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1. BELARUS AND EURASIAN DIPLOMACY

Why in news?

Belarus has opened the door for negotiations with all major players in Europe, including NATO.

What is the brief history of Belarus?

- **Administration** - Belarus is a landlocked country in Eastern Europe bordered by Russia to the northeast, Ukraine to the south, Poland to the west, and Lithuania and Latvia to the northwest.
- The Socialist Soviet Republic of Byelorussia became a founding constituent republic of the Soviet Union in 1922 and was renamed as the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (Byelorussian SSR).
- The nation became independent in 1994, Alexander Lukashenko has served as the country's first president since 1994.
- Belarus has been labeled "Europe's last dictatorship" by some Western journalists, on account of Lukashenko's self-described authoritarian style of government.
- Elections under Lukashenko's rule have been widely criticized as unfair; and according to many countries and organizations, political opposition has been violently suppressed.

- **Political Co-operation** - In 2000, Belarus and Russia signed a treaty for greater cooperation, forming the Union State.
- Belarus has closer defense and political cooperation with Russia and Russian-led regional organizations,
- Belarus has shown no aspirations for joining the European Union but nevertheless maintains a bilateral relationship with the organization, and likewise participates in two EU projects: the Eastern Partnership and the Baku Initiative.



What are the recent policy shifts of Belarus?

- Belarusian administrations had earlier expressed serious concerns about NATO's eastward expansion and deployment of troops near its borders.

- However, in the last few months, it appears that Belarus has adopted a more flexible approach towards NATO.
- Recently Belarus administration is showing interest on European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations that Belarus would remain committed to the Eastern Partnership.
- This initiative is aimed at consolidating the EU's relations with six post-Soviet republics - Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia.
- Further, Belarus has also pronounced that it would pursue a policy of non-involvement in the conflict between Russia and the West.
- This attitude of Belarus has surprised many in Russia and in the West.

What are the reasons behind the policy shift of Belarus?

- There have been several instances of Belarus radically differing and disagreeing with Russia and Russian actions in the international sphere.
- For instance, Belarus declined to recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia after the Russo-Georgian war of 2008. From the very onset of the Ukraine crisis, Belarus has expressed displeasure over the Russian approach towards Crimea.
- Belarus did not recognize or back the integration of Crimea into Russia.

- The differences between Belarus and Russia include an argument over Russian energy subsidies to Belarus and a Belarusian request for easing the terms of payment for the construction of a nuclear power plant.

What is the significance of diplomacy of Belarus?

- Belarus has been pursuing an independent foreign policy since declaring its state sovereignty on 1991.
- Unlike in Moldova and Ukraine, the ruling elite of Belarus is not divided into pro-Russian and pro-EU camps.
- As a result, Belarus has managed to diversify its international engagements and balanced its ties with both Russia and the West.
- In line with the new concept of diplomacy Belarus would gradually improve relations with members of NATO and the European Union, as well as with nations that respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Belarusian state and advance a trustful and equal dialogue.
- However, unlike Georgia and Ukraine, Belarus has never shown any willingness to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU).
- Nor has it ever threatened to leave the Russian-led political and security organizations.
- Instead, the country's leaders have repeatedly emphasized their

continued commitment to strengthening ties with Russia.

- Belarus has always abided by good neighborliness and practised a multi-vector foreign policy based on the principles of mutual respect, equality, partnership, and non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states.
- In spite of its limited resources and influence in international politics, Belarus continues to play a prominent role in the international arena to strengthen peace and promote stability in the region.

2. SIGNIFICANCE OF MISSION SHAKTI

Why in news?

India has conducted Mission Shakti, an anti-satellite (ASAT) missile test as a part of Ballistic Missile Programme.

What is Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) Programme about?

- BMD programme has two distinct phases, a two-layered shield against hostile missile attacks.
- Under Phase-I of the programme, which envisages the interception of up to 2000 km range ballistic missiles in both the endo-atmosphere and exo-atmosphere in the altitude range of 15-25 km and up to 140 km, respectively.
- Phase-I is now ready for operational deployment, possibly under the command of the Indian Air Force.

- Under Phase-II of the BMD DRDO aims to intercept longer range missiles of 5000 km range at a higher altitude of up to 400 km.
- It is important to note that though the target Indian satellite of the ASAT was hit at a range of 283 km, the missile is actually capable of shooting down hostile objects moving at 10 km per second at a far higher altitude of nearly 1200 km.
- The technological capability for intercepting such a high velocity moving target at a higher altitude has a direct bearing on Phase-II of the BMD programme which envisages intercepting missiles travelling with a similar or lesser speed at a greater distance.

What is India's further plans on Space and Defense?

- Defense Space Command** -Given the reality of the military utility of outer space, India exploits its new capability in the fourth domain of warfare to further national security interests.
- In this regard India has established an Integrated Space Cell (ISC) in 2009 to coordinate the space-related aspects of the three defense forces.
- Now, this is to be upgraded to a dedicated defense Space Command to cater to all user services.
- It may be headed by a senior military officer, with a strong component of specialists from various scientific and technical organizations including

DRDO, National Technical Research Organization (NTRO) and the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO).

- **Defense Space Research Agency (DESRA)** - India also plans to create a dedicated Defense Space Research Agency (DESRA) to harness the entire spectrum of space technologies with defense applications.
- Some of the technologies and areas that DESRA exclusively focus upon include:

1. Space Situational Awareness

(SSA) -SSA would play a critical role in mapping and cataloguing space-borne objects, including those of potential adversaries, for the purpose of devising suitable counter strategies.

2. Formation Flying -Typically, swarm missions involving satellites are utilized for various tasks where orbiting satellites operate in various formations to achieve a variety of objectives ranging from killing adversary satellites to undertaking coordinated intelligence gathering operations.

3. Launch on Demand - This capability should include rapidly deployable launch vehicles, launch facilities (both mobile and stationary) and reconfigurable / retrievable launch vehicles, among others.

4. Directed Energy Weapons (DEW)

- DEWs include systems such as

high power microwaves, precision high power lasers and light-directed energy capabilities which are essential for contactless, non-kinetic means to achieve superiority in space.

5. Electronic Warfare (EW) - It involves jamming and spoofing technologies to disturb the electromagnetic spectrum and other mission critical systems which are essential for conducting wars in a network centric environment.

6. Rogue Satellites -Used to cause damage to adversary assets, these satellites use a combination of kinetic kill vehicles, high-power microwaves, lasers, jammers, robotic instruments and chemical sprayers.

What lies ahead?

- India would need a DESRA-like agency in spite of having agency like ISRO is due to its the civilian character as ISRO access key technologies from other countries.
- ISRO is also committed to various international treaties that promote the peaceful, or non-military, uses of outer space, Hence there is a need for a military counterpart of ISRO.
- Having demonstrated its ASAT capability, India now needs to weaponize the technology and, at the same time, harness all possible space-related military technologies to put in

place an effective deterrent against potential adversaries.

- To achieve this, India needs a comprehensive space security architecture consisting of a dedicated Space Command for operational aspects of space weaponry and an exclusive Defense Space Research Agency under DRDO.

3. IMPORTANCE OF NEPALI SATELLITE

Why in news?

United States launched Nepal's first satellite, NepaliSat-1, into orbit.

What are the highlights of NepaliSat-1 launch?

- NepaliSat-1 satellite is equipped with a 5-megapixel camera and a magnetometer, is meant to gather information about Nepal's topography and earth's magnetic field.
- The NepaliSat-1 was launched by the United States under the "Birds-3" satellite launch to International Space Station project.
- The BIRDS project is a UN initiative to help countries launch their first satellite and the Japanese Kyushu Institute of Technology has been involved in this particular project.
- Under the project, there was also a satellite from Sri Lanka, named Raavana-1 that was launched along with the NepaliSat-1.

- Nepal government is estimated to have spent a total of 20 million Nepali rupees (roughly \$180,000) for the development and launch of the satellite as well as the construction of the ground station.
- Though a humble beginning, with the launching of NepaliSat-1 Nepal has entered the Space-Era.

What is Nepal's further plan on space exploration?

- The country is working on a second satellite, Nepal PQ-1, to be launched in 2020.
- Given the growing demand in the telecommunications sector, Nepal is reported to be working with France to launch a communication satellite in 2022.
- That this is being made a priority should come as no surprise given Nepal's own needs.
- For instance, currently, Nepal's service providers rely on foreign communication satellites for meeting their requirement in the broadcasting and telecommunication sectors, but Kathmandu clearly understands the cost-effectiveness of having its own satellite.
- The growth projection in areas including direct-to-home (DTH) and rural internet connectivity is pushing Kathmandu to expand its own assets in outer space.

What is India's aid in Nepal's Space explorations?

- Nepal and Sri Lanka chose to avoid India and China — the two established space powers in the neighborhood to launch their satellites.
- This comes after Bangladesh launched its Bangabandhu-1 satellite on an improved version of SpaceX Falcon rocket in 2018.
- India had reportedly offered assistance to launch the satellite but because the satellite weighed 3,500 kg, it was beyond the Indian launch capacity at the time.
- On the other hand, both Nepal and Bangladesh are part of the Indian-launched South Asia Satellite (SAS) or GSAT-9 that has significance in the context of communication, e-governance, and disaster management.
- The SAS is expected to enhance communication and provide better disaster links in the Indian neighborhood.
- More specifically with respect to Nepal, under the SAS, India agreed to provide at least one transponder with a bandwidth of 24,000 to 36,000 MHz to Nepal, though Nepal had to establish its own ground stations.
- Further, Nepali engineers are to be trained at Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) training centers in India.

- Each of the participating countries Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka have received 36 Mbps of bandwidth from this satellite.

What is the significance of India's space diplomacy?

- Space is often discussed in the context of emerging geopolitical competition between major powers, in spite of this India is grasping other dynamics which has its own significance.
- India used outer space to entice its neighbors, giving New Delhi a high-profile success while also satisfying some real needs of its neighbors.
- Going beyond GSAT-9, India is reported to have invited the South Asian neighborhood also to use the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System, a mini-version of the U.S. Global Positioning System.
- India could also be fielding its remote sensing satellites to help its neighbors as the growth for downstream applications picks up pace.

4. OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS IN BRI FOR AFRICA

Why in news?

Annual Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) Forum meeting is scheduled to be held in Beijing in late April.

What is Belt and Road Initiative?

- BRI, also known as the One Belt, One Road initiative, was introduced by

President Xi Jinping in September 2013.

- It involves China underwriting billions of dollars of investment in infrastructure projects to connect China with rest of the world, on the lines of the ancient Silk Road.
- It is an ambitious project straddling countries in Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America.
- This encompasses investments in infrastructure projects in various fields such as construction, power, transport, communication, and energy.
- China has proposed “policy coordination, facilities connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration and people-to-people bonds,” as the five major goals of cooperation underlying the BRI.

What is China's plan on Africa?

- Initially, Africa found limited space in the conceptualization of the BRI.
- However, over the years, the scheme has become an important part of the continent's relationship with Africa.
- In fact, the declaration issued at the end of the 2018 Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) notes that “Africa, being part of the historical and natural extension of the Belt and Road, has been an important participant in this initiative”.

- South Africa, Ethiopia, Kenya and Egypt were some of the initial countries to sign up to this project.
- In addition, China managed to get the support of Djibouti by opening its first overseas military support base in the country in 2017.
- As per the latest count, the African Union and 37 African countries have agreed to join the BRI.
- The Belt and Road Initiative provides an opportunity for African countries to address the infrastructure deficit on the continent.
- African leaders have in turn prioritized infrastructure development as the main pillar underpinning national as well as regional development.
- This task requires significant financing and Chinese support in this regard will help them achieve their infrastructure goals.

What are the opportunities before Africa?

- China's increasing role in Africa, including its assistance in infrastructure development, is generating competing narratives across the continent.
- For decades, African countries looked towards traditional donors, such as the USA, France and the UK or multilateral institutions (the World Bank and the IMF) for addressing the huge infrastructure gap.

- However, the conditional terms of lending and emphasis on good governance have left them wary of continuing to look at these sources for infrastructure funding.
- In contrast, Chinese approach eschews conditionality related to good governance or human rights and concentrates solely on the task of infrastructure building, which offers an attractive alternative for these countries.
- African leaders often reiterate that cooperation with China through the Belt and Road Initiative will broaden the continent's developmental prospects.

What are the Risks involved?

- BRI leaves African countries open to the risk of unsustainable debt and mounting dependence on China.
- Voices in countries across Africa from Djibouti to Zambia accuse China of indulging in debt trap diplomacy.
- They claim that China has laden a number of countries with heavy debt and may exploit the defaulters by appropriating vital strategic assets.
- There are fears that Djibouti may face the same fate as that of Sri Lanka, in 2015, Sri Lanka ceded control of Hambantota port on a 99 years lease to China as it defaulted on repayment of loans.
- Similarly, in December 2018, a leaked report linked to the Kenyan auditor general claimed that the Mombasa

- port was used as collateral for the \$3.2 billion loan from China for development of SGR, a BRI project.
- This leaves the Mombasa port exposed to seizure by the Chinese government in the event of a default.
- Many questions have been raised about the risks involved in borrowing from external powers for large infrastructure projects.
- China continues be a major bilateral lender, though multilateral institutions and traditional powers also contribute to Kenya's overall external debt.

5. INDIA-IRAN OIL DILEMMA

What is the issue?

US administration has decided not to extend waivers from sanctions on those countries that continue to buy oil from Iran.

What is India's stand on Iranian oil Imports?

- The United States, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, three of the world's great energy producers, are committed to ensuring that global oil markets remain adequately supplied.
- The nations have also agreed to take timely action to assure that global demand is met as all Iranian oil is removed from the market.
- The US administration is clear that it is not ready to extend Significant Reduction Exceptions to the countries which import oil from Iran.

- Indian Petroleum ministry has a robust plan for an adequate supply of crude oil to Indian refineries and Indian refineries are fully prepared to meet the national demand for petrol, diesel & other petroleum products.
- But while India may have possibly been ready for additional reduction of oil imports from Iran, New Delhi is certainly not ready for a complete halt.
- Given the centrality of India in the U.S. Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy, Indian government may have assumed that India will get another exemption from the sanctions that are to kick start on May 1.

What are the concerns before India?

- The decision not to extend another round of Significant Reduction Exceptions (SREs) will have a significant impact on big Asian oil importers including India, China, Japan, and South Korea, which had each initially secured a 180-day exemption from U.S. sanctions last year.
- Among these countries, India is likely to be significantly impacted.
- India is the second largest importer of Iranian crude oil after China, and New Delhi is reported to be buying a considerable share of its oil from Tehran, making Iran the third largest oil supplier to India after Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

- The U.S. decision is likely to create some negative reaction in New Delhi and raise once again the rhetoric of the United States as an unreliable partner that encroaches on Indian interests and sovereignty.
- In truth, India does have alternate options – Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and even the United States are potential suppliers that could replace Iran as an oil source.

What are the benefits for India in importing Iranian oil?

- There are a number of strategic reasons why India wants to continue buying Iranian oil in spite of other options available.
- For instance, Shia Iran is seen in New Delhi as an ally against the predominantly Sunni Pakistan. Pakistan's traditionally close relations with Saudi Arabia made Iran a possible ally.
- Iran's position on Pakistan's flank is also attractive, as is the perception of common Indian-Iranian interest in countering Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan.
- From a wider perspective, New Delhi also sees Iran as a conduit to Central Asia, a region that India considers strategically vital.
- India has invested in Chabahar port in Iran and highways that provide an alternative route to both Afghanistan and Central Asia, bypassing Pakistan.

What are the dilemmas before India?

- India has invested more in its relationship with Saudi Arabia and other anti-Iranian Gulf monarchies.
- Such improving relationships will put pressure on India to moderate its support for Iran.
- India has also grown increasingly close to Israel, a country that is the source of vital military equipment for India, but which is also engaged in severe competition with Iran.
- New Delhi has so far managed to insulate these relationships, but they also mean that India cannot be seen to be going out of its way to support Tehran.
- Iran's positioning on a number of issues that matter to India is no longer very reassuring to New Delhi.
- For instance, Iran appears to be more closely aligned to Pakistan on Afghanistan than before, as evidenced by Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan's recent trip to Iran.

6. SRI LANKA EASTER BOMBINGS

Why in news?

Religious radical groups has attacked Sri Lanka through series of bomb blasts claiming lives of 400 civilians.

What is the brief history of terrorism in India?

- Sri Lanka witnessed one of the world's bloodiest and longest civil wars in modern history from 1983 to 2009

when the Tamil secessionist movement was at its peak.

- During this time coordinated bombings using improvised explosive devices (IEDs) were a regular phenomenon.
- The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) extensively used IEDs against an array of targets, including Sinhalese residential areas, high-value targets like lawmakers and heads of state, and financial hubs like the Central Bank of Sri Lanka.
- The Tamil separatists were not alone in using such tactics, Maoist offshoots of the erstwhile Ceylon Communist Party regularly used IEDs and hand-assembled mines to carry out ambushes and attacks.
- In fact, through the now-defunct Revolutionary Internationalist Movement, Sri Lankan guerrillas had well established channels of skill sharing and training with the Maoists of India and Nepal.

What is the pattern of the attacks conveys?

- Soon after the Easter bombings experts analyzed the pattern of attacks and matched that of IS and that the scale clearly shows signs of the involvement of a foreign hand.
- Later the official media of IS terror group announced it is responsible for the attacks and swear allegiance to the cause of the Caliphate.

- Before IS claimed the attack as their own, three main reasons were cited by those who said the group was responsible.
- **Choice of places** - Choice of Christian churches (over sites specific to Sri Lanka's Buddhist majority) and the suggested plot that this was a revenge attack for the Christchurch mosque shootings.
- **Scale of Attacks** - The "scale of attacks," proves that the attack wouldn't have been achieved without foreign assistance.
- **Suicide Bombing** - The use of suicide bombers which is infrequent in South Asia but very common for IS in the Middle East.
- As for suicide bombings, before IS or even al-Qaeda were even conceived, the LTTE had an entire wing dedicated to this form of warfare.

What are the concerns created by the attacks?

- The Easter Sunday bombings might actually herald a new era of pan-South Asian jihadist violence one that has learned some hard lessons from the fall of the Caliphate in Mosul.
- **Spread of Islamic Radicalism** - The IS uses various mediums to spread religious radicalism and attract youth from different parts of the globe.
- The IS network uses the local religious organizations for their operations, and also uses the regional communal strife between Muslims and other

communities the recent attack in Sri Lanka has proved this nature of the IS.

- **Emergence of coordinated attacks** - IS has a demonstrated history of taking credit for the smallest of deeds by Muslim insurgents, no matter how remotely they were connected to the main network based in Syria and Iraq.
- This habit is an essential part of their propaganda tactics of appearing larger and more global than they actually were.
- **Lack of Preparedness** - Before the bombings there were inputs from Sri Lanka's own Muslim population that said something was up but the Lankan security establishment just didn't act.
- Either the Sri Lankan military and police didn't know how to act on this input or there is a suspicion that elements in the country's polity, including the defense and security establishments, wanted this to happen as a way of damaging the incumbent government.
- **Emergence of IS in South Asia** - The Easter Sunday bombings may have breathed new life into the Islamic State brand in its post-Mosul existence.
- But this new version of IS won't just be a copy of what was in Syria and Iraq, it will be South Asia's own.

- One that has evolved from the failed mission in Syria and adapted to suit local political and social conditions.

What lies ahead?

- In the wake of Sri Lanka's worst terrorist carnage of the decade, the national narrative will turn its focus on security and the threat posed yet again by another minority.
- It is likely that the emergence of a national security state will empower the security apparatus at the cost of the minorities.
- Thus Sinhala-Buddhist majoritarianism will triumph once again.

- After the end of the war with the LTTE in 2009, fringe Sinhala Buddhist extremists riding on Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism searched for a new enemy and the Muslims fit their narrative.
- This should be seen in the context of the global portrayal of Muslims as extremists and radicals.
- The drive against 'halal' certification, protest against Burqas, and attacks against Muslim business houses all took place under the watchful eyes of the Rajapakse government.
- Radicalized Muslims consider the state responsible for attacks on them, Sinhala speaking Christians were seen as part of the larger Sinhalese community.
- Increasingly, the state and the majority Sinhala community are seen as synonymous and responsible for the injustice meted to Muslims despite their support for the state against the LTTE.
- **Failure of Intelligence** -India's intelligence capabilities are almost entirely focused on Pakistan.
- Given that al-Qaeda's traditional South Asian networks have been very close to the Pakistani military establishment, Indian intelligence could have picked up said "extremist chatter" from the AQIS network alone.
- Intelligence inputs provided by India, which contained a more specific warning of an impending attack, was treated as a routine matter.

7. SRI LANKA BOMBINGS AND IMPACTS TO INDIA

What is the issue?

The Sri Lankan bombings leaves a strong message in terms of internal security and religious harmony for India.

What are the factors behind Easter attack?

- **Factors of Muslim Alienation** -Sri Lanka has a history of ethno-religious conflict, the first major conflict between Tamil speaking Muslims and Sinhalese occurred in 1915.
- After independence, Muslims were successfully co-opted by the Sinhala majority in order to wean them away from Tamils who began to demand a separate homeland and politically challenge Sinhala majoritarianism.

- Though a national alert was issued by the police chief, security was not beefed up in the church or the hotels located in the High security zone.
- It would not be an exaggeration to say that the government machinery was more focused on the threat that LTTE sympathizers could pose and dismissed any threats that could be posed by radicalized Muslims.
- It also ignored the fact that Muslims from Sri Lanka have joined ISIS and local groups may have been infected by the latter's radical narrative especially in the aftermath of several attacks on Muslims.
- **Dysfunctional government** -The politicization of the suicide bombings has already began with the President and the Prime Minister blaming each other for the security failure.
- Differences between them had reached such a level that they even prepared to send two separate delegations to represent the country at the UN Human Rights Council, although sanity prevailed and a joint delegation was eventually sent.
- The Prime Minister has publicly stated that he was not invited to National Security Council meetings and was kept out of the loop on issues concerning national security.

What is the status of IS presence in India?

- **North India States** - This part of the nation regularly sees communal clashes.
- States such as Jammu and Kashmir, MP and UP in North India have seen some IS influence on the youth.
- **South Indian States** - The southern states have sent maximum recruits to IS.
- Reportedly, almost 90% of all recruits who have gone to Syria are from the southern States.
- A majority of those arrested while preparing to launch an attack are also from southern States.
- These include Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Telangana, Karnataka and Maharashtra.
- Most recruits from Kerala who joined the Islamic State were working in the Gulf.
- Otherwise, they had come back from the Gulf with an already developed liking for IS's extreme ideology.

What is the operational structure of IS in India?

- The IS had not provided any kind of organizational support to its recruits in India.
- It has largely focused on inspiring the youth to either migrate to Syria and Iraq or carry out attacks in India with their own resources.
- Many Indians have not even had a handler and have merely come

together on their own to allegedly carry out attacks in the name of IS.

- They have formed various groups such as the Ummat E Mohammadiya, HarkatulHarb-e-Islam, AnsarulTawheed fi Bilad Al Hind and Junud Al Khilafa e Hind.
- However, none have had any influence beyond their close-knit group.
- Most of these groups were made to arrange for explosives and arms on their own with members contributing from their pockets.
- Islamic State came to the notice of Indian intelligence agencies way back in 2013.
- Reports from Syria had then suggested that some Indians were fighting alongside the IS there, however, it was more considered a problem of the Middle East.

What is the action of India against IS?

- The perception of Indian agencies changed in 2014 when IS kidnapped 39 Indians in Iraq and executed them.
- Further, a closer look at the outfit's plans revealed that they have had India in their targets since the beginning.
- Many have also been arrested for preparing to carry out an attack in India after being inspired by the IS.
- The Indian security establishment has approached the issue of IS influence with caution.

- Some of the youth who were learnt to be eager to join IS are merely swayed by the IS online propaganda.
- It has attracted restless youth with video-game-like macabre videos.
- So realizing the fact that they may not be fully radicalized given their clean background, India has taken the counselling approach.
- Many IS recruits have been counselled, made to go through a de-radicalization programme and let off with a warning.
- These were done on slight detections of surfing IS's online material or apprehended while trying to migrate to Syria.
- India's approach had been positive given the fact of less recruits to the IS despite a very large Muslim population in India.
- Only those who were in the process of carrying out an attack or had made multiple attempts to go to Syria despite counselling were arrested.

8. HINDU NATIONALISM AND INDIA'S FOREIGN RELATIONS

What is the issue?

Indian administration's ideology of Hindu nationalism has affected Indian foreign policy in many ways over the last five years.

What is Hindu nationalism ideology about?

- India's ruling party's roots belong to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh

(RSS), a Hindu nationalist organization that follows a rigid nationalist outlook.

- The strong ideological roots of most of the cabinet members affect India's policies toward the outside world.
- Hindu nationalists perceive Hindu religious identity as the bedrock of Indian national identity and hence perceive any conversion from Hinduism as a threat to national unity.
- They have been always suspicious and sometimes even violent toward Christian missionaries and Muslim population.
- The ruling party's ideologically is more involved with the promotion of Indian culture, including spirituality, as part of its policy.
- India has increasingly begun to use religious diplomacy, for instance, as a strategic tool for a variety of ends.

How Hindu nationalism influences India's foreign relations?

- **Offensive position with Pakistan** - Present Indian administration proved to be bolder in dealings with Pakistan in the second half of its tenure (2016-2019) than the two previous Congress-led governments (from 2004-2014).
- One could assume that Hindu nationalism the proponents of which always demanded that New Delhi deal with Pakistan by applying strong

measures was an important aspect of this position.

- The government has also not fulfilled its promise of facilitating the comeback of Kashmiri Pandits community of Hindu priests that had to flee the Kashmir valley where they were persecuted by Muslim radicals.
- This step would both fit in perfectly well with the goals of Hindu nationalism and send out a strong message to Islamabad.
- **Ties with Global powers** - The shades of ideology were hardly visible in New Delhi's policy toward the three main global powers: the United States, China, and Russia.
- India's cooperation with United States has been evolving for many years now, and none of the previous governments tried to turn the ship in another direction.
- India's Nationalist boldness was invisible in India's gestures towards China and addressing weakening ties with Russia.
- India is strengthening his ties with Israel at the same time India is being gradually sidelined in Palestine issue.
- **Retrospective Economic policy** - Both the ruling party and the nationalist organization behind it, the RSS, have been promoting the idea of swadeshi, the promotion of Indian companies and their products and services.

- **Promoting Islamic hatred** - Hindu Nationalism surfaced strongly toward refugee policy, where the government admitted openly that it is unwilling to accept Muslim refugees or to grant citizenship to Muslims of foreign origins.
- Indian government was clearly unhappy to accept the (predominantly Muslim) Rohingya refugees from Myanmar once they started to be persecuted again in 2017 and started to flee to nearby countries, including India.
- Apart from this the ruling government tabled the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill in 2016 and eventually voting it through the lower house of Parliament.
- The piece of legislation stipulated that after seven years of residence Indian citizenship would be given to any person who had come from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan provided that she or he would profess any other religion other than Islam.