy experts and researchers that works with governments and organizations.
 - ♦ It creates and implements initiatives designed to preserve the Earth's cryosphere.
- **The National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem (NMSHE)** is a government initiative aimed at addressing climate change and its impacts on the Himalayan region.
 - ♦ It focuses on developing sustainable strategies, and addressing issues like glacial melt, natural hazards, and biodiversity loss.
- **The Arctic Council:** It is a forum for Arctic countries to collaborate on environmental protection, sustainable development, and climate change mitigation in the Arctic region.
- **Global Ice Monitoring Initiatives:** Like the World Meteorological Organization's **Global Cryosphere Watch (GCW)** and the European Space Agency's **CryoSat mission** use satellite-based remote sensing to monitor changes in glaciers and ice sheets.

Way Ahead

- Establish a **coordinated Himalayan glacier-monitoring network** using satellite remote sensing, drones and ground-based observations to track glacier mass balance, thickness, velocity and meltwater discharge.
- **Expand automated weather stations** at higher elevations to generate reliable data on temperature, snowfall, precipitation and radiation, which are essential for accurate glacier modelling.
- **Protect wetlands, springs and high-altitude ecosystems** that can act as natural water buffers, while preventing unsustainable development in fragile mountain areas.

Source: TH

INDIA'S CULTURAL DIPLOMACY: TOWARDS A NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT

Context

- India is strengthening its cultural diplomacy and international engagement through a Cultural Exchange Programmes with 98 countries.

What is Cultural Diplomacy?

- Cultural diplomacy is the **exchange of ideas, information, art, language and other aspects of culture** among nations and peoples in order to foster mutual understanding.
 - ♦ It functions as a soft but potent force for unity and coexistence.
- Following independence, several countries centred their foreign policy around culture or development policies around inter-state cooperation in culture.
- **Examples of Soft Power:** The formation of the EU is an excellent example of the triumph of soft power to settle centuries of dispute and conflict in Europe.
 - ♦ Immediately after World War II, school children from France and Germany were sent on exchange programmes to learn about each other's culture, language and customs.

Pillars of India's Cultural Diplomacy

- **Saman (Peace):** India's commitment to peace is reflected in its long history of non-violence and diplomatic engagements.
 - ♦ India has played a proactive role in **UN peacekeeping missions** contributing personnel to over 40 missions globally.
 - ♦ The country's **peace-oriented foreign policy** combined with its non-aligned status has bolstered its image as a peaceful and stable power.
 - ♦ India's advocacy for **global South-South cooperation** has earned respect from developing nations which view India as a model for economic development.
- **Samriddhi (Prosperity):** India's economic success through initiatives such as Make in India and Startup India has positioned it as an emerging global economic powerhouse with an emerging global market.
 - ♦ The country's growing trade relationships particularly with **Africa, Southeast Asia and the Middle East** showcase its economic influence.
- **Suraksha (Security):** India's strategy for regional and global security is based on its alliances with significant powers like the **United States, Russia and Japan**.
 - ♦ India has established itself as a crucial actor in Indo-Pacific security balancing its historical non-aligned stance with active involvement in security platforms like the **QUAD**.

- ♦ India's emphasis on counterterrorism and humanitarian efforts reflects its position as a contributor to regional security.
- **Sanskriti (Culture):** Bollywood, classical arts, yoga and food are among the most visible exports of Indian culture.
 - ♦ **The International Day of Yoga** which is observed all around the world exemplifies how India expanded its cultural history to reach out to global audiences.
 - ♦ **Indian diaspora** play a vital role in spreading Indian culture and values. Making its impact in an interconnected globalized world.

Initiatives taken by Government

- **Global Engagement Scheme (GES):** The **Ministry of Culture** promotes India's cultural relations with other countries through the **GES**.
 - ♦ **GES comprises four major components:** the International Cultural Exchange Programme (ICEP), Project Mausam, Brihattar Bharat and the Scheme for Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Diverse Cultural Traditions of India.
- **The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR),** an autonomous organisation under the Ministry of External Affairs, promoting Indian culture overseas and strengthening people-to-people ties through its network of Indian Cultural Centres and cultural programmes abroad.
- **Multilateral Cultural Engagement:** Cultural diplomacy is also pursued through India's participation in forums such as BRICS, G20, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and BIMSTEC.

Challenges

- **Competition from Other Countries' Soft Power:** China, South Korea, Japan and other countries spend a lot to promote their culture abroad.
- **Limited Institutional and Financial Resources:** Organisations like Indian Council for Cultural Relations are limited in terms of budgetary and manpower resources compared to similar institutions of major powers.
- **Underutilisation of Cultural Assets:** India's rich cultural heritage, languages, literature, museums and historical sites are not always effectively showcased internationally.
- **Digital and language barriers:** Compared to competitors, Indian cultural content has less global accessibility due to limited translation and digital dissemination.

- **Commercialisation of culture:** Excessive commercialisation leads to the commodification, or dilution of traditional cultural practices and reduces their authenticity.

Way Ahead

- **Strengthen institutional capacity:** Enhance the funding, manpower and global presence of ICCR and Indian Cultural Centres to expand India's cultural outreach.
- **Digital Diplomacy:** Use OTT platforms, social media, virtual museums, digital archives and multilingual content to make Indian culture accessible to global audiences.
- **Strengthen Diaspora Partnerships:** Engage the Indian diaspora as cultural ambassadors to promote Indian traditions, languages, festivals and values abroad.

Concluding remarks

- India's soft power capability has significantly increased in the age of globalization fueled by its cultural diplomacy, economic advancement and strategic alliances.
- As India maneuvers through the intricacies of international geopolitics its soft power will be an essential asset for cultivating relationships, encouraging mutual respect and promoting its interests globally.

Source: PIB, DD NEWS

SHIP RECYCLING IN INDIA

In Context

- India has emerged as a leading destination for environmentally sound ship recycling.

Ship recycling

- It refers to the process of dismantling vessels with the purpose of extracting and recovering materials for reuse, particularly the steel.
- It is an integral part of the maritime lifecycle, enabling ships that have reached the end of their operational life to be dismantled in a safe, environmentally sound and resource-efficient manner.

Present Status in India

- India's ship recycling sector has evolved into a modern and internationally aligned industry.
- **India ranked first globally** in ship recycling in 2025.
- India's contribution of global ship recycling **increased to 35.4% in 2025, up from 30.1% in 2024.**

- In India, the volume of ship recycling increased from 1.86 million Gross Tonnes (GT) in **2024 to 2.99 million GT in 2025**. That's an almost 60 per cent increase in the volume being recycled.
- India aims to nearly **double its ship recycling capacity to about 9 million light displacement tons (LDT)** under the Maritime India Vision (MIV) 2030.

Importance

- **Environmental:** Controls re-use of ship for disposal of end-of-life ships
 - ♦ Less chance of marine and coastal pollution.
 - ♦ Hazardous materials are recycled appropriately for safe handling, and strict regulatory control.
 - ♦ It also contributes to reduction of Green House Gases and pushes India's sustainability and de-carbonisation goals.
- **Sector resources:** The steel industry is the largest user of ferrous waste from ship recycling in the country.
 - ♦ It lowers reliance on imported raw materials and enhances security of supply.
 - We are heading to a circular economy and efficient use of resources with the recovery of steel and its reuse.
 - Steel from recycled steel takes far less energy than steel from virgin sources.
- **Economic and Industrial:** Ship recycling generates large scale employment opportunities.
 - ♦ More jobs would be created through a large number of subsidiaries & activities. This comprises transport, re-rolling mills, equipment suppliers and waste management services.

Do you know?

- The recycling of **Ex-INS Viraat at Alang, Gujarat** was a landmark project in ship-recycling sector in India.
- The aircraft carrier was **decommissioned in March 2017** after serving 30 years with the Indian Navy and 27 years with the Royal Navy and arrived at Alang in September 2020.
- Viraat has been recognised by the **Guinness World Records as one of the world's longest serving warships** and clocked over 22,622 flying hours, 2,252 days at sea and over 5.88 lakh nautical miles.

- The recycling showcased **India's ability to safely dismantle large and complex vessels**, recovering valuable materials and promoting environmental protection, occupational safety, employment and economic activity.

Initiatives taken by government

- The **Alang-Sosiya ship recycling cluster** in Gujarat forms the backbone of India's recycling capacity.
 - ♦ It is recognised as the world's largest ship recycling hub. The cluster accounts for approximately 98% of India's ship recycling activity.
 - ♦ India aims to nearly double its ship recycling capacity to about **9 million light displacement tons (LDT)**.
- **Ship Recycling Act, 2019:** The Act provides the primary legal framework for regulating ship recycling in India.
 - ♦ It gives domestic effect to international standards. It also designates the Directorate General of Shipping as the National Authority.
 - ♦ The Act mandates authorisation, certification, inspection, and enforcement mechanisms.
- **Ship Recycling Rules, 2021:** The Rules operationalise the Act by prescribing procedural and technical requirements.
 - ♦ These include facility authorisation, ship recycling plans, hazardous material management, worker safety, training, and reporting obligations.
- **Ship Recycling Regulations, 2026:** The Regulations strengthen implementation through detailed operational, safety, and environmental standards.
 - ♦ They support uniform compliance and effective monitoring across ship recycling facilities.
- The **Hong Kong International Convention** for the Safe and Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships is the principal international instrument governing ship recycling.
 - ♦ It lays down legally binding requirements for ships and recycling facilities.
- **Inventory of Hazardous Materials (IHM).** It is an important part of environmentally sound ship recycling.

- ♦ It identifies and catalogues hazardous materials on board ships during their working lives and prior to recycling.
- **India has a life-cycle compliance system.** This would ensure transparency, traceability and proper risk mitigation before the ship recycling at licensed recycling facilities.
- **Scheme for Issuance of Credit Notes for Ship Breaking Scheme** for Issuance of Credit Notes for Ship Breaking is being formulated under the Ship Building Financial Assistance Scheme (SBFA) 2.0 to incentivise ship owners to recycle ships at compliant ship recycling yards in India.

Source :PIB

NEWS IN SHORT

LAKE MEAD

Context

- Lake Mead, the largest reservoir in the United States, has fallen to its lowest water level since it was filled nearly 90 years ago.

About

- Lake Mead is a reservoir formed by the **Hoover Dam on the Colorado River**, located on the **Arizona-Nevada border**, about 40 km east of Las Vegas.
- It is one of the **largest man-made reservoirs in the world by water capacity**. The lake was created as part of the **Boulder Canyon Project** and was named after **Elwood Mead**, former Commissioner of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.
- The reservoir supplies water to **Arizona, California and Nevada**, as well as parts of Mexico, supporting millions of people and extensive agricultural areas.



Source: Mint

CONTAINER MANUFACTURING ASSISTANCE SCHEME (CMAS)

Context

- The Union Government has proposed a ₹10,000 crore Container Manufacturing Assistance Scheme (CMAS) to strengthen domestic production of shipping containers, reduce import dependence and enhance the resilience of India's trade and logistics network.

What is Container Manufacturing Assistance Scheme (CMAS)?

- CMAS** is a Central Sector Scheme of the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, announced in the **Union Budget 2026–27**.
- With an outlay of ₹10,000 crore over **five years**, the proposed scheme supports establishment of new manufacturing facilities and expansion of existing units.
- The initiative targets an annual domestic manufacturing capacity of around **10 times** the existing container production capacity **upto 7.5 lakh Twenty-foot Equivalent Units (TEUs)**.
- It is expected to generate a market opportunity of nearly **₹80000 lakh crore** while positioning India as a reliable producer of internationally competitive shipping containers.
- To strengthen the container manufacturing value chain, the scheme provides:
 - Capital assistance for establishing new Greenfield manufacturing facilities.
 - Support for expansion of existing Brownfield manufacturing units.
 - Operational support to improve the competitiveness of domestic container manufacturing.
 - Support for testing infrastructure, skilling initiatives and capacity building.



Source: PIB

DEEN DAYAL UPADHYAYA GRAMEEN KAUSHALYA YOJANA (DDU-GKY)

Context

- The Standing Committee on Rural Development has highlighted the gap between skill training and actual employment outcomes under the **Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY)**.

About

- The **Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD)** launched the **Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY)** in 2014.
 - It is a **placement-linked skill development programme** under the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana–National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM).
- Age Limit:** Rural youth between **15 and 35** years of age (age limit is up to 45 years for women, SC/ST, persons with disabilities and minorities).
- DDU-GKY aims to skill rural youth** and promote sustainable livelihoods for rural youth through placement-linked skilling programs.
 - The scheme mandates placement-linked outcomes and continuous industry participation in curriculum design and training delivery.

Source: PIB

NEW MENU OF PM-POSHAN

In News

- Delhi government schools will have a new menu for **PM-POSHAN with additions such as idli-sambar**.

Background

- Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman (PM POSHAN) was formerly called **Mid-Day Meal Scheme** and has become a significant intervention to enhance **child nutrition, school enrolment, attendance and retention**.
- It has its **origin in 1925** when the Mid-Day Meal Program was started in the **Madras Municipal Corporation**.
- By the mid-1980s, cooked mid-day-meals had been universalised at the primary level in Gujarat, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.
- In 1995, the Center started the **National Program of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NP-NSPE)** in 2,408 blocks, which was extended to the whole country by 1997-98.

- In 2007-08 the scheme was extended to **upper-primary classes (VI-VIII)** and from April 2008 the scheme covered all eligible primary and upper-primary children throughout the country.

PM-POSHAN Scheme

- It is a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme &** being implemented by the **Ministry of Education**.
- It providing hot cooked meal to eligible children in Government and Government aided Schools
- It is implemented across the **country covering all the eligible children without any discrimination of gender and social class**.

Objectives

- It aims to address two of the pressing problems for the majority of children in India, viz. hunger and education by improving the nutritional status of eligible children in Government and Government-aided schools.
- It aims to encouraging poor children, belonging to disadvantaged sections, to attend school more regularly and help them concentrate on classroom activities.

Source :HT

MOON BASE PROGRAMME

In News

- US space agency NASA has invited ISRO to join its **Moon Base programme** building on partnership under the **Artemis Accords**.

Background

- In 2023, India had joined the **Artemis Accords, a US-led space alliance**, whose stated purpose is to evolve and commit to a common set of principles that govern the **civil exploration of outer space including the Moon**.

- ♦ India was the **27th country to sign on the Artemis Accords**. Now, a total of 70 countries are part of the Accords.
- India-US discussed expanding cooperation following the successful launch of the **joint NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR) mission** last year, as well as pursuing future science and human spaceflight technology collaborations.
- ♦ They reaffirmed their commitment to advancing the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) guidelines on the long-term sustainability of outer space activities.

Moon Base

- It is humanity's first lunar outpost, a place where astronauts will live, work, and explore near the **Moon's South Pole**.
- NASA and its partners will build the **infrastructure needed to support an enduring human presence** on the lunar surface while advancing science, technology, and exploration for the benefit of all.

Importance

- NASA's proposed Moon Base near the lunar South Pole provides opportunities for scientific discovery, resource utilisation and long-term human exploration.
- The invitation to ISRO is to bolster India-US space co-operation on the back of Shubhanshu Shukla's ISS mission and the NISAR satellite mission.

Source :TH

