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### 1. Why is Brazil Considering Alternatives to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)?

#### Background on Brazil's BRI Stance

Brazil recently indicated it might not join China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), making it the second BRICS country, after India, to potentially decline the infrastructure project launched in 2013. This comes following statements from Celso Amorim, President Luiz Inacio Lula Da Silva's chief foreign policy adviser.



#### Brazil's Approach to China's Initiative

Instead of signing an "accession contract," Brazil prefers a partnership focusing on "synergies" in nationally defined projects. Although not entirely rejecting BRI funding, Brazil is emphasizing infrastructure initiatives that align with its own priorities, such as solar energy and electric vehicles. Amorim also pointed to possible regional and geopolitical collaborations, including a peace plan for Ukraine.

#### The Timing of Brazil's Decision

Brazil is one of only four South American countries not participating in the BRI, even as it maintains strong trade ties with China. In July, President Lula mentioned that Brazil was

evaluating the potential benefits of joining. However, after recent BRICS summits and diplomatic visits, Brazil appears hesitant, with concerns that the risks may outweigh the advantages.

### **India's Reasons for Staying Out**

India declined to join the BRI in 2017, citing concerns over sovereignty (due to projects in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir), risks of debt traps for smaller nations, environmental concerns, and a lack of transparency in the BRI's broader geopolitical aims.

### **Challenges Facing the BRI**

Now over a decade old, the BRI has lost some appeal. China's economic slowdown and less generous loan terms post-COVID have impacted the initiative, with countries like Sri Lanka facing heavy collateral demands. Additionally, the U.S. has lobbied against the BRI, influencing countries like Italy, which recently opted not to renew its BRI MoU.

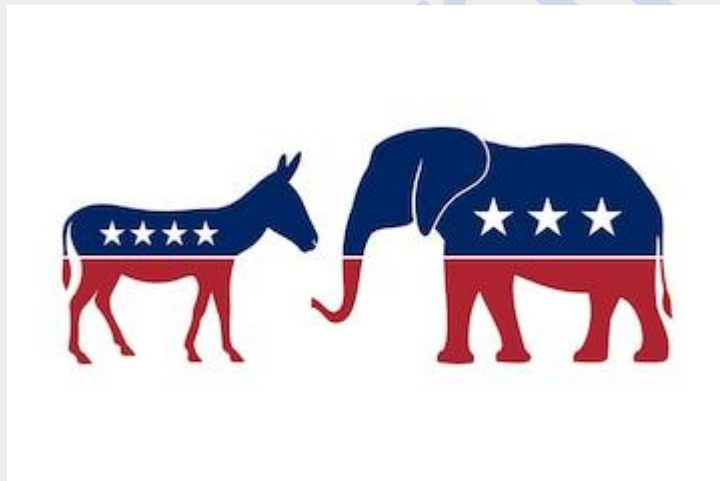
### **Brazil's Diplomatic Balancing Act**

Amid U.S. concerns and protests from China, Brazil is carefully weighing its options. Observers speculate that President Lula may keep Brazil's stance flexible, especially with U.S. elections looming and President Xi Jinping's visit to Brazil scheduled for later this month.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues

Source: The Hindu

## **2. Why Donkeys and Elephants Represent Democrats and Republicans in U.S. Politics**



### **Origins of the Symbols**

In U.S. politics, the donkey represents the Democratic Party, while the elephant represents the Republican Party. This association dates back over a century and was popularized through political cartoons. The person behind these enduring symbols was Thomas Nast, a prominent political cartoonist in the late 19th century.

### **Thomas Nast's Influence**

Thomas Nast, often called the "father of the American political cartoon," used satire to depict the political landscape. He was known for supporting the Republican Party and often ridiculed Democrats through his art. His cartoons simplified complex political ideas into relatable images, making them powerful tools for influencing public opinion. Abraham Lincoln even referred to Nast as his "best recruiting general" due to his impactful illustrations.

### **The Donkey and Elephant: Satire in Symbols**

In 1870, Nast used a donkey to represent certain Democrats he disliked, showing it kicking a dead lion in a cartoon titled "A Live Jackass Kicking a Dead Lion." The donkey was originally

intended as a satirical insult. However, Democrats had encountered the symbol earlier, when Andrew Jackson's opponents mockingly called him a "jackass" during his 1828 presidential campaign. Jackson embraced the donkey, reframing it as a symbol of determination rather than obstinance.

For the Republicans, Nast chose the elephant to represent them, portraying it as a large, strong animal but also one that could be vulnerable. In his 1874 cartoon "Third-Term Panic," he illustrated a fearful elephant about to stumble off a cliff, critiquing the Republicans' indecision over a potential third term for President Ulysses Grant. The elephant symbolized both the strength and the sometimes misguided direction of the Republican Party.

### Official Adoption and Evolving Depictions

Over time, these symbols gained popularity, especially as party loyalty grew among voters. Political divides softened in some periods, leading cartoonists to draw the animals with softer, more rounded features. Today, with renewed political polarization, these depictions may once again reflect the intensity of partisan divides.

Relevance: GS Prelims

Source: Indian Express

## 3. How Cyber Scams Use Social Engineering and Malicious APKs to Defraud Users

### Overview of the Scam

In October, a traveler, Bhargavi Mani, reported losing nearly ₹1 lakh while trying to book lounge access at Bengaluru airport. The scam involved social engineering and a malicious APK (Android Package file) that allowed scammers to mirror her screen and enable call forwarding, leading to unauthorized transactions.

**Android  
Malicious Apps  
Targeting  
Indian Users**



### Details of the Attack

Ms. Mani received a link via WhatsApp from an international number, leading her to a fake website, "Loungepass.in." She was prompted to download an app that appeared legitimate but was actually a malicious APK. By clicking the link and granting permissions, scammers

were able to mirror her screen and eventually access her credit card information. Following this, they enabled call forwarding on her device, which allowed them to receive OTPs and make further transactions. Attempts to reach Ms. Mani during this period were redirected to the scammer's number.

### Role of Big Tech Platforms in the Scam

The fake website Ms. Mani used appeared high in search results, highlighting potential gaps in verification on search engines. Though Apple's App Store generally prevents unverified app installations, scammers used social engineering to manipulate certain iOS settings to bypass these safeguards.

### **Mechanics of the Malicious APK**

The malicious APK gained control over Ms. Mani's device by exploiting features like screen sharing, allowing scammers to view and control her screen. Once installed, they enabled call forwarding by dialing specific codes on her network. This technique is commonly used in sophisticated scams to intercept OTPs required for bank transactions.

### **The People Behind the Scam**

The fake website used in the scam was hosted by Hostinger and registered in Gujarat, India, though specific details about the individuals behind it were obscured. Law enforcement can request additional information for further investigation.

### **Cybercrime Statistics in India**

In 2023, cyber scams cost Indian citizens ₹66.66 crore across 4,850 reported cases. Reports indicate digital financial frauds amounting to ₹1.25 lakh crore over the past three years, with 5.3 million breached accounts reported in 2023. As these crimes grow more complex, users are urged to avoid clicking unverified links, download apps only from official sources, and regularly review their financial records.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Science & Technology

Source: The Hindu

## **4. Kerala's New Coastal Zone Management Plan (CZMP)**

### **Overview of the Coastal Zone Management Plan (CZMP)**

The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change recently approved Kerala's Coastal Zone Management Plans (CZMPs) for ten coastal districts, aligning them with the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification of 2019. This updated CZMP allows these coastal districts in Kerala to undertake development activities with relaxed CRZ rules, permitting construction on the seaward side while aiming to protect the coastal environment and local communities.

### **Approval and Implementation Process**

The Kerala Coastal Zone Management Authority must upload the signed CZMPs for public access within one month. Any project applications seeking CRZ clearance will now be assessed under the 2019 CRZ Notification, which was introduced to balance conservation with sustainable development. This policy aims to protect India's unique coastal ecosystems while considering the livelihoods of coastal communities.

### **Implications for Kerala's Coastal Population**

With a 590-km coastline, Kerala has a high coastal population density. CRZ regulations affect urban and rural communities in ten districts, covering five corporations, 36 municipalities, and 245 village panchayats. Previously, high demographic pressure led to CRZ rule violations, including illegal reclamation of wetlands and construction. The earlier CRZ framework (CRZ 2011) focused heavily on coastal ecosystem conservation to protect local communities' livelihoods.

### **Changes in No Development Zones (NDZ)**

Under the new CZMP:

1. The No Development Zone (NDZ) distance from tidal water bodies is reduced from 100 meters to 50 meters from the High Tide Line for at least 122 local bodies in Kerala.
2. In CRZ-III A zones, covering densely populated rural areas, the NDZ is now set at 50 meters instead of the previous 200 meters, enabling more flexibility in construction.
3. Sixty-six village panchayats are newly classified as CRZ-2, allowing commercial and residential buildings along established building lines.
4. Overall, Kerala's NDZ will shrink to 108.4 sq. km from the previous 239.4 sq. km.

### **Impact on Mangrove Forests**

Mangroves, crucial to coastal ecosystems as breeding grounds for marine life, will see reduced protection under the new regulations:

1. The legal buffer zone for government-owned mangrove tracts over 1,000 sq. meters is reduced to 50 meters, reducing protected mangrove zones to 2,500 hectares from the previous 4,300 hectares.
2. Private landowners with mangrove patches no longer face mandatory buffer zone requirements, raising concerns that this could lead to further depletion of Kerala's mangrove cover, which is already diminishing.

In conclusion, Kerala's updated CZMP will enable development along its coastline but could pose risks to delicate ecosystems, particularly mangroves, which are crucial for coastal resilience.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Environment

Source: The Hindu