

'Sharing is Caring'

If you have friends preparing for Civil Services, tell them that they can also receive Updates from PrepMate IAS by sending 'Name' and 'State' through WhatsApp on 75979-00000

1. Justice is key to tackling the climate crisis: What a new study says**Introduction**

It is still possible for all humanity to thrive, escape poverty and be safe from climate change, but only if we learn to share Earth's riches equally, according to a new study. For the first time, scientists have connected the planet's safety with the idea of justice for all in the distribution of the planet's critical resources, such as freshwater and nutrients.

“

Justice is an essential part of the environmental discussion.”

The study, 'A Just World on a Safe Planet', published in the journal The Lancet Planetary Health, was carried out by 65 leading natural and social scientists from more than 20 countries. The scientists belong to

the Earth Commission, a global team that aims to define a safe and just corridor for people and the planet.

What are the findings of the study?

The study shows that the over-consumption of finite resources by a minority of the world's population is shrinking the "Safe and Just Space" — a conceptual space in which it is possible to meet everybody's basic needs with minimum damage to the planet. The researchers have found that providing resources to people who do not have enough would be less harmful to the planet than the present situation in which the wealthy minority is consuming more than its fair share.

Here are some of the key findings of the study:

1. Historically marginalised people are suffering the most.

The research follows from Earth System Boundaries, published in 2023, which underlined the safe and just "ceiling" up to which people could continue to extract natural resources and pollute without destabilising the Earth's systems and endangering humanity. The scientists call the present study the "foundation" as it shows what Earth's 7.9 billion human population needs from the planet to live free of poverty.

According to the researchers, 'Safe ESBs' are the levels beyond which tipping points may be triggered, making Earth unstable. Safe ESBs are not necessarily just. 'Just ESBs' prevent significant harm to humans, communities and countries. The study says that in seven of eight indicators for the five domains, the EBSs have already been transgressed. These include

climate, surface water, groundwater and natural ecosystem areas. "The eighth ESB, air pollution, has been transgressed in many parts of the world," says the study.

At the receiving end are people who are historically marginalised, such as those living in former colonies, and the poor are at particular risk. At present, nine million premature deaths are linked to air and water pollution and millions of others are suffering from diseases due to rising heat and extreme weather events. The research adds that, in India, one billion people are living on land with diminishing yields. India is also among the hardest hit globally by water shortages.

The Paris Agreement seeks to limit global warming to below 2 degree Celsius from pre-industrial levels but, even then, 30 million people of Bangladesh will be vulnerable to the impact of sea level rise.

2. The rich are responsible for the present crisis.

That the rich are responsible for the present crisis is at the heart of all climate crisis discussions, according to the study. Apart from the fossil fuel-powered industrial revolution of the developed nations, there are statistics on consumerism. In 2020, a study by Oxfam and the Stockholm Environment Institute showed that the richest 10 per cent of the world had caused around half of global emissions in 2015. An unequal 15 per cent of emissions were by the top 1 per cent of the world. On the other hand, the world's poorest 50 per cent were responsible for just 7 per cent and, ironically, they were the ones suffering the effects of the climate crisis the most.

The new study says that the economic growth trajectories, which dominate the global economic policy, threaten to destabilise the global commons. "Current environmental pressures are hugely unequal, with the richest 10 per cent of the global population consuming as much energy as the poorest 80 per cent and being responsible for more emissions than the other 90 per cent," says the study.

3. Society needs to move in a safe and just direction.

The researchers say that the need of the hour is to rethink economic models and technological interventions and ensure that critical natural resources are accessed, shared and managed fairly. Unless these changes are implemented, by 2050, even if every person on the planet had only a basic standard of living, the earth's climate systems would still be overshoot and the planet "would be outside the climate boundary".

"If we want to meet minimum needs and stay within boundaries, we have to change. This is not a very welcome message for governments, businesses, and society at large. If we can change our production patterns to more circular ones, to more ecosystem-based solutions, we have a safe and just future. Consumption patterns of the rich have to change even in poorer countries like India. Such change can enhance the well-being of people, and reduce their exposure to environmental change," according to Dr Joyeeta Gupta, lead author of the study and former co-chair of the Earth Commission.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: Indian Express

2. All about Neom, the controversial Saudi project that promises a desert utopia

Introduction

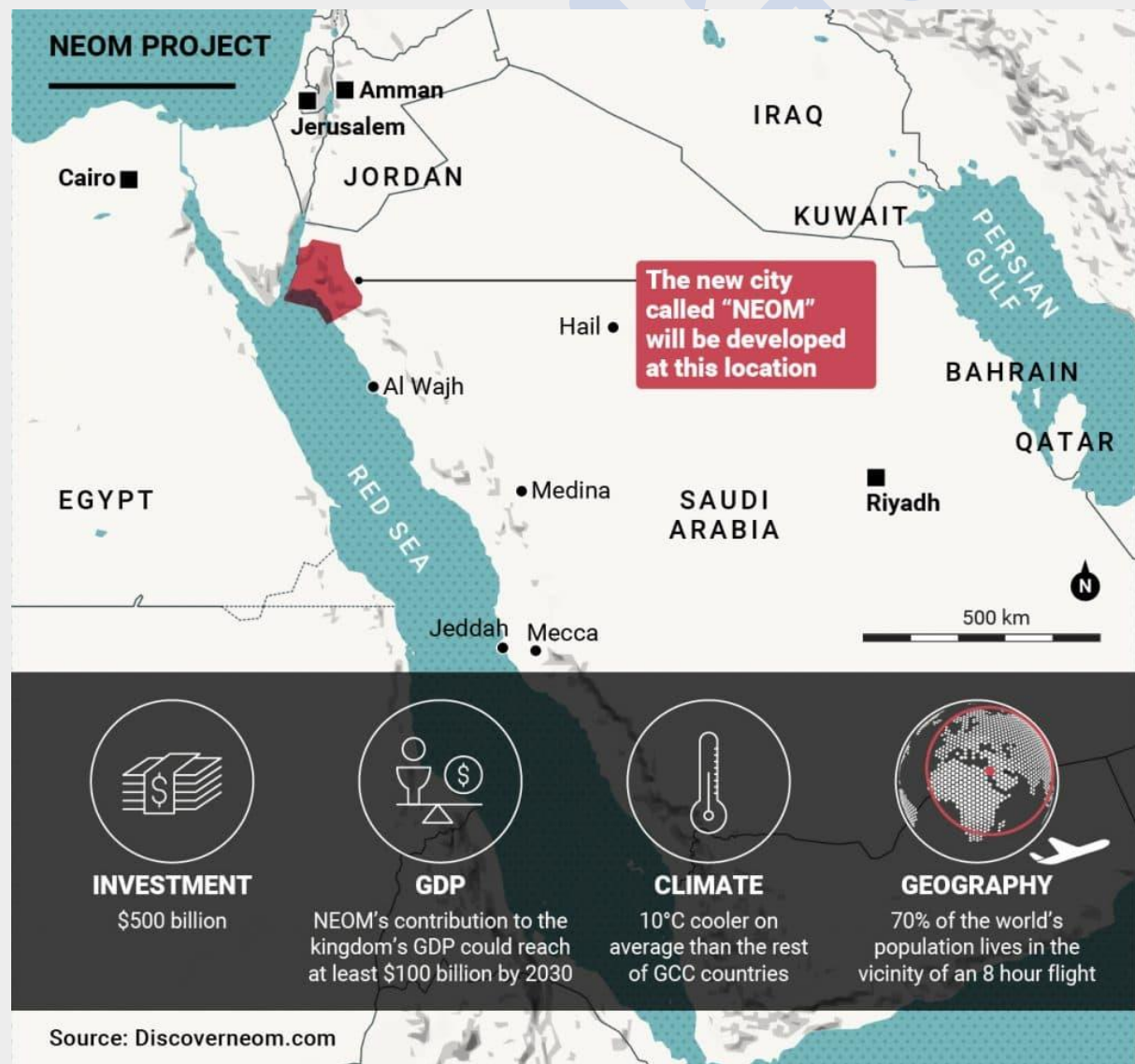
Earlier this month, The Wall Street Journal published a highly critical report on Neom, the ambitious Saudi megacity project championed by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

"Saudi Arabia's Neom project contends with corruption, worker deaths, racism and misogyny," The WSJ report said. Here is all you need to know about what is the world's largest construction project, and the many controversies that have plagued it.

What is Neom?

Neom was visualised as part of Saudi Arabia's ambitious Vision 2030 project, which sought to diversify the country's economy and thus reduce its dependence on oil.

Spread over an area of 26,500 sq km, Neom is situated in Saudi Arabia's western Tabuk province. First announced by the Crown Prince in 2017, its name is a fusion of the Greek word "neo" meaning "new", and the Arabic word "mustaqbal" meaning "future".



Initially pegged to be a \$500-billion project, the costs have swelled to \$1.5 trillion, according to a Bloomberg report from April 2024. It is set to be completed in 2039.

Neom will comprise five regions, each home to a project ambitious in design, scale and imagination.

1. The Line – Probably the best-known among all the Neom projects, the Line will be built as a 170-kilometre-long mirrored city line spanning 34 square kilometres across the desert. The original plans for the city had “vertically layered” buildings 500 metres tall and 200 metres wide. Designed to be entirely walkable, the city will be powered by 95 per cent renewable energy.

2. Oxagon – The Oxagon is an octagonal industrial city which will house an integrated industrial port and residential apartments. Oxagon too will be powered entirely by renewable energy.

3. Trojena – Trojena is set to host the Asian Winter Games in 2029. The region is home to Saudi Arabia’s tallest mountains, and will house a ski resort. According to the Neom website, Trojena “experiences sub-zero winter temperatures and has a year-round moderate climate that is cooler on average than the rest of the region”.

4. Magna – Magna is designed to be a luxury lifestyle coastal destination, located on the coast of the Gulf of Aqaba . The region will house 12 premiere destinations spanning 120 kilometres, and will be home to a nature reserve which aims to be the “gold standard in sustainable tourism”.

5. Sindalah – Sindalah is a luxury island in the Red Sea, which hopes to rival the likes of the Greek isles, the Caribbean Sea and the Mediterranean coastline, all favoured by yacht and boat owners. Set to open this year, Sindalah will span 840,000 square metres.

What are the various controversies that have plagued Neom?

Neom’s development, however, has not been without a hitch. Here are some controversies that have plagued it.

1. Displacement of the indigenous residents

The BBC in 2020 reported that Saudi security forces were resorting to force to evict the Huwaitat tribe, the indigenous residents of the Tabuk region where Neom is being built. Col Rabi Alenezi, a former Saudi intelligence officer, told the BBC in May 2024 that he had been ordered to evict the Huwaitat villagers from al-Khurraybah, located 4.5 kilometres south of The Line. He also said that the Saudi authorities had approved the use of lethal force to achieve the same.

The UN in 2023 expressed alarm at the Saudi government’s imminent execution of Huwaiti dissenters for protesting their forced evictions while being charged as terrorists.

2. Sluggish progress of the projects

Bloomberg in April 2024 reported that the Neom project had been considerably scaled down. While the goal was to accommodate 1.5 million of the 9 million residents in The Line by 2030, officials currently believe the mirrored city will only house a maximum of 300,000 residents. Additionally, only 1.4 kilometres of the project would be completed by 2030.

This has raised concern about Neom's readiness to host the 2029 Asian Winter Games in Trojena.

3. Apathy of the higher-ups at Neom

From the start, Mohammed bin Salman has delegated key elements of the project to executives who would get the job done by any means. This often meant basic workplace ethics were given a pass and toxic behaviour was actively encouraged. More troublingly, those who were hired often had to leave their previous jobs due to workplace misconduct or crimes.

Following news of the deaths of three construction workers, Wayne Borg, the Managing Director of Neom's media division felt inconvenienced by the situation and made racist and classist remarks according to The Wall Street Journal. He said, "A whole bunch of people die so we've got to have a meeting on a Sunday night".

Borg went on to call Neom's blue-collar employees, who mostly hail from the Indian subcontinent, "f-ing morons", saying "That is why white people are at the top of the pecking order."

4. Concerns about surveillance

A 2020 Neom press release announced its intent to create "cognitive cities," which would rely on real-time information to anticipate and offer proactive insights to its residents. In effect, this would imply constant monitoring of internet use, and create a surveillance state, something that critics have raised fears of.

Relevance: GS Prelims

Source: Indian Express

3. India becomes 3rd Most Powerful Nation in Asia, Surpasses Japan in Asia Power Index

Introduction

In a major shift, India surpassed Japan to become the third-largest power in the Asia Power Index, reflecting its increasing geopolitical stature. This achievement is driven by India's dynamic growth, youthful population, and expanding economy, solidifying its position as a leading force in the region.

One of the most significant findings in the 2024 Asia Power Index is India's steady rise in the regional power rankings. Witnessing a gradual rise, India is looking to achieve its full potential and exercise its influence in the region.

Key Factors Behind India's Rise:

1. Economic Growth: India has shown remarkable post-pandemic economic recovery, contributing to a 4.2-point rise in its Economic Capability. India's massive population and strong GDP growth reinforce its standing as the world's third-largest economy in PPP terms.

2. Future Potential: India's Future Resources score increased by 8.2 points, signalling a potential demographic dividend. Unlike its regional competitors, particularly China and Japan, India benefits from a youthful population that will continue to drive economic growth and labour force expansion in the coming decades.

3. Diplomatic Influence: Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership has garnered greater international recognition. India's non-aligned strategic posture has allowed New Delhi to navigate complex international waters effectively. India ranked 6th in terms of diplomatic dialogues in 2023, reflecting its active engagement in multilateral forums.



Further, India's large population and economic capabilities offer it substantial promise. India's score in Cultural Influence has also remained relatively strong, underpinned by its global diaspora and cultural exports.

In addition, India's role in multilateral diplomacy and security cooperation has been a point of emphasis. India's participation in dialogues, as well as its leadership in the Quad, has allowed it to play a significant role in regional security dynamics, albeit outside of formal military alliances. India's economic outreach, though limited, has seen incremental improvements, particularly in defense sales, such as the BrahMos missile deal with the Philippines. These developments, though small in scale, suggest that India is beginning to flex its geopolitical muscles beyond its immediate neighborhood.

India's Role in Asia

The 2024 Asia Power Index shows India as a power to reckon with in Asia. The country's substantial resource base gives it immense potential for future growth. The outlook for India is optimistic. With continued economic growth and a burgeoning workforce, India is well-positioned to expand its influence in the years ahead. In particular, India's rising Diplomatic Influence and its strategic autonomy make it a key player in the Indo-Pacific Region.

Asia Power Index

The Asia Power Index, launched by the Lowy Institute in 2018, is an annual measure of power dynamics in the Asia-Pacific region. It evaluates 27 countries across the Asia-Pacific, examining their ability to shape and respond to the external environment. The 2024 edition offers one of the most comprehensive assessments of power distribution in the region to date. Timor-Leste has been included for the first time, reflecting its growing importance in Southeast Asia. The Index focuses on both the material capabilities of states and the influence they exert on the international stage.

Criteria and Parameters of Power Measurement

Power in the Asia Power Index is divided into resource-based and influence-based determinants:

1. Resource-Based Determinants:

- **Economic Capability:** The core economic strength of a country, measured through indicators like GDP at purchasing power parity (PPP), technological sophistication, and global economic connectivity.
- **Military Capability:** Evaluates conventional military strength based on defense spending, armed forces, weapon systems, and signature capabilities like long-range power projection.
- **Resilience:** The internal capacity to deter threats to state stability, including institutional robustness, geopolitical security, and resource security.
- **Future Resources:** Forecasts the future distribution of resources, including economic, military, and demographic factors projected for 2035.

2. Influence-Based Determinants:

- **Economic Relationships:** The capacity to exercise leverage through trade, investment, and economic diplomacy.
- **Defense Networks:** The strength of alliances and partnerships, measured through military cooperation and arms transfers.
- **Diplomatic Influence:** The extent of a country's diplomatic reach, participation in multilateral forums, and foreign policy ambition.
- **Cultural Influence:** The ability to shape international public opinion through cultural exports, media, and people-to-people ties.

A country's overall power score is derived from a weighted average of these eight measures, encompassing 131 individual indicators. The results offer a nuanced understanding of how countries convert their resources into influence within the Asia-Pacific.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Relations

Source: PIB