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1. Israel sanctions: Who has imposed curbs over its Gaza assault?

Why in News?

Israel's allies have ramped up the pressure in recent weeks to allow more aid into Gaza to avert a worsening humanitarian crisis. But few have so far imposed sanctions on the Middle Eastern country, or boycotted products from Israel.

Turkey raises the stakes

In its first significant measure against Israel since the war began, Turkey has announced it will not resume trade with Israel, worth \$7 billion (€6.52 billion) a year, until a permanent cease-fire and humanitarian aid are secured in Gaza.

The trade included \$5.4 billion in Turkish exports and \$1.6 billion in Israeli imports last year.

US, France and UK sanction Israeli settlers

Among major Western powers, only France has mooted the idea of sanctions to pressure Israel to pull back its troops from Gaza and allow more humanitarian aid to reach displaced Palestinians.

In February, the Biden administration named two Israeli outposts and several Israeli settlers it accused of undermining stability in the landlocked territory. The State Department said the outposts had been bases for violence against Palestinians.

The White House also imposed sanctions on multiple Israeli men it accused of being involved in settler violence in the West Bank.

The sanctions typically freeze any US assets of those targeted and generally bar Americans from dealing with them. Canada, France and the UK imposed similar curbs on several Israeli settlers.

The Biden administration is also planning to require goods produced in West Bank settlements to be clearly marked. In 2019, the European Union's top court ruled that goods from West Bank settlements must be labeled as coming from occupied territory and not imply that they came from Israel.

Chile blocks Israel from aviation fair

The Chilean government informed Israel last month that its companies would be banned from taking part in the 2024 International Air and Space Fair, FIDAE.

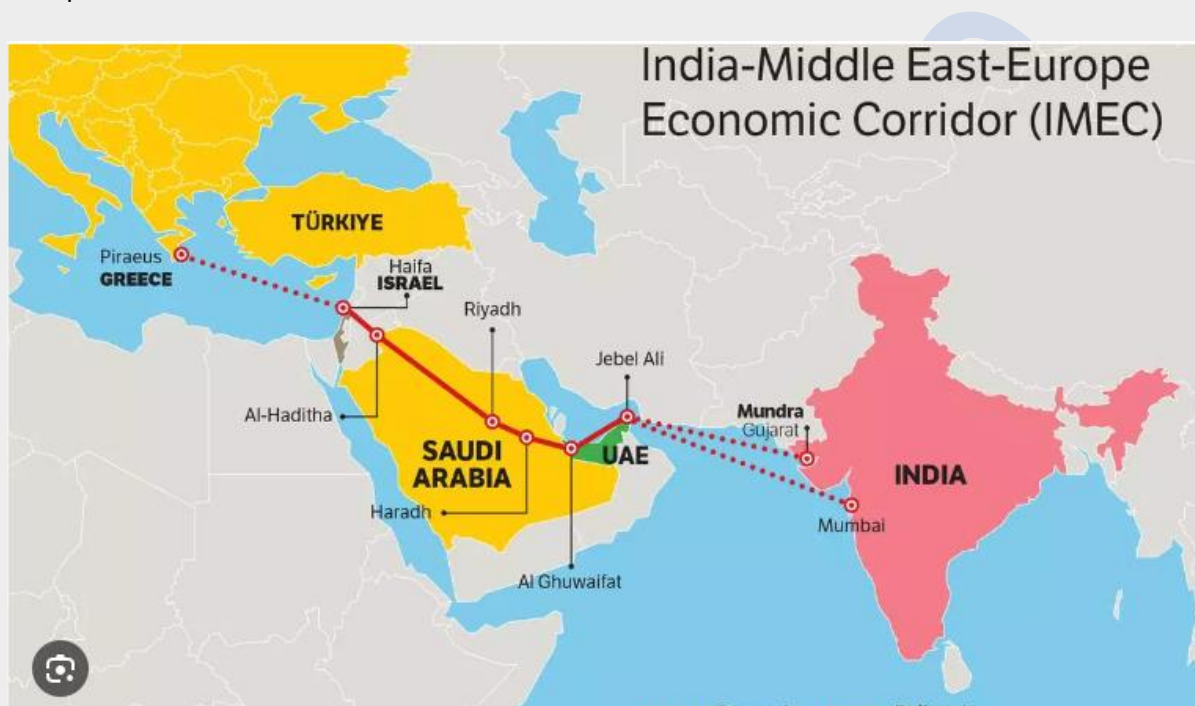
Organized by the Chilean Air Force, the fair is regarded as the main aerospace and defense show in Latin America, bringing together exhibitors from more than 40 countries.

As well as the ban, Chile has canceled all cooperation or training activities with Israel on Chilean territory. The government said it would no longer purchase any weapons, defense or security systems from Israel.

In January, Chile asked the International Criminal Court in The Hague to investigate Israel's actions in Gaza and the occupied territories.

Israel's tie normalization with Arab states hits the skids

The Israel-Hamas war has halted progress on what is known as the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) which aims to foster integration between Asia, the Persian Gulf and Europe.



The project will see new rail and shipping links built to counter China's massive Belt and Road (BRI) infrastructure initiative. But IMEC is understood to be on hold while the conflict plays out. There was hope the IMEC could help speed up the long-awaited rapprochement between Israel and Saudi Arabia, which the Biden administration hoped would help open the door for other Muslim countries to recognize Israel.

Arab nations have regularly condemned Israel's aggressive tactics against civilians as it seeks to root out the Hamas militant group in Gaza. Riyadh has warned that it would only normalize relations with Israel if there is a two-state solution between the Israelis and Palestinians.

Israel established ties with the United Arab Emirates, Morocco, Sudan and Bahrain in 2020 as part of the Abraham Accords.

BDS movement urges global sanctions against Israel

Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) is a nonviolent Palestinian-led movement promoting boycotts, divestments and economic sanctions against Israel.



BDS now has branches in 40 countries and has also advocated a boycott of Israeli sporting, cultural and academic events, calling for pressure on foreign companies that “collaborate” with Israel.

The movement is regularly accused of antisemitism by Israel and the US.

Meanwhile, several apps are helping consumers boycott businesses deemed to be supporting Israel and its war on Gaza.

The apps, including one called Boycat, allow users to scan the barcode of any product and see its links to the Middle Eastern country. The app also offers a choice of products consumers may buy instead.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations

Source: Indian Express

2. What is Artificial General Intelligence (AGI), and why are people worried about it?

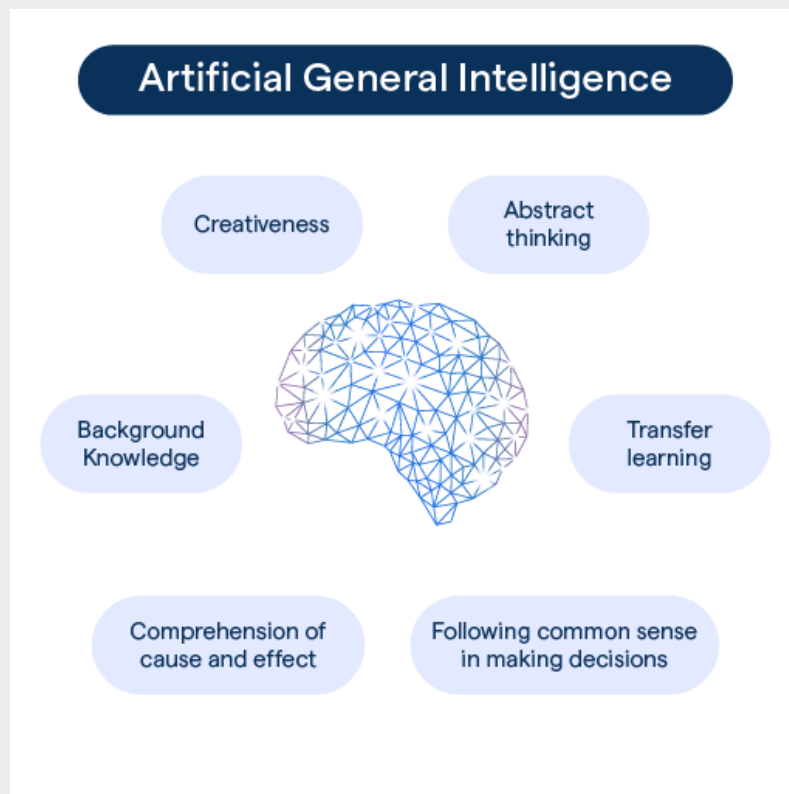
Why in News?

In a recent interview, Sam Altman, CEO of OpenAI, expressed his commitment to invest billions of dollars towards the development of Artificial General Intelligence (AGI). But even as Altman continues to champion what is considered to be the pinnacle of AI development, many in the global tech community are very apprehensive.

What is AGI?

AGI refers to a machine or a software that can perform any intellectual task that a human can do. This includes reasoning, common sense, abstract thinking, background knowledge, transfer learning, ability to differentiate between cause and effect, etc.

In simple words, AGI aims to emulate human cognitive abilities such that it allows it to do unfamiliar tasks, learn from new experiences, and apply its knowledge in new ways.



Humans learn through their experiences — in school, home, or elsewhere; by talking to people or observing things; by reading books, watching television, reading articles, etc. The human brain then uses the information it has gathered to make decisions (often subconscious) that solve any given problem, or come up with a new one.

With AGI, researchers aim to build a software or computer that can do all this — everything that a human computer does. Think of having a super intelligent robot friend who can understand everything you

say, learn new things just the way you do, and even think of problems to find solutions.

How is AGI different from AI we already use?

The main difference between AGI and the more common form of AI, also known as narrow AI, lies in their scope and capabilities.

Narrow AI is designed to perform specific tasks such as image recognition, translation, or even playing games like chess—at which it can outdo humans, but it remains limited to its set parameters. On the other hand, AGI envisions a broader, more generalised form of intelligence, not confined to any particular task (like humans).

This is what puts AGI at the summit of all developments in artificial intelligence. Since the very beginning, the thrust behind AI development has been to broaden its capabilities. The reason why ChatGPT, launched in November 2022, piqued global interest was its ability to come up with human-like text responses.

Since then, AI models have gotten progressively better and more sophisticated, as billions of dollars have been pumped in to fuel research. The creation of AGI is like the final frontier in this development.

Is this a new idea?

No. The idea of AGI first emerged in the 20th century with a paper written by Alan Turing, widely considered to be the father of theoretical computer science and artificial intelligence. In 'Computing Machinery and Intelligence' (1950), he introduced what is now known as the Turing test, a benchmark for machine intelligence. Simply put, if a machine can engage in a

conversation with a human without being detected as a machine, according to the Turing test, it has demonstrated human intelligence.

When Turing wrote this influential paper, humans were nowhere close to developing artificial intelligence — even computers were in their nascency. Yet, his work led to wide-ranging discussions about the possibility of such machines, as well as their potential benefits and risks.

How can AGI help humanity?

In theory, AGI has innumerable positive implications. For instance, in healthcare, it can redefine diagnostics, treatment planning, and personalised medicine by integrating and analysing vast datasets, far beyond the capabilities of humans.

In finance and business, AGI could automate various processes and enhance the overall decision-making, offering real-time analytics and market predictions with accuracy.

When it comes to education, AGI could transform adaptive learning systems that work towards the unique needs of students. This could potentially democratise access to personalised education worldwide.

OpenAI's Sam Altman in an interview with The Wall Street Journal said that AGI will lead to a "lot of productivity and economic value", and will be "transformative", promising unprecedented problem-solving capabilities and creative expression.

What then drives the skepticism regarding AGI?

Despite the promise AGI holds, it continues to fuel widespread apprehensions, due to a number of reasons. For instance, the humongous amount of computational power required to develop AGI systems raises concerns about its impact on the environment, both due to the energy consumption and generation of e-waste.

AGI could also lead to a significant loss of employment, and widespread socio-economic disparity, where power would be concentrated in the hands of those who control the AGI. It could introduce new security vulnerabilities, the kind we have not even thought about yet, and its development could outrun the ability of governments and international bodies to come up with suitable regulations. And if humans were to become dependent on AGI, it might even lead to the loss of basic human skills and capabilities.

But the most serious fear regarding AGI is that its abilities can outpace human beings', making its actions difficult to understand and predict. This might even lead to a situation where it becomes 'too' independent, so much so that humans simply lose control. And like in many sci-fi movies, this might lead to a point where AGI takes actions against human well-being.

In a 2014 interview to the BBC, the late professor Stephen Hawking said, "The development of full artificial intelligence could spell the end of the human race."

Similarly, AI pioneers Yoshua Bengio, Geoffrey Hinton, and Yann LeCun, collectively known as the Godfathers of AI, have often warned about the catastrophic outcomes of creating AGI, with Hinton even comparing AGI's dangers to that posed by nuclear weapons.

Today, most thinkers in the field advocate for stringent regulations to ensure that the development of AGI is in line with human values and safety standards.

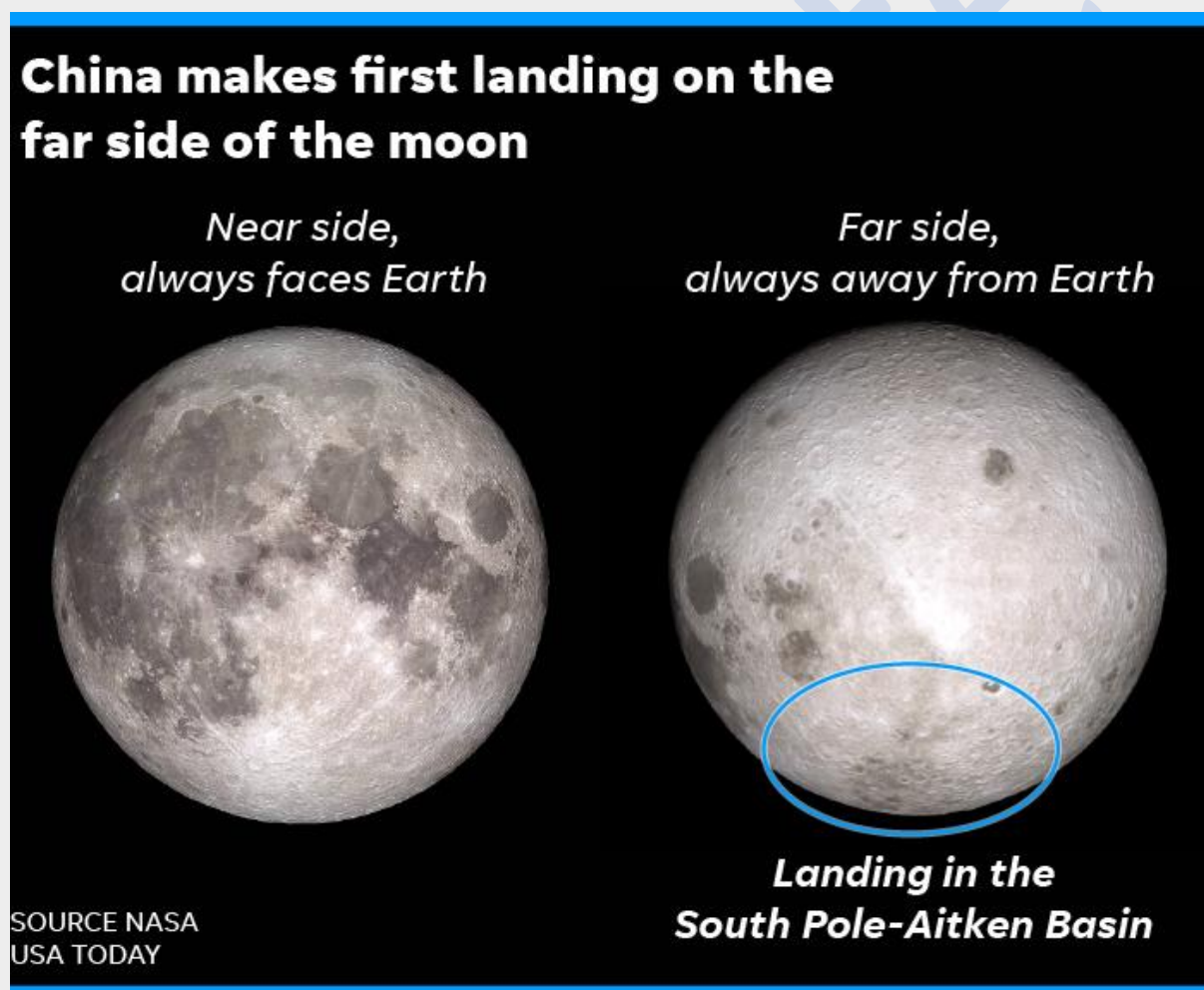
Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

3. Why has China sent a mission to the far side of the Moon?

Why in News?

Recently, China launched its second mission to the far side of the Moon. If successful, it will be the world's first mission to bring back samples from the part of the Moon that the Earth never gets to see.



The mission, known as Chang'e-6, lifted off from the Wenchang Space Launch Center. Around 30 minutes after the launch, the spacecraft separated from the rocket and began its five-day-long journey towards the Moon.

Why explore the far side of the Moon?

The Moon's far side is often referred to as the dark side because it cannot be seen from the Earth, not because it does not catch the Sun's rays. The Moon is tidally locked with the Earth and therefore, we see only one side of the Moon, also known as the near side.

The far side has been under the spotlight in recent years as it is very different from the near side.

Examining the samples from the far side can help scientists solve mysteries about the origin and evolution of the Moon — till now, scientists have only been able to analyse samples from the near side. The far-side samples can also give answers to the longstanding question: why is it different from the near side?

What will the Chang'e-6 mission do?

The Chang'e-6 is a 53-day-long mission. After reaching the Moon's orbit, the mission's orbiter will circle the natural satellite while its lander will descend into the 2,500-kilometre-wide South Pole-Aitken basin on the lunar surface.

After collecting samples through scooping and drilling, the lander will launch an ascent vehicle, which will transfer the samples to the orbiter's service module. This module will then return to the Earth.

China is the only country to achieve a soft-landing on the far side of the Moon. In 2019, its Chang'e-4 mission landed on the region and explored the Moon's Von Karman crater with the help of a rover.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express