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Daily News Juice

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China denies entry to three Arunachal athletes from the Hangzhou Asian Games



Relevance: Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Relations

Why in news?

- The Asian Games, which were opened on Sept 23 by Chinese President Xi Jinping in Hangzhou are meant to showcase a broader message of Asian solidarity.
- However, it has so far proved otherwise! The day before the opening, Union Sports Minister Anurag Thakur cancelled his visit to China as a mark of protest to the last-minute denial of entry to three Indian Wushu players from Arunachal Pradesh.
- The three athletes were given the accreditation needed to travel along with the rest of the Indian team for the Games. However, in what appears to be a directive issued to the airline by China, the athletes were told they could not board their flight. China has in the past issued stapled visas to Indians from Arunachal Pradesh.
- Only in July, three wushu players from Arunachal Pradesh, due to take part in the World University Games in Chengdu, were issued stapled visas. In this instance, the decision to bar the athletes appears particularly vindictive as visas were not needed to travel for athletes issued digital accreditations.
- Indian officials believe China thus went out of its way to bar their travel by instructing the airline to not allow them to board. The Ministry of External Affairs in a statement described the action as “targeted and pre-meditated”.
- This is, unfortunately, not the first instance of China using sporting events that should have no place for politics to score geopolitical points.

Past instances

- In February last year, China ill-advisedly selected the People's Liberation Army's commander involved in the Galwan Valley clash as one of the torchbearers for the Winter Olympics.
- Both then and now, the organisers have appeared more than happy to look the other way given China's status as both a willing host and strong financial backer of such events.
- Beyond the Asian Games, the latest Chinese action serves as a reminder of the current distrust in bilateral relations, as well as of the absence of adequate channels of communication to deal with long-persisting thorny issues, including visas.
- India has correctly made clear that restoring normalcy in relations will not be possible without completing the disengagement process along the Line of Actual Control and restoring peace in border areas.
- Until China reviews its stance on the border, the current state of affairs, which suits neither of the two neighbours, is likely to endure.

Japan starts releasing wastewater from the Fukushima nuclear plant

Relevance: Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Why in news?

- Last month, amid strong backlash from the public and neighbouring countries, Japan began the release of contaminated water from the Fukushima nuclear plant into the sea.



Background

- In 2021, Japan's govt announced plans to release over one million tonnes of contaminated water from the Fukushima nuclear plant into the sea over the next 30 years.
- The wastewater is a byproduct of the catastrophic 2011 earthquake and tsunami, which disabled the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, leading to the release of radioactive materials.
- After more than a decade of storing this wastewater, Japan says they are running out of storage space, and claims that the, now treated water is safe for release.
- However, since the announcement in 2021, a sizeable fraction of the public, both domestic and foreign, have been speaking out against this decision, claiming that mixing radioactive materials in the sea poses major health risks, especially since these countries rely heavily on seafood.

How is the water being treated?

- The water is being treated by the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO), Japan's largest electric utility firm.
- The water has been treated with multiple techniques, notably the Advanced Liquid Processing System (ALPS), which removes 62 types of radioactive materials.
- However, it doesn't remove tritium. TEPCO and the Japanese govt argue that the concentration of tritium does not exceed international standards, in particular, those of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the United Nations' nuclear watchdog. The concentration is also six times less than the limit for tritium in drinking water, set by the World Health Organization.
- As per an expert, one can't remove tritium because it is identical to hydrogen. So removing it, chemically extracting it from wastewater becomes quite impossible. What all nuclear plants do is - mix it with water so that the tritium quantity reduces further, before it is actually released into the sea.

Public response

- Fears persist within the majority. A recent poll conducted in Japan shows that 16.3% of respondents are opposed to the discharge of the treated water, and 30.8% were neither opposed nor in favour.
- Several protests have been held in Seoul against the release, and many hoarded seafood ahead of the discharge. Some surveys show that 80-85% of South Koreans oppose the water's release.
- The Chinese govt, which has been against Japan's decision since the announcement was made, has already banned seafood from Japan.

Is the water safe?

- As per an expert, although, scientifically, the levels of radiation in the wastewater are not so high as to cause panic, there is evidence showing that exposure to radiation, even at low levels, can harm the health of humans and the environment.
- He adds that tritium is easily absorbed by the bodies of living creatures when it is in the form of tritiated water, and rapidly distributed throughout bodies via blood. Since tritiated water can pass through the placenta, it could lead to developmental effects in babies when ingested by pregnant women.

Affecting regional politics!

- Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol publicly ate seafood after the discharge began in order to strengthen public trust in the water treatment process.
- A key factor for Japan in maintaining relations with South Korea in particular, has been transparency over the treatment and release process.
- South Korea's govt, following repeated consolation by the IAEA, has told people that the water and the seafood is safe. They have also assured the public that they will continuously monitor the seawater and seafood, and that the 2011 ban on seafood from the water near Fukushima, would remain intact.
- For both PMs, the water may pose more geopolitical problems than health issues. Japan colonised the Korean peninsula in the early 20th century, and the tensions of that time continue to strain relations even now. But both leaders have been working toward forming friendlier relations, especially given the potential threats that their more aggressive neighbours, China and North Korea, present.

Significance of China's hardline response

- As per analysts, China's response must be seen through a wider geopolitical lens. Japan-Sino relations have fluctuated repeatedly in the recent past, especially as China grows its military presence in the South China Sea. This has evoked more nationalist sentiments from both sides, making this wastewater issue notable, but not necessarily new.
- China is also watching South Korea and Japan's strengthening relationship. China is not comfortable about the growing bonhomie between South Korea and Japan. The Chinese govt aims to make it an issue just to create further strategic fissures between South Korea and Japan

CSIR's Bhatnagar awards for 2022 announced after a year's delay



Relevance: Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Why in news?

- After nearly a year's delay, the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) has publicised the list of awardees for the Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar (SSB) awards for 2022, considered among the prestigious prizes for science in India.
- While usually announced on September 26 – CSIR's Foundation Day – the prizes weren't announced last year, without any official reason being ascribed.
- Last year, the Ministry of Home Affairs constituted a committee to review all the national awards administered by various science and medical ministries and whittled down some of them. The SSB awards were however retained.
- The SSB Prize was instituted in memory of the first Director General of the CSIR – Dr. Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar.

List of winners



- This year's awardees constitute 12 scientists below the age of 45. They include:
 - Biological Sciences: This is jointly awarded to Dr. Ashwani Kumar of CSIR-Institute of Microbial Technology and Dr. Maddika Subba Reddy of Centre for DNA Fingerprinting Diagnostics
 - Chemical Sciences: This is jointly awarded to Dr. Akkattu T Biju of the Indian Institute of Science and Dr. Debabrata Maiti of the Indian Institute of Technology (Bombay)
 - Earth, Atmosphere and Planetary Sciences: This is awarded to Dr. Vimal Mishra of the Indian Institute of Technology (Gandhinagar)
 - Engineering Sciences: This is jointly awarded to Dr. Dipti Ranjan Sahoo of the Indian Institute of Technology (Delhi) and Dr. Rajnish Kumar of the Indian Institute of Technology (Madras)
 - Mathematical Sciences: This is jointly awarded to Dr. Apoorva Khare of the Indian Institute of Science and Dr. Neeraj Kayal of Microsoft Research Lab
 - Medical Sciences: This is awarded to Dr. Dipyaman Ganguli of CSIR- Indian Institute of Chemical Biology
 - Physical Sciences: This is jointly awarded to Dr. Anindya Das of the Indian Institute of Science and Dr. Basudeb Dasgupta of Physics Tata Institute of Fundamental Research

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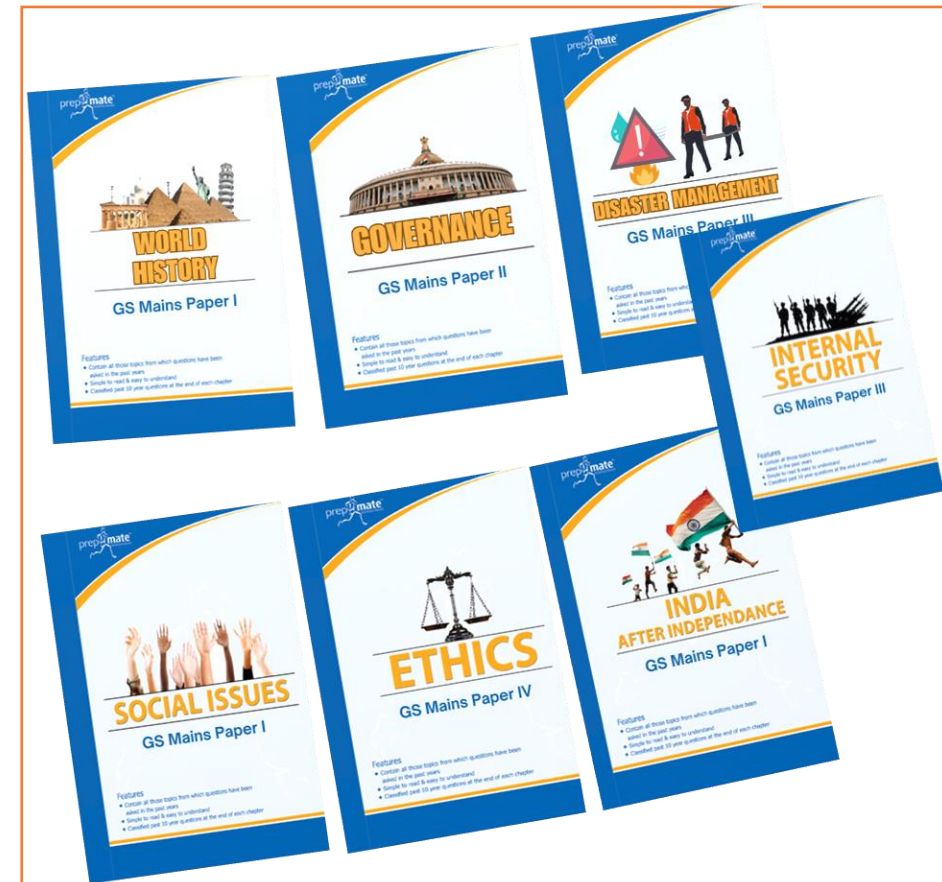
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