

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS (DCA)

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FTA CONCLUDED BETWEEN INDIA AND EU

Context

- **India and the European Union (EU)** announced the **conclusion of negotiations** for a **Free Trade Agreement (FTA)**.

About

- The FTA enables deeper market integration between the **world's 4th and 2nd largest economies**.
- Together, **India and the EU account for nearly 25% of global GDP** and close to **one-third of global trade**.
- **Bilateral trade in goods and services** currently stands at around **€190 billion** annually, including **€120 billion** in goods and more than **€80 billion** in services.
- **The agreement is expected to expand this relationship substantially over the coming decade.**

Major Highlights of the FTA

- **Market Access:** India has gained preferential access to the European markets across 97% of tariff lines, covering 99.5% of trade value.
 - ♦ India is offering 92.1% of its tariff lines which covers 97.5% of the EU exports.
- **Safeguard to Sensitive Sectors:** India has safeguarded sensitive sectors, including dairy, cereals, poultry, soymeal, certain fruits and vegetables, etc. balancing export growth with domestic priorities.
- **Service Sector:** Commitments have been secured from the EU across 144 services subsectors, including IT/ITeS, professional services, education, and other business services.
 - ♦ Indian service providers will get a stable and conducive regime in the EU market to supply their services.
- **Key industrial products: Indian duties** of up to 44% on machinery, 22% on chemicals and 11% on pharmaceuticals are set to be largely eliminated over phased timelines of five to ten years.
 - ♦ Tariffs on car parts will be abolished over time, while duties on fully built vehicles will be reduced from 110% to as low as 10% under a quota-based system.
- **CBAM-related provisions** include a forward-looking **most-favoured nation assurance**, ensuring that any flexibilities extended to **third countries will also apply to India.**

- ♦ The agreement also provides for enhanced technical cooperation on recognising carbon pricing mechanisms, mutual recognition of verifiers, and financial assistance and targeted support to help Indian exporters reduce emissions and comply with emerging carbon requirements.
- **Climate Resilient Infrastructure:** The European Investment Bank has committed 2 billion to climate-resilient infrastructure through the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, while a proposed EU-India climate cooperation platform is expected to launch in 2026.
- **Mobility Framework:** The FTA establishes an assured regime for temporary entry and stay for professionals, including Business Visitors, Intra-Corporate Transferees, Contractual Service Suppliers, and Independent Professionals.
- **Indian Traditional Medicines:** In the EU Member States where regulations do not exist, AYUSH practitioners will be able to provide their services using the professional qualifications they gain in India.

Significance for India

- **Gain in Exports:** FTA is expected to enhance **India's exports to the EU**, which stood at approximately USD 16.6 billion, and improve share in EU's nearly USD 2 trillion engineering goods imports.
- **Marine Exports:** Preferential access covering 100% of trade value, by reducing tariffs of up to 26% will unlock the EU marine market for imports.
 - ♦ This enhanced market access is expected to significantly improve the competitiveness of India's marine exports empowering coastal communities in Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Kerala, and India's blue economy.
- **Gain for Key labour-intensive sectors:** Sectors such as textiles, apparel, marine, leather, footwear, chemicals, plastics/rubber, sports goods, toys, gems, and jewellery will enter zero duty from entry into force of the FTA and thus gain enhanced competitiveness in the EU market.
- **Imports of EU's high technology goods** are expected to diversify India's import sources, thereby reducing input costs for businesses, benefit consumers and will create opportunities for Indian businesses to integrate into global supply chains.
- **Impact on Agriculture:** India secures preferential market access for its agricultural exports for processed foods, tea, coffee, spices, table grapes, gherkins and cucumbers, sheep and lamb meat, sweet corn, dried onion, and some other fruits and vegetable products.

- ◆ This will strengthen rural incomes, women's participation, and India's position as a premium, trusted supplier in Europe.

Landmark agreement

After almost two decades of talks, the European Union and India sealed a landmark trade pact, driven by U.S. tariff pressures. The deal aims at doubling exports to India



HOW DOES IT BENEFIT EU?

- Tariffs removed or cut on 90% of EU goods
- Wine duties cut from 150% to 20-30%; Spirits cut to 40%
- Car tariffs drop from 110% to 10% (250,000 vehicle quota)
- Tariffs eliminated on Airbus aircraft, and processed food
- 0% tax on most machinery, and pharmaceutical products

HOW DOES IT BENEFIT INDIA?

- Duty-free exports for items such as textiles, leather, gems, and spices
- A duty-free quota of 1.6 million tonnes for steel
- Easier for skilled Indian workers to work in the 27-country bloc
- Dialogue on carbon border tax; India set to be treated like other EU partners
- Phased-out tariffs on arms and ammunition, among other goods

WHAT THE DEAL DOESN'T INCLUDE?

- No concessions on items such as chicken and rice
- No agreement on government procurement on energy and raw materials
- A "sustainable development" chapter (rejected by India)
- Agreement on Geographical Indications

Source: AFP

► **Diplomatic outreach:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Council President António Costa, on Tuesday in New Delhi. ANI

India - EU Trade Relations

- The EU is India's largest trading partner, accounting for trade in goods worth **€120 billion in 2024**, or **11.5%** of India's total trade.
- **India is the EU's 9th largest trading partner**, accounting for 2.4% of the EU's total trade in goods in 2024, well behind the USA (17.3%), China (14.6%) or the UK (10.1%).
- Trade in goods between the EU and India has increased by **almost 90% in the last decade**.
- **The EU's imports from India** comprise mainly machinery and appliances, chemicals, base metals, mineral products, and textiles.
- **The EU's main exports to India** consist of machinery and appliances, transport equipment, and chemicals.
- **Trade in services** amounted to **€59.7 billion** in 2023 (with EU exports of **€26 billion**).
- **The EU's share of foreign direct investment (FDI) stock in India** reached **€140.1 billion** in 2023, up from **€82.3 billion** in 2019.
- Some 6,000 European companies are present in India.



Source: PIB

INTERNATIONAL DATA PRIVACY DAY

In News

- **International Data Privacy Day** is observed annually on **28th January** to raise awareness about the importance of protecting personal data and privacy in the digital age.
 - ♦ It was designated in 2006 by the **Council of Europe** to commemorate the **signing of Convention 108**- the world's first **legally binding international treaty on data protection**.

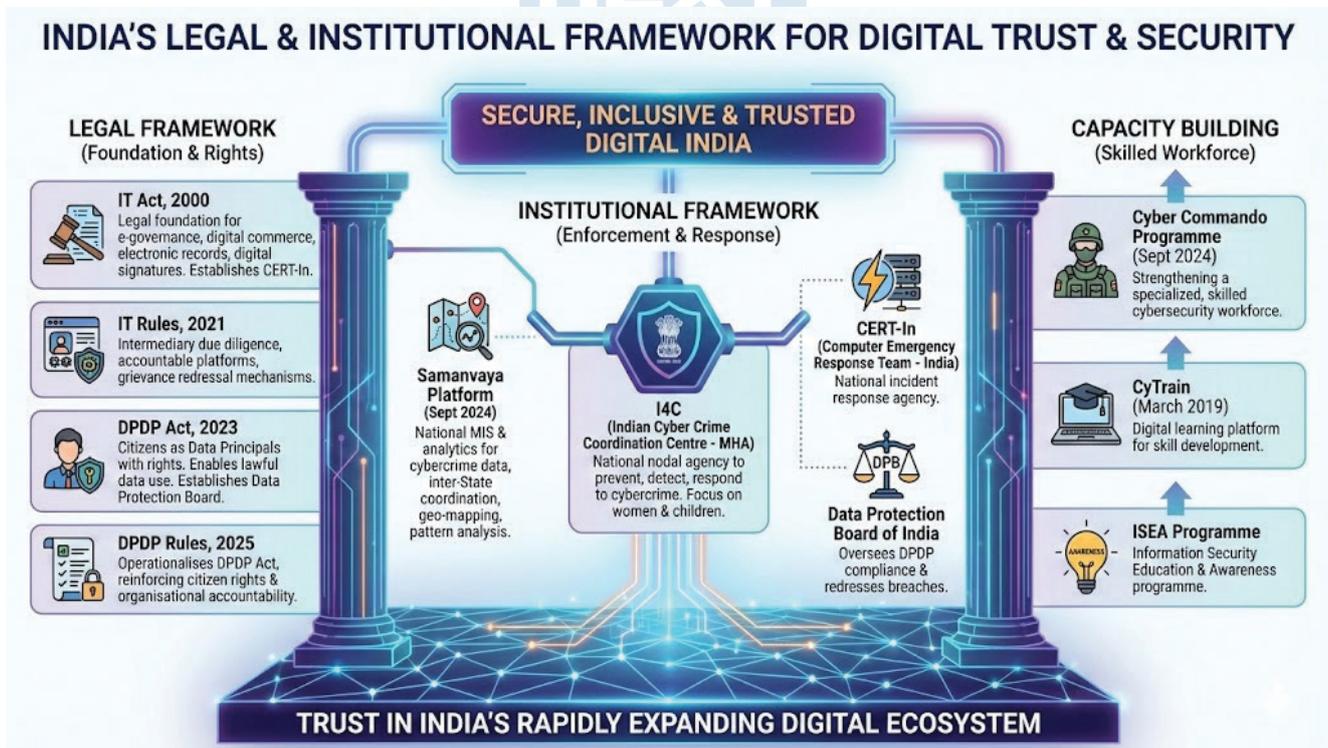
Importance of Data Privacy

- Data privacy is a foundational pillar of responsible **digital governance**.
- It **protects and safeguards citizens' personal information** across large-scale digital public platforms.
- It builds public trust by strengthening **confidence in government-led digital services**.
- **Strong data privacy frameworks** promote safe, ethical, and secure digital use, reduce cyber risks, prevent data misuse, and enhance governance through transparency and accountability.
- As digital platforms grow, safeguarding **personal data ensures** that innovation remains citizen-centric, ethical, and accountable, highlighting the

shared responsibility of governments, institutions, and citizens in protecting digital rights.

India's Expanding Digital Footprint and the Privacy Imperative

- India is now among the world's most digitalised economies, with the digital economy already contributing over **10% of GDP** and projected to reach about **one-fifth by 2026–30**.
- This growth **rides on large-scale digital public infrastructure**: Aadhaar-linked identity, UPI-led payments, DigiLocker, and near-universal broadband access.
- **Affordable connectivity and over 101.7 crore broadband subscribers** have made India one of the most digitally inclusive societies, touching core aspects of daily life such as identity verification, payments, healthcare, and education.
- However, the scale of digitalisation increases privacy and **cybersecurity risks, as more sensitive personal data is generated and processed**.
- In response, the government has strengthened **data protection and cybersecurity frameworks**, including significant budgetary allocations, and emphasises privacy by design, oversight, and accountability.



Democratic and Rights-Based Concerns

- Data protection in India is **not just a technical cyber issue** but flows from the fundamental right to privacy recognised in **Puttaswamy**.

- Large-scale welfare and fintech infrastructures (Aadhaar seeding, UPI-linked accounts, digital health and education stacks) **create risks of profiling, exclusion, and surveillance** if not coupled with strong purpose limitation, oversight, and remedies.
- The DPDP framework has been **criticised for wide exemptions for the state, scope for broad “legitimate uses”, and dependence on executive rule-making**, which may dilute safeguards in practice.
- Weak institutional capacity, concentration of data in a few state and private platforms, and patchy cyber hygiene further heighten the risk that breaches or misuse could erode citizen trust.

Way Forward

- First, the legal framework must be complemented by stronger independence and capacity of the Data Protection Board, time-bound breach notification, and meaningful penalties even for public authorities.
- Second, privacy-by-design, data minimisation, and decentralised architectures should be built into DPI and sectoral systems (health, education, mobility) rather than treated as afterthought compliance.
- Third, citizens need enforceable rights—easy-to-use consent dashboards, clear grievance channels, and legal aid for data harms—so that “SARAL” is realised in everyday practice.
- Finally, Parliament and regulators must ensure that national-security or innovation narratives do not become blanket justifications to dilute privacy, as a resilient digital economy ultimately rests on public confidence and constitutional values.

Source :TH

INDIA'S PAPER INDUSTRY PUSH FOR EASING FOREST RULES

Context

- The Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) notified amendments to the **Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 2023**, formerly the Forest Conservation Act, 1980.

Background

- According to 2023 guidelines forest land leased for commercial purposes attracted:
 - ♦ **Net Present Value (NPV) payments:** A one-time charge reflecting the economic value of ecosystem services lost due to diversion of forest land.

- ♦ **Compensatory Afforestation (CA) obligations:** Mandatory afforestation undertaken to compensate for diverted forest land.
- Plantation of medicinal plants was treated as a **non-forest activity**, requiring prior Union approval.

What are the New Rules?

- **Commercial plantations** are now legally classified as “**forestry activities**” under the amended Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 2023.
- **Exemption from Levies:** Entities undertaking these plantations are no longer required to pay **Net Present Value (NPV) or undertake mandatory compensatory afforestation.**
- **Simplified Approvals:** Plantations that align with state-approved “Working Plans” and are supervised by forest departments do not require prior central government approval.
- **Leasing to Private Entities:** The central government can specify terms and conditions for leasing forest land to private companies for plantation purposes.

Why the Paper Industry Pushed for Easing Norms?

- **Domestic wood availability** in India is estimated at around **nine million tonnes per year.**
 - ♦ Current demand stands at approximately **eleven million tonnes** per year, impacting domestic paper production and increased input costs.
- **Rising Dependence on Imports:** Despite being the **third-largest paper producer** globally, India's imports of paper have increased sharply particularly from ASEAN countries.
- **Underutilised Capacity in the Paper Sector:** India has around 900 pulp and paper mills, of which only about **550 are operational.**
 - ♦ The inadequate access to raw materials has prevented mills from operating at optimal capacity.

Environmental Concerns

- Environmental groups caution that;
 - ♦ Commercial plantations **may not replicate the ecological functions** of natural forests.
 - ♦ **Monoculture plantations** can adversely affect biodiversity, soil health and water availability.
- The amendment raises questions about the **balance between ease of doing business and ecological safeguards.**

India's Paper Industry

- India's Paper Industry accounts for about **5%** of the world's production of paper.
- The mills use a variety of raw material viz. **wood, bamboo, recovered paper, bagasse, wheat straw**, etc.
 - ♦ In terms of share in total production, approximately 18-20% is based on wood, 74-76% on recycled fibre and 6-8% on agro-residue.
- **Over 90 percent** of wood is currently sourced from agroforestry and farm forestry, not from natural forests.
- Approximately **500,000 farmers** are engaged in growing plantation species such as eucalyptus, poplar, subabul, casuarina and acacia across about **1.2 million hectares**.

Way Ahead

- Commercial plantations should be restricted to degraded and open forest lands, avoiding ecologically sensitive areas.
- Strong monitoring and ecological safeguards are needed to prevent monoculture-driven environmental harm.
- Agroforestry and recycled fibre use should be further promoted to reduce pressure on forest land.

Source: DTE

CONGESTION INDEX

Context

- According to the latest **2025 TomTom Traffic Index**, ranked **India as the fifth most** traffic-congested country globally and **second in Asia**.

About

- The index evaluates **cities worldwide based on average travel time, congestion levels and vehicle speeds**.
 - ♦ The index is widely **used to track changes in urban mobility** and compare congestion trends across regions and countries.
- **Bengaluru** emerged as **India's most traffic-congested city**, recording an average congestion level of 74.4%
 - ♦ **Bengaluru and Kolkata** were both listed among the world's five slowest cities.
- **Of the top 10 cities with the highest congestion in Asia, six were from India:** Bengaluru (1), Pune (2), Mumbai (6), New Delhi (7), Kolkata (9), and Jaipur (10).

Causes of Traffic Congestion in India

- **Rapid urbanisation and population growth** is increasing pressure on limited road space.
- **Rising private vehicle ownership** due to higher incomes and inadequate public transport is exceeding the road capacity growth.
- **Inadequate and poorly planned road infrastructure**, including narrow roads and missing bypasses.
- **Mixed traffic conditions** with vehicles of different speeds and sizes sharing the same road. Also, an absence of lane discipline slows down traffic flow.
- **Poor traffic management** and weak enforcement of traffic rules.
- **Encroachments and on-street parking** reduce effective road width.

Implications

- **Economic losses** due to fuel wastage, delayed logistics, and reduced productivity.
- **Increased air and noise pollution** leading to the worsening urban health outcomes.
 - ♦ Higher carbon emissions, undermining climate and sustainability goals.
- Long waiting hours lead to higher stress levels and road rage, affecting **mental health and social well-being**.
- Congested roads lead to **delay in emergency services** (ambulances, fire services), risking lives.
- **Increased road accidents** due to chaotic traffic and rule violations.
- **Reduced quality of urban life**, lowering livability and ease of doing business.

Initiatives to Combat Traffic Congestion in India

- **Strengthening public transport** through metro rail, Bus Rapid Transit System (BRTS), suburban rail and electric buses.
- **Promotion of intelligent traffic management systems** (ITMS) using AI, sensors and adaptive signals.
- **Transit-Oriented Development (TOD)** to integrate land use with mass transit corridors.
- **Urban road infrastructure** upgrades, including flyovers, ring roads and dedicated lanes.
- **Parking management reforms**, such as pricing, multi-level parking and no-parking zones.
- **Encouraging non-motorised transport** by developing footpaths and cycle tracks.
- **Policy and behavioural initiatives**, including congestion pricing, staggered office timings and stricter enforcement.

Source: DTE

NEW UGC RULES ON CASTE-BASED DISCRIMINATION

Context

- The University Grants Commission (UGC) notified new regulations aimed at addressing discrimination, particularly caste-based discrimination, in higher education institutions.

Background

- **As per Regulation 3(c)** of the UGC (Promotion of Equity in Higher Education Institutions) Regulations, 2026, “caste-based discrimination” means “**discrimination only** on the basis of caste or tribe against the members of the **scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and other backward classes**”.
- It aims to curb caste-based discrimination on campuses and ensure a safe, dignified and inclusive academic environment for students, teachers and non-teaching staff.

Key Provisions of the 2026 Regulations

- Every higher education institution is mandated to have an Equal Opportunity Centre, an Equity Committee and Equity Squads.
 - ♦ **The Equal Opportunity Centre (EOC)** will oversee the implementation of policies related to disadvantaged groups, coordinate with the district administration and police, and **help provide legal aid** when necessary.
 - ♦ **Equity Committee:** The EOC will have a **ten-member Equity Committee** chaired by the head of the institution. Five of its members must be from reserved categories.
 - ♦ **Equity Squads:** These are to be constituted to “maintain vigil and prevent discrimination on campus”.
- A 24-hour ‘**Equity Helpline**’ and **Equity Ambassadors** will be appointed.
- The UGC will monitor compliance, and non-compliant institutions with the risk of losing UGC funding, degree-granting powers, and even recognition.

Impact of Caste-Based Discrimination

- **On Individuals:**
 - ♦ It undermines **dignity, self-worth, and mental health**, leading to anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal.
 - ♦ It results in educational exclusion, including **higher dropout rates**, denial of academic opportunities, and restricted access to mentorship.
 - ♦ It creates fear of reprisal, discouraging students from reporting discrimination.

- **On Institutions:**

- ♦ It weakens **academic excellence** by preventing equal participation and talent realisation.
- ♦ It fosters a hostile campus climate, **eroding trust** between students, faculty, and administration.

- **On Society:**

- ♦ It **perpetuates intergenerational inequality** and social stratification.
- ♦ It contradicts constitutional values of **equality, fraternity, and social justice**.

Constitutional Provisions

- **Article 46 under the Directive Principles of State Policy**, mandates the State to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections, particularly Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs).
- **Article 14** guarantees equality before law and equal protection of laws.
- **Article 15(4) & 15(5)** enable affirmative action for socially and educationally backward classes.
- **Article 16(1) & 16(4)** ensure equality of opportunity and reservation in public employment.
- **Article 17** abolishes untouchability and forbids its practice in any form.

Legal and Statutory Measures

- **Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989**, criminalises caste-based harassment and violence.
- **Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955**, penalises the practice of untouchability.
- **Right to Education Act, 2009**, mandates non-discrimination in elementary education.
- **University Grants Commission Act, 1956**, empowers UGC to regulate equity in higher education.

What are the Concerns?

- **Legal Concerns:** Absence of a provision to deal with **false or motivated complaints** may raise fears of misuse.
 - ♦ **Time-bound action mandates** may compromise principles of natural justice if due process is rushed.
- **Institutional Concerns:** Smaller colleges may face capacity constraints in setting up EOCs, Equity Committees, and Squads.
 - ♦ Fear of punitive action by UGC may lead institutions to act defensively rather than fairly.

- **Social and Academic Concerns:** Excessive focus on monitoring rather than dialogue may undermine academic freedom.
 - ♦ Perceived bias may lead to **alienation of students** affecting campus harmony.

Way Ahead

- Expand access to **mental health counselling, mentorship programmes, and academic support**, especially for first-generation learners.
- Link equity mechanisms with **student welfare and grievance redressal systems** for holistic intervention.
- Use data from complaints to **identify systemic patterns** such as evaluation bias, hostel segregation, or faculty discrimination.

Source: IE

INDIA'S ENERGY SECTOR: A \$500-BILLION OPPORTUNITY FOR GLOBAL INVESTORS

Context

- Recently, the Prime Minister of India, at **India Energy Week** in Goa, has called on global investors to partner in **India's rapidly expanding energy sector**, describing it as a \$500-billion investment opportunity.
 - ♦ Representatives from nearly **125 countries** participated, reinforcing India Energy Week's position as a major global energy platform.

Key Highlights of India Energy Week 2026

- **Focus on Energy Independence:** India outlined its transition from **energy security to energy independence**, with long-term, sustainable strategies.
- **India as a Reliable Energy Partner:** India is among the **top five exporters of petroleum products**, supplying over **150 countries**, making it a reliable global energy partner.
- **Major Investment Opportunities:** India showcased **\$500 billion worth of opportunities** across the energy value chain, from exploration to downstream sectors.
- **Exploration and Deep-Sea Initiatives:** Emphasis on the **Samudra Manthan Mission**, with plans to attract **\$100 billion** in oil and gas exploration investments and expand exploration areas to **1 million sq km**.
- **Refining Powerhouse Vision:** India is on track to become the **world's largest refining hub**, ranking **second globally** in refining, with capacity expected to exceed **300 MMTPA**.

- **LNG and Gas Infrastructure Push:** Target to meet **15% of energy demand through LNG**, backed by a **₹70,000-crore shipbuilding programme**, new terminals, pipelines, and city gas networks.
- **Growing Petrochemical Demand:** Rising population and economic growth are driving strong investment prospects in **petrochemicals and downstream infrastructure**.

India's Energy Sector

- **Installed Generation Capacity:** India is the third-largest producer and consumer of electricity worldwide, with an installed power capacity of 466.24 GW as of January 31, 2025.
- **India's Coal Based Energy:** It contributes nearly 55% to the national energy mix and fuels over 70% of total power generation.
- **Renewable Energy Growth:** India is among the top nations globally for solar and wind capacity, aiming for 500 GW of non-fossil fuel capacity by 2030.
- **Total Installed Capacity** (renewable energy sources, including large hydropower): 209.45 GW (As of December 2024).
 - ♦ **Wind Power** (48.16 GW); **Solar Power** (97.87 GW); **Biomass/Co-generation** (10.73 GW); **Small Hydro** (5.10 GW); **Waste To Energy** (0.62 GW), and **Large Hydro** (46.97 GW).
- **Transmission Infrastructure:** The country boasts one of the world's largest synchronized power grids, enabling electricity transfer across regions.
 - ♦ India has achieved **near-universal electricity access**, with over 99% of villages electrified.
- **Total Energy Supply and Demand (2025):**
 - ♦ **Supply:** Approximately 1,800 Million Tonnes of Oil Equivalent (MToE), reflecting an annual increase of 4.5% compared to 2024.
 - ♦ **Demand:** It is driven primarily by industrial growth (40%), transportation (25%), and residential consumption (20%).

Other Reasons For Global Investors to Invest in India's Energy Landscape

- **Attractive Exploration Potential:** Reforms in oil and gas exploration, over **170 awarded blocks**, reduced No-Go areas, and promising regions like the **Andaman & Nicobar basin** enhance upstream opportunities.

- **Integration with Global Trade Networks:** Recent FTAs with the **EU, UK, and EFTA countries** strengthen supply chains and boost investor confidence.
- **Growing Petrochemical Market:** Rising industrialisation, urbanisation, and consumer demand are creating strong growth prospects in **petrochemicals and downstream infrastructure**.
- **Commitment to Innovation and Sustainability:** Focus on cleaner fuels, advanced technologies, and sustainable energy solutions aligns India with global energy transition goals.
- **Stable and Predictable Market:** Democratic governance, policy continuity, and a large domestic market provide long-term stability for global investors.

Related Concerns & Issues in India's Energy Landscape

- **Rising Energy Demand Pressure:** Rapid economic growth and urbanisation are increasing energy demand, creating challenges in balancing supply, affordability, and sustainability.
- **Import Dependence for Crude Oil and Gas:** Despite strong refining capacity, India remains heavily dependent on imported crude oil and natural gas, exposing it to global price volatility and geopolitical risks.
- **Infrastructure Gaps:** Expanding pipelines, LNG terminals, storage facilities, and transmission networks requires large capital investments and timely execution.
- **Energy Transition Challenges:** Balancing fossil fuel expansion with clean energy commitments and climate targets remains a complex policy and investment challenge.
- **Technology and Skill Gaps:** Advanced exploration, deep-sea drilling, LNG shipping, and cleaner technologies require specialised skills and high-end technology.
- **Logistics and Supply Chain Constraints:** Port congestion, shipping availability, and inland transportation bottlenecks can affect energy trade efficiency.
- **Regulatory and Policy Uncertainty:** While reforms are ongoing, frequent policy changes and varying state-level regulations can create uncertainty for investors.
- **Financing and Capital Mobilisation:** Large-scale energy projects require long-term, low-cost financing, which can be challenging amid global economic uncertainties.

- **Environmental and Social Concerns:** Exploration, refining, and infrastructure projects may face environmental clearances, land acquisition issues, and community resistance.
- **Geopolitical Risks:** Global conflicts and supply chain disruptions can impact energy imports, exports, and investment flows.

Source: IE

NEWS IN SHORT

SHIKSHAPATRI DWISHATABDI MAHOTSAV

Context

- PM Modi addressed the Shikshapatri Dwishatabdi Mahotsav.

What is the Shikshapatri?

- The Shikshapatri is a **sacred text** authored by **Bhagwan Swaminarayan in 1826**.
- It consists of **212 concise Sanskrit verses** that lay down **moral, social, spiritual, and civic codes of conduct**.
- The text serves as a practical **guide for righteous living**, addressing personal discipline, family life, social responsibilities, and devotion.

Significance of the Dwishatabdi Mahotsav

- The Dwishatabdi Mahotsav marks **200 years of the Shikshapatri's promulgation**.
- It is being observed as a global spiritual and cultural event, especially by followers of the Swaminarayan tradition.
- The celebration highlights the continuing relevance of ethical values in a modern, complex society marked by social fragmentation and moral uncertainty.

Gyan Bharatam Mission (GBM)

- GBM is a flagship initiative launched by the **Ministry of Culture** to preserve, digitise, and disseminate India's vast manuscript heritage.
- Announced in the **Union Budget 2025–26**, it revives and expands the vision of the **National Mission for Manuscripts (NMM)** established in **2003**.
- **The mission aims to document and digitise over 1 crore (10 million) manuscripts across India over the next five years.**

Source: PIB

SEA OF JAPAN

In News

- North Korea recently test-launched short-range ballistic missiles toward the Sea of Japan (East Sea).

About Sea of Japan



- It is a marginal sea in the Western Pacific that is elliptical-shaped, bordered east by Japan and Sakhalin Island, and west by Russia and the Korean Peninsula.
- It connects south to the East China Sea via Tsushima and Korea Straits, north to the Okhotsk Sea via La Perouse and Tatar Straits, and east to Japan's Inland Sea and Pacific Ocean via Kanmon and Tsugaru Straits.

Source: TH

LONAR LAKE

Context

- There has been a steady water rise by **20 Feet in the water levels of Lonar Lake.**

About

- Lonar lake is a lake of lagoon in **Buldhana district of Maharashtra state.**
- It was created by a **meteorite impact** about 52,000 years ago discovered by **British Officer J E. Alexander.**
- It is located in the **basaltic rock of the Deccan Plateau**, which was created by enormous volcanic eruptions 65 million years ago, it is the **only impact crater that is known to exist.**
- The lake has **two distinct layers of water** one **alkaline** and one **saline** harboring **microorganisms not found anywhere else on Earth.**



- Recognising its ecological and scientific significance, the Maharashtra government has **designated Lonar and its surrounding area as a Wildlife Sanctuary.**
- Depending on the time of year, the **water shifts colour - sometimes emerald green, other times a surreal pink.**
 - This transformation is thanks to blooming microorganisms that flourish in the unique chemical below the surface.

Source: ET

SYRIA'S KURDISH REGIONS

In News

- Recently, Syrian government forces advanced into Kurdish-held northern territory, capturing key towns and triggering clashes that threaten to derail efforts to reunify the country.

Background and Issues

- Since the collapse of Bashar al-Assad's regime in December 2024, Syria has remained unstable despite hopes for peace.
- Ahmed al-Sharaa (formerly Abu Muhammad al-Golani) became interim leader and pledged inclusive governance, but sectarian violence resurfaced, and fighting erupted between government forces and the **Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)** in the northeast.

Kurds

- They are one of the largest ethnic groups in the world, spread over Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria in West Asia.



- They also constitute a substantial diasporic population in Europe and elsewhere.
- The Kurdish language, with its various dialects, is a major unifying factor in their dispersion across countries.
- In Syria, the Kurds form around 10% of the total population, and comprise an estimated 5% of the total Kurdish population.
 - ♦ They faced various forms of discrimination — cultural, linguistic, economic and political — during the Ba’athist rule in Syria under both Hafiz al-Assad and his son Bashar al-Assad, who was deposed in December 2024.
- The Kurdish issue originates from post-World War I agreements, where Wilson’s Fourteen Points and the Treaty of Sèvres (1920) proposed autonomy or potential independence for the Kurds, but the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) excluded such provisions.

Source :TH

GIG WORKERS’ WELFARE BOARD

In News / Context

- Karnataka has constituted a **Gig Workers’ Welfare Board** to strengthen social security coverage for platform-based workers in the State.

About

- It is constituted under the **Karnataka Platform-Based Gig Workers (Social Security and Welfare Development) Act, 2025**.
 - ♦ The Labour Minister serves as **ex-officio Chairperson**.
- The Board oversees **mandatory registration of aggregators and gig workers**, issuing unique IDs valid across platforms.
 - ♦ Aggregators must contribute **1-1.5% welfare fee (capped, potentially up to 5%) per transaction to fund social security schemes** like health and income support.
- The Board will monitor schemes, grievance redressal, and transparent contracts, addressing gig economy growth projected at 4.1% of India’s workforce by 2030.

Source: TH

EURATOM

In News

- India and the EU reaffirmed their commitment to strengthen cooperation on peaceful nuclear energy uses under the existing **India-Euratom Agreement** during the **16th India-EU Summit**.

About

- EURATOM was established by the **1957 Treaty of Rome**.
- It promotes joint R&D, safeguards fissile materials against military diversion, and fosters technical knowledge sharing.
- The **2020 India-Euratom R&D pact** covers nuclear safety, fusion research (including ITER), radiation protection, and non-power applications like radio-pharmaceuticals.
- India has been CERN’s associate membership since 2017.

Source: TH

CERT-IN

Context

- In 2025, the **Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In)** handled over 29.44 lakh cyber incidents, reflecting **large-scale national cyber response capability**.

About

- CERT-In is the **national agency** for cyber incident response in India.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.
- Its mandate **under section 70B** of the **Information Technology (IT) Act 2000** includes the prevention of cyberattacks, real-time monitoring of cyber threats, and swift coordination with stakeholders to mitigate and contain cyber incidents.



Source: PIB

INDO-PACIFIC LEOPARD SHARK

In News

- Thailand has begun its first “rewilding” project for the Indo-Pacific leopard shark off Maiton Island.

The Indo-Pacific Leopard Shark (*Stegostoma tigrinum*)

- It is a **medium-sized shark** that occurs across the Indo-West Pacific Oceans.
- It is found on continental and insular shelves from inshore to a depth of 90 m and is associated with coral and rocky reefs, and inshore mudflats, mangroves and seagrass beds.
- The Indo-Pacific Leopard Shark inhabits tropical and subtropical waters up to 142 m deep, favoring coral reefs, rocky areas, sandy plateaus, mangroves, and seagrass beds.
- ♦ It occurs across the Indian and Western Central Pacific Oceans from South Africa to Samoa and north to Japan
- It is listed as Endangered species on the IUCN Redlist.

Source: Reuters

