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INDIA-EUROPEAN UNION (EU) FREE TRADE AGREEMENT (FTA)

Context: India and the EU have concluded negotiations for a comprehensive FTA. The EU is India's 22nd FTA partner and this is India's largest ever trade deal.



Key Highlights of the India-EU FTA:

1. European Union Commitments:

- **Comprehensive Market Access:** The EU committed to open 97% of its tariff lines, covering 99.5% of India's exports by value, offering India one of the deepest preferential market access arrangements it has ever received.
- **Labour-Intensive Sector Advantage:** Key employment-generating sectors such as textiles, apparel, leather, footwear, marine products, gems and jewellery, toys, and sports goods, currently facing EU duties of 4–26%, will enter the EU market at zero duty, covering exports worth USD 33 billion.

- **Services Market Liberalization:** EU made binding commitments across 144 services subsectors, including IT Services, digital services, professional services, education, and business services - ensuring regulatory certainty and non-discriminatory treatment for Indian service providers.
- **Farm Exports:** FTA provides India preferential access to the EU market for key agricultural and processed food exports, improving their competitiveness. This aims to boost farmer incomes, promote value-added agri-exports, and strengthen rural livelihoods.
- **Professional Mobility Regime:** The FTA establishes a framework for temporary movement of professionals such as intra-corporate transferees, contractual service suppliers, and independent professionals along with rules for dependents, students, and future social security arrangements.
- **Regulatory and Standards Cooperation:** Cooperation on Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) was agreed upon to reduce non-tariff barriers and improve market access.

2. India's Commitments

- **Calibrated Tariff Liberalization:** India committed market access on 92.1% of its tariff lines, covering 97.5% of EU exports. Sectors including dairy,

cereals, poultry, soymeal, and select agricultural products remain protected, while automobiles, wines, and spirits are subject to gradual liberalization to shield MSMEs and farmers.

- **Services Sector Opening:** India opened 102 services subsectors, including telecom, financial, environmental, maritime and business services, providing EU firms a stable and predictable environment for their working.
- **MSME-Friendly Rules of Origin:** Product-specific rules of origin aligned with global value chains were adopted, allowing self-certification through Statements of Origin and special flexibilities for MSME-dominated sectors such as shrimps, prawns, and aluminium products.
- **IPR and Digital Trade Framework:** India reaffirmed TRIPS-compliant intellectual property rights (IPR) protection while safeguarding public interest, protecting India's pharma industry, recognizing the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (of CSIR), and balancing digital trade with data localization & digital sovereignty.

Source: India-EU Summit highlights: India-EU announce mega FTA; PM Modi calls it New Delhi's biggest trade deal ever (The Hindu)

ANTI MICROBIAL RESISTANCE

Context: PM Modi recently made an appeal for the responsible use of antibiotics, stating that antibiotics are becoming ineffective against common infections.



About Anti-Microbial Resistance (AMR):

- AMR is resistance acquired by any microorganism against antimicrobial drugs. These microorganisms are called **superbugs**. It occurs when a microorganism changes over time and no longer responds to medicines.
- **Makes infections harder to treat** and increases risk of disease spread, severe illness, death.
- WHO has identified AMR as one of the **top ten threats to global health**.

As per a study by India's National Centre for Disease Control (January 2024):

- **57% antibiotics prescribed in India have potential** to cause high AMR.
- India has a **remarkably high prevalence of antibiotic usage** (71.9%), with 4.6% of patients getting four or more antibiotics.
- Only 6% were prescribed antibiotics after a confirmed diagnosis of the specific bacteria causing their illness.

Key Findings of the Global Antibiotic Resistance Surveillance (GLASS) 2025 Report by WHO:

- **Rising AMR Threat:** Between 2018 and 2023, AMR increased in 40% of pathogen-antibiotic combinations.

- **Geographically Uneven AMR:** AMR was highest in Southeast Asia and the Eastern Mediterranean, followed by Africa, while Europe and the Western Pacific show lower rates. AMR
- **Threat in India:** India, with one of the highest AMR rates, had 1 in 3 bacterial infections resistant to common antibiotics, with ICU infections by E. coli, and K. highly resistant.

Initiatives taken to Prevent AMR

- ✓ **AMR Surveillance and Research Network (AMRSRN):**
 - Aims to generate evidence and capture trends and patterns of drug-resistant infections in the country.
- ✓ **National Action Plan on AMR:**
 - Focuses on One Health approach and was launched in April 2017 involving various ministries/depts.
- ✓ **Red Line Campaign:**
 - Awareness campaign urging people not to use medicines marked with a red vertical line without a prescription.
 - These medicines are included in Schedule H-1 of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940.
- ✓ **WHO Global AMR and Use Surveillance System:**
 - Aims to incorporate data from surveillance of AMR in humans, surveillance of antibiotic use, AMR in food chain & environment into health policy.
- ✓ **ICMR Antibiotic Stewardship Program (AMSP) by ICMR:**

- Aims to control misuse and overuse of antibiotics in hospital wards and ICUs.
- ✓ **Chennai Declaration:**
 - In 2012, India’s medical societies adopted the Chennai Declaration, a set of national recommendations to promote antibiotic stewardship.
- ✓ **Nafithromycin:**
 - India’s 1st indigenous anti-biotic (launched in Nov 2024 against drug-resistant strains of pneumonia bacteria).

Source: The looming threat of antimicrobial resistance (The Hindu BusinessLine)

PLACES IN NEWS

Rojava Region



- Renewed **fighting between Syrian government forces and the Kurdish-led, U.S. backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)** has endangered Rojava’s autonomy after the collapse of Bashar al-Assad’s regime in 2024.
- Rojava, officially the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES), is a **de facto autonomous region in north-eastern Syria.**

- It follows the ideology of **democratic confederalism**, emphasizing local self-rule, gender equality, and ethnic pluralism, though it lacks international recognition.
- It is **strategically located along the Euphrates basin and key oil- and gas-rich areas** of eastern Syria. This location makes Rojava a geopolitical crossroads involving regional and global powers.
- The region is bordered by **Türkiye** to the north, **Iraq (Kurdistan Region)** to the east, and Syrian government-controlled areas to the west and south

Buddhist Diamond Triangle



- UNESCO has added **Odisha's famed Buddhist Diamond Triangle (Lalitgiri, Udayagiri, and Ratnagiri)** to India's **Tentative List for World Heritage Sites**.
- The Diamond Triangle refers to **three interconnected monastic complexes** located in the Jajpur and Cuttack districts of Odisha.
- These sites are unique because they document 1,500 years of continuous history, showcasing the transition of Buddhism through **all three major schools: Theravada (Hinayana), Mahayana, and Vajrayana**.

- Located in the Cuttack district, **Lalitgiri is the oldest site in the triangle**, dating back to the 2nd–3rd Century BCE. A massive stupa containing sacred relic caskets made of gold, silver, and stone - believed by many to be the relics of Lord Buddha himself, is located here.
- **Udayagiri, the largest complex in the group**, flourished between the 1st and 13th Century CE. The site is famous for its images of Avalokiteswara and the Pancha Dhyani Buddhas.
- Often compared to Nalanda, **Ratnagiri is a Vajrayana site**. The site boasts an incredible collection of sculptures, including those of Tara and Vajrapani.

UNESCO's Tentative List of World Heritage Sites is the first step toward UNESCO World Heritage nomination. Countries identify cultural or natural sites and submit them to UNESCO at least a year before nomination. Only sites on this List can be considered for full inclusion. In India, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) compiles and submits the nominations.

Kalakkad – Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve



- It is **southernmost Tiger Reserve** in India. It is part of the **Agasthyamalai Biosphere Reserve** and is located in **Tamil Nadu**.
- It was established in 1988 as a Tiger Reserve. It is **situated in the Western**

Ghats, one of the world's eight "hottest hotspots" of biodiversity.

- It features diverse landscapes including **dense forests, grasslands, and riverine ecosystems**.
- It receives high rainfall, leading to rich vegetation and a thriving ecosystem.
- Vegetation: It includes **tropical evergreen forests, moist deciduous forests, dry deciduous forests and grasslands**.
- A total of 448 endemic flowering species and 161 fern species have been documented from this area.
- **Fauna:** Tiger, leopard, rusty spotted cat, sloth bear, elephant, gaur, sambar, spotted deer, mouse deer, Nilgiri langur, slender loris, bonnet macaque, lion tailed macaque, etc.

the **Persian Gulf and Kuwait** to the southeast, **Jordan** to the southwest, and **Syria** to the west.

- The capital & largest city is **Baghdad**.
- From the 6th millennium BC, fertile alluvial plains between Iraq's **Tigris and Euphrates Rivers** (the region of Mesopotamia) gave rise to some of the **world's earliest cities, civilizations, and empires**
- **Modern Iraq dates back to 1920**, when a **British-backed monarchy** under Faisal was established, followed by independent **Hashemite Kingdom**. The **Ba'ath government** took power in 1968 coup, first led by Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr and then by **Saddam Hussein**. The **2003 US invasion** led to the creation of a parliamentary republic.
- It is a founding member of the UN, OPEC, Arab League, NAM and the IMF.
- It has the **3rd largest oil reserves in the world** after Venezuela and Saudi Arabia.

Iraq



TERMS IN NEWS

Square Kilometer Array Observatory (SKAO)



- Iraq is a country in **West Asia**. With a population of over 46 million, it is the **30th-most populous** country. It is a **federal parliamentary republic**.
- Iraq is bordered by **Turkey** to the north, **Saudi Arabia** to the south, **Iran** to the east,

- SKAO is an **intergovernmental organization** that aims to build and operate **cutting-edge radio telescopes**.

Its global headquarters is located in the Jodrell Bank Observatory, United Kingdom.

- The project will not have a single telescope but an **array of thousands of antennas, to be installed in remote radio-quiet locations in South Africa and Australia**, that will operate as one large unit meant to observe and study celestial phenomena.
- SKAO objectives also include **study of gravitational waves**.
- Some of the countries taking part in SKAO include the **UK, Australia, South Africa, Canada, China, France, India, Italy and Germany**.
- India, through the Pune-based **National Centre for Radio Astrophysics (NCRA)** and other institutions, has played a key role in the development of the SKAO project since its inception in the 1990s.
- India's primary contribution to SKAO lies in the **development and operation of the Telescope Manager element**, essentially the "neural network" or software that controls the entire telescope's operation.

Future Circular Collider (FCC)



- CERN has unveiled the final blueprint for the FCC, which will succeed the Large Hadron Collider (LHC).
- It is a **particle accelerator planned to host the next generation of particle**

colliders. It is expected to be finished in 2035 and will have much higher energy than previous colliders.

- FCC aims to create a hadron collider which will be built in a **new tunnel that is 80-100 km long**.
- FCC intends to **extend the research currently being conducted at Large Hadron Collider (LHC)**. LHC has been operational since 2010.
- Estimated to cost around 16 billion Euros, FCC aims to **fully commence operations by 2040**.

About Large Hadron Collider (LHC):

- ✓ It is an experiment that **collides two beams of sub-atomic particles at very high energies**. It is operated by CERN (European Organisation for Nuclear Research).
- ✓ The LHC is a circular pipe that is 27 km long and is located near Geneva.
- ✓ It consists of two D-shaped magnetic fields created by almost 9,600 magnets.
- ✓ It is the **world's largest and most powerful particle accelerator**.

About CERN:

- ✓ CERN was established in 1954. It has 23 members. **22 members are European countries**. The only non-European nation with full membership is **Israel**. CERN is based in Geneva (Switzerland)
- ✓ **India is an associate member** of CERN while the USA and Japan have observer status at CERN.
- ✓ CERN is an **official "Permanent Observer" to the United Nations**.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Q1. Consider the following protected regions located in South India:

1. Kalakkad – Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve
2. Shendurney Wildlife Sanctuary
3. Mukurthi National Park
4. Aralam Wildlife Sanctuary
5. Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary
6. Neyyar Wildlife Sanctuary
7. Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve

Which of these protected areas are part of the Agasthyamala Biosphere Reserve ?

- (a) 1, 2, 3 and 6
- (b) 2, 4, 5 and 7
- (c) 1, 2, 5 and 6
- (d) 2, 4, 6 and 7

Q2. The “GLASS Report”, released by the World Health Organization (WHO), is related to which of the following purposes ?

- (a) Help developing nations tackle neglected tropical diseases
- (b) Increase awareness on the risks of non-communicable diseases
- (c) Tackling anti-microbial resistance globally and improve surveillance
- (d) Surveillance over cross-border flow of diseases and pathogens

Q3. Consider the following countries located in West Asia:

1. Iran
2. Kuwait
3. Syria
4. Oman
5. Azerbaijan
6. Jordan
7. Turkey

How many of these nations share a border with Iraq ?

- (a) Only two
- (b) Only three
- (c) Only four
- (d) Only five

Q4. Consider the following statements regarding the European Organisation for Nuclear Research (CERN):

1. Only nations that are members of the European Union (EU) can have full membership in CERN.
2. India presently only has “observer” status at CERN.
3. CERN has been officially accorded “permanent observer” status at the United Nations.

How many of the above statements are correct

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

Q5. The “Rojava Region”, often seen in news, is located in:

- (a) Iran
- (b) Syria
- (c) Sudan
- (d) Ukraine

Answers:

1. C
2. C
3. D
4. A
5. B