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'Mother of all deals': India and EU finalise FTA

After nearly two decades of negotiations, India and the European Union have finalised a Free Trade Agreement, described as the “mother of all deals”. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and European Commission President H.E Ms. Ursula von der Leyen, jointly announced the conclusion of the India–European Union Free Trade Agreement (India–EU FTA) at the 16th India–EU Summit, held during the visit of the European leaders to India. This announcement marks a historic milestone in India–EU economic relations and trade engagement with key global partners. Under this agreement, the EU will remove tariffs on 99.5% of Indian exports, while India will give tariff concessions on 97.5% of imports from the EU.

Beyond trade, both sides highlighted the geopolitical importance of the deal at a time of global uncertainty. The India-EU trade pact covers conventional areas such as trade in goods, services, trade remedies, rules of origin, customs and trade facilitation, as well as emerging areas such as SMEs and digital trade, amongst others. India and EU are 4th and 2nd largest economies, comprising 25% of Global GDP and account for one third of global trade. Together, India and the EU account for about one-third of global trade. Therefore, it is anticipated that the integration of the two large diverse and complementary economies will create unprecedented trade and investment opportunities.

The agreement is India's largest-ever FTA and is expected to improve market access for farmers, small industries, manufacturing and services. At the same time, sensitive sectors have been protected, as India has excluded agriculture and dairy, while the EU has kept tariffs on items such as beef, sugar, rice, milk powder and some others. The text will now undergo legal review and ratification, and is expected to enter into force in 2026. Most Indian exports will get immediate or phased duty elimination, especially in labour-intensive sectors.



Market Access

Over 99% of Indian exports gain preferential entry into the EU.



MSME Growth

FTA opens new opportunities for MSMEs and creates jobs for women, artisans, youth, and professionals.



Services

Ambitious and commercially meaningful market access in services.



Skilled Workforce

Future-ready mobility framework expands opportunities for skilled and semi-skilled professionals.



Inclusive Growth

FTA lays the foundation for inclusive, resilient, and future-ready growth.

Nashik farmers' 'long march' enters Thane



Thousands of tribal farmers and farm labourers undertaking a long march from Nashik to Mumbai for their land rights and other long-pending demands crossed into Thane district on Tuesday. A delegation of the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) met Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis at his official residence. Later, official sources confirmed that the Chief Minister assured the delegation that the government would address the farmers' demands. A final decision on suspending the march will be taken after consultation with the protesters.

The government has agreed to conduct a district-wise review of all land claims under the Forest Rights Act (FRA) over the next three months. Tribal farmers will also be ensured access to all government schemes for crops cultivated on forest land. Earlier, the AIKS delegation met Revenue Minister Chandrashekhar Bawankule, Water Resources Minister Girish Mahajan, Tribal Development Minister Ashok Uike, School Education Minister Dada Bhuse, Forest Minister Ganesh Naik, and senior officials to discuss these issues.

The protesters' demands include the implementation of FRA assurances, provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996, completion of irrigation projects, and filling of vacant posts in zila parishad schools. The march commenced on January 25, and the farmers will halt at Bhatsa in Thane until Wednesday.

In a first, private technical staff set to assist officials in digital Census

For the first time, private technical staff will be engaged to assist government officials in the Population Census 2027 to enable faster release of data. The first phase of the Census will begin in April and conclude on September 30, and it will be India's first fully digital census. Enumerators, mostly government school teachers, will collect data using mobile applications on their personal phones. The Registrar-General and Census Commissioner of India (RG&CCI) stated that systems such as CMMS, HLBC web application and self-enumeration portal will be used to obtain digitised data directly from the field.

Technical manpower and multitasking staff will be hired for a maximum period of 18 months starting January 2026 through outsourcing agencies. The maximum monthly remuneration will be ₹25,000 for Technical Assistants and ₹18,000 for MTS, with no further financial liability on the Government of India. The engagement will be purely contractual with no right to regularisation.

Around 31 lakh government officials will work as enumerators and receive an honorarium of ₹25,000 each, covering 750–800 persons. States will also receive one-time grants for IT infrastructure, vehicles and contingency needs at State, district and tehsil levels.



INTERNATIONAL

Doomsday Clock: 85 seconds to midnight

The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists has moved the Doomsday Clock to 85 seconds to midnight, the closest the world has ever come to global catastrophe in its assessment. The announcement was made on January 27 in Washington DC and reflects a sharply worsening global security environment. It points to weakening nuclear norms, rising conflicts in both Europe and Asia, increasing climate and biological risks, and a fragmenting international order. Earlier, the clock had been set at 89 seconds to midnight. The Bulletin stated that despite its warning last year about the world being dangerously close to catastrophe, countries have continued to move away from cooperation on managing existential risks. Founded in 1945 by scientists involved in the Manhattan Project, the Doomsday Clock was created in 1947 as a symbolic measure of global danger and human-made catastrophe.

The Bulletin expressed deep concern over nuclear weapons, particularly recent U.S. rhetoric on the possible resumption of nuclear testing and the modernisation of atomic stockpiles, which it said could destabilise long-standing deterrence. It also warned that the last remaining U.S.-Russia nuclear treaty is nearing expiry, raising fears of an uncontrolled nuclear arms race. Climate change, AI-driven misinformation, and the rise of nationalist autocracies were also cited as major risks contributing to the current crisis.

The Doomsday Clock is a design that warns the public about how close we are to destroying our world with dangerous technologies of our own making. It is a metaphor, a reminder of the perils we must address if we are to survive on the planet.

Japan-U.S. ties would crumble if Tokyo ignored Taiwan crisis



Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi said that Japan's strategic alliance with the United States would collapse if Tokyo were to turn away from a conflict in Taiwan. However, she clearly distanced herself from her earlier remarks that were seen as suggesting a possible military response. She expressed these views during a nationally broadcast television programme late on Monday, after an Opposition party leader criticised her for increasing tensions with China through her previous statements.

Ms. Takaichi said that her position was being misunderstood and clarified that the issue was not about Japan going out to fight if China and the United States come into conflict over Taiwan. She stated that if a serious situation arises, Japan would have to focus on rescuing Japanese and American citizens in Taiwan. In such a situation, she said, there could be cases where Japan and the United States take joint action. She stressed that her comments should not be seen as support for direct military involvement.

The sensitivity of the Taiwan issue was highlighted by an earlier episode involving Ms. Takaichi. On November 7, 2025, she stated in Parliament that a Chinese use of force against Taiwan could amount to a "survival-threatening situation," which is a legal condition for Japan to exercise its right to collective self-defence. This remark triggered one of the sharpest diplomatic confrontations between Tokyo and Beijing in recent years.

Karnataka constitutes Gig Workers' Welfare Board

The Karnataka government has issued a notification constituting the Karnataka Platform-Based Gig Workers Welfare Development Board under the 2025 Act to implement welfare measures for gig workers. The Labour Minister will be the ex-officio President, and senior officials from the Labour Department, the IT Department, and the Commercial Taxes Department will be ex-officio members. The Board's CEO will be the Member Secretary. The Board includes four representatives each from gig worker unions and aggregator platforms, including companies like Zomato, Uber, Amazon, and Porter, and unions such as AITUC and app-based worker unions. Both gig workers and aggregators must register with the Board. Aggregators have 45 days to register and submit details of all engaged workers.

Each registered worker will get a unique ID for social security benefits. The welfare fund will include aggregator fees, worker contributions, and State and Union grants. A 1% to 1.5% welfare fee with a cap will be levied, varying by sector, and kept low initially to avoid burden.

The Karnataka Platform based Gig Workers (Social Security and Welfare) Act, 2025

Key Features

- A gig worker who sources work through a platform will be registered with a unique ID.
- A Welfare Board will oversee registration of gig workers and aggregators, create social security schemes, and monitor the schemes.
- A Social Security and Welfare Fund will be established. It will be funded by aggregators, gig workers, central and state governments.

Oil and gas sector eyeing \$100 bn in investments, says PM



India's oil and gas sector is aiming to attract 100 billion dollars in investment by the end of the current decade, the Prime Minister said while inaugurating India Energy Week in Goa. He said India plans to expand its exploration acreage to one million square kilometres and has already awarded more than 170 exploration blocks, with the Andaman Nicobar basin emerging as the next hydrocarbon hope. He added that companies investing in India's exploration space could be assured of profits and said the energy sector is at the centre of the country's aspirations, with potential for 500 billion dollars in investment opportunities. India Energy Week is the flagship conference of the sector and brings together stakeholders for agreements and consultations. At the event, ADNOC chief Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber said global oil demand would remain above 100 million barrels per day till 2040, while demand for LNG and electricity would rise by 50 percent each. He added that air conditioners would add to demand, rising to 5.6 billion units by 2050. He warned that the biggest risk is underinvestment. On a related diplomatic development, India and Canada launched a renewed ministerial energy dialogue.

India–EU Free Trade Agreement Concluded: A Strategic Breakthrough in India's Global Trade Engagement

Present trade relations : The European Union is one of India's largest trading partners, with bilateral trade in goods and services growing steadily over the years. In 2024–25, India's bilateral trade in goods with the EU stood at INR 11.5 lakh crore (USD 136.54 billion) with exports worth INR 6.4 lakh crore (USD 75.85 billion) and imports amounting to INR 5.1 lakh crore (USD 60.68 billion). India-EU trade in services reached INR 7.2 Lakh Crore (USD 83.10 billion) in 2024.

Trade in Goods under India–EU FTA

Tariff Elimination: EU removes tariffs on over 90% of goods; India removes tariffs on 86%. Partial liberalisation increases coverage to 99.3% for the EU and 96.6% for India.

Benefits for EU: agri-food, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, machinery, medical devices, avionics, automotive.

Benefits for India: fisheries, chemicals, textiles, footwear, pharmaceuticals.

India will remove high duties (averaging over 16%) on key industrial products, including chemicals, cosmetics, plastics, car parts, textiles, ceramics, machinery, and boats. Some tariffs will be lifted immediately at the agreement's entry into force, while others will be phased out over 5–10 years. These reductions will make it easier for EU exporters to access the Indian market.

Service Sector under India–EU FTA

The agreement will create more opportunities for EU and Indian service providers and ensure a stable, predictable trading environment. It builds on WTO rules (GATS) with modern improvements, introducing clearer commitments on regulation, senior management, local presence, and the mobility of professionals, making India's service market more transparent and accessible.

Beyond boosting commerce, it reinforces shared values, fosters innovation, and creates opportunities across sectors and stakeholders.

India - EU FTA : Overview

- **Partnership:** India, 4th largest economy, and the EU, 2nd largest economy, forge a trusted partnership.
- **Market Access:** Over 99% of Indian exports gain preferential entry into the EU.
- **MSME Growth:** FTA opens new opportunities for MSMEs and creates jobs for women, artisans, youth, and professionals.
- **Exports Boost:** INR 6.41 Lakh Crore (USD 75 Billion) exports from India to benefit from preferential access (including USD 33 Billion in labour-intensive sectors).
- **Make in India:** Auto liberalisation with reciprocal market access shall support manufacturing growth.
- **Agri Exports:** FTA opens opportunities for India's agricultural and processed food exports.
- **Protection:** Sensitive agricultural products and dairy sector remain safeguarded.
- **Services:** Ambitious and commercially meaningful market access in services.
- **Skilled Workforce:** Future-ready mobility framework expands opportunities for skilled and semi-skilled professionals.
- **CBAM Engagement:** Forward-looking CBAM provisions secure constructive dialogue and support.
- **Inclusive Growth:** FTA lays the foundation for inclusive, resilient, and future-ready growth.

PRELIMS CORNER :

1) With reference to the religious history of India, consider the following statements: (2017)

1. Sautrantika and Sammitiya were the sects of Jainism.
2. Sarvastivadin held that the constituents of phenomena were not wholly momentary but existed forever in a latent form.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

2) With reference to the cultural history of India, which one of the following is the correct description of the term 'paramitas'? (2020)

- (a) The earliest Dharmashastra texts written in aphoristic (sutra) style
- (b) Philosophical schools that did not accept the authority of Vedas
- (c) Perfections whose attainment led to the Bodhisattva path
- (d) Powerful merchant guilds of early medieval South India

**PRELIMS 2026
 COUNTDOWN**



116 DAYS TO GO

CASE STUDY

Odisha's Nirikhyana Initiative



The Nirikhyana initiative in Ganjam district of Odisha is a good example of ethical and compassionate administration. In the district, many rural pregnant women did not have access to ultrasound facilities because diagnostic services were mostly concentrated in urban areas. This forced women to travel long distances, sometimes up to 75 kilometres, and increased the risk to maternal and neonatal health. After taking charge in July 2022, the District Collector Dibyajyoti Parida identified this gap during field visits and review meetings. To address the problem, he launched the Nirikhyana initiative using a Public Private Partnership model by involving both government and private diagnostic centres. Under this initiative, about 42 government and private clinics now provide up to three free ultrasound scans to pregnant women at the block level. This has greatly improved access to essential prenatal care and has helped reduce neonatal deaths by half within two years. The initiative reflects values such as compassion, empathy, innovation, and commitment to public service, and shows how proactive and ethical leadership can use simple administrative solutions to save lives and improve governance outcomes.

Prelims Corner: Explanations



1) Answer is option b

Statement 1: Sautrantika and Sammitiya were the sects of Jainism. This statement is incorrect.

Sautrantika and Sammitiya are sects of Buddhism, not Jainism.

Sautrantika: A Buddhist school of thought that emphasized the primacy of the Sutras (scriptures) and rejected the Abhidharma as authoritative. They believed in the momentariness of all phenomena.

Sammitiya: A Buddhist sect belonging to the Vibhajyavada tradition, known for its belief in the existence of a "pudgala" (person or self) without contradicting the doctrine of "anatman" (non-self). Jainism, on the other hand, had sects like Digambara and Svetambara, which are not related to Sautrantika or Sammitiya.

Statement 2: Sarvastivadin held that the constituents of phenomena were not wholly momentary but existed forever in a latent form. This statement is correct. The Sarvastivadin school of Buddhism held that all dharmas (phenomena) exist in the past, present, and future, but in different forms. They believed that dharmas were real entities that exist eternally in a latent state.

2) Answer is option C

Paramitas: The term Paramitas is a Sanskrit word meaning "perfections" or "virtues." In Mahayana Buddhism, the Paramitas are qualities or virtues that a Bodhisattva must cultivate to progress on the path toward enlightenment and assist others in achieving it.

The Paramitas are often described as six (or ten) perfections:

Generosity (Dana)

Morality (Shila)

Patience (Kshanti)

Effort (Virya)

Meditation (Dhyana)

Wisdom (Prajna)

Mahayana Buddhism:

It means the greater vehicle.

The school is more liberal and believes in the heavenliness of Buddha and Bodhisattvas embodying Buddha Nature.

The ultimate goal under Mahayana is "spiritual upliftment."



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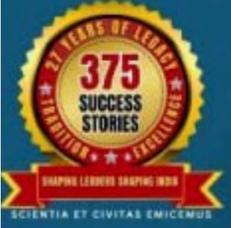
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does. Keep going."

Sam Levenson



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