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News: World Crafts Council (WCC)

- Srinagar has recently been added to the World Craft Cities list by the World Crafts Council (WCC), recognizing its rich craft traditions making it the fourth such city in India.

World Craft Council (WCC)

- World Craft Council (WCC) is a Kuwait-based organisation working on the recognition and preservation of traditional crafts across the globe.
- It was found by Ms. Aileen Osborn Vanderbilt Webb, Ms. Margaret M. Patch, and Smt Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay at the 1st World Crafts Council General Assembly in New York on June 12, 1964.
- Since its inception, the World Crafts Council has been affiliated with UNESCO under Consultative Status for many years.
- The World Crafts Council meets every four years.

Objective

- The main objective of the World Crafts Council is to strengthen the status of crafts in cultural and economic life.

- The Council also aims to promote fellowship among craftspersons by offering them encouragement, help, and advice.
- It fosters and assists cultural exchange through conferences, international visits, research study, lectures, workshops, exhibitions, and other activities.

World Craft City by World Craft Council

- The WCC-World Craft City Programme, a groundbreaking initiative launched in 2014 by the World Crafts Council AISBL (WCC-International) in recognition of the pivotal role local authorities, craftspeople, and communities play in cultural, economic, and social development worldwide.
- The WCC-World Craft City Programme establishes a dynamic network of craft cities across the globe, aligning with the principles of the creative economy. This initiative responds to the increasing acknowledgment of the valuable contributions made by local entities to the multifaceted dimensions of development.
- Recently, Srinagar has recently been added to the World Craft Cities list by the World Crafts Council (WCC), recognizing its rich craft traditions making it the fourth such city from India.

- Jaipur, Mamallapuram, and Mysore are other three Indian cities on the list included in a total of 60 cities worldwide.

Significance of World Craft City Recognition

- **International Prestige:** The recognition elevates the city's status on a global platform, enhancing its reputation as a center of excellence for crafts.
- **Economic Benefits:** This designation can boost the local economy by attracting tourists, investors, and buyers interested in authentic crafts, thereby increasing market opportunities for artisans.
- **Cultural Preservation:** It highlights the city's dedication to preserving traditional crafts, ensuring that these cultural practices are passed down to future generations.
- **Support for Artisans:** The recognition often leads to increased support for local artisans, including funding, training, and opportunities for international collaboration and exchange.
- **Promotion of Innovation:** It encourages innovation within the craft sector by blending traditional techniques with modern designs, fostering creativity and sustainability.
- **Enhanced Visibility:** The city and its crafts receive greater visibility through international media coverage, exhibitions, and events associated with the WCC.

Criteria for Recognition

To be recognized as a World Craft City, a city typically needs to demonstrate:

- A rich **tradition of crafts and a significant population of skilled artisans.**
- **Active promotion and development of craft traditions.**
- **Commitment to preserving cultural heritage and supporting sustainable practices.**
- **Evidence of innovation and creativity** in craft practices.
- **Strong community involvement and support** for the craft sector.

UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN)

- UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) was created in **2004.**
- Currently, over 250 cities make up this network which aims towards a common objective of **placing creativity and cultural industries at the heart of their development plans at the local level and cooperating actively at the international level.**
- By joining the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN), the **cities pledge to share best practices and develop partnerships involving public and private sectors** as well as civil society to strengthen the creation, production, and distribution of cultural activities.

- The UNESCO Creative Cities aims to achieve Sustainable Development Goals through innovative thinking and action.
- The network covers seven creative fields: crafts and folk arts, media arts, film, design, gastronomy, literature and music.
- **Mumbai** – Creative City of Film, **Hyderabad** – Creative City of Gastronomy, **Chennai, Varanasi, and Gwalior** – Creative City of Music, **Jaipur** – Creative City of Crafts and Folk Arts and **Srinagar** – Creative City of Crafts and Folk arts, **Kozhikode – Creative City of Literature** are the entries from India.
- Recently, the **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)** announced the addition of 55 new cities to its **Creative Cities Network (UCCN)**.
- Among the **new entrants, two Indian cities made their mark: Kozhikode in Kerala as the ‘City of Literature’ and Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh as the ‘City of Music’.**

News: African Union (AU) included in G –20

- Recently, African Union was added to the economic grouping of G – 20, marking a significant boost to the African sovereign nations in world economy.

Group of 20 (G 20)

- Group of 20(G-20) is an **international forum for Govt. and Central bank governors from 19 countries, African Union (AU) and European Union (EU).**
- Aim of the grouping is to **bring together systemically important industrialized and developing economies to discuss key issues in the global economy.**
- G 20 was founded in **1999** to discuss policies relating to financial stability.
- G-20 has expanded its agenda since 2008 and Heads of Gov. /Heads of States as well as **Finance Ministers** and foreign ministers have met periodically.
- G20 **works with International Organization of Securities Commission (IOSCO) and Financial Stability Board (FSB) in setting up the standards for strengthening the securities markets.**

The work of G20 is divided into two tracks:

- The **Finance track comprises all meetings with G20 finance ministers and central bank governors** and their deputies. Meeting several times throughout the year they focus on monetary and fiscal issues, financial regulations, etc.

- The **Sherpa track** focuses on broader issues such as political engagement, anti – corruption, development, energy, etc.
- Since 2011, **G20 summits had been held annually.**
- **Spain** is a **permanent non–member** invitee for the G-20 summits held annually.
- Members are **Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States and European Union.**
- Collectively, the **G20 economies account for around 90% of the gross world product (GWP), 80% of world trade (or, if excluding EU intra-trade, 75%), two-thirds of the world population, and approximately half of the world land area.**
- The **chairmanship of G-20 is rotated among members** for a period starting from December 1 to November 30 of each year. Current chair is Italy (2020 - 2021), followed by Indonesia (2021 - 2022) and India (2022 - 23). The **group of present, immediate past and immediate next chairperson is called G-20 Troika.**
- G-20 works **without a permanent secretariat.** Each year, **incumbent chair will setup a temporary secretariat.** **Osaka Track on Digital economy (discussed in 2019 summit held at Osaka, Japan) was rejected by India, Indonesia and South Africa.**

- G-20 Summits includes summit of State leaders, Summit of Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors, Summit of Labour and Employment Leaders, Summit of Foreign Leaders, Summit of Education Ministers, B20 Summit, C20 Summit, T20 summit, W20 Summit and Y20 summit.
- Recently, Italy organised Global Health Summit as its role as President of G20.

African Union (AU)

- African Union is the **political continental union consisting of 55 countries of Africa, except various territories of European possessions** located in Africa which **replaced Organisation of African Unity (OAU)**.
- Recently, it was decided that **African Union (AU) will join the G 20 grouping**.
- AU was announced in the **Sirte Declaration** in Sirte, Libya on 9th September 1999.
- Founded in 26th May 2001 in **Addis Ababa, Ethiopia** & its secretariat is located there.
- Most important decisions are made by **Assembly of AU, a semi-annual meeting of Heads of State and Government of its members**.
- 12th Extra-Ordinary Summit of African Union saw **54/55 members (except Eritrea) signing the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA)**. AfCFTA seeks to create a single continental market for goods & services.

- It establishes the **largest free trade agreement since the creation of WTO**.
- Recently, India has extended \$15 million financial support to Niger as a support for organizing AU Summit.
- **Membership of Male has been suspended** following the military coup in the state.
- African Union (AU) was recently **given a collective membership in G – 20**.

African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)

- The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is a **free trade area, outlined in the African Continental Free Trade Agreement among African Union nations**.
- AfCFTA is the **largest in the world in terms of participating countries** since the formation of the World Trade Organization.
- The agreement was brokered by the African Union (AU) and was signed on by 44 of its 55 member states in Kigali, Rwanda in 2018. To date, the **Agreement has been signed by 54 out of 55 member States**.
- **Accra, Ghana serves as the Secretariat** of AFCFTA.
- The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) **forecasts that the simplification of border controls and the reduction in duties to AfCFTA will boost intra-regional trade by 52 percent in five years**.

News: Widening of the scope of SCO with new members joining

Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)

- Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is a permanent Eurasian political, economic, and military intergovernmental organization aiming to maintain peace, security, and stability in the region.
- SCO was established on 15th June 2001 with its headquarters in Beijing, China.
- Previously it was known as Shanghai-Five. With the inclusion of Uzbekistan on 15th June 2001, the grouping became Shanghai Cooperation Organization.
- Present members of the organisation are Belarus, China, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.
- Mongolia is an observer of the group.
- Dialogue Partners are Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Cambodia, Egypt, Kuwait, Maldives, Nepal, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Turkey and United Arab Emirates (UAE).
- Culture has become an important element of SCO.
- SCO is the largest regional organization in the world in terms of geographical coverage and population, covering 80% area of the Eurasian continent and nearly 40% of the human population. As of 2023, its combined GDP based on PPP was around 32% of the world's total.

- Officially accepted languages in the group are **Russian and Chinese**.
- Recent meet of Prosecutors General hosted by India, adopted a protocol to **strengthen cooperation in preventing and combating growing menace of human trafficking, especially women and children**.
- Recently, **Varanasi has been selected as the SCO region's first "Tourism and Cultural Capital"**.
- Varanasi "Cultural and Tourism Capital" has been **decided under a new rotating initiative to promote people-to-people contacts and tourism among the member states**.
- **Each year a city of the cultural heritage of a member country that will take over the rotating Presidency of the organisation will get the title to highlight its prominence**.

Objectives

- **Strengthening mutual trust and neighborliness** among the member states.
- Promoting **effective cooperation in -politics, trade & economy, research & technology, and culture**.
- **Enhancing ties in education, energy, transport, tourism, environmental protection, etc**.
- **Maintain and ensure peace, security, and stability in the region**.

- Establishment of a democratic, fair, and rational new international political & economic order.
- Guiding Principle – **Based on Shanghai Spirit.**
- Internal policy is based on the **principles of mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, mutual consultations, respect for cultural diversity**, and a desire for common development.
- External policy in accordance with the **principles of non-alignment**, non-targeting any third country, and openness.

Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization

- **Heads of State Council** – **The supreme SCO body which decides its internal functioning and its interaction with other States** & international organizations and considers international issues.
- **Heads of Government Council** – **Approves the budget, considers, and decides upon issues related economic spheres** of interaction within SCO.
- **Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs** – Considers issues related to day-to-day activities.
- **Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS)** – Established to combat terrorism, separatism, and extremism.

- **SCO Secretariat** – Based in Beijing to provide informational, analytical & organizational support.

Importance for India

- India's membership of SCO can help in **achieving regional integration**, promote connectivity and stability across borders.

Security

- India through RATS can **improve its counterterrorism** abilities by working toward intelligence sharing, law enforcement and developing best practices and technologies.
- Through the SCO, India can also work on **anti-drug trafficking** and small arms proliferation.
- Cooperation on common challenges of **terrorism and radicalization**.

Energy

- **India being an energy deficient country** with increasing demands for energy, **SCO provides it with an opportunity to meet its energy** requirements through regional diplomacy.

- Talks on the construction of stalled pipelines like the **TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) pipeline**; **IPI (Iran-Pakistan-India) pipeline** can get a much-needed push through the SCO.

Trade

- SCO provides **direct access to Central Asia** – overcoming the main hindrance in flourishing of trade between India and Central Asia.
- SCO acts as an **alternative route to Central Asia**.
- Economic Ties - **Central Asian countries provides India with a market for its IT, telecommunications, banking, finance and pharmaceutical industries.**

Geopolitical

- Central Asia is a part of India's **Extended Neighborhood** – SCO provides India an opportunity to pursue the **“Connect Central Asian Policy”**.
- Helps India fulfil its aspiration of playing an active role in its extended neighborhood as well as **checking the ever-growing influence of China** in Eurasia.
- Platform for India to **simultaneously engage with its traditional friend Russia as well as its rivals, China, and Pakistan.**

Challenges of SCO Membership for India

- Pakistan's inclusion in SCO poses potential difficulties for India.
- India's ability to assert itself would be limited and it may have to play second fiddle since China and Russia are co-founders of SCO and its dominant powers.
- India may also have to either dilute its growing partnership with the West or engage in a delicate balancing act - as SCO has traditionally adopted an anti-Western posture.

Wonders of SCO

- India- Statue of Unity
- Kazakhstan- Archaeological Landscape of Tamgaly
- China- Daming imperial palace complex
- Kyrgyzstan- Lake Issyk-Kul
- Pakistan- The Great Mughal's heritage, Lahore
- Russia- The Golden Ring cities
- Tajikistan- Palace of Nowruz
- Uzbekistan- The Poi Kalon complex.

News: New members in BRICS bloc

BRICS

- BRICS is the **economic grouping** of major emerging national economies. Its founding members were **Brazil, Russia, India and China**. South Africa joined the grouping in 2010 to become BRICS.
- Presently, **Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)** are also the members. **Saudi Arabia** is yet to officially join, but participates in the organisation's activities as an invited nation. **Argentina**, who had applied for the **membership has withdrawn**, with new government forming alienating from the grouping.
- While there is **currently no formal application process to join BRICS**, any hopeful government **must receive the unanimous backing of all member states** to receive an invitation.
- Combined, the **BRICS members encompass about 30% of the world's land surface and 45% of the global population**.
- **South Africa has the largest economy in Africa** whereas **Brazil, Russia, India, and China** are among the world's ten largest countries by population, area, and gross domestic product (GDP) nominal and by purchasing power parity.

- All five initial member states are members of the G20, with a combined nominal GDP of US\$28 trillion (about 27% of the gross world product), a total GDP (PPP) of around US\$57 trillion (33% of global GDP PPP), and an estimated US\$4.5 trillion in combined foreign reserves (as of 2018).
- The BRICS countries are considered the foremost geopolitical rival to the G7 bloc of leading advanced economies, implementing competing initiatives such as the New Development Bank, the BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement, the BRICS pay, the BRICS Joint Statistical Publication and the BRICS basket reserve currency.
- BRICS PAY or BRICS Pay is a distributed payment messaging mechanism system by BRICS member states. It is similar to Europe's SWIFT and India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI). The project is a joint venture between states to receive and make payments in own local currency.
- Recently, BRICS Counter Terrorism Action Plan that will strengthen counter terror cooperation among the members of the grouping has been finalised.
- The discussion in this regard was held at the sixth meeting of the BRICS Counter Terrorism Working Group held on July 2021.
- The plan is one of the key deliverables during India's Chairmanship of BRICS.

- BRICS plus is a concept put forward by China with the objective of widening the “Circle of Friends” of BRICS that can bring unity among developing countries.

Structure

- BRICS does not exist in form of organization, but it is an annual summit between the supreme leaders of five nations.
- The Chairmanship of the forum is rotated annually among the members, in accordance with the acronym B-R-I-C-S.
- BRICS cooperation in the past decade has expanded to include an annual programme of over 100 sectoral meetings.

Objectives

- The BRICS seeks to deepen, broaden and intensify cooperation within the grouping and among the individual countries for more sustainable, equitable and mutually beneficial development.
- BRICS takes into consideration each member’s growth, development and poverty objectives to ensure relations are built on the respective country’s economic strengths and to avoid competition where possible.

- BRICS is emerging as a new and promising political-diplomatic entity with diverse objectives, far beyond the original objective of reforming global financial institutions.

Areas of Cooperation

Economic Cooperation

- There are rapidly growing trade and investment flows between BRICS countries as well as economic cooperation activities across a range of sectors.
- Agreements have been concluded in the areas of Economic and Trade Cooperation; Innovation Cooperation, Customs Cooperation; strategic cooperation between the BRICS Business Council , Contingent Reserve Agreement and the New Development Bank.
- These agreements contribute to realization of the shared objectives of deepening economic cooperation and fostering integrated trade and investment markets.

People-to-People exchange

- BRICS members have recognized the need for strengthening People-to-People exchanges and to foster closer cooperation in the areas of culture, sport, education, film and youth.

- People-to-People exchanges seek to forge new friendships; deepen relations and mutual understanding between BRICS peoples in the spirit of openness, inclusiveness, diversity and mutual learning.
- Such People to people exchanges include the Young Diplomats Forum, Parliamentarian Forum, Trade Union Forum, Civil BRICS as well as the Media Forum.

Political and Security Cooperation

- BRICS member political and security cooperation is aimed **at achieving peace, security, development and cooperation for a more equitable and fair world.**
- BRICS provides opportunities for **sharing policy advice and exchanges of best practices in terms of domestic and regional challenges** as well as advancing the **restructuring of the global political architecture** so that it is more balanced, resting on the pillar of multilateralism.
- BRICS is utilized as a driver for South Africa's foreign policy priorities including the pursuit of the African Agenda and South-South Cooperation.

Cooperation Mechanism

Cooperation among members is achieved through:

- Track I: Formal diplomatic engagement between the national governments.

- Track II: Engagement through government-affiliated institutions, e.g. state-owned enterprises and business councils.
- Track III: Civil society and People-to-People engagement.

Importance for India

- India can benefit from collective strength of BRICS by way of consultation and cooperation on economic issues of mutual interests, as well as topical global issues, such as, international terrorism, climate change, food and energy security, reforms of global governance institutions, etc.
- India remains engaged with the other BRICS countries (except China) on its NSG membership.
- The NDB will help India to raise and avail resources for their infrastructure and sustainable development projects. The NDB has approved its first set of loans, which included a loan of US\$ 250 million in respect of India for Multi tranche Financing Facility for Renewable Energy Financing Scheme’.