Impact of MARITIME trade

- What has been the impact on maritime trade so far in Ukraine?
- When the war started, some 15 sea ports in Ukraine were shut down.
- The loading and discharging of cargo ceased. Around 140 ships that were berthed in the Ukrainian ports at that time have stayed in the ports since then.

What has been the impact globally?

- Crude oil prices have gone up 20% over the last week in-part due to fears and also due to possible disruptions in supply since Russia is a major supplier of oil and gas through pipelines as well as ships.
- Black Sea is home to the few warm water ports the country has and is the theatre of the war.
- As crude oil prices go up, the price of ship fuel, called Bunker fuel, is going up as well.
- Fuel cost is the biggest contributor to the operating costs of a ship and the increase will have a cascading effect on shipping costs and freight.

What is the role of Turkey in this conflict?

- Turkey controls the entry and exit of Black Sea and hence has a say over ship traffic in the Black Sea.
- It has banned Russian naval ships from passing through the Bosphorus Strait. Turkey is not a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea which sees the oceans as commons and allows even warships innocent passage through territorial waters of a nation.
- Turkey abides by the Montreux convention which gives it greater control over the straits. Free passage is guaranteed for merchant vessels belonging to belligerents in war, especially if Turkey is not a belligerent.
- The convention also lays down clearly what is a warship and what is not.

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V dem report

The story so far

- According to the latest report from the V-Dem Institute at Sweden’s University of Gothenburg, the level of democracy enjoyed by the average global citizen in 2021 is down to 1989 levels, with the democratic gains of the post-Cold War period eroding rapidly in the last few years.
- The study, titled ‘Democracy Report 2022: Autocratisation Changing Nature?’ states that more than twice as many countries (32) are
undergoing autocratisation as are witnessing democratisation (15).

**What is the V-Dem report’s methodology?**

- Since key features of democracy, such as, judicial independence, are not directly measurable, and to rule out distortions due to subjective judgments, V-Dem uses aggregate expert judgments to produce estimates of critical concepts.
- The report classifies countries into four regime types based on their score in the Liberal Democratic Index (LDI):
- It classifies India as an electoral autocracy ranking it 93rd on the LDI, out of 179 countries.
- One of the biggest drivers of autocratisation is “toxic polarisation”, a dominant trend in 40 countries, as opposed to 5 countries that showed rising polarisation in 2011.

**What does the report say about India?**

- The report notes that India is part of a broader global trend of an anti-plural political party driving a country’s autocratisation. Ranked 93rd in the LDI, India figures in the “bottom 50%” of countries.
- It has slipped further down in the Electoral Democracy Index, to 100, and even lower in the Deliberative Component Index, at 102.
- In South Asia, India is ranked below Sri Lanka (88), Nepal (71), and Bhutan (65) and above Pakistan (117) in the LDI.
- What does the report say about the changing nature of autocratisation?
- One of the biggest drivers of autocratisation is “toxic polarisation” defined as a phenomenon that erodes respect of counter-arguments and associated aspects of the deliberative component of democracy a dominant trend in 40 countries, as opposed to 5 countries that showed rising polarisation in 2011.
- The report also points out that “toxic levels of polarisation contribute to electoral victories of anti-pluralist leaders and the empowerment of their autocratic agendas”.
- Noting that “polarisation and autocratisation are mutually reinforcing”, the report states that “measures of polarisation of society, political polarisation, and political parties’ use of hate speech tend to systematically rise together to extreme levels.”
- The report identified “misinformation” as a key tool deployed by autocratising governments to sharpen

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polarisation and shape domestic and international opinion.

- Repression of civil society and censorship of media were other favoured tools of autocratising regimes.

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War and energy control

- The lack of clear systems within social media companies that claim to connect the world is appalling.

Corporations and problems

- In the context of conflict, social media platforms have multiple challenges that go unaddressed.
- Content moderation remains a core area of concern, where, essentially, information warfare can be operationalised and throttled.
- Additionally, they also act as a conduit for further amplification of content on other platforms. Major social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter also provide space for extremist views.
- Social media platforms have gone by the mantra of “tech neutrality” to avoid taking decisions that may be considered political for too long.

Technology falls short

- Misinformation and disinformation are thorny challenges to these platforms.
- Algorithmic solutions are widely put to use to address them.
- These include identification of content violative of their terms, reducing the visibility of content deemed inappropriate by the algorithm, and in the determination of instances reported to be violative of the terms by other users.

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India has a role

- For India, there are many lessons. India’s strategic position in the global order appears to be diminishing.
- The time is ripe to set that right and gain currency in the developing world order.
- Indian diplomats can initiate a new track of conversations here which can benefit the international community at large.
- India should ensure that it initiates these conversations through well-informed diplomats. Ultimately, this will contribute to maintaining a rule based world order that can greatly benefit India.
- Transparency, accountability
Finally, it is necessary to reassess the domestic regulatory framework on social media platforms. Transparency and accountability need to be foundational to the regulation of social media platforms in the information age.

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**Safety of students**

- Before the onset of the pandemic, more than 7,50,000 Indian students were studying abroad, spending $24 billion in foreign economies, which is around 1% of India’s GDP.
- The number is expected to rise to around 1.8 million by 2024 when our students will be spending nearly $80 billion outside India. Demand is soaring for various reasons, including the gap in India’s supply of quality education against the demand.
- With more than half the Indian population under the age of 25, and no Indian university in the world’s top 100, it is natural that aspirational students would look to study abroad.
- It is estimated that around 20,000 Indian students were stranded in Ukraine.
- The work of the Union government, complemented by the efforts of some active State governments, is aimed at bringing our fellow citizens back home.
- These efforts are ably supported by embassies in the region, voluntary organisations like NISAU, and other people’s collectives

**Mandating protection**

- Given a proper ecosystem, Indian students can significantly contribute to India’s development by transferring advanced knowledge and best practices.
- They are consumers of higher education abroad, and guests of the nations they reside in.
- It is only natural then for us to mandate protection of our people abroad by ensuring that host countries take on this responsibility.
- The Indian government should proactively create a safety net for the international students.
- International agreements that oblige host countries to ensure the welfare of Indian students during times of crises and contingencies should be given paramount importance.
- The trade agreements India is currently negotiating with the U.K. and Australia make for great opportunity to do so.
- A mandatory student insurance scheme as well as responsibility of welfare of students in the foreign country should be incorporated into agreements to secure the interests
of students who also spend considerably in the host country.

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