



The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

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The ASI's Epigraphy Division completed copying historical inscriptions at three temples in Thirukurungudi, Tirunelveli.

- These inscriptions, discovered during renovations, provide insights into donations and practices of the Pandya and Vijayanagara periods, adding valuable information to India's cultural heritage.

Analysis of the news:

- Inscriptions were found at Nambi Rayar, Thirumalai Nambi, and Anilisarar temples in Thirukurungudi.
- A Pandya period inscription, in Vattezhuthu and Tamil, mentions a donation of 50 sheep for ghee to light perpetual lamps in Anilisarar Temple.
- Another inscription at Nambi Rayar Temple records a tax-free land donation during the Vijayanagara reign, specifying land boundaries.

Complete Details About

- These inscriptions offer insights into temple rituals and donations, reflecting socio-religious practices of the time.
- Some inscriptions were partially damaged, making identification of specific donors and the reigns challenging.
- The inscriptions were copied onto maplitho paper using the estampage method by ASI's P. Balamurugan.
- These findings will contribute to further studies and be published in the Archaeological Survey of India's annual report.

Inscriptions at 3 T.N. temples copied onto paper by ASI

N. Sai Charan
CHENNAI

The Epigraphy Division of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), Mysore, has recently completed copying inscriptions onto maplitho papers using the estampage method at three temples at Thirukurungudi, Tirunelveli district.

P. Balamurugan, Assistant Epigraphist, ASI, copied about 25 inscriptions for nearly 15 days from the Nambi Rayar Temple, the Thirumalai Nambi Temple and the Anilisarar Temple. These inscriptions were found when renovation works were under way at these temples, he said.

A preliminary reading of one inscription sheds light on a donation of 50 sheep to the Anilisarar Temple. The Pandya period inscription was in Vattezhuthu and Tamil, dating back to the 9th Century. The sheep were gifted to obtain ghee for lighting perpetual lamps (*nundha vilakku*) in the temple, Mr. Balamurugan said.

An inscription at the



An inscription at a temple in Thirukurungudi being copied. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Nambi Rayar Temple records how a tax-free land was gifted to the temple for creating a garden. The inscription was in Tamil, and mentions the boundaries of the land donated during the reign of a Vijayanagara King, he added.

He further said that as some of the inscriptions were partially damaged, it was difficult to find out the names of donors and the reigns of the kings.

The inscriptions would be analysed further, and the findings would be published in the ASI's annual report, he added.



UPSC Prelims PYQ : 2021

Ques : With reference to Chausath Yogini Temple situated near Morena, consider the following statements:

1. It is a circular temple built during the reign of Kachchhapaghata Dynasty.
2. It is the only circular temple built in India.
3. It was meant to promote the Vaishnava cult in the region.
4. Its design has given rise to a popular belief that it was the inspiration behind the Indian Parliament building.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 4
- (d) 2, 3 and 4

Ans: c)



A team from the University of Mysore is excavating megalithic burial sites in Chamarajanagar district to study Iron Age culture.

- ▶ The project aims to explore the region's historical significance and provide field training for archaeology students.

Excavations commence at Doddalathur megalithic burial site in Hanur taluk

The Hindu Bureau

MYSURU

A team of history and archaeology scholars and students from the University of Mysore have embarked on an excavation of megalithic burial sites in Chamarajanagar district.

The excavations are being conducted at Doddalathur village, located in a small valley formed by the Male Mahadeshwara Hill ranges in Hanur taluk of Chamarajanagar district, in association with the Mythic Society, Bengaluru.

V. Shobha, Chairperson of the Department of Studies in Ancient History and Archaeology, University of Mysore, who is involved with the project, said that to the west of the village was a small hillock and in



A megalithic burial site near Hanur in Chamarajanagar district will be excavated for research and further studies. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

the adjacent fields were hundreds of burials of the megalithic period which corresponded to the Iron Age. The burials consisted of circles made of large boulders and hence the name "megalithic". Since iron technology came into use during this period, it was also known as Iron Age, and in South India,

this period had been broadly placed in the time bracket of 1200 BC to 300 CE, said Ms. Shobha.

She pointed out that Doddalathur megalithic burial site was discovered by C. Krishnamurti of the Archaeological Survey of India in 1961.

The site once had more than 1,000 burials, accord-

ing to the local villages but many had vanished in recent years owing to expansion of agriculture and cultivation activities, settlement and land development projects, Ms. Shobha added. But the site had potential for excavation as a majority of the burials are still intact despite disturbances, she said.

Superintending Archaeologist C.B. Patil (retd.), ASI, is the co-director of the excavation, and the project hopes to throw more light on the megalithic-iron age culture in the hilly regions of southern Karnataka.

Another purpose is to provide field training to the students of archaeology. The excavations, which began on October 3, will continue for two months.

Analysis of the news:

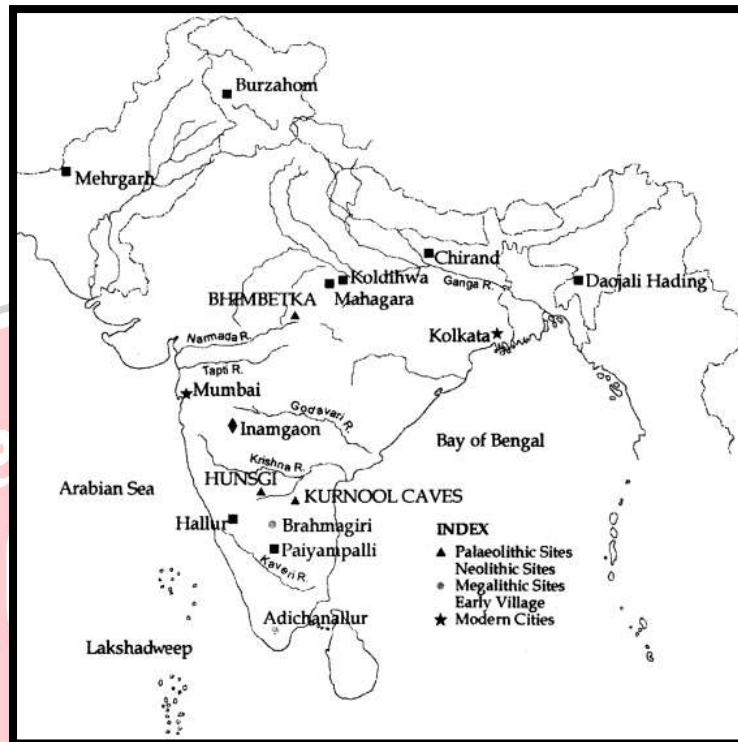
- ▶ The site is located in a small valley formed by the Male Mahadeshwara Hill ranges.
- ▶ The burial site dates back to the megalithic period, also known as the Iron Age, between 1200 BC and 300 CE.

Complete Details About

- ▶ Burials are characterised by circles made of large boulders, typical of megalithic culture

Daily News Analysis

- The site was discovered by C. Krishnamurti of the Archaeological Survey of India in 1961
- It once had over 1,000 burials, though many have been lost to agricultural and development activities.
- Despite disturbances, many burials remain intact and hold potential for further excavation
- The excavation aims to understand the region's megalithic culture and train archaeology students in fieldwork.



What are megaliths?

- Megaliths are large stones used to construct structures or monuments, often associated with South Indian cultures.
- They typically form burial sites, ceremonial structures, or markers for ancient rituals.
- Common types include dolmens, menhirs, and stone circles, found across various regions.
- Megalithic sites provide insights into the social, cultural, and religious practices of ancient civilizations.

Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu's state visit to India comes amid a looming economic crisis and significant debt repayments.

- During his talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he seeks support for currency swaps and debt relief.
- This visit marks a pivotal moment in revitalising India-Maldives relations after recent tensions.

Muizzu to meet Modi, request India's support over looming economic crisis

The Maldivian President has said he hoped that India would be ready to ease the Maldives' burden; he is expected to seek a currency swap arrangement and debt support from India; any default in repayment of the rising external debt would spiral the Maldives into a major crisis

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu landed in New Delhi on Sunday for a four-day state visit to India and is expected to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday morning with a looming economic crisis and an imminent debt repayment on his hands back home.

In an interview to an international broadcaster ahead of his visit, Mr. Muizzu said he hoped that India would be ready to "ease the Maldives' burden", and he is expected to request a currency swap arrangement and debt support during bilateral talks at Hyderabad House, after he receives a guard of honour at the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

"India is fully cognisant of our fiscal situation, and as one of our biggest development partners, will always be ready to ease our burden, find better alternatives and solutions to the challenges we face," Mr. Muizzu had told the BBC in a written interview.

In September, India announced that the State



Friendly ties: External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar with Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu during a meeting in New Delhi on Sunday. PTI

Bank of India would subscribe Maldivian government bonds of \$50 million, staving off the country's most imminent crisis, and Mr. Muizzu is expected to request Indian support in terms of currency swaps and debt waivers. He had earlier announced that China, a significant creditor, has agreed to defer loan repayments for five years.

On October 8, Maldives is due to make a \$25 million payment towards its

\$500 million *sukuk* (Islamic bonds) debt repayment, out of a total \$114 million still due this year, and about \$1.5 billion in the next two years. In view of the rising external debt, high debt to GDP ratio - at approximately 110% - and falling foreign exchange reserves - at about \$440 million, credit rating agencies Moody's and Fitch have both downgraded the Maldives in recent weeks, and any default on payments is likely to spiral the Maldives

into a major crisis akin to the one faced by Sri Lanka in 2022.

On Sunday, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, and other officials called on Mr. Muizzu to prepare for the talks, which are expected to end with announcements of MoUs on Indian infrastructure projects, security cooperation, and bilateral cooperation in other fields.

In a social media post, Mr. Jaishankar said Mr.

Muizzu's talks with Prime Minister Modi would "give a new impetus" to India-Maldives ties.

"I am confident that this visit will pave the way to further elevating the close neighbourly relations between our two countries and strengthen the enduring friendship and cooperation between our two peoples," Maldives' newly appointed Foreign Minister, Abdulla Khaleel, also said in a post describing the meeting, without offering any specifics on the discussions.

Full turnaround

The visit by Mr. Muizzu to Delhi, his second since he attended Mr. Modi's swearing-in ceremony, marks a full turnaround in ties between the two countries from the tensions between them over the past year.

Mr. Muizzu won elections in the Maldives last year on the back of an 'India Out' campaign and insisted that India withdraw military personnel from the archipelago by May this year. Unlike leaders of other friendly countries in the neighbourhood, Mr. Muizzu did not make India his

first destination abroad, and visited Turkiye, UAE, and China instead over the past year.

Tensions also rose over remarks by Maldivian Ministers that were critical of Mr. Modi and led to an informal 'Boycott Maldives' campaign by certain tour operators, that has halved the number of Indian tourists travelling there. However, after a number of bilateral ministerial meetings, and the Modi government completing the withdrawal of military personnel, ties have warmed up and Mr. Muizzu recently sacked the Ministers involved.

While Mr. Muizzu's visit to India has been expected for some weeks, the economic situation in the Maldives, as well as a Cabinet reshuffle after the resignation of the Finance Minister, had delayed plans. Former Foreign Minister Moosa Zameer, who visited Delhi in May, has now been appointed the Finance Minister.

Mr. Muizzu and his delegation will travel to Agra and Mumbai on Tuesday and then to Bengaluru on Wednesday.

Challenges Faced by Mauritius:

- **Economic Crisis:** The Maldives is grappling with a significant economic crisis, characterised by rising external debt and a debt-to-GDP ratio of approximately 110%.

Daily News Analysis

- **Imminent Debt Repayment:** The country is approaching critical debt repayments, including a \$25 million payment due for sukuk (Islamic bonds) and a total of \$1.5 billion in repayments over the next two years.
- **Declining Foreign Exchange Reserves:** The Maldives' foreign exchange reserves have dwindled to about \$440 million, further straining the economy and raising concerns about potential default.
- **Climate Change:** Threats to coastal infrastructure and biodiversity, necessitating urgent adaptation and mitigation strategies.
- **Food Security:** Increasing reliance on imports for food, affecting self-sufficiency and resilience.

Ways India Can Help Mauritius:

- **Currency Swap Arrangement:** The Maldives is expected to request a currency swap to ease its financial burden.
- **Debt Support:** India can provide financial support to help manage imminent debt repayments and maintain economic stability.
- **Development Partnerships:** Continued collaboration on infrastructure projects and security cooperation can foster long-term economic growth.
- **Capacity Building:** Training programs for local officials in governance, administration, and disaster management.
- **Bilateral Trade:** Enhancing trade relations to diversify economic opportunities and reduce dependence on tourism.



Key Insights from Recent Meeting:

- ▶ **Strengthening Ties:** The meeting aims to reinforce India-Maldives relations following previous tensions and the Maldives' "India Out" campaign.
- ▶ **Development Initiatives:** Discussions are expected to result in MoUs related to infrastructure and bilateral cooperation.
- ▶ **Positive Outlook:** Leaders expressed optimism that the visit would rejuvenate their nations' friendship and collaboration.

UPSC Prelims PYQ : 2014

Ques: Which one of the following pairs of islands is separated from each other by the 'Ten Degree Channel'?

- (a) Andaman and Nicobar
- (b) Nicobar and Sumatra
- (c) Maldives and Lakshadweep
- (d) Sumatra and Java

Ans: (a)

Researchers at the University of Alberta have developed a groundbreaking ultrasound technique that transforms cancerous tissue into blood-circulating droplets, potentially replacing invasive biopsies.

➔ This method allows for the detection of cancer biomarkers in blood samples, promising a less painful diagnostic approach.

Scientists are working on a way to detect cancer with sound waves

Biopsies are cumbersome, painful, and potentially injurious. Research has found that high-energy ultrasound can break off a small piece of cancerous tissue into droplets and release their contents into the bloodstream. The team could then test the blood for biomarkers specific to cancer.

Joel P. Joseph

Scientists have developed a new technique to detect cancers. The method uses ultrasound to turn a small part of our body's tissue into droplets that are released into the blood. These bubbles contain molecules like RNA, DNA, and proteins that allow the scientists to identify particular types of cancer.

Roger Zemp, associate professor of electrical and computer engineering at the University of Alberta, Canada, led a recent study describing such a technique. He presented his team's findings at the joint meeting of the Acoustical Society of America and the Canadian Acoustical Association at Shaw Centre in Canada on May 13.

A summary of the findings was also published in the *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* earlier this year.

Break-off, blood, biomarker

Doctors have been using ultrasound to take pictures of internal organs. The technology converts the sound waves reflected by surfaces inside the body to an image, just the way bats use ultrasound to sense their surroundings.

This said, the gold standard to detect many cancers is a biopsy. Doctors extract a small piece of tissue or cells using a large needle from the part of the body where cancer is suspected to be present. In vitro tests can confirm if the tissue or cells are cancerous and, if so, what kind of cancer it is.

Now, Zemp and his colleagues at the university are figuring out a way to use ultrasound to perhaps someday replace biopsies, which are cumbersome, painful, and potentially injurious. They have found that high-energy ultrasound (at frequencies greater than those used in ultrasound scans) can break off a small piece of cancerous tissue into droplets and release their contents into the bloodstream. The team could then test the blood for biomarkers – certain biomolecules like DNA, RNA, or proteins – specific to cancer.

"Ultrasound can enhance the levels of these genetic and vesicle biomarkers in blood samples by over 100-times," Zemp said in a press release. This method could allow clinicians to use blood samples to detect specific cancer types and even the mutations they contain, which are currently undetectable in blood.

He estimated the technique could help clinicians avoid nearly half of all biopsies.

'New kind of readout'

In the most advanced use of the technique, Zemp and his colleagues



A technician prepares to use an ultrasonogram device that creates an image of the body's insides using ultrasound waves. ELEN SHER/UPI/FLASH

detected the presence of a single cancer cell circulating in the blood. When cancer progresses and spreads, cancer cells move to parts of the body other than their original site via the blood. But scientists and clinicians have struggled to spot these cells in the blood because they're very small in number. A few tests are still sensitive enough to detect them, but they're expensive. For example, the 'CellSearch' test costs \$10,000 (₹ 8.4 lakh).

But Zemp & co. were able to detect a cancer cell in the blood samples of a prostate cancer patient using their technique. The team passed ultrasound waves through blood samples isolated from the cancer patients. The waves shredded the circulating cancer cells and released the biomarkers they contained into the blood. The team looked for and confirmed the presence of these biomarkers. Zemp estimated this version of the test would cost a hundred times less, around \$100 (Rs 8,400).

The researchers are now trying to expand their findings to other types of cancer, particularly breast cancer and melanoma.

"We hope our ultrasound technologies will benefit patients by providing clinicians a new kind of molecular readout of cells and tissues with minimal discomfort," Zemp said in the same release.

Needed: large cohorts

Himanshu Shekhar, assistant professor of electrical engineering, and Karla Mercado-Shekhar, assistant professor of

Doctors use ultrasound to take pictures of internal organs. The technology converts the sound waves reflected by surfaces inside the body to an image, just the way bats use ultrasound to sense their surroundings

biological sciences and engineering, both at IIT Gandhinagar, said the effort was promising and considerably more advanced than previous work in this field.

"The ability to perform ultrasound-aided detection using drawn blood samples is most exciting because of the simplicity of this approach. The main advantage of this approach is its non-invasiveness, which will prevent patient discomfort," shekhar said.

Mercado-Shekhar said the approach could be extended to monitoring cancer progression and treatment response. However, she cautioned that more studies in a large cohort of patients would be required before doctors start using this tool in the clinic.

Clinical trials with large cohorts of patients with different types of cancer and healthy people across different ethnic groups and geographies are important to ensure the technique can produce accurate results for different cancer types and prove that it's sensitive to their varying biomarker thresholds.

Brian Tysinger, a research assistant professor of public policy, and Jakub Hlavka, associate professor of population

and public health sciences, both at the University of Southern California, underscored this point in an article published by the US National Academies Press in May 2022: "Lack of representative studies on screening for cancer or cardiometabolic disease may lead to recommendations that fail to consider earlier ages or lower biomarker thresholds to start screening that might be warranted in some populations."

About five years

There has been a push of late for more accessible and affordable cancer screening methods.

The U.S. National Cancer Institute recently launched its 'Cancer Screening Research Network'. In 2025, the network will start a pilot study to evaluate a battery of screening tests to spot cancer early and accurately with a cohort of 24,000 people.

The study is expected to be completed in four years.

The network may later support similar trials for screening methods developed by individual research groups, potentially including the ultrasound-based one.

"If results of clinical trials are favourable, the researchers will likely pursue regulatory approval in collaboration with industry partners, and subsequently, this technique could be available commercially in about five years," Mercado-Shekhar said.

(Joel P. Joseph is a freelance science journalist and researcher. joeljoseph2009@gmail.com)

THE GIST

Ultrasound can enhance the levels of biomarkers over 100-times. This method could allow clinicians to use blood samples to detect specific cancer types and even the mutations, which are currently undetectable in blood

Researchers were able to detect a single cancer cell circulating in the blood. Scientists have struggled to spot these cells because they're small in number. Some tests can detect them but they are extremely expensive

Ultrasound-aided detection using blood samples is important because of its simplicity. The main advantage is its non-invasiveness, which will prevent patient discomfort

Using Sound for Cancer Detection:

➔ **Ultrasound Technology:** High-energy ultrasound waves can be employed to break off small droplets of cancerous tissue from tumours, releasing biomolecules into the bloodstream.



- **Biomarker Identification:** These droplets contain genetic material (RNA, DNA) and proteins that serve as biomarkers for cancer, allowing scientists to detect specific cancer types and mutations.
- **Enhanced Detection:** The ultrasound technique can increase the concentration of biomarkers in blood samples by over 100 times, significantly improving the chances of early detection.
- **Non-Invasive Approach:** This method offers a less painful alternative to traditional biopsies, minimising patient discomfort while still providing valuable diagnostic information.

Challenges Faced by Scientists:

- **Low Sensitivity:** Detecting circulating cancer cells in the bloodstream is difficult due to their low numbers, requiring highly sensitive methods for accurate identification.
- **Cost and Accessibility:** Many existing tests, such as the CellSearch test, are expensive, limiting their accessibility to patients.
- **Need for Comprehensive Trials:** Large-scale clinical trials involving diverse populations are essential to ensure that the technique is effective across different cancer types and demographics.

Recent Advancements:

- **Successful Single Cell Detection:** Researchers have successfully detected a single prostate cancer cell in blood samples using the ultrasound method, demonstrating its potential effectiveness.
- **Cost-Effective Testing:** The new ultrasound-based technique is expected to reduce testing costs to around \$100, making cancer detection more affordable and accessible.
- **Broader Applications in Cancer:** Ongoing research aims to expand the technique to detect other cancer types, such as breast cancer and melanoma, enhancing its utility in oncology.

UPSC Prelims PYQ : 2016

Ques : 'Mission Indradhanush' launched by the Government of India pertains to :

- (a) Immunization of children and pregnant women
- (b) Construction of smart cities across the country
- (c) India's own search for the Earth-like planets in outer space
- (d) New Educational Policy

Ans: (a)

Community In News : Doukhobor community

The Doukhobor community gained attention due to their dwindling population in Georgia and the challenges they face in preserving their unique culture and traditions amid assimilation pressures.

- This situation reflects their historical struggle for identity and nonviolent principles in a changing society.



Doukhobor Community:

- The Doukhobors are a spiritual community originating in Russia during the 18th century, known for their pacifist beliefs and rejection of the Orthodox Church.
- They believe in communal living, nonviolence, and a direct relationship with God, which they express through prayer and hymns without formal rituals.
- Their ancestors faced persecution for refusing military service and were expelled from mainstream society, leading them to establish tight-knit communities.
- In the mid-19th century, about 5,000 Doukhobors emigrated to Canada to escape oppression, where they continue to thrive while maintaining their cultural identity.
- The community historically practised agriculture and collective farming, excelling in food production during the Soviet era.
- Today, the Doukhobor population in Georgia has dwindled to about 100 individuals, who struggle to preserve their traditions and heritage amidst demographic changes.
- Younger generations feel the urgency to learn traditional customs as assimilation pressures increase in surrounding societies.

A three-tier war in West Asia with no endgame



Stanly Johny

In an essay in *Foreign Affairs* magazine in October 2023, U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan wrote, "...Although the Middle East remains beset with perennial challenges, the region is quieter than it has been for decades... The Israeli-Palestinian situation is tense, particularly in the West Bank, but in the face of serious frictions, we have de-escalated crises in Gaza." A few days after the piece was sent to press, on October 7, Hamas launched its deadliest attack in Israel, killing at least 1,200 people and taking some 250 people hostage, triggering the latest spell of war in the Israel-Palestine conflict. A year later, West Asia (or the Middle East, as Mr. Sullivan calls it) is deadlier today than it has been in decades.

Mr. Sullivan's October 2023 prognosis was not entirely unfounded if the region is seen from an American perspective. The Abraham Accords, signed in 2020 by Israel, the UAE, Bahrain, and Morocco, announced a new age of Arab-Israel partnership. Saudi Arabia was in an advanced stage of normalising ties with Israel, as Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman himself put it. At the G20 Summit in Delhi in September 2023, U.S. President Joe Biden announced an ambitious economic corridor that sought to connect India's western coast to Europe through the Persian Gulf, Jordan, and Israel. But what Mr. Sullivan, the Arabs, and the Israelis overlooked was the Palestine question.

Two narratives

Israel believed that it had established a new status quo – occupation without consequences. The Arabs believed that the Palestine issue had lost its geopolitical currency and that they could go ahead with formalising their decades-long back-room relationship with Israel. The U.S. wanted to bring the Sunni Arabs and the Israelis, two pillars of its West Asia strategy, closer in its bid to reshape West Asia and isolate Iran. But by carrying out a murderous attack in Israel, Hamas not only torpedoed this status quo, but also triggered a chain of events that led to a wider regional conflict, reinforcing the old argument that there will not be peace and stability in West

This is a conflict loop where no side is deterring its rival. With no way to break out of the loop, Israel chose to climb up the escalation ladder

Asia unless the Palestine question is addressed.

But Israel has a different narrative. It has always sought to delink Palestinian militarism from its occupation of the Palestinian territories. Before October 7, Israel had been treating Palestinian violence as a security nuisance. But after the Hamas attack, the first large-scale one in Israel proper since 1948, the narrative shifted. Now, Israel is fighting an "existential war" against terror. Israel marched to Gaza with fire and fury. Over the past 12 months, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) have killed more than 41,000 Palestinians (more than 110 every day) and injured nearly 1,00,000 Palestinians. Nearly the whole population of Gaza (2.3 million) has been displaced.

Octopus doctrine

As the onslaught on Gaza began, Hezbollah, the Iran-backed Lebanese militia group, opened a "support front" in Israel's north. Israel expanded the war, defying pressure from the U.S., by doubling down on its assault on Hezbollah and taking the war to Iran by attacking its embassy complex in Damascus. In retaliation, Iran launched direct attacks against Israel. Now, Israel is fighting a three-tier regional war in West Asia.

Israel has different objectives at each tier, which collectively make for its strategy to alter the balance of power in West Asia to further its advantage. At the bottom tier, Israel went to Gaza with two declared objectives – to destroy Hamas and secure the release of hostages. In the middle, it wants to push Hezbollah from the border region of Lebanon and stop the Shia militia from launching rockets into Israel so that the displaced residents of the Upper Galilee region can return to their homes. At the top, it wants to weaken Iran, its main regional rival. Israel sees the conflict, as the former Prime Minister Naftali Bennett put it, as a war against a rival octopus. Iran is the head of the octopus and the militias (Hamas, Hezbollah, Houthis, Hashad al-Shabi, etc.) are the tentacles. In the three-tier war, Israel wants to destroy or degrade the tentacles and weaken the octopus and thereby reshape West Asia. Is this an achievable goal?

After 12 months of fighting in Gaza, which has been under an Israeli blockade since 2007 and has been besieged by Israel since October 7, 2023, Israel is yet to meet its objectives in the 365 sq. km enclave, sandwiched between the Mediterranean Sea and Israel proper. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu wants to obliterate Hamas, but now even the IDF says this is not an achievable objective. More than 100 hostages, many of them believed to be dead, are still in Hamas's captivity. Hezbollah says it will not stop firing rockets into Israel unless Israel ceases fire in Gaza. Israel cannot do this unless it meets its goals in Gaza.

Mr. Netanyahu chose to expand the war to Lebanon not because he is achieving his

objectives, but because he is far from doing so. Granted that Israel's back-to-back attacks on Hezbollah, including its killing of Hassan Nasrallah, perhaps the second most influential figure in Iran's axis after Ayatollah Khamenei, was a huge setback for both Hezbollah and Iran. When Hezbollah was in shock after the killing of its leader, Israel launched a ground invasion of Lebanon. Here, Israel faces two questions. First, will the decapitation of Hezbollah's leadership help Israel finish the war in Gaza? Second, will the decapitation of Hezbollah's leadership help Israel defeat Hezbollah in Lebanon? The answer to the first question is an outright no. The second question will be answered in the coming weeks, months, or years.

History suggests decapitation hardly works in destroying or deterring militias. Nasrallah took over Hezbollah after Israel killed the group's co-founder, Abbas al-Musawi. That did not stop Hezbollah from becoming what it is today: the most powerful non-state militia in the region. Israel killed two of Hamas's founding leaders in 2004. But that did not stop Hamas from driving the Israelis out of the enclave in 2005, capturing the territory in 2007, and carrying out the cross-border attack on October 7 last year. If Israel has not destroyed Hamas in the besieged Gaza in 12 months, how is it going to stop Hezbollah from firing rockets from Lebanon? After Nasrallah was killed, Hezbollah has launched hundreds of rockets into Israel.

The Iran question

This takes us to the third problem: Iran. The IDF has great firepower. Israel has proved in the past that it can carry out pinpointed attacks inside Iran, which shows the deep penetration of its intelligence in the Islamic Republic. Israel is set to carry out a decisive attack in Iran, in retaliation for the October 1 ballistic missile attacks by the Iranians. But will that deter Iran from launching another attack or supporting the axis? If it doesn't, what Israel, Iran, and the region as a whole will get is a shooting match between the two most powerful actors of West Asia. If Iran's already porous deterrence is weakened further in the shooting match, there is a high possibility that Iran will change its nuclear doctrine. Israel does not have a clear endgame vis-à-vis Iran, unless there is a regime change in Tehran.

This is a conflict loop where no side is deterring its rival. With no way to break out of the loop, Israel chose to climb up the escalation ladder. To dial down the heat in the region, there has to first be a ceasefire in Gaza. For long-term stability, the Palestine question needs to be addressed. Israel is ready for neither now; it is seeking to reshape West Asia in its favour instead. The last time a country tried to do so was the U.S. And the world's most powerful nation failed.

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GS Paper 02 : International Relations

(UPSC CSE (M) GS-2 2018): "India's relations with Israel have, of late, acquired a depth and diversity, which cannot be rolled back." Discuss.(150 w/10m)

UPSC Mains Practice Question : Discuss the implications of the ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict for regional stability in West Asia, considering the role of non-state actors and external interventions. (250 w/15m)

Context :

- The article discusses the escalating conflict in West Asia following a deadly Hamas attack on Israel in October 2023.
- It critiques Israel's military response, its attempt to reshape the region, and the impact of ignoring the Palestinian issue.
- The article suggests that without addressing the Palestine issue, stability is unattainable.

Introduction: Changing Realities in West Asia

- In October 2023, U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan commented that the Middle East was quieter than it had been for decades, despite the ongoing tensions in the region.
- However, just a few days later, Hamas launched a major attack on Israel, resulting in severe casualties and hostilities, leading to renewed conflict.
- One year later, the region is deadlier than it has been in decades, contradicting the previously optimistic narrative of stability.

The American Perspective on West Asia Stability

- The American Perspective was shaped by recent developments like the Abraham Accords (2020), which signalled a new era of Arab-Israel partnership, and Saudi Arabia's moves to normalise ties with Israel.
- Additionally, the announcement of an economic corridor linking India to Europe via the Middle East also bolstered the perception of progress.
- However, the Palestinian issue was overlooked, which ultimately derailed this vision.

Israel's Current War: The "Octopus Doctrine"

- Israel is now engaged in a three-tier war, aiming to destroy Hamas, push Hezbollah back, and weaken Iran.

Daily News Analysis

- **Tier One:** The war in Gaza is focused on destroying Hamas and securing the release of hostages. However, these goals remain unmet after 12 months of fighting, with over 41,000 Palestinians killed and the entire population of Gaza displaced.
- **Tier Two:** In northern Israel, Hezbollah continues to launch attacks despite Israel's retaliation, undermining Israeli efforts to create a stable border.
- **Tier Three:** At the regional level, Israel is attempting to weaken Iran through direct military actions. Iran's influence is seen through its support of militias like Hamas and Hezbollah, and Israel is trying to degrade these tentacles while targeting the "head of the octopus" — Iran itself.

Hezbollah and the Limits of Decapitation

- Israel's recent killing of Hezbollah's leader Hassan Nasrallah was a major setback for the group.
- Yet history has shown that decapitation does not eliminate militias like Hezbollah or Hamas.
- Hezbollah continues to launch attacks, and Israel faces significant challenges in achieving its objectives in Lebanon.
- Attempts to weaken Hezbollah or replace its leadership may not lead to Israel's desired outcomes, as past experience has shown that militias can endure and continue to grow despite leadership losses.

The Iran Factor

- Israel has demonstrated its ability to carry out attacks deep inside Iran. However, it remains unclear whether such strikes will deter Iran from its regional objectives or from supporting allied militias.
- A "shooting match" between Iran and Israel could further destabilise the region, potentially prompting Iran to alter its nuclear policy.
- Israel lacks a clear strategy for Iran, especially without a regime change in Tehran.

Escalation and Conflict Loop

- Israel is caught in an escalation loop with no clear path to a decisive victory.
- The escalation of the conflict and expanding the war to new fronts have not yielded Israel's desired outcomes.
- For any lasting stability in West Asia, a ceasefire in Gaza is essential, along with addressing the Palestinian question.
- However, Israel is currently more focused on reshaping the region to its advantage rather than pursuing a peace process.

Conclusion

- The last country that attempted to reshape West Asia was the United States, and it ultimately failed to achieve lasting peace or stability.
- Israel's efforts may face a similar fate if it continues to disregard the central issues and focuses only on military escalation.