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INDIA-EUROPEAN FREE TRADE ASSOCIATION TRADE AND ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT (TEPA) CAME INTO EFFECT

In News

India-European Free Trade Association (EFTA) Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) came into effect.

Do you know ?

The European Free Trade Association (EFTA) is the intergovernmental organisation of Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. It was set up in 1960 by its then seven Member States for the promotion of free trade and economic integration between its members.

The India-EFTA Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA)

- TEPA is a modern and ambitious agreement that incorporates, for the first time in any Free Trade Agreement (FTA) signed by India, a commitment linked to investment and job creation.
 - The agreement was signed in March 2024 at New Delhi.
- It comprises of 14 chapters with main focus on market access related to goods, rules of origin, trade facilitation, trade remedies, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, technical barriers to trade, investment promotion, market access on services, intellectual property rights, trade and sustainable development and other legal and horizontal provisions.

Key features of the agreement

- Market Access:** EFTA has committed to **100% tariff elimination** on non-agricultural goods and concessions on processed agricultural products, covering 99.6% of India's exports.
 - It aims to attract USD 100 billion in foreign direct investment over 15 years and generate 1 million direct jobs in India.
- India's Offer:** Covers 82.7% of tariff lines (95.3% of EFTA exports), with protections for sensitive sectors like pharma, food, dairy, and gold.
- Services & Mobility:** India and EFTA offer market access in over 100 sub-sectors. Agreement allows for digital service delivery, commercial presence, and temporary stay of professionals.
 - Enables Mutual Recognition Agreements in professions like nursing and accountancy.

- Intellectual Property:** The agreement upholds **TRIPS-level IPR standards**, safeguards India's generic medicine interests, and promotes sustainable development.
- Sustainability & Skills:** Focus on sustainable development, vocational training, and technology collaboration in fields like health sciences, renewables, and R&D.
- Sectoral Gains:** Indian exporters in machinery, chemicals, textiles, and processed foods will benefit from lower tariffs and easier access to EFTA markets.

Importance

- Strategic European Engagement:** EFTA is one of three key European economic blocs alongside the EU and UK.
 - EFTA's advanced economies, especially Switzerland and Norway, offer strong potential in finance, engineering, food, and health sciences.
- Boost to Exports:** Sectors like machinery, chemicals, textiles, and processed foods gain improved access to high-value European markets.
- Job Creation & Skill Development:** TEPA is expected to catalyze employment and enhance India's human capital.
- Strengthened Bilateral Ties:** Especially with Switzerland, India's largest EFTA trading partner.

Challenges

- Sensitive Sector Protection:** India has excluded or cautiously negotiated sectors like pharma, dairy, coal, and processed food.
- Sensitive sectors protected,** including pharma, medical devices, processed food, dairy, soya, coal, and sensitive agricultural products
- Trade Imbalance:** Over 80% of EFTA exports to India are gold, raising concerns about reciprocal trade benefits.
- Implementation Complexity:** Coordinating across diverse sectors and regulatory frameworks may pose hurdles.
- Limited Market Size:** EFTA's population is small, though its GDP large

Conclusion and Way Forward

- TEPA positions India as a hub for innovation, manufacturing, and global trade and opens doors for Indian exporters and symbolizes a new phase in India-Europe relations driven by growth, technology, and sustainability.
- TEPA represents a transformational shift in India's trade diplomacy—integrating market access,

investment, and employment into a single framework.

- TEPA enhances market access for goods and services, strengthens intellectual property rights, and fosters sustainable, inclusive development, while supporting Make in India and Atmanirbhar Bharat initiatives.

Source : PIB

ENVIRONMENTAL SURVEILLANCE: RELEVANCE

Context

- Environmental surveillance has emerged as a vital tool in modern public health and ecological management, as it allows scientists and policymakers to detect early signs of disease outbreaks, monitor pollution, and safeguard ecosystems.

About Environmental Surveillance

- Pathogens such as bacteria, viruses, and parasitic worms that cause diseases in humans and animals **can be tracked outside clinical settings by monitoring the environment.**
- It involves collecting and analyzing samples from sources like **wastewater, air, soil, and even audio recordings** in public spaces.
 - ♦ These samples can **reveal the presence of pathogens, pollutants, or other indicators** of public health risks.

How Does Wastewater Surveillance Work?

- **Sampling Methods:** Samples are collected from **sewage treatment plants; hospital effluents; and public spaces** such as railway stations and airplane toilets;
 - ♦ These samples contain pathogens shed through stool, urine, and other biological waste.
- **Types of Pathogens Detected:** **Viral and bacterial infections** (e.g., COVID-19, measles, cholera, polio);
 - ♦ **Parasitic worm diseases** such as roundworm and hookworm via wastewater and soil sampling;

Why It Matters

- **Limitations of Traditional Detection:** Traditional **clinical case detection** relies on patient testing. However:
 - ♦ Not all infected individuals show symptoms;
 - ♦ Mild cases may go untested;
 - ♦ Clinical data may underrepresent actual infection levels.

- **Early-Warning Advantage:** Environmental surveillance can detect pathogen levels in wastewater **up to a week before** clinical cases rise.
 - ♦ It allows health authorities to anticipate outbreaks and prepare timely interventions.
- **Non-Invasive Monitoring:** Environmental surveillance doesn't require individual participation, unlike traditional testing.
 - ♦ It can track community-level health trends anonymously and efficiently.
- **Tracking Emerging Threats:** Environmental surveillance helps monitor viruses like avian influenza in wild and domestic bird populations with rising zoonotic diseases and environmental changes.
- **Ecosystem Protection:** Surveillance also helps detect land-based sources of pollution, preserving freshwater and marine ecosystems.
- **Public Health Planning:** Understanding viral loads in a community helps allocate resources, prepare hospitals, and guide vaccination campaigns.

India's Current Approach

- **Wastewater Epidemiology in Practice:** It has been used for over 40 years to track diseases such as **measles, cholera, and polio.**
 - ♦ **India's first initiative:** Polio surveillance in Mumbai (2001).
 - ♦ **COVID-19 pandemic:** Wastewater programs expanded to five Indian cities, continuing today.
- The **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)** has announced plans to initiate wastewater surveillance for **10 viruses across 50 cities.**
 - ♦ It includes monitoring avian influenza and other high-risk pathogens.

Challenges and Improvements

- Need for better **data sharing and protocol standardization;**
- Development of **programmatic, long-term frameworks** instead of isolated projects;
- Integration of wastewater surveillance with routine public health systems;

Future Directions

- Emerging methods expand environmental surveillance beyond wastewater:
 - ♦ **Audio Surveillance:** Machine learning can analyze coughing sounds in public places to estimate respiratory disease prevalence.

- ♦ **Broader Environmental Data:** Combining wastewater, air, and soil monitoring could create a more holistic early-warning network.

Source: TH

CLIMATE CHANGE SPURS GROWTH IN AMAZON RAINFOREST TREES

Context

- A recent study published in Nature Plants reveals that trees in the Amazon rainforest are steadily increasing in size due to rising levels of atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂).

Key Findings of the study

- **Tree Growth:** Amazon trees are getting bigger, with average diameter increasing by ~3.3% per decade.
 - ♦ **Rise in CO₂ levels** (nearly 20% in 30 years) led to the **carbon fertilisation** effect, where higher CO₂ **enhances photosynthesis** and accelerates growth.
- **Shift in forest structure:** The accelerated growth of larger, canopy-level trees is happening at the expense of smaller trees, whose numbers are declining. This fundamentally changes the forest's structure and biodiversity.
- **Shift in forest structure:** The accelerated growth of larger, canopy-level trees is happening at the expense of smaller trees, whose numbers are declining. This fundamentally changes the forest's structure and biodiversity.

Amazon Rain Forests

- **Location:** The region belongs to **nine nations** of the **South American** continent.
 - ♦ It is bounded by the **Guiana Highlands** to the north, the **Andes Mountains** to the west, the **Brazilian central plateau** to the south, and the **Atlantic Ocean** to the east.
- **Area Covered:** The majority of the forest, 60%, is in **Brazil**, followed by **Peru** with 13%, **Colombia** with 10%, and with minor amounts in **Bolivia**, **Ecuador**, **French Guiana**, **Guyana**, **Suriname** and **Venezuela**.
- **Climate:** Hot and humid climate with temperatures of **26-30°C** throughout the year.
 - ♦ There are no periodic seasons. The precipitation ranges from 2,000 mm to 10,920 mm annually.
- **Tribes:** Yanomamo, Kayapo, Akuntsu, Matses, Tupi etc.
- **Fauna:** Anaconda, Jesus lizard, howler monkey, golden lion tamarin, jaguar, sloth, spider monkey, Amazon River dolphin, toucan and the scarlet macaw, poison dart frog and the glass frog.

- **Flora:** Moist broadleaf tropical rainforest like myrtle, laurel, palm, acacia, rosewood, Brazil nut, rubber tree, mahogany and Amazonian cedar.

Significance of the Rainforests

- **Lungs of the planet:** Rainforests generate about **20%** of the world's oxygen and its trees play a key role in reducing pollutant levels.
- **Fight climate change:** They act as a crucial buffer in the global fight against climate change as it holds tremendous capacity to store carbon.
 - ♦ It is estimated that around **150-200 billion tonnes** of carbon are stored in the Amazon rainforest.
- **Biodiversity:** Rainforests house a vast array of plant and animal species, many of which are found nowhere else and some of which are endangered.
- **Medicinal Properties:** Many of these plants contain bioactive compounds capable of treating diseases that are not yet curable, especially cancer.

Threat to the forests

- **Climate Change:** Due to climate change the forests are witnessing various challenges like changes in rainfall patterns, pollution etc.
- **Deforestation:** The size of the Amazon forest shrank dramatically as a result of settlers' clearance of the land to obtain lumber and to create grazing pastures and farmland.
- **Wildfires:** It causes threat to the survival of ecosystems and biodiversity. The 2019 forest fires in the region have led to widespread devastation in the region.

Initiatives to Protect the Amazon Rainforest

- **Brazil's Forest Code (2012):** A key law requiring landowners in the Amazon to maintain a specific percentage of their land (**up to 80%**) as a Legal Forest Reserve to conserve native vegetation and biodiversity.
- **Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO, 1978):** Eight Amazon countries (Brazil, Peru, Colombia, Bolivia, Ecuador, Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname) cooperate on sustainable development and conservation.
- **UN REDD+ Programme:** Supports countries in reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation while promoting sustainable management.
- **Amazon Fund (2008):** Established by Brazil with support from Norway and Germany; finances efforts to prevent, monitor, and combat deforestation.

Concluding remarks

- Rainforests are nature's living archives, holding irreplaceable biodiversity and regulating the planet's climate.
- Their protection is not just an environmental imperative but a safeguard for humanity's future, linking ecological health with social, cultural, and economic resilience.

Source: IE

CENTRE INVOKES MUTUAL LEGAL ASSISTANCE TREATY

Context

- India has formally invoked the **Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT) with Singapore**, seeking cooperation in the investigation into the death of singer Zubeen Garg in the southeast Asian country.

Mutual Legal Assistance

- **Mutual Legal Assistance** is a mechanism whereby **countries cooperate** with one another in order to provide and obtain formal assistance in prevention, suppression, investigation and **prosecution of crime**.
- **Aim:** To ensure that the **criminals do not escape or sabotage** the due process of law for want of evidence available in different countries.
- India provides mutual legal assistance in criminal matters through **Bilateral/Multilateral Agreements, or International Conventions or on the basis of assurance of reciprocity**.
- India has entered into MLAT **with more than 45 countries**.
- **Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).

Notable Use of MLAT

- **2G Spectrum Case (2010–2012):** Investigating agencies obtained crucial call data records and financial evidence from countries like the UAE, Mauritius, and the UK under MLATs.
 - ♦ Helped in establishing links in the money laundering chain.
- **AgustaWestland Helicopter Scam (2013 onwards):** Through MLAT requests, India sought evidence from Italy, Mauritius, Singapore, and the UK.
- **Nirav Modi & Mehul Choksi (PNB Scam, 2018):** India sent MLAT requests to Hong Kong, Singapore, Switzerland, and UAE to trace assets and collect financial evidence.
 - ♦ Helped in asset seizure and strengthening extradition proceedings.

Objectives and Key Provisions

- **Objectives:**
 - ♦ Facilitate investigation and prosecution of crimes.
 - ♦ Ensure speedy exchange of evidence and information.
 - ♦ Provide an alternative to lengthy diplomatic channels.
- **Provisions:**
 - ♦ Exchange of documents, records, and evidence.
 - ♦ Identification and location of persons.
 - ♦ Examination of witnesses.
 - ♦ Search and seizure of assets.
 - ♦ Assistance in asset recovery, forfeiture, and confiscation.
 - ♦ Service of judicial documents.
 - ♦ Transfer of persons for testimony.

Challenges in MLATs

- **Time-Consuming Process:** Requests often take months due to bureaucratic red tape.
- **Lack of Uniformity in Legal Systems:** Different countries have varying evidentiary standards, admissibility rules, and judicial procedures.
 - ♦ Some requests are rejected because they don't meet local legal requirements.
- **Limited Coverage:** India doesn't have MLATs with all countries hampering cooperation in jurisdictions without treaties.
- **Digital Evidence Issues:** Rising cybercrimes demand quick access to server logs, emails, cloud data.
 - ♦ Big Tech companies are often located in countries where India doesn't have speedy MLAT access.
- **Sovereignty & Privacy Concerns:** Countries are reluctant to share sensitive information citing sovereignty or data protection laws.
- **Resource Constraint:** Many developing countries lack trained personnel, infrastructure, and capacity to process MLAT requests efficiently.

Significance

- **Tackling Transnational Crimes:** Provides a legal mechanism to investigate and prosecute crimes that cross borders such as terrorism, drug trafficking, human trafficking, cybercrimes, and money laundering.
- **Faster & Reliable Evidence Sharing:** Unlike informal channels or diplomatic routes, MLATs offer a direct, legally binding framework for collecting and sharing admissible evidence.

- **Strengthening Counter-Terrorism Efforts:** Helps trace terror financing, identify operatives, and dismantle international terror networks.
- **Combating Financial Crimes:** Assists in locating, freezing, and confiscating assets obtained through corruption, fraud, and black money parked abroad.
- **Promotes Rule of Law & Mutual Trust:** Enhances legal cooperation and builds trust between nations.
- **Strengthening Diplomatic Ties:** MLATs deepen bilateral and multilateral relations by fostering cooperation in sensitive areas of law and security.
- Later named the **Federal Public Service Commission (1937)**, it was renamed the **Union Public Service Commission** with the adoption of India's **Constitution on 26th January 1950**.
- **The UPSC conducts** civil services examinations to select officers for the Indian Administrative Service, Indian Foreign Service and the Indian Police Service, among others.
- **Members:** Besides the chairman, it can have a **maximum of 10 members**.
 - A UPSC chairman is appointed for a **term of six years** or until attaining **65 years of age**, **all members have the same term**.
- **Reappointment:** The UPSC Chairman is **not eligible for reappointment** after completing their term.
- **Removal (317): Removal by President:**
 - Can only be done on the ground of misbehaviour.
 - Requires a Supreme Court inquiry and report confirming the misbehaviour.
 - Reference to the Supreme Court is made by the President.
 - **Can remove without Supreme Court inquiry if the person:** Is adjudged insolvent, engages in paid employment outside office duties, is unfit due to mental or physical infirmity.

Other Mechanisms

- **Extradition Treaties:** It aims to transfer an accused/convicted person from one country to another to face trial or serve a sentence.
 - **India's Status:** India has extradition treaties with more than 40 countries including UK, USA, France, UAE.
- **Letters Rogatory (LRs):** These are formal requests from an Indian court to a foreign court for judicial assistance such as evidence collection, serving summons.
 - It is done through diplomatic channels and is usually slower than MLAT.
- **Interpol Mechanisms:** It uses tools such as:
 - **Red Notice** – request to locate & provisionally arrest a person pending extradition.
 - **Blue/Green Notices** – for information gathering.
- India uses these when bilateral MLAT/extradition treaties don't exist.

Source: TH

100 YEARS OF UPSC : THE GUARDIAN OF MERITOCRACY

Context

- **The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC)** marks a **century of its establishment on October 1**.

About

- **Establishment:** The **Government of India Act, 1919**, first provided for such a body, and in **October 1926, the Public Service Commission was set up**, following the **recommendations of the Lee Commission (1924)**.

Civil Services Day

- **Civil Services Day** is observed on **21st April every year** to commemorate the day in **1947** when **Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel** addressed the **first batch of civil servants at the Metcalfe House, New Delhi**.
 - He termed civil servants as the **"Steel frame of India,"** emphasizing their role in maintaining unity and integrity.

History of Civil Services in India

- **Lord Cornwallis** is considered as **'Father of Civil Services in India'**.
- **Lord Wellesley** founded the **College of Fort William in Calcutta in 1800** to educate young recruits for the Civil Services.
 - But the directors of the Company, in 1806, replaced it with their own **East Indian College at Haileybury in England**.
- **The Charter Act of 1853** abolished the patronage system and introduced open competitive examinations.
- The first competitive exams for the Indian Civil Services (ICS) were held in London in **1855**.

- **Satyendranath Tagore** was the first Indian to clear ICS in **1864**.
- **From 1922 onwards** the Indian Civil Service Examination began to be held in India.

Constitutional Provisions

- **Article 309** empowers Parliament and State Legislatures to regulate recruitment and conditions of service.
- **Article 310** of the Constitution states that civil servants of the Union and the States hold office during the pleasure of the President or the Governor, respectively.
- **Article 311** provides safeguards for civil servants against arbitrary dismissal.
- **Article 312** outlines the process for creating All India Services, such as the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), the Indian Police Service (IPS), and the Indian Forest Service (IFS).
- **Articles 315 to 323** of the Indian Constitution establish Public Service Commissions (PSCs) for both the Union (UPSC) and each state (SPSC).

Role of Civil Services in Governance

- **Service delivery:** They are responsible for administering welfare schemes and ensuring that public services reach the intended beneficiaries, particularly at the last mile.
- **Maintaining law and order:** Civil servants ensure peace, justice, and security by upholding the rule of law and coordinating with law enforcement agencies.
- **Elections:** They have been instrumental in the conduct of free and fair elections, and ensuring smooth transfer of power both at the Centre and States.
- **Uninterrupted Administration:** There have been numerous instances when States have been placed under President's rule, with the civil services ensuring uninterrupted administration during such times.
- **Policy Making:** They provide advice to governments in policy making and also implement the policies made by the political executive.

Challenges faced by civil services

- **Political Bias:** At times lack of neutrality of Civil servants result in political bias in discharge of critical functions.
 - ♦ The cause and effect of this phenomenon is the increasing political interference in all aspects of bureaucracy including postings and transfers.
- **Lack of Expertise:** Career bureaucrats who are generalists, may lack the expertise needed to address technical challenges.

- **Red-tapism:** Excessive procedural formalities often delay decision-making and hinder timely service delivery.
- **Mental health issues:** High-pressure environments, and long working hours impact the mental well-being of civil servants.
- **Resistance to innovation:** A rigid administrative culture discourages experimentation and adoption of new practices.
- **Outdated rules and procedures:** Many service regulations are colonial-era legacies that are not compatible with modern governance needs.

Governance reforms to enhance efficiency of bureaucracy

- **Mission Karmayogi National Program:** It is a flagship programme of Government of India **launched in 2020** for training of civil servants, which intends to transform the Civil Services from 'Rule Based' to 'Role Based' way of functioning and Citizen Centric.
- **Lateral Entry into Civil Services** to bring domain expertise and promote competitiveness in administration.
- **e-Governance Initiatives:** Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS) for grievance redressal, SPARROW for performance appraisal, and digitization of service records.

Conclusion

- Civil servants play a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of India's growth and governance, often known as the **architects of Viksit Bharat**.
- While it has been praised for its professionalism and institutional stability, it also faces challenges such as delays, procedural rigidity, and adaptability to modern needs.
- Strengthening transparency, efficiency, and accountability can help the bureaucracy continue to serve as an effective pillar of India's democratic system.

Source: TH

HISTORIC INDIA-BHUTAN RAILWAY PROJECTS SET TO TRANSFORM CONNECTIVITY

Context

- The Union Government announced **two cross-border railway projects** which will connect Bhutan with the bordering areas of Assam and West Bengal.

Background

- The genesis of these two projects lies in the **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** signed between Bhutan and India in **2005**.
- **Why Gelephu and Samtse?**
 - ♦ Gelephu and Samtse are the **major export-import hubs** in Bhutan and serve the 700-km long India-Bhutan border.
 - ♦ Gelephu is being developed as “**Mindfulness City**” and Samtse is being developed as an **industrial town** by the Government of Bhutan.

About the Rail Projects

- **Kokrajhar–Gelephu Line:** It will connect Sarpang district in Bhutan with Kokrajhar and Chirang districts in **Assam**.
 - ♦ It is declared a **Special Railway Project** for fast-track approvals and land acquisition.
 - ♦ It will span **69 km** and is estimated to cost **Rs 3,456 crore**.
- **Banarhat–Samtse Line:** It will connect Samtse district in Bhutan with Jalpaiguri district in **West Bengal**.
 - ♦ The line will cover **20 km** and is estimated to cost **Rs 577 crore**.



Significance of the Project

- **Strengthening ties with Bhutan:**
 - ♦ **Development assistance:** This initiative builds on India's long-standing role as Bhutan's largest developmental partner and its recent commitment of approximately **\$1.2 billion** for **Bhutan's 13th Five-Year Plan**.
 - ♦ **Enhanced contact:** Facilitating smoother passenger and cargo movement is expected to boost people-to-people connections and cultural exchanges.
- **Increasing trade:**
 - ♦ **Seamless connectivity:** For landlocked Bhutan, the railway links will provide seamless access to Indian ports and markets, significantly lowering freight costs for its exports.
 - ♦ **Bolstering key hubs:** The new lines will support the economic development of

Gelephu as a new commercial hub and **Samtse** as an industrial center.

- ♦ **Free trade access:** As Bhutan's top trading partner, the projects will further enhance the benefits of the **2016 free trade agreement** between the two nations.
- **Counterbalancing China's influence:** The railway lines are located near the sensitive **Siliguri Corridor (Chicken's Neck Area)**, a narrow strip of land linking mainland India to its northeastern states.
 - ♦ By improving security and supply chains in this region, the project helps mitigate potential security risks in the wake of China's growing regional footprint.

What are the challenges?

- **Land Acquisition and Terrain:** Southern Bhutan and northeast India have hilly and forested terrain, making land acquisition complex and time-consuming.
 - ♦ Negotiating with local communities and obtaining environmental clearances could cause delays.
- **Construction and Engineering:** Projects require numerous bridges, viaducts, and underpasses in challenging topography.
 - ♦ There are risks of geological hazards such as landslides, river floods, and seismic activity.
- **Strategic and Geopolitical Risks:** Proximity to the China–Bhutan–India border requires infrastructure security and strategic considerations.

Way Ahead

- The railway projects mark a historic milestone in India–Bhutan relations, establishing the Himalayan nation's first-ever train links.
- With careful implementation and bilateral cooperation, the project poised to become a transformative infrastructure initiative, benefiting both nations and the broader eastern Himalayan region.

Source: IE

NEWS IN SHORT

INTERSTELLAR MAPPING AND ACCELERATION PROBE (IMAP)

In News

NASA launched the Interstellar Mapping and Acceleration Probe (IMAP) to map the heliosphere's boundary, track energetic particles, and enhance space weather forecasting.

Interstellar Mapping and Acceleration Probe (IMAP)

- It is a space mission designed to explore the heliosphere—the Sun's protective bubble around the solar system—and its interaction with interstellar space.
- It is positioned at the Earth-Sun Lagrange Point 1 (L1).
- It uses 10 instruments to study solar wind, energetic particles, magnetic fields, and cosmic remnants.

Features and Objectives

- It aims to uncover how solar particles are energized and how the heliosphere shields Earth from galactic radiation.
- It also provides real-time space weather data to protect astronauts and technology, while advancing our understanding of cosmic materials and the habitability of planetary systems.

Source :TH

INDIA RE-ELECTED TO ICAO COUNCIL WITH STRONGER MANDATE

In News

India has been re-elected to Part II of the Council of International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) for the 2025-2028 term, reflecting increased global confidence in its leadership in international civil aviation.

Council of International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)

- It is a specialized UN agency established in 1944 that helps 193 countries collaborate for safe, efficient, and sustainable global air travel.
 - ♦ **Part II of the ICAO Council comprises States** making the largest contribution to the provision of facilities for international civil air navigation
- **The ICAO Assembly**, held every three years, is the sovereign body of the organization and comprises all 193 signatory States to the Chicago Convention.
 - ♦ The 36-member Council, elected during the Assembly, serves as ICAO's governing body for a three-year term.

Progress

- It has played a key role in building a rapid and reliable international air network, connecting people and promoting economic growth worldwide.

- It is evolving by strengthening partnerships and providing expert guidance to shape the future of international air transport with sustainable and strategic solutions.

Do you know ?

- **India has been a founding member** of ICAO since **1944** and has maintained an uninterrupted presence on the Council for 81 years.
- The country continues to play a pivotal role in shaping ICAO's mission to promote safe, secure, sustainable, and inclusive international civil aviation.
- For the 2025–2028 term, India has reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening aviation safety, security and sustainability; promoting equitable growth in global air connectivity; advancing technology and innovation; and supporting ICAO's No Country Left Behind initiative.

Source :PIB

DIAMOND JUBILEE SILVER TRUMPET AND TRUMPET BANNER TO PRESIDENT'S BODYGUARD

In News

President Droupadi Murmu presented the **Diamond Jubilee Silver Trumpet and Trumpet Banner to the President's Bodyguard (PBG)**, marking 75 years since it was designated as the elite regiment in 1950.

Do you know?

- The tradition of presenting the Silver Trumpet and Trumpet Banner to the PBG began with Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the first President of India, who bestowed the honour on May 14, 1957

President's Bodyguard

- The President's Bodyguard is the **oldest regiment of the Indian Army**, tracing its origins back to **1773** when it was raised as the **Governor-General's Bodyguard**, later known as the **Viceroy's Bodyguard**.
- Following India's transition to a republic, the regiment was renamed the **President's Bodyguard on January 27, 1950**.
- The PBG is the only Regiment that is permitted two 'Standards', namely the President's Standard of Body Guard and the Regimental Standard of The PBG.

IE+DD+Air+PIB

INDIA'S FIRST DUGONG CONSERVATION RESERVE IN PALK BAY

In News

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has officially recognized **India's first Dugong Conservation Reserve in Palk Bay**, Tamil Nadu, at the 2025 IUCN World Conservation Congress.

Dugong Conservation Reserve

- It was established in September 2022, by the Tamil Nadu government under the **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972**.
- It covers 448.34 sq. km. in northern Palk Bay and is home to over 12,250 hectares of seagrass meadows, vital feeding grounds for dugongs (Dugong dugon)

Dugongs(Dugong dugon)

- They are relatives of manatees, have a similar plump look but a dolphin-like tail.
- Dugongs are primarily herbivorous, grazing on 30 kg-40 kg of seagrass a day.
- They are known as "sea cows," and peacefully graze on seagrass in shallow coastal waters of the Indian and western Pacific Oceans.
 - They are often referred to as the "farmers or gardeners of the sea" for their important role in preserving the coastal ecosystems and aiding fish production.
- Geographic Range:** These gentle giants are found in warm waters along coastlines, mainly confined to seagrass beds which occur in calm sheltered habitats such as bays and lagoons.
 - They are found in the **Gulf of Mannar, the Palk Bay, the Gulf of Kutch and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in India.**
- Threats :** Their population was on the decline over the past several decades owing to a variety of factors, including hunting for meat, commercial fishing practices leading to accidental drowning, and habitat degradation.
- Protection status :** The species is listed as **Vulnerable** to Extinction on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List.
 - Once abundant in Indian waters, dugongs are protected under Schedule I of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.

Source :TH

PAYMENTS REGULATORY BOARD (PRB)

In News

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has constituted a six-member Payments Regulatory Board (PRB) to oversee the country's payment systems.

Payments Regulatory Board (PRB)

- The PRB replaces the **Board for Regulation and Supervision of Payment and Settlement Systems (BPSS)**, a committee of the RBI's Central Board.
- The new board derives its authority from the **Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007**.
- It will be supported by the RBI's Department of Payment and Settlement Systems (DPSS), which will report directly to it.

Composition

- It will be chaired by RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra, the PRB includes two other RBI officials—the Deputy Governor and Executive Director for Payment Systems—and three Central Government nominees: the Secretaries of Financial Services and Electronics & IT, along with former Telecom Secretary Aruna Sundararajan.
- Decisions will be made by majority vote, with the chairperson (or deputy governor in absence) holding a casting vote in case of a tie.
- The Board must meet at least twice annually, and decisions may also be made via circulation if directed by the chairperson.
- The RBI's principal legal adviser is a permanent invitee to PRB meetings.

Functions

- The Board is responsible for the regulation and supervision of all payment systems including electronic and non-electronic, domestic and cross-border systems.

Source :IE

ACCIDENTAL DEATHS AND SUICIDES IN INDIA: NCRB REPORT (2023)

Context

- Recently, the **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)** released its **Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India 2023** report, offering a snapshot of the India's public health and safety landscape.

Key Findings of Report (2023)

- Age Groups:** **30-45 Years** (31.7%; 1,40,933 deaths); **18-30 Years** (24.4%; 1,08,254 deaths).

- **Road Accidents:** India witnessed a staggering **1.73 lakh deaths and 4.47 lakh injuries** due to road accidents in 2023—a 1.6% increase from the previous year.

Accidents in India

	2022	2023
Accidental Deaths	4,30,504	4,44,104
*Rate of Accidental Deaths	31.2	31.9

*Accidental Deaths per lakh population

Suicides in India

	2022	2023
Suicides	1,70,924	1,71,418
*Rate of Suicides	12.4	12.3

*Suicides per lakh population

- ♦ **Over-speeding and careless driving:** 82% of fatalities.
- ♦ **Two-wheeler:** 45.8% of total deaths, followed by pedestrians;
- ♦ Most incidents occur **between 6 p.m. and 9 p.m.**, highlighting the need for better traffic enforcement and public awareness during peak hours.
- **Accidents due to Forces of Nature:** 6,444 deaths were attributed to natural forces like **lightning (39.7%), heat stroke (12.5%), exposure of cold (11.4%) and floods.**
 - ♦ Under 'Lightning', Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand are the biggest victim States/UTs.
- **Accidents due to Other Causes:** The major causes of accidental deaths were traffic accidents (45.2%), sudden deaths (14.5%), drowning (8.6%), falls (5.7%), poisoning, and electrocution (3.2%).
- **Farmer Suicides:** The agricultural sector saw 10,786 suicides in 2023 (declined by 10% from 2022), including 4,690 farmers and 6,096 agricultural laborers.
 - ♦ It translates to nearly one farmer suicide every day, underscoring the deep-rooted agrarian distress.
 - ♦ Maharashtra led with 2,518 farmer suicides, followed by Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.
- **Mental Health and Illness-Linked Suicides:** Report highlights a 3.2% rise in suicides due to illnesses, with nearly 20% of cases linked to conditions like cancer, paralysis, and mental health disorders.
 - ♦ Mental illness accounted for 13,978 suicides.
 - ♦ Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, and Karnataka reported the highest illness-related suicides.

- ♦ Alarming, **suicides due to cancer rose by 14%**, and **abortion-related fatalities spiked by 59%**.

Source: DTE

MODEL YOUTH GRAM SABHA INITIATIVE

Context

- The Union Government is set to launch the **Model Youth Gram Sabha (MYGS) initiative** from October 2025, inspired by the **Model UN framework**, to instill awareness about Panchayati Raj institutions among school students.

About Model Youth Gram Sabha (MYGS)

- The initiative will **train rural and tribal students** in grassroots democracy.
- **Vision:** To create a new generation of **informed and responsible citizens** who see local governance as central to development and social justice.
 - ♦ The program involves students in **mock Gram Sabha sessions**, where they take on roles like sarpanch and ward members to discuss village issues and pass resolutions.
 - ♦ Each school receives **₹20,000 financial support** to conduct the activity.
- **Implementing Ministries:** Ministry of Panchayati Raj, in collaboration with the Ministries of Education and Tribal Affairs.

Implementation of the scheme

- **Phased Rollout:** The initiative began with a first phase covering about 1,100–1,200 schools.
- **Participating Institutions in Phase 1:**
 - ♦ **Over 600 Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas (JNVs)** across the country.
 - ♦ **200 Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS)** in tribal regions.
 - ♦ Selected government schools in Maharashtra and Karnataka.

Source: IE

BATHUKAMMA FESTIVAL CREATES TWO GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS

Context

- The Bathukamma festival set Guinness World Records for the **largest floral arrangement and the most synchronized female dance participants.**

About

- The Bathukamma was built by around **300 workers with metal, bamboo, and flowers**, and the structure took 72 hours to complete.



- The Bathukamma festival is celebrated predominantly in **Telangana**.
- Women gather in large numbers to **create intricate flower stacks**, offer prayers, and dance in concentric circles, **celebrating the goddess Gauri and the harvest season**.

About Bathukamma Festival

- The term "Bathukamma" translates to "**Mother Goddess Come Alive**", reflecting the divine feminine energy and protection.
- Folklore connects the festival to legends of **Goddess Gauri as well as King Dhramangada and Queen Satyavati of the Chola dynasty**.
- Bathukamma's timing coincides with **Navratri, celebrating life, devotion and the triumph of good over evil**.

Source: AIR

RBI'S NEW BANKING NORMS TO ENHANCE POLICY TRANSMISSION

Context

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has introduced major reforms to ensure faster policy transmission, ease gold and silver-backed lending, and enhance banking sector flexibility with effect from October 1, 2025.

About

- **Changes to Basel III:** The RBI has amended the **Basel III capital regulations**.
 - ♦ Under this, the eligible limit for Perpetual Debt Instruments issued abroad has been increased.
 - ♦ This will provide banks with greater flexibility in **raising Tier-1 capital** from the foreign market.
- **Reforms in Gold and Silver Lending:** Earlier lending against primary gold or silver, including ETFs or mutual fund units, was prohibited.
 - ♦ **New Amendment:** Banks and **tier-3/tier-4 urban cooperative banks** can provide working capital loans to borrowers using gold or silver as raw material for industrial or production purposes. Individuals holding gold for investment or speculative purposes are excluded.

Flexibility in Floating-Rate Loans

- ♦ **Spread Reduction:** Banks can now reduce the spread on floating-rate loans even before the previous three-year lock-in period ends.
- ♦ **Fixed-Rate Option:** Borrowers may be offered the option to switch to a fixed rate at the time of interest rate reset, though this is no longer mandatory.
- **Draft proposals** include extending gold metal loan repayment from **180 to 270 days**, allowing non-manufacturing jewellers to avail these loans, aligning large exposure norms for foreign bank branches, and requiring weekly credit data submissions to credit bureaus for improved accuracy.
 - ♦ Public feedback on drafts is open until October 20.

Do you know ?

- **Spread** refers to the **additional percentage** that lenders add to the benchmark interest rate such as external benchmark rate or **marginal cost of funds based lending rate (MCLR)** by banks when determining the final lending rate to a borrower.
- Banks typically factor in credit risk profile, operating cost and tenure of the loan while finalising the spread charged to a borrower.
 - ♦ Earlier the spread charged to a borrower could be altered once in three years.

Significance of the Reforms

- **For Borrowers:**
 - ♦ Reduced interest burden through faster pass-through of policy rate cuts.
 - ♦ Access to working capital loans for industrial gold and silver users.
 - ♦ Greater flexibility in choosing loan options.
- **For Banks:**
 - ♦ Enhanced ability to manage spreads and credit exposures.
 - ♦ Flexibility in raising Tier-1 capital from international markets.

Source: FE

REMISSION OF DUTIES AND TAXES ON EXPORTED PRODUCTS (RODTEP) INCENTIVE SCHEME

Context

- The Government has extended the **Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP) incentive scheme** for exporters until March 31, 2026.

About

- The scheme was started in **2021**, and provides **refunds to exporters** for any embedded duties, taxes, and levies incurred by them not already refunded under other schemes.
- The revised rates under the scheme will be ranging from **0.3% to 3.9% and the same will remain in force for all qualifying export products.**
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
- As of March 31, 2025, total disbursements under the RoDTEP scheme have crossed Rs. 57,976.78

crore, **underscoring its significant role in supporting India's merchandise exports.**

- The scheme is compliant with **World Trade Organization (WTO) norms** and is implemented via a **comprehensive end-to-end digital platform to ensure transparency and efficiency.**
- **Significance:**
 - ♦ Neutralizes the impact of domestic taxes that exporters cannot claim back.
 - ♦ Encourages more exports by lowering costs.

Source: TH

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