1. Srisailam Left Bank Canal (SLBC) tunnel collapse

Introduction

The Srisailam Left Bank Canal (SLBC) tunnel collapse in Nagarkurnool district of Telangana has drawn significant attention due to its tragic consequences and the safety concerns it highlights in large-scale irrigation projects.

What Happened?

On February 17, 2024, a portion of the SLBC tunnel collapsed near Yellur village in Nagarkurnool district. 8 workers were trapped inside the tunnel following the collapse. The incident occurred during ongoing works to complete the tunnel lining and finishing process.

This tunnel is part of the Srisailam Left Bank Canal project, which aims to divert Krishna River water to drought-prone areas of Mahabubnagar and surrounding districts in Telangana.
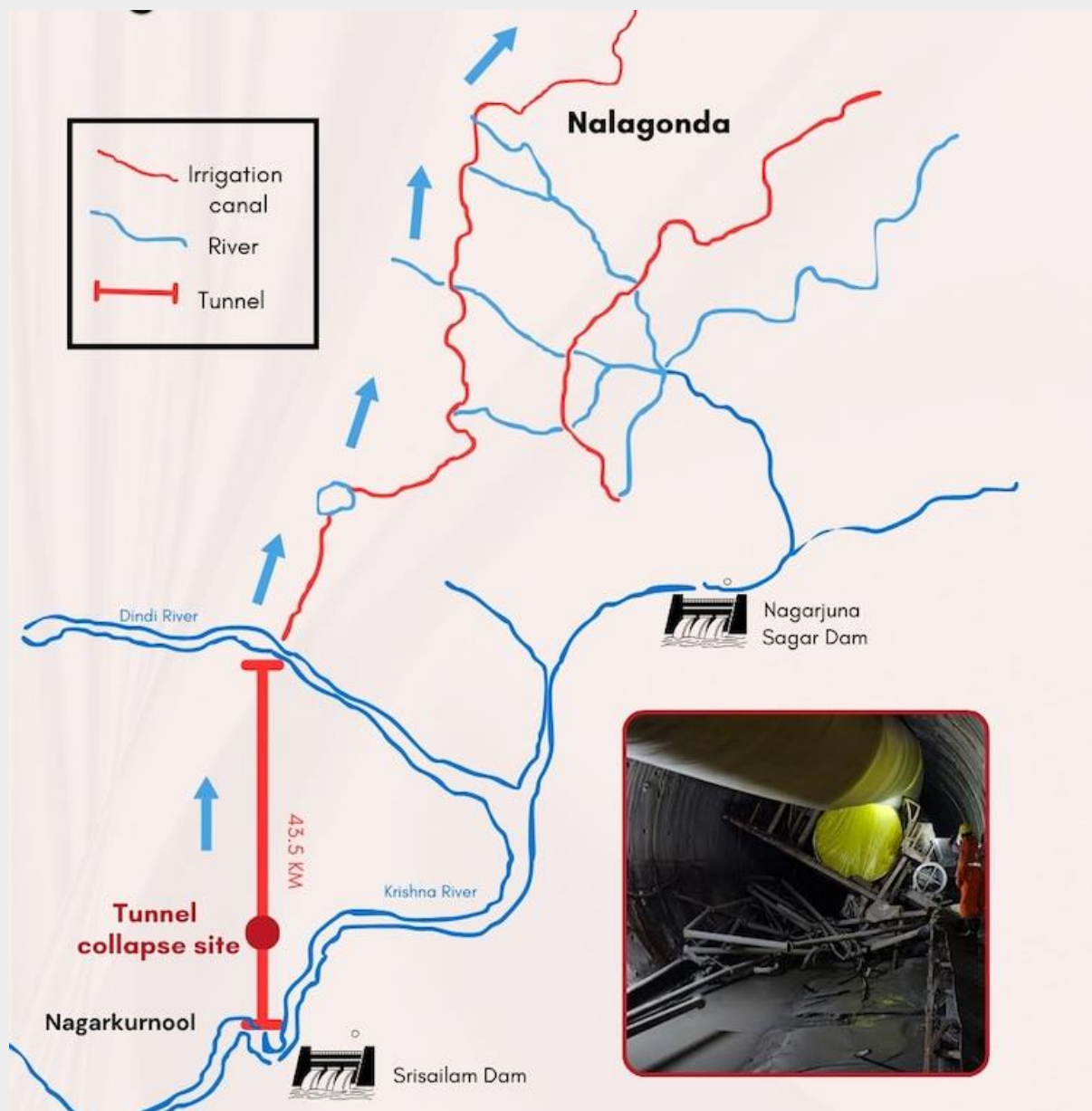
Rescue Operations

Massive rescue operations were launched, with National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), and Irrigation Department teams involved.

Rescue efforts were hampered by poor visibility, lack of oxygen, and water ingress within the tunnel, making it a very challenging operation. Specialized drilling equipment was brought in to create an alternative entry point into the collapsed tunnel section.

About SLBC Tunnel

The SLBC tunnel is a crucial part of the Srisailam Left Bank Canal project, designed to bring water from Srisailam Reservoir to dry regions in Telangana. The tunnel is 43.5 km long, making it one of the longest irrigation tunnels in South India.

This project has faced delays for decades, owing to technical challenges, land acquisition issues, and funding constraints.

Aftermath & Accountability

The incident has sparked criticism about safety lapses, poor project management, and inadequate contingency planning in large-scale infrastructure works.

The Telangana government has ordered a high-level inquiry into the collapse. Contractors, engineering teams, and officials involved in the tunnel construction are being scrutinized for possible lapses in safety protocols and tunnel reinforcement.

This incident has reignited debates over the safety standards followed in major infrastructure projects in India, especially underground works in challenging geological conditions.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Disaster Management
Source: The Hindu

2. NAKSHA scheme which will update urban land records

Introduction

Union Rural Development Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan launched the Central government's new initiative—'NAtional geospatial Knowledge-based land Survey of urban HAbitations' (NAKSHA)— on February 18 from Raisen in Madhya Pradesh.

What is NAKSHA?

NAKSHA is a city survey initiative under the existing Digital India Land Records Modernization Programme (DILRMP). It is spearheaded by the Department of Land Resources (DoLR), under the Ministry of Rural Development.

Under the new initiative, maps of towns and cities will be prepared. The programme has been launched as a pilot across 152 urban local bodies in 26 states. The cities selected meet two criteria: area less than 35 sq km, and population less than 2 lakhs. The pilot will be completed in a year. According to the DoLR officials, the Centre plans to scale up NAKSHA once the pilot is completed.

Why was the program needed?

The programme addresses the issue of updation of land records in urban areas. Several cities lack maps even today. Most urban areas – barring a few states like Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Goa – have outdated or unstructured land records, causing inefficiencies in governance and taxation.

What does NAKSHA entail?

As per the Census 2011, India has 7,933 towns covering 1.02 lakh square km of the total 32.87 lakh square km geographical area of the country. NAKSHA will cover 4,142.63 square km of area.

The initiative is 100 per cent centrally funded. The pilot project is expected to cost about Rs 194 crore. Once completed, NAKSHA is expected to provide comprehensive digital urban land records, reduce land disputes, aid in faster and more efficient urban planning, improve property tax collection, simplify property transactions and improve access to credit.

How will the survey be done?

The survey will be done through aerial photography using cameras. These cameras will be mounted on drones. The ground resolution of these cameras will be 5 cm, which is far better than any satellite.
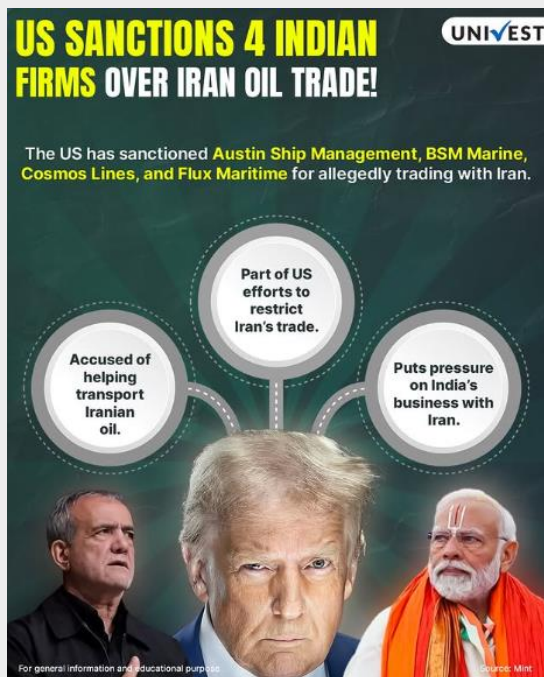
Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance
Source: Indian Express

3. Four Indian firms among those sanctioned by the US: Why, and what are sanctions?

Introduction

As part of its "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran, the US has sanctioned four India-based companies among other companies, "for their role in brokering the sale and transportation of Iranian petroleum-related products.

Which Indian firms are on the list?

According to information from the US Office of Foreign Assets Control and the Department of State, the four Indian companies are Navi Mumbai-based Flux Maritime LLP, National Capital Region (NCR)-based BSM Marine LLP and Austinship Management Pvt Ltd, and Thanjavur-based Cosmos Lines Inc. Three of these four companies have been sanctioned for being commercial or technical managers of vessels allegedly involved in transportation of Iranian oil and petroleum products, while one—Cosmos Lines—has been sanctioned for its alleged involvement in transport of Iranian petroleum.

View of the US

Because Iran is heavily sanctioned, many countries and firms don't buy Iranian oil openly. However, the US has alleged, the trade still continues, through "shadow fleets". A shadow fleet is a group of ships that transport goods, like oil, in secret to avoid detection and regulation. Shadow fleets often violate international sanctions.

Sanctioned Iranian tankers rely on ship-to-ship transfers outside of jurisdictional port limits with non-sanctioned vessels to transport petroleum to foreign customers. This money is then used for "regionally destabilising activities of Iran's military and its proxy groups.

What are sanctions?

Sanctions basically restrict or entirely scrap the economic relations between the entity applying the sanctions and the one they are being applied on. Sanctions can take the form of import or export ban, refusal to trade, freezing of assets, ban from using banking systems and currency of a country or group of countries, etc.

According to the Council on Foreign Relations, "Sanctions may be comprehensive, prohibiting commercial activity with regard to an entire country, like the long-standing US embargo of Cuba, or they may be targeted, blocking transactions by and with particular businesses, groups, or individuals."

The US, for example, has imposed sanctions on a host of countries, including Iran, North Korea, China, etc. Russia, after the breakout of the Ukraine war, became the most sanctioned country in the world.

Apart from individual countries, the United Nations Organisation (UNO) also imposes economic sanctions, after they are approved by its Security Council. The European Union (EU), too, has a mechanism for imposing sanctions.

Utility of Sanctions
While sanctions act as a tool of punishment or pressure tactic on the country or entity they are being applied to — the logic being that economic losses will force it to reconsider its moves — their efficacy has been debated. Critics have pointed out that targets can easily find ways to circumvent sanctions, and enforcing them hurts the other party too.

For example, Russia's economy has not been derailed despite heavy Western sanctions, as other countries, such as India and China, continue to trade with it. When an international organisation like the UN imposes sanctions, it has no means to enforce it, and that is left to individual member countries. Also, if a country were to ban imports from another country, its industries that need the imports also suffer.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Relations
Source: Indian Express