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All about Infra and solar alliance: India's climate vision

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will launch a new programme to secure and strengthen critical infrastructure in small island states against disasters induced by climate change. Infrastructure for Resilient Island States or IRIS is the first major initiative by the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) started by India in 2019.

What is CDRI?

- The effort is to climate-proof critical infrastructure in member countries. Twenty-six countries, including the US, Germany, UK, Australia, Brazil, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and Japan are already part of the coalition.
- The coalition will not create any new infrastructure — rather, it will serve as a ‘knowledge centre’ for member countries to share and learn best practices with respect to disaster-proofing of infra.
- It will work towards making existing and upcoming infrastructure in member countries more robust and resilient against climate disasters such as floods, heat, cyclones, forest fires, and rain.
- According to CDRI estimates, every one dollar invested in making infrastructure more resilient in low- and middle-income countries can potentially save losses of over \$4 when a disaster strikes.
- There is widespread acknowledgment that despite the actions by countries to fight climate change, the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events and disasters will likely only increase in the coming years.
- Countries are already experiencing more intense flooding, heat waves, and forest fires every year, and they realise the urgency of the problem.
- India's east coast, especially Odisha and Andhra Pradesh, has for example been experiencing more powerful and frequent cyclones every year. Thanks to the significant progress in advance warning and tracking systems, and timely evacuation of people, the loss of lives has been greatly reduced over the years.
- But the threat to infrastructure has persisted. So, power plants stop functioning, communication towers are damaged and street lights uprooted, and trains and flights have to be stopped. All this has cascading effects, and the monetary costs of the damage and disruption runs into billions of dollars every year.
- The aim of CDRI is to minimise the damage and disruptions.

Has India taken such a global climate initiative before CDRI?

- CDRI is India's second international climate initiative; the first was the International Solar Alliance (ISA), launched at the 2015 Paris climate change conference.
- ISA's main objective is to promote largescale harnessing and exploitation of solar energy. Equatorial and tropical regions get very good sunlight for most of the year, which is sufficient to meet the energy demands of many countries in this belt.
- ISA is working towards boosting the use of solar power in the region, mainly by bringing down the cost of technology and finance, which can facilitate rapid, mass deployment of solar energy. It hopes to do so by aggregating the demand from a large number of countries, standardising equipment and grid, and promoting research and development.
- To take this idea forward, the One Sun One World One Grid (OSOWOG) proposes a common grid through more than 100 countries. The idea is to stabilise energy supply, overcome local and natural fluctuations in the availability of sunlight, and to maintain reliable baseload capacities at all times.
- ISA and CDRI are an attempt by India to claim climate mission leadership at the global level. Both have received wide support from developing as well as developed countries.



- The solar alliance will result in the mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions through a largescale switch from fossil fuels to solar energy, while also addressing issues of energy access and energy security.
- CDRI is aimed towards achieving the adaptation goal. Together, they form the bases of India’s vision for global climate action that also takes into account issues of equity, development, and the special needs of developing and least developed countries.

What is IRIS?

- As OSOWOG is a specific work programme to realize the objectives of the ISA, IRIS seeks to operationalise the CDRI initiative.
- Small island states are the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. As sea levels rise, they face a threat of being wiped off the map. According to CDRI, several small island states have lost 9 per cent of their GDPs in single disasters during the last few years.
- Kamal Kishore, co-chair of the executive council of CDRI, pointed out that infrastructure in these smaller countries is more critical simply because there is so little of it.
- “A larger country may have several airports, for example, so even if one or two are damaged in climate disasters, the country can divert their operations elsewhere. But many small island states have a single airstrip that is their only connection to the world, and their only supply line,” he said.
- Unsurprisingly, several small island states have joined the IRIS platform, and drawn up plans for implementation. The bulk of the work would involve mobilising and directing financial resources towards building resilient infrastructure, retrofitting existing infrastructure, development of early warning systems, and development and sharing of best practices.

All about Adi Shankara

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveiled a 12-foot statue of Adi Shankaracharya at Kedarnath, where the acharya is believed to have attained samadhi at the age of 32 in the ninth century.

Shankara of legend

- The story recounted today has been reconstructed from multiple Shankaravijayas (Conquests of Shankara) written over the centuries.
- In his biography of the acharya (Shree Shankaracharyar, 1994), Sanskrit scholar and former director of Adyar Library, K Kunjunni Raja, mentions texts that situate his lifetime between 788 and 820 AD.
- Adi Shankara is said to have been born in Kaladi village on the bank of the Periyar, the largest river in Kerala.
- His parents, the Brahmin couple Siva Guru and Arya Antharjanam, had fallen on difficult times. He left home very early in search of learning and to become a sanyasin.
- In one legend, a crocodile caught hold of the young Shankara while bathing in the Periyar, and told his mother it would let him go if she allowed him to take sanyas. She reluctantly agreed and Shankara swam ashore.





- In another legend, the young Shankara visited a poor Brahmin household, where the woman of the house apologetically fed him an amla, the only food she could offer. A grateful Shankara composed the Kanakadhara Stotram, following which there was a rain of golden amlas, which brought prosperity to the household.
- Even the narrations about Shankara's philosophical debates with scholars such as Mandana Misra and his wife Ubhaya Bharati, Kumarila Bhatta, etc., are embellished with stories that suggest his supernatural powers — after being challenged by Ubhaya Bharati on aspects of kama, the celibate Shankara is said to have undergone parakaya pravesha to gain knowledge about sex.

Remarkable scholarship

- The picture we gain from these stories is of a remarkable scholar-monk who, after being initiated into studies by Govindacharya, a disciple of the scholar Gaudapada acharya, was constantly on the move — bearing the flag of Advaita Vedanta, challenging prevailing philosophical traditions including Buddhism and Jainism, establishing mathas, preparing commentaries on important texts, and organising monastic orders.
- In a lifespan of just 32 years, he is said to have visited all the important spiritual centres of the time — from Kanchi (Kancheepuram) to Kamrup (Assam), and Kashmir and the Kedar and Badri dhams, as well as Sringeri, Ujjain, Kashi, Puri, and Joshimath. He is believed to have established the ritual practices at the Badri and Kedar dhams, and to have debated with tantrics in Srinagar.
- He is believed to have attained samadhi at Kedarnath; however, Kanchi and Thrissur are also talked about as places where Adi Shankara spent his last days.
- Adi Shankara is generally identified as the author of 116 works — among them the celebrated commentaries (bhashyas) on 10 Upanishads, the Brahmasutra and the Gita, and poetic works including Vivekachudamani, Maneesha Panchakam, and Saundaryalahiri. But scholars such as Vidyavachaspathi V Panoli have argued that Saundaryalahiri and Maneesha Panchakam are not his works, but attributions.
- It has also been claimed that Adi Shankara composed texts like Shankarasmrithi, which seeks to establish the social supremacy of Nambuthiri Brahmins. Scholars point out that often authorship is credited to a great figure to claim legitimacy for texts that may in fact have been composed centuries later.

Master of Advaita Vedanta

- Shankara's great standing is derived from his commentaries of the prasthanatrayi (Upanishads, Brahmasutra and Gita), where he explains his understanding of Advaita Vedanta.
- According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Advaita Vedanta articulates a philosophical position of radical nondualism, a revisionary worldview which it derives from the ancient Upanishadic texts.
- According to Advaita Vedantins, the Upanishads reveal a fundamental principle of nonduality termed 'brahman', which is the reality of all things. Advaitins understand brahman as transcending individuality and empirical plurality. They seek to establish that the essential core of one's self (atman) is brahman.
- The fundamental thrust of Advaita Vedanta is that the atman is pure non-intentional consciousness. It is one without a second, nondual, infinite existence, and numerically identical with brahman. This effort entails tying a metaphysics of brahman to a philosophy of consciousness."
- This philosophical tradition, according to the encyclopedia entry, found its most sustained early articulation in the works of Shankara, who "endeavoured to communicate nonduality through systematised theories of metaphysics, language, and epistemology", and whose "philosophy and methods comprise a teaching tradition intended to culminate in a direct liberating recognition of nonduality that is synonymous with liberation or freedom (moksha)".

Shankara's contested legacy



- In Bharatiya Chintha (Indian Thought), K Damodaran, scholar and a founding member of the Communist movement in India, says the essence of Adi Shankara's philosophy is encapsulated in the much quoted formulation: "brahma satyam jagan-mithya, jivo brahmaiva naaparah" (brahman alone is real, this world is an illusion/ and the jiva is non-differential from brahman).
- Custodians of the caste system cite from Shankara's commentaries to justify the unequal and unjust social order, whereas others claim these are extrapolations and point to works like Maneesha Panchakam to suggest a different reading of the acharya's outlook.
- The philosophy and legacy of this incomparable philosopher continue to be contested — and he has been claimed, reclaimed, interpreted and reinterpreted over the centuries.
- Among the interpreters of his philosophy would be those who suggested that the Advaita Vedanta borrowed the categories of Buddhist thinkers and called him the Prachhanna Buddha (Buddha in disguise), to Sri Narayana Guru who in the 20th century offered a radical reading of Advaita Vedanta to dismantle the theory and praxis of caste.

His political appropriation

- The mathas Shankara is believed to have established in Sringeri, Dwaraka, Puri, and Joshimath for the spread of Advaita Vedanta are seen as custodians of Hinduism, and Shankara's digvijaya (conquest) is often interpreted as a near nationalistic project where faith, philosophy and geography are yoked together to imagine a Hindu India that transcends the political boundaries of his time.
- It is a project that fits in with the ideological exigencies of the present time.
- The image of the lonely seeker, looming above his peers, demolishing his foes, and seeking transcendence in the snow-clad mountains has rich connotations in today's performative politics.