

PLACES IN NEWS: WEEK 9 (27 July to 2 August)

Topic 1: River Cauvery Issue

Context:

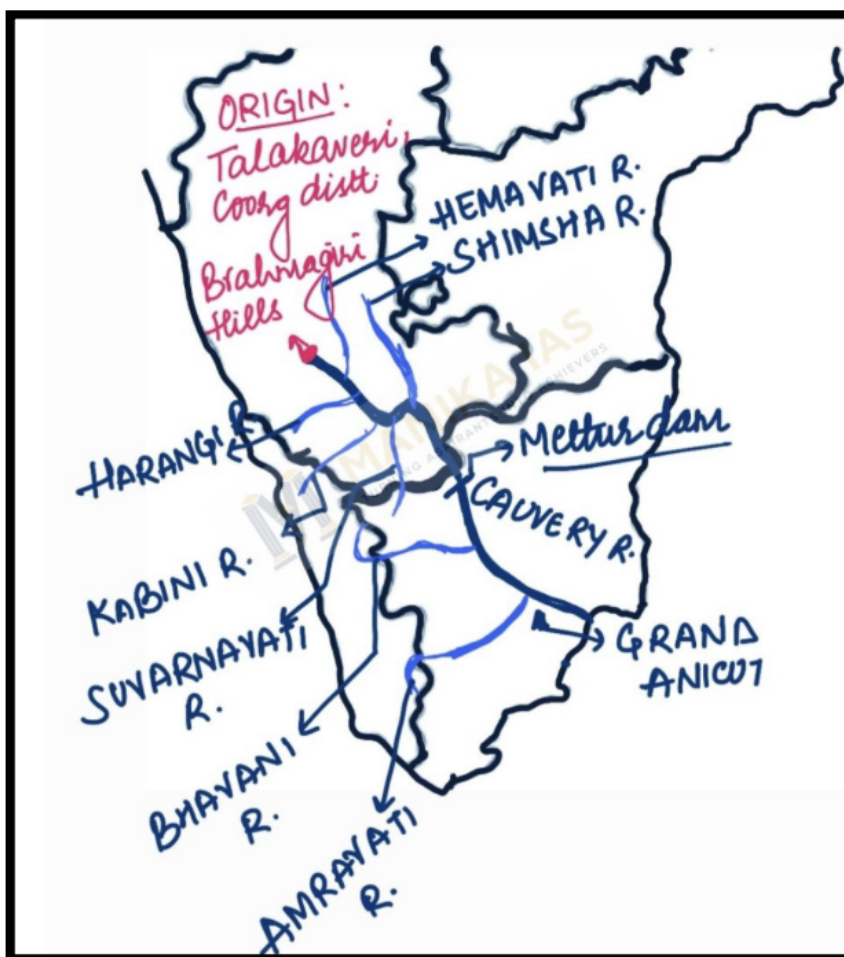
- The river water sharing conflict has recently flared up again over Karnataka's proposed **Mekedatu Balancing Reservoir Project**. Tamil Nadu has strongly urged the Central Government to deny any statutory or administrative approvals unless the Mekedatu project strictly complies with the **2007 Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDT) Award** and the definitive **2018 Supreme Court judgment**.

About the Issue:

- Often referred to as the "Dakshin Ganga" (Ganges of the South), the Cauvery River is a crucial lifeline for southern India. The ongoing **Cauvery Water Dispute** over its waters remains one of India's oldest and most complex inter-state river water conflicts. This dispute primarily involves the states of **Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and the Union Territory of Puducherry**

Time Line

- 1990 CWDT Formation:**
The Central Government constituted the **Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDT)** under the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956.
- 2007 Tribunal Award:**
The CWDT delivered its final award, allocating water based on the specific basin requirements of each state.
- 2013 Legal Enforcement:**
The Central Government officially notified the CWDT's final award in the



Official Gazette, making the water allocations legally enforceable.

- **2018 Supreme Court Verdict:** The Supreme Court of India delivered its final, binding verdict, which modified the tribunal's earlier water allocations.

Cauvery River Basin:

- **Origin:** The river rises at Talakaveri in the Brahmagiri Hills of the Western Ghats (Kodagu district, Karnataka).
- **Length:** It flows for approximately 800 km eastward into the Bay of Bengal.
- **Basin States Involved:** Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Puducherry.
- **Major Tributaries:**
 - *Left Bank Tributaries:* Harangi, Hemavati, Shimsha, Arkavathi.
 - *Right Bank Tributaries:* Lakshmantirtha, Kabini, Suvarnavati, Bhavani, Noyyal, Amaravati.
- **Key Dams on the Cauvery:** Krishnarajasagar (KRS), Mettur Dam, Kabini, Hemavati, and Harangi.
- **Mouth of the River:** Forms a highly fertile agricultural delta before emptying into the Bay of Bengal near Poompuhar (Tamil Nadu).

Mekedatu dam :

A proposed balancing reservoir and drinking water project initiated by Karnataka at Mekedatu (Ramanagara district) on the Cauvery River.

Topic 2: Caspian Sea

Context: Iran strongly condemned an unprecedented Ukrainian long-range drone strike on an Iranian vessel in the Caspian Sea, warning that the "dangerous adventurism" violated international law and would not go unanswered.

This is the first time the Russia-Ukraine war has directly spilled over into the Caspian Sea, a critical, landlocked trade corridor connecting Russia and Iran. One Iranian civilian sailor got killed and 3 others injured. Along with this hit 2 sanctioned Russian Cargo ships.

Key features of Caspian Sea:

- Caspian sea is completely landlocked Sea between 5 countries : **TARIK**
 - Turkmenistan
 - Azerbaijan
 - Russia
 - Iran

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- Kazakhstan
- **Classification:**
 - It is a completely landlocked endorheic sea. An **endorheic basin** is a closed drainage basin that retains water and allows no external outflow to other external bodies of water, such as rivers or oceans
 - It act as a drainage basin of Volga , Ural, Kura and Terek river, so ideally it should be classified as a lake and not a Sea.
 - **Definition of a sea:** A sea is a water body which has an outlet and is eventually connected to an ocean.
 - But it is classified as a Sea because of 3 Reasons:
 1. **Crust:** most of the lake in the world have continental crust, whereas caspian sea has an oceanic Basaltic crust
 - a. **Ancient Remnant:** Billions of years ago, the Caspian Sea was not a lake; it was part of the **Tethys Ocean**(and later the Paratethys Sea), which connected the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.
 - b. **Tectonic Isolation:** When the Arabian and Eurasian tectonic plates collided, they buckled the earth, elevating the Caucasus Mountains and completely cutting off this section of the ocean from the rest of the world.
 2. Brackish water and Salinity:
 - a. When rivers flow into an endorheic basin, they dump trace minerals and salts. Because water only leaves through evaporation, the salts are left behind, concentrating over millennia. The Caspian has a salinity of about **1.2%**. While this is lower than the global ocean average (3.5%), it is highly brackish and completely distinct from the freshwater found in standard lakes
 3. **Oceanic Wave Action:**



- a. Due to its immense surface area (stretching over 1,200 km from north to south), the Caspian Sea experiences severe, large-scale meteorological weather patterns. It has tidal variations, powerful undercurrents, and **massive oceanic storm waves** that require full-scale maritime naval ships and commercial vessels to navigate, completely defying the typical calm dynamics of a lake.

Economic and Ecological Strategic Value

A. Hydrocarbon Treasure Trove

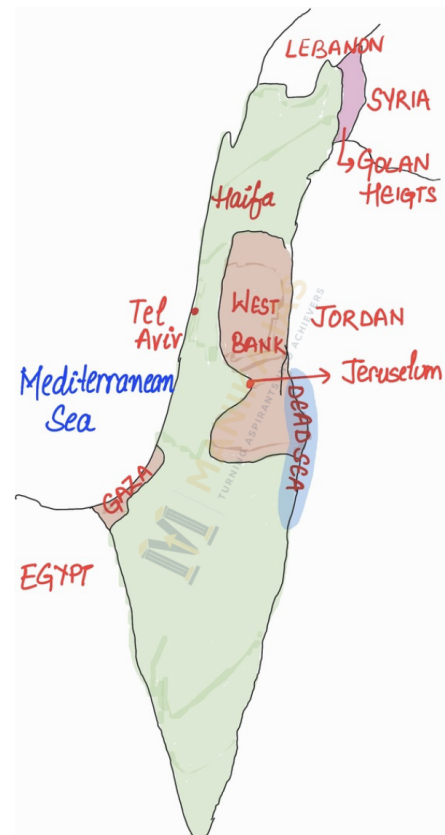
The Caspian basin contains some of the world's largest untapped **oil and natural gas reserves**. Major offshore oil fields, like Kazakhstan's *Kashagan* and Azerbaijan's *Shah Deniz*, are critical to global energy supply lines bypassing OPEC.

B. The Caviar Industry

The sea is home to the **Beluga Sturgeon**, an ancient fish species that produces the world's most expensive caviar. Overfishing, illegal poaching, and pollution have severely endangered this native ecosystem.

C. The Volga-Don Canal Connection

Though landlocked, ships transit from the Caspian Sea into the global oceans via Russia's internal waterway network: the **Volga River**, connected to the **Don River** via the artificial *Volga-Don Canal*, which empties out into the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea.



Topic 4: Israel:

west bank : israeli settlers set fire to mosques in west bank

Al-Rahma Mosque (Qusra Village, south of Nablus)

Topic 5: France and Spain wild fire

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Why in the News?

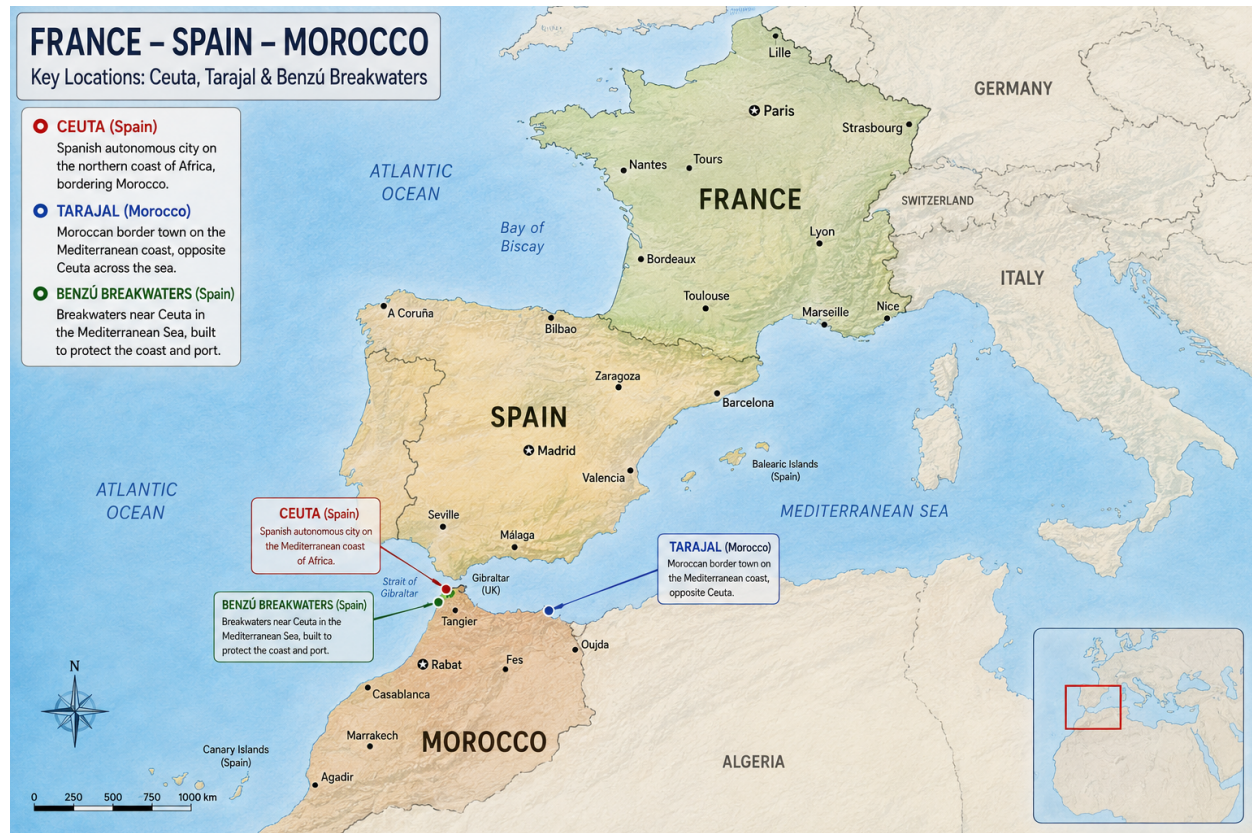
- **Mega-disaster Scenario:** Both nations are experiencing their **worst wildfire emergencies in decades**. The fires have collectively scorched hundreds of thousands of hectares of land across southwestern Europe.
- **Mass Evacuations:** The blazes have triggered one of the largest peace-time evacuation efforts in Europe since World War II. Over **325,000 residents and tourists** have been forced to flee their homes and holiday destinations.
- **National Emergencies:** Major economic and urban hubs are threatened, with fires creeping within 15 km of Bordeaux in France and raging directly on the outskirts of Spain's capital, Madrid.

Unique Aspects of the Wildfires

- **Sixth-Generation Megafires:** These blazes are characterized by extreme intensity (releasing over 10 Megawatts of energy per meter), meaning they are **too intense for direct human containment** or conventional firefighting methods.
- **Fire-Induced Weather Systems:** The extreme heat has caused the fires to modify the local atmosphere, generating their own **pyrocumulonimbus (fire thunderstorm) clouds**. These clouds produce intense down-slope winds and dry lightning, sparking new fires kilometers away.
- **State Capacity Constraints:** The scale of the fires has exposed an acute **mismatch in state response capabilities**. The European Commission acknowledged that the simultaneous fires are operating at "ten times over the capacity" of available personnel and aerial water bombers.

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Reasons for the Wildfires

- **The "Fuel Paradox" (Climate Whiplash):** An unseasonably wet winter and spring promoted rapid, dense growth of shrubs, grasses, and undergrowth. Consecutive record-breaking summer heat waves then completely dried out this vegetation, turning it into highly combustible fuel.
- **Meteorological Drivers:** The formation of a **persistent heat dome** trapped compressed, heating air over the Iberian Peninsula. This prevented the inflow of cooler polar air, causing prolonged severe droughts and a drastic depletion of soil moisture.
- **Anthropogenic and Land-Use Vulnerabilities:**
 - **Rural Depopulation:** The abandonment of traditional agricultural land and a decline in pastoral cattle grazing have left forest floors unmanaged and overgrown.
 - **Monoculture Silviculture:** Broad reliance on dense, highly flammable pine and eucalyptus timber plantations (especially in France's Landes de Gascogne) has drastically accelerated fire propagation compared to natural mixed forests.

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The Morocco Migrant Issue Spain is Grappling With

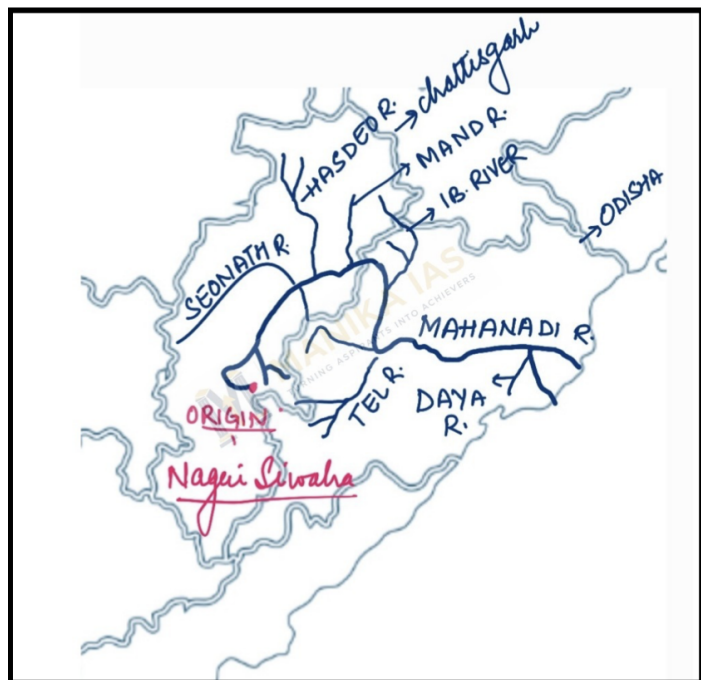
- **The Sudden Border Influx:** Compounding the environmental crisis, Spain faces a severe geopolitical and humanitarian emergency at its North African enclave, Ceuta. Driven by rumors on social media, **60,000 to 72,000 migrants crossed the border** from Morocco in a matter of days.
- **The Legal Spark:** The migration surge was triggered by a **July 8, 2026 Spain Supreme Court ruling**. The court declared that fast-track "border rejections" (summary deportations) for migrants intercepted at sea near the enclaves were unlawful, granting them the right to formal asylum processing.
- **Humanitarian and Geopolitical Fallout:**
 - The dangerous maritime crossing resulted in at least **88 confirmed migrant deaths**.
 - Asserting a sovereign border breach, Spain deployed military units to secure the enclave, processing and returning approximately 70,000 arrivals back to Morocco.
 - The crisis has created internal European strain, leading **Italy to temporarily suspend its standard Schengen border arrangements with Spain** due to regional security concern.

Topic 5: Mahanadi water dispute

The **Mahanadi Water Dispute** is a prominent interstate river water conflict in India, primarily involving the riparian states of **Odisha (downstream)** and **Chhattisgarh (upstream)**. In a major breakthrough, following a high-level meeting chaired by the Union Jal Shakti Minister, both states have committed to resolving the decade-long conflict amicably.

Geographical Context of the Mahanadi River

- **Origin and Course:** The Mahanadi is India's 8th largest river. It originates in the Sihawa hills of the **Dhamtari district in Chhattisgarh** and flows through Odisha before emptying into the Bay of Bengal.



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- **Basin Distribution:** The total length is roughly **851 km**, with 494 km flowing through Odisha. Its total catchment area spreads across Chhattisgarh and Odisha, with minor extensions into Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Maharashtra.
- **No Historical Accord:** Unlike other major rivers, no formal interstate water-sharing treaty or agreement was ever signed between the co-basin states, leaving a regulatory vacuum.

Odisha's Stand (Downstream State)

- **Upstream Obstruction:** Odisha alleges that Chhattisgarh has unilaterally constructed over 500 anicuts (small dams) and 30 major barrages (such as the Kalma barrage) in the upper catchment area without prior consultation.
- **Hirakud Dam Depletion:** Odisha argues that these upstream structures drastically reduce water flow into the **Hirakud Dam** (the lifeline of Odisha) during the crucial lean/non-monsoon season.
- **Socio-Economic Threat:** The lower flow endangers drinking water security, decreases domestic and industrial supply, and negatively impacts irrigation for millions of delta-region farmers.

Chhattisgarh's Stand (Upstream State)

- **Sovereign Basin Rights:** Chhattisgarh asserts its rightful claim to utilize the water resources within its territory to support its own agricultural and industrial expansion.
- **Minimal Impact Claim:** The state argues that the overall multi-seasonal water flow reaching Odisha remains largely unaffected and that its usage falls well within equitable allocation standards.

Institutional and Legal Chronology

- **Supreme Court Intervention:** After initial political negotiations failed in 2016, Odisha moved the Supreme Court. In early 2018, the Court directed the Union Government to set up an adjudication framework.
- **Mahanadi Water Disputes Tribunal (MWDT):** Constituted by the Centre on **February 20, 2018**, under the chairmanship of Supreme Court Judge Justice A.M. Khanwilkar (later succeeded by Justice Bela M. Trivedi)

Current Status and the Path Toward Resolution

- **The Tribunal's Ultimatum:** After multi-year delays aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the MWDT gave both states a final warning to either frame a mutual, consensus-driven formula or face a legally binding, tribunal-imposed distribution formula. The Centre also extended the tribunal's term to ensure an organized close to the proceedings.

- **Political Realignment:** The political landscape shifted fundamentally when both Odisha and Chhattisgarh came under the governance of the same political party (the BJP). This configuration ended years of political non-cooperation and opened direct lines of communication.
- **The Breakthrough:** High-level bilateral negotiations resulted in both states agreeing **not to contest at least 15 key technical and data issues**. The respective Chief Ministers have expressed strong optimism about formalizing an enduring, equitable framework based on shared hydrological facts.

Major Tributaries

The Mahanadi is fed by numerous tributaries divided by their point of convergence:

A. Left-Bank Tributaries (Northern Bank)

- **Seonath:** The longest tributary of the Mahanadi; joins near Bilaspur.
- **Hasdeo:** Heavily industrialized basin known for coal mining.
- **Mand:** Drains the southern parts of the Chhota Nagpur Plateau.
- **Ib:** Originates Chhattisgarh ; runs through a rich coal belt before joining the Hirakud reservoir.

B. Right-Bank Tributaries (Southern Bank)

- **Jonk:** Flows along the Chhattisgarh-Odisha border.
- **Ong:** Joins the river downstream of the Hirakud Dam.
- **Tel:** The second-largest tributary of the Mahanadi; joins near Sone