



Current Affairs of the Day

GS Paper II

- What led to the Biden-Putin summit?

GS Paper III

- Sale of illegal HTBt cotton seeds doubles



What led to the Biden-Putin summit?

Western alliance

1. In the past, when American Presidents visited Europe and met NATO allies, Russia had been their main focus. But this time, when Mr Biden went to Europe, his first foreign trip after becoming the President, the focus was on China — a sign of the emerging shifts in the global power balance.
2. Mr Biden held a host of talks with separate blocs in Europe — the Group of Seven (G7), NATO and the EU — with a focus on strengthening the western alliance.
3. The G7 industrialised nations — the U.S., the U.K., Germany, France, Italy, Canada and Japan — issued a communiqué slamming China's human rights records.
4. Issues such as the detention of Uighurs in Xinjiang, the crackdown on dissent in Hong Kong, growing tensions with Taiwan and the alleged lack of transparency on COVID-19 were all mentioned in the G7 statement.
5. The 30-member NATO, whose traditional focus has been on Russia, has also issued a statement in which China has been mentioned multiple times.
NATO members warned against the “systemic challenges to the rules-based international order” emanating from China's rise.
6. The U.S. and the 27-member EU have decided to cooperate more on technology, regulation, industrial development and trade in an attempt to help the West compete better with China. They have also decided to set up a high-level trade and technology council, which would boost innovation and investment.

The China focus

1. This approach is in line with the Biden administration's overall focus on reorienting American foreign policy to deal with the China challenge more effectively.
2. Earlier, he called the first summit of Quad countries — the U.S., India, Japan and Australia — which decided to boost vaccine production to help other countries.
3. At home, the U.S. Congress passed the \$250 billion techs and manufacturing Bill, which would ensure funds for the semiconductor research, design, and manufacturing initiatives. The aim is undoubtedly to counter China.



Detente with Russia

1. The message from Geneva is that the leaders wanted to establish rules of engagement so that the countries can better address their differences and seek common ground on issues of mutual interest.
2. With some predictability in ties with Russia, Mr Biden can strengthen his China-focused foreign policy. And with a less hostile America, Mr Putin can retain Russian influence in the country's backyard.

It's too early to see any meaningful change in Russia-U.S. relations. But the Geneva summit suggests that policymakers in Washington have at least started thinking of Russia as a secondary challenge that needs to be tackled diplomatically, not only through coercion if the U.S. wants to take on a rising China.

Sale of illegal HTBt cotton seeds doubles

1. The illegal cultivation of herbicide-tolerant (HT) Bt cotton has seen a huge jump this year, with seed manufacturers claiming that the sale of illegal seed packets has more than doubled from 30 lakh last year to 75 lakh this year.
2. Industry lobbies have written to the Agriculture Ministry, demanding that action be taken to stop such sales and punish offenders, noting that cultivation of the genetically modified cotton variant has serious environmental and economic consequences.
3. However, a senior official at the Ministry said it was up to the State governments to enforce the policy.
4. This comes even as activists from the Shetkari Sangathan have stepped up the reach of their civil disobedience movement to demand the legalisation of HTBt cotton by encouraging farmers to plant the seeds in violation of government regulations.

Bt cotton

1. Bt cotton is the only transgenic crop that has been approved by the Centre for commercial cultivation in India. It has been genetically modified to produce an insecticide to combat the cotton bollworm, a common pest.



2. The HTBt cotton variant adds another layer of modification, making the plant resistant to the herbicide glyphosate, but has not been approved by regulators.
3. Fears include glyphosate having a carcinogenic effect, as well as the unchecked spread of herbicide resistance to nearby plants through pollination, creating a variety of superweeds.