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S.NO.	TOPIC
1.	LAND DEGRADATION
2.	INDIA-QATAR RELATIONS
3.	PM TO LAY FOUNDATION FOR AMRIT VATIKA

LAND DEGRADATION

SOURCE: [DOWN TO EARTH](#)

WHY IN NEWS?

From 2015-2019, the world lost at least 100 million hectares of healthy and productive land each year, according to the [United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification \(UNCCD\) data](#). This is twice the size of Greenland, it added.

KEY FINDINGS OF THE REPORT:

1. Global Land Degradation:

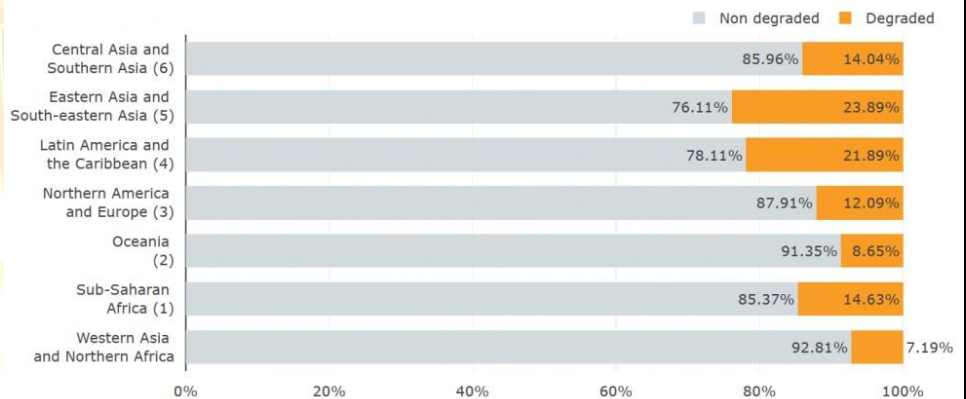
- a) Land degradation is increasing in all regions worldwide, as per the UNCCD's first data dashboard, which gathered national statistics from 126 countries.

2. Severely Affected Regions:

- a) **Eastern & Central Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean are the most severely affected, with over 20% of their total land area experiencing degradation.**

3. Faster Degradation Rates:

- a) Sub-Saharan Africa, Western and Southern Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean all witnessed land degradation at rates exceeding the global average.



4. Positive Examples:

- a) **Botswana reduced land degradation from 36% to 17%** of its territory in sub-Saharan Africa.
- b) The **Dominican Republic decreased degraded land from 49% to 31%** between 2015 and 2019.
- c) **Uzbekistan planted 1.6 million hectares of saxaul from 2018 to 2022 to combat degradation caused by the drying of the Aral Sea.**

5. Restoration Goals:

- a) To achieve land degradation neutrality (LDN) targets outlined in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, approximately 1.5 billion hectares of degraded land need to be restored by 2030, according to UNCCD data.

ABOUT LAND DEGRADATION:

Land degradation stems from human activities that exploit land, leading to a decline in its usefulness, biodiversity, soil fertility, and overall health.

CAUSES OF LAND DEGRADATION:

Natural Causes:

- **Loss of Soil Cover:** Soil erosion, mainly due to rainfall and surface runoff, contributes to 11.01% of desertification in India.
- **Water Erosion:** Water erosion accounts for 10.98% of desertification in India.
- **Wind Erosion:** Wind erosion, where soil is carried away by the wind, causes 5.46% of desertification in India.



Anthropogenic Causes:

- **Poor Agricultural Practices:** Inappropriate crop rotations and excessive use of agrochemicals exacerbate land degradation.
- **Deforestation:** Activities like deforestation and shifting cultivation degrade vegetation, which is crucial for soil health.
- **Increasing Urbanization:** Rising urbanization diverts land from agriculture to urban development.
- **Overgrazing:** Unsustainable grazing practices worsen land degradation.
- **Climate Change:** Rising temperatures and frequent droughts intensify desertification and contribute to forest fires.

IMPACT OF LAND DEGRADATION:

- **Economic Impact:** Land degradation resulted in India losing over 2% of its GDP for 2014-15.

➤ **Environmental Impact:**

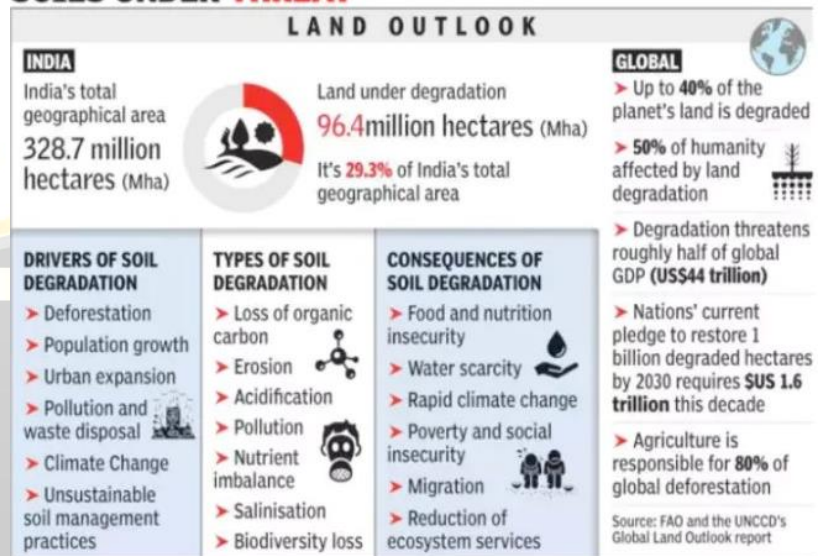
- **Soil Erosion:** Topsoil detachment from land carried away by various factors.
- **Loss of Fertility:** Resulting from scientific inputs, unscientific cropping practices, and soil health degradation.
- **Salinity/Alkalinity:** Affects soil fertility in areas with water surplus and high temperatures.
- **Water Scarcity:** Dryland populations face water stress and increased drought risks.

➤ **Potential Impacts on Human Health:**

- **Malnutrition risks** from reduced food and water supplies.
- Increased risk of **water- and food-borne diseases** due to poor hygiene and a lack of clean water.
- **Respiratory diseases due to atmospheric dust** from wind erosion and air pollutants.
- Spread of **infectious diseases due to population migration.**

- **Rights of Indigenous People:** Insecure land tenure hinders people's ability, including indigenous groups, to combat climate change and threatens their rights and livelihoods.

SOILS UNDER THREAT



MEASURES TAKEN BY GOVERNMENT:

- **National-Level Land Degradation Mapping:** ISRO, along with partner institutions, is conducting national-level land degradation mapping under the Natural Resources Census (NRC) mission of DOS/ISRO. This initiative aims to provide information on land degradation at a 1:50,000 scale.

- **National Commitments:** India is committed to achieving national goals related to Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) and restoring 26 million hectares of degraded land by 2030. These efforts emphasize sustainable and optimal utilization of land resources.

UNCCD's Goal of Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN):

- Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) is a state where land resources needed for ecosystems and food security remain stable or improve over time.
- A key part of this strategy is to restore one billion hectares of land by 2030 with proper funding and action.
- Promisingly, 109 countries have set voluntary LDN targets for 2030.



- **India's Pledge:** India has made a commitment to the **Bonn Challenge**, pledging to restore 13 million hectares of degraded and deforested land by 2020 and an additional 8 million hectares by 2030.
- **Government Schemes:** Various government schemes address land degradation issues, including the **Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, Soil Health Card Scheme, and Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana.**
- **National Afforestation Programme:** Implemented since 2000, this program focuses on afforesting degraded forest lands. It is administered by the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change.

UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION (UNCCD):

- ❖ The UNCCD is **one of three Conventions from the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro.**
- ❖ **Established in 1994**
- ❖ It is **the sole legally binding international agreement linking environment and development to sustainable land management.**
- ❖ **Members:** 197 parties, India became a signatory in 1994 and ratified it in 1996.
- ❖ Objectives:
 - Aims to improve living conditions in drylands.
 - Seeks to maintain and restore land and soil productivity.
 - Mitigates the effects of drought.





INDIA-QATAR RELATIONS

SOURCE: [THE HINDU](#)

WHY IN NEWS?

A Qatari court handed down death sentences to eight Indian Naval veterans on charges of espionage. The trial was secretive, with little information on the charges or evidence, and the judgment hasn't been shared with India.

REASON FOR SENTENCING:

➤ **Unclear Charges:** The precise charges against the eight Indian Navy officials remain unknown.

➤ **Alleged Espionage:** Various news reports suggest that they were arrested for allegedly leaking classified information related to a high-value Qatari submarine project.

➤ **Speculation on Recipient:** There is speculation in some news reports that the recipient of the classified information was Israel.

➤ **Case Details:**

✓ **Arrest Details:** The Indian Embassy learned about their arrests in mid-September of the previous year.

✓ **Consular Access:** The first consular access was granted on October 3, more than a month after their detention.

✓ **Solitary Confinement:** While the specific charges were never publicly disclosed, the fact that the detainees were confined in solitary cells suggests possible security-related offenses.

ARRESTED IN AUG 2022, CHARGES NOT REVEALED

<p>➤ The 8 former Navy personnel who have been convicted were employees of Al Dahra Global Technologies, which provided technical consultancy services to Qatari armed forces</p> <p>➤ They were arrested on Aug 30, 2022 and trial began on March 29, 2023. Death sentence was pronounced after seven hearings</p>	<p>➤ The company's CEO, who was also arrested, was released in November 2022, before the Fifa World Cup</p> <p>➤ The charges against the arrested personnel were not made public or conveyed to their families. Some reports claimed they were accused of spying on a submarine programme on behalf of Israel</p>	<p>➤ The first consular access was granted on Oct 3, 2022. They were reportedly allowed to contact their families soon after</p> <p>➤ India's ambassador in Doha and deputy head of mission met the arrested officers on Oct 1 this year</p> <p>➤ The families of the officers have already filed a mercy plea with the Emir of Qatar</p>
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“ We are deeply shocked by the verdict of death penalty... We are in touch with the family members and the legal team, and we are exploring all legal options. We attach high importance to this case and have been following it closely. We will continue to extend all consular and legal assistance. We will also take up the verdict with Qatari authorities – External affairs ministry

INDIA – QATAR RELATION:

➤ **Political Relations:**

✓ **Close ties:** India and Qatar share historically close relations, with regular high-level diplomatic engagements.

✓ **State Visits:** HH Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani's visit to India in 2015 was a milestone event.

✓ **Emphasis on partnership:** The visit aimed to deepen cooperation in energy, investments, infrastructure, education, culture, and more.

✓ Several agreements and MOUs signed during the visit covering various areas including transfer of sentenced persons and information technology.

➤ **Bilateral Agreements:**

✓ India and Qatar signed a **Defence Cooperation Agreement in 2008**.

✓ The **Joint Defence Cooperation Committee (JDCC)** conducts meetings to strengthen military ties.

✓ India and Qatar have agreements, such as the 2015 "**Transfer of Sentenced Persons**" agreement, that could be invoked for repatriation of prisoners.

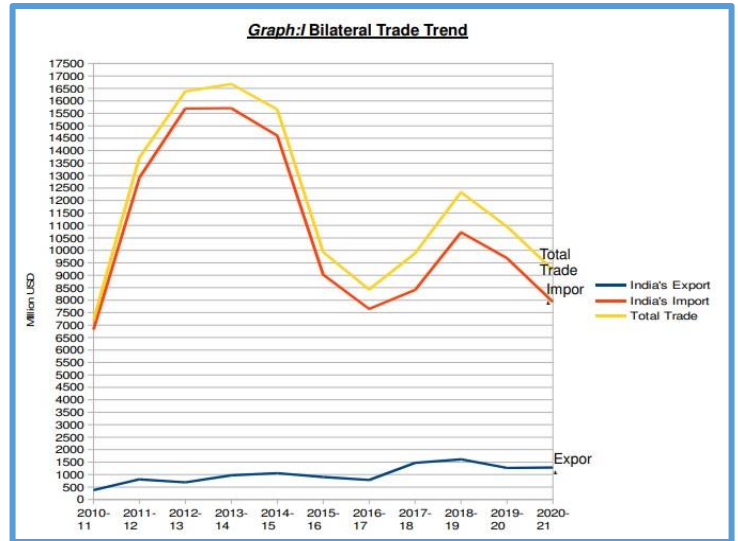
➤ **Defence Cooperation:**

✓ The defence relationship includes training, exchanges, and participation in military exercises.





- ✓ **Indian Naval Ships have made goodwill visits to Qatar**, promoting cooperation in maritime security.
- **Commercial Relations:**
 - ✓ **Economic growth:** India's exports to Qatar have been on the rise, **India's exports to Qatar were valued at just \$1.97 billion in FY2022-23.**
 - ✓ **Key exports include cereals, copper articles, iron and steel articles, vegetables, fruits, spices, and processed food products**
 - ✓ **Investment opportunities:** Both countries are exploring investment avenues, particularly in infrastructural sectors.
 - ✓ **The India-Qatar Business Forum facilitates business collaborations.**
- **Cultural Relations:**
 - ✓ **Cultural exchanges:** India's diverse cultural heritage is appreciated in Qatar.
 - ✓ **Cultural cooperation agreement:** Signed in 2012 to promote cultural exchange.
 - ✓ **Celebration of International Day of Yoga (IDY)** is a testament to the deepening cultural ties.
- **Indian Community:**
 - ✓ **Expatriate community:** Indian nationals constitute the largest expatriate group in Qatar, engaged in various professions.
 - ✓ **Labor cooperation:** A **Joint Working Group on Labor and Manpower Development** supports the welfare of Indian workers in Qatar.
 - ✓ **Appreciation for Indian workers:** The Indian community is recognized for its **contribution to Qatar's progress.**
 - ✓ **Labor reforms:** Qatar has undertaken labor reforms to improve workers' conditions and rights.



IMPORTANCE OF INDIA-QATAR RELATIONS:

- India has **strong ties with Qatar**, including **strategic and defense cooperation** agreements.
- **India sources 40% of its LNG needs from Qatar** and is a major source of imports, particularly raw materials for construction and fresh food.
- **700,000 Indian expatriates play a vital role** in Qatar's institutions, industry, and workforce.
- **Diplomatic Response Needed:**
 - ✓ India's government **must act swiftly to support the Indian Naval veterans.**
 - ✓ Diplomatic efforts should involve **legal appeals and discussions with the Qatari leadership.**
 - ✓ **The highest levels of diplomacy**, including the Indian Prime Minister, should be activated if necessary.





CHALLENGES IN PRESENT SITUATION

➤ Diplomatic Challenge:

- ✓ The situation poses a **major diplomatic challenge for the Indian government**, given the **severity of the charges and the potential consequences** for the accused individuals.

➤ Secrecy and Lack of Transparency:

- ✓ The trial was shrouded in secrecy, with **limited information about the charges and evidence**, which has raised concerns about due process and transparency.

➤ Potential Impact on India-Qatar Relations:

- ✓ The case has the potential to impact the **strong and multifaceted relationship between India and Qatar**, which includes strategic, defense, economic, and people-to-people ties.

➤ Humanitarian Concerns:

- ✓ The death sentences have raised humanitarian concerns, and there is a **need to ensure that the accused individuals are given a fair and just legal process**.

➤ Strategic Leverage:

- ✓ India's strategic ties with Qatar, including defense cooperation and agreements, provide **opportunities for diplomatic efforts and negotiations**.

➤ Large Indian Expatriate Community:


- ✓ The significant presence of **Indian expatriates in Qatar**, contributing to the country's institutions, industry, and workforce, adds to the complexity and sensitivity of the situation.

➤ Rare Espionage Case:

- ✓ This case is **exceptional in the Gulf region**, involving **espionage by Indians**, which further underscores its significance.

Case History	
<p>In August 2022, eight Indian nationals – all retired Indian Navy personnel – were arrested by Qatari intelligence</p> <p>Capt Navtej Singh Gill, Capt Birendra Kumar Verma, Capt Saurabh Vasishth, Cdr Amit Nagpal, Cdr Purnendu Tiwari, Cdr Sugunakar Pakala, Cdr Sanjeev Gupta, Sailor Ragesh were working for Al Dahra company</p> <p>Before taking up jobs at Al Dahra, all had retired from Indian Navy several years ago</p>	<p>Initially, they were kept in solitary confinement without clear charges</p> <p>They were charged with spying in Qatar on behalf of Israel</p> <p>Al Dahra was shut down after the arrests</p> <p>Reports said the personnel were working on a project to develop small, stealth submarines for the Qatar Navy</p>

<p>India had secured consular access to the accused and provided legal assistance</p>	<p>Trial started in March this year</p>	<p>Qatari court of first instance has pronounced them guilty and awarded death sentence</p>	<p>India is 'deeply shocked' at the verdict and 'exploring legal options'</p>
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WAY FORWARD

The government **must act swiftly to ensure that the Indian nationals** sentenced to death in Qatar receive the best possible support in their legal appeals. This support should involve a **multi-pronged approach**:

➤ Legal Appeals:

- ✓ The government should work **diligently through the legal appeals** process to **secure a fair trial** and **potentially commute** the death sentences to jail terms.

➤ Diplomatic Efforts:

- ✓ Engaging in **diplomatic negotiations** and discussions with **Qatari authorities is crucial**.
- ✓ The highest levels, including the Prime Minister, should be ready to intervene if necessary.

➤ Appealing for Clemency:

- ✓ A strong case for clemency must be presented to the Qatari leadership, highlighting the value of preserving human lives and the principle of **"no Indian left behind."**

➤ Focus on Humanitarian Concerns:

- ✓ While **geopolitical considerations may play a role**, the government should emphasize that the **lives of these men are a priority for India**, irrespective of any other geopolitical issues.

➤ Assurance of Support:



- ✓ The Indian government **must reassure its citizens abroad, especially the large Indian diaspora** in the Gulf, that it is **committed to protecting their interests and welfare**.

Prelims Specific

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC):

- ✓ Established in **1981** among **Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE**.
- ✓ Based on shared relations, **geography, political systems, Islamic beliefs, common objectives**.
- ✓ Comprises Supreme Council, Ministerial Council, and Secretariat General.
- ✓ Political, economic, social, and regional organization.

India's Relations with GCC:

- **Political:**
 - ✓ **GCC governments are India-friendly.**
 - ✓ Indian PM received **top civilian awards** from the **UAE and Bahrain**.
 - ✓ Saudi Arabia and UAE maintained non-hostile positions on **India's domestic developments**.
- **Economic:**
 - ✓ GCC states supply essential energy to India.
 - ✓ Remittances from Indians in **GCC are valued at USD 4.8 billion**.
 - ✓ UAE and Saudi Arabia are India's **third and fourth-largest trading partners**.
 - ✓ Total bilateral trade with **GCC in 2018-19 was USD 121.34 billion**.
 - ✓ **UAE ranks among the top 10 sources of FDI inflows into India**.
- **Security:**
 - ✓ India and GCC are **both FATF members**.
 - ✓ Participation in the **multilateral Milan Exercise**.
 - ✓ Bilateral exercises between India and most GCC countries.
 - ✓ Indian Navy's access to **Oman's Port of Duqm SEZ**, a significant **deep-sea port**.
 - ✓ Bilateral naval and **air force exercises with the UAE**.





PM TO LAY FOUNDATION FOR AMRIT VATIKA

SOURCE: [INDIAN EXPRESS](#)

WHY IN NEWS?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will lay the foundation stone for Amrit Vatika, a memorial lawn next to India Gate. The soil from 766 districts across India has been collected for this event.

ABOUT AMRIT VATIKA

- Amrit Vatika will span an area of 12,000 sqm next to the India Gate.
- The site is expected to be ready for visitors within the next four to six months.
- It will be located beside the Netaji Bose statue under the Grand Canopy and the National War Memorial.
- The memorial will commemorate 75 years of India's Independence and honor the valor of unsung freedom fighters.
- It will symbolize 'Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat,' an initiative to enhance interaction and promote mutual understanding between states and Union Territories.
- **Mission Amrit Sarovar:**
 - ✓ Mission Amrit Sarovar follows a "Whole of Government" approach involving various ministries.
 - ✓ The mission focuses on constructing or rejuvenating at least 75 Amrit Sarovars in each district.
 - ✓ Each Amrit Sarovar will have a pondage area of at least 1 acre with a water holding capacity of around 10,000 cubic meters.
 - ✓ The Sarovars will be surrounded by trees such as Neem, Peepal, and Banyan, serving multiple purposes like irrigation, fisheries, and more.



'MERI MAATI MERA DESH' CAMPAIGN:

- The Prime Minister announced the launch of the 'Meri Maati Mera Desh' campaign.
- This campaign aims to honor the sacrifices of our brave martyrs through various programs across the country.
- Special inscriptions will be installed in lakhs of village panchayats in memory of these luminaries.
- The 'Amrit Kalash Yatra' will be organized, carrying soil from every corner of the country to Delhi.

Key Significance:

- **Memorial Plaque Installation:**
 - ✓ The campaign includes the installation of a memorial plaque bearing the names of those who sacrificed their lives.
 - ✓ This work can be executed through the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), utilizing local materials and resources.
- **Vasudha Vandhan:**
 - ✓ 'Vasudha Vandhan' involves every gram panchayat or village renewing "Mother Earth" by planting 75 saplings of indigenous species and creating an Amrit Vatika.
- **Veeron Ka Vandan:**





- ✓ 'Veeron Ka Vandan' aims to honor freedom fighters and their families.
- **Soil Collection Process:**
 - ✓ Young volunteers and others will collect soil from every panchayat or village and bring it to the block.
 - ✓ The collected 'Mitti Kalash' will be ceremoniously transported to Delhi.
- **Urban Events:**
 - ✓ In urban areas, events will be organized at various levels, including local bodies, area councils, Cantonment Boards, and town panchayats.

