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1. 4th Defence Cooperation Dialogue between India and Maldives held in Male (March 20, 2023)

4th Defence Cooperation Dialogue between India and Maldives held in Male

India and Maldives held the **4th Defense Cooperation Dialogue (DCD) in Male** on March 19, 2023.

An overview of the news

- The dialogue was co-chaired by Defence Secretary **Giridhar Aramane** and his Maldivian counterpart, Chief of Defence Force **Major General Abdulla Shamaal**.
- During the talks, the ongoing bilateral defense cooperation activities were reviewed.
- The talks covered existing **bilateral exercises**, with both countries agreeing to increase the complexity of these exercises.
- There is bilateral cooperation between the armed forces of India and Maldives in a number of fields, a positive sign for the future of bilateral relations.

About Defense Cooperation Dialogue (DCD)

- The Defense Cooperation Dialogue is the **highest institutionalized interactive mechanism** between the two countries.
- The Dialogue is one of **India's policy-level frameworks** that aim to strengthen long-standing and mutually beneficial bilateral defence ties.
- The first Defense Cooperation Dialogue was **held in 2016 and the second in 2019**.
- **Since 1988**, defense and security have been a major area of cooperation between India and Maldives.
- **In 2016**, the two countries signed a **comprehensive action plan to strengthen defense partnership**.

About Maldives

- It is also called **Maldives Islands**, an independent island country in the **north-central Indian Ocean**.
- It extends more than **510 miles (820 km)** from north to south and 80 miles (130 km) from east to west.
- Basis of economy -**fisheries, tourism**
- Industries - **handicraft or cottage including the making of coir** (coconut-husk fibre) and coir products, fish canning, and boatbuilding.
- Capital -**Male**

- President - **Ibrahim Mohamed Solih**
- Official Language - **Dhivehi (Maldivian)**
- Official Religion - **Islam**
- Currency - **Rufiyaa**

2. Nepal, India agree to formulate modality to supply electricity to Indian states via Bihar (March 19, 2023)

Nepal, India agree to formulate modality to supply electricity to Indian states via Bihar

Nepal and India have agreed to formulate a **modality to supply electricity from Nepal to multiple states of India through central transmission line via Bihar grid.**

An overview of the news

- The **14th meeting of the Nepal-India Power Exchange Committee** concluded on March 17 in New Delhi.
- It was decided in the meeting to work out modalities for **export of power from Nepal to various states of India via Bihar** within a month.
- **Kulman Ghising**, Executive Director, Nepal Electricity Authority, and **Ashok Kumar Rajput**, Power System Member, Central Electricity Authority of India, agreed to finalize the modalities within a month.
- The agreement has ensured the **additional market for the sale of surplus electricity during the rainy season.**
- Under the power exchange agreement in the meeting, the **price of electricity per unit has been fixed at Rs 11.54** for the financial year 2022-23.
- **Kataiya (Bihar)-Kushaha (Nepal) and Raxaul-Parawanipur 132-KV transmission line** are connected with Bihar.
- Nepal imports power from India when needed through the **Power Exchange Agreement and competition with the Mahakali Treaty.**
- Power is being imported into Nepal through the **Dhalkebar-Muzaffarpur cross-border 400 KV double circuit transmission line** and other transmission lines.
- The Nepal Electricity Authority has been importing electricity from India's **Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand** as per the electricity exchange agreement.
- Only **Bihar and Uttar Pradesh** are connected to Nepal through **132 KV transmission lines.**

3. India and Australia target \$100 billion bilateral trade in next five years (March 11, 2023)

Union Commerce and Industry Minister **Piyush Goyal** said on 11 March, **Australia and India** will target **\$100 billion trade in the next five years.**

An overview of the news

- Both the countries are currently dissatisfied with the **\$30 billion trade.**
- Both countries expressed their commitment to **complete negotiations to expand the scope of the existing Free Trade Agreement** by the end of this year.
- He was addressing the media in New Delhi on the **India-Australia 18th Joint Ministerial Commission** along with Australian Trade and Tourism Minister **Don Farrell.**
- On 29 December 2022 India and Australia implemented an **economic cooperation and trade agreement (ECTA).**
- They are now negotiating to expand its scope for a **comprehensive economic cooperation agreement (CECA).**
- Both sides are looking at firming up the ambitious **CECA by 2023.**

India-Australia Trade Relations

- Australia is the **17th largest trading partner** of India and India is Australia's 9th largest trading partner.
- India-Australia bilateral trade in goods and services is pegged at **US\$ 27.5 billion in 2021.**
- India's merchandise exports to Australia grew by **135% between 2019 and 2021.**
- **India's exports to Australia** - Manufactured goods such as petroleum, medicaments, diamonds, jewellery, railway coaches and vehicles, milled rice and herbicides.
- **India's imports to Australia** - 82% of its imports from Australia are coal, gold, copper ore, aluminum oxide, liquified natural gas, manganese ore, aluminum waste, pigments, lentils, etc.

4. India-US 5th Commercial Dialogue meeting held in New Delhi (March 11, 2023)

The **India-US Fifth Commercial Dialogue** meeting was held in **New Delhi** on 10 March.

An overview of the news

- The meeting was attended by Union Commerce and Industry Minister **Piyush Goyal** and US Commerce Secretary **Gina Raimondo.**

- The two leaders acknowledged that bilateral goods and services trade is **set to almost double since 2014**, surpassing a recorded **US\$ 191 billion in 2022**.
- Both sides welcomed the steps taken to enhance their commercial cooperation and tap the market potential in several sectors.
 - Both sides welcomed the efforts being made to enable an environment for investment by small and medium-sized industries and startups.
 - Both ministers recognized that small businesses and entrepreneurs are the lifeblood of the US and Indian economies.
 - In this context, both sides announced the launch of **a new working group on talent, innovation and inclusive growth** under the Commercial Dialogue.
 - It will take forward **cooperation on start-ups, SMEs, skill development and entrepreneurship**, including digital and emerging technologies.
 - **An MoU was signed between the two countries** on establishing a semiconductor supply chain and innovation partnership under the framework of the Indo-US Commercial Dialogue.

India-US Commercial Dialogue

- It aims to facilitate trade and maximize investment opportunities in a wide range of economic sectors.
- The last India-US commercial dialogue was held in **February 2019**.
- Since then, it could not be held due to the pandemic and other factors.
- After a gap of three years, it is proposed to relaunch the commercial dialogue with a strategic approach with a **focus on supply chain resilience and diversification and new emerging sectors**.

India- US trade relation

- According to the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry**, India is the **ninth largest trading partner for the US**, while the US is India's largest trading partner and largest export destination.
- During the calendar year 2022, bilateral trade in goods is expected to increase significantly, **crossing USD 131 billion**, thus doubling from 2014 (in 8 years).
- The US is also the **third largest source of foreign direct investment (FDI)** for India, and the US is among the top five investment destinations for India.

5. Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's visit to India (March 9, 2023)

Free Trade Agreement

Australian Prime Minister **Anthony Albanese** arrived in **Ahmedabad** on 8 March on a four-day (8-11 March) visit to India to participate in the **India-Australia Annual Summit**.

An Overview of the news:

- After reaching Ahmedabad, the Prime Minister of Australia visited the Sabarmati Ashram and paid homage to Mahatma Gandhi. He also participated in a cultural program at the **Raj Bhavan in Gandhinagar**, followed by a program at an Australian university in Albany Ahmedabad.
- Albanese will visit Ahmedabad, Mumbai and Delhi respectively during his visit. This is the first visit to India by an Australian Prime Minister since 2017.
- On the first day of his visit, the Prime Minister of Australia participated in the **Holi program at the Raj Bhavan beside the Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad.**
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Prime Minister of Australia Anthony Albanese watched part of the **4th Memorial Cricket Test match of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad.**
- On March 9 itself, the Australian Prime Minister went to Mumbai, where he was given a **guard of honour at INS Vikrant.**
- This is the first visit of Anthony Albanese, who became the Prime Minister of Australia in May 2022, and during this time there will be talks on various bilateral issues ranging from economic cooperation, defence cooperation.
- Australia and India have committed to a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) to further economic cooperation and trade agreement.

Free Trade Agreement (FTA):

- FTA is an agreement between two or more countries to reduce barriers to imports and exports.
- Goods and services can be bought and sold across international borders with little or no government tariffs, quotas, subsidies, or prohibitions to constrain their exchange.

FTAs of India:

- India has signed 13 Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with its trading partners, including 3 agreements:
- India-Mauritius Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA).
- India-UAE Comprehensive Partnership Agreement (CEPA).
- India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (IndAus ECTA).

India-Australia ECTA:

- Australia exports largely raw materials to India, while India exports finished goods.
- ECTA is based on this complementarity, creating better opportunities for both countries.
- India's imports from Australia are estimated at US\$17 billion, while its exports to Australia are estimated at US\$10.5 billion in 2022.

- However, India's imports from Australia are mainly (96%) raw materials and intermediate goods.

6. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz calls on President Droupadi Murmu (Feb. 26, 2023)

German Chancellor **Olaf Scholz** called on President **Draupadi Murmu**, in New Delhi on February 25.

An overview of the news

- India and Germany enjoy a **long-standing relationship**, based on shared values and shared goals for both countries.
- Bilateral relations cover a wide spectrum, reflecting the mutual trust that has been nurtured over the decades.
- Germany is **India's largest trading partner in Europe** and also among the top investors in India.
- Germany is also **India's second largest development cooperation partner** and has played an important role in India's development journey.
- In recent years, Germany has emerged as a **preferred destination for Indian students** and researchers seeking to pursue higher education, especially in science and technology.
- India and Germany also have strong cultural ties, with a long tradition of German Indologists working in India.
- India and Germany share a common objective in maintaining democratic values, rules-based international order, multilateralism, as well as reform of multilateral institutions.

Federal Republic of Germany

- Germany is also known as **Deutschland**.
- Capital : **Berlin**
- Currency : **Euro**
- President : **Frank-Walter Steinmeier**
- Chancellor : **Olaf Scholz**
- The German Chancellor is equivalent to the **Prime Minister in India**.

7. India and Fiji sign MoU on visa exemption for holders of diplomatic and official passports (Feb. 16, 2023)

memorandum of understanding (MoU)

India and Fiji signed a **Memorandum of Understanding** on **visa exemption for diplomatic and official passport holders** on 16 February in presence of External Affairs Minister **S Jaishankar** and Fiji Prime Minister **Sitiveni Rabuka**.

An overview of the news

- Under this agreement, holders of diplomatic and official passports will be able to **enter, transit and stay** in each other's territory without a visa for a **period of 90 days**.
- India and Fiji share close and long-standing relations and the two countries also reviewed bilateral relations.
- India and Fiji have inaugurated the **solarisation of the State House in Suva** and this is the first of a series that India is supporting in the **Pacific Islands**.
- It shows India's commitment towards **climate action**.
- The **Visa Waiver Agreement** will be helpful in encouraging greater travel between the two countries.

Republic of Fiji

- It is an archipelago consisting of around **300 islands** in the South Pacific Ocean.
- Capital: Suva
- Currency: **Fijian Dollar**
- President : **Wiliame Katonivere**
- Prime Minister: **Sitiveni Rabuka**

8. India and Spain agreed to cooperate in digital infra, climate action, clean energy (Feb. 16, 2023)

digital infrastructure, climate action, clean energy and sustainable development
Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** and his **Spanish counterpart Pedro Sanchez** on February 15 agreed to collaborate on issues such as **digital infrastructure, climate action, clean energy and sustainable development**.

An overview of the news

- They also discussed several bilateral and international issues of **mutual interest**.
- They reviewed bilateral initiatives and expressed satisfaction at the growing cooperation in the **defence, economic and commercial sectors**.
- Sanchez extended full support to India's initiative of chairing the **global bloc G20**.

India-Spain Relations

- Relations between the two countries have been cordial since the establishment of **diplomatic relations in 1956**.
- To give impetus to trade and investment ties, the **India-Spain Joint Commission on Economic Cooperation (JCEC)** was established in **1972**.
- The commission was established under the **Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement** and has met ten times since then.
- Spain is India's **7th largest trading partner** in the European Union.
- **India's exports to Spain** include organic chemicals, textiles, iron and steel products, motor vehicle components, marine products and leather goods.
- Spain is the **15th largest investor** in India.

Bilateral Agreements between India and Spain

- Agreement on Trade and Economic Cooperation, 1972
- Agreement on Cultural Cooperation, 1982
- Civil Aviation Agreement, 1986
- Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement, 1993
- Bilateral Investment Protection and Promotion Agreement, 1997
- Extradition Treaty, 2002
- MoU on Institutionalisation of Political Dialogue, 2006

9. 11th India-Mongolia Joint Working Group Meeting Held in New Delhi (Feb. 11, 2023)

The 11th meeting of the India-Mongolia Joint Working Group was held on 10 February 2023 in New Delhi.

An overview of the news

- Co-chaired by Dr. Ajay Kumar, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Defence, India and Brigadier General Gankhuyag Davgdorj, State Secretary, Ministry of Defence, Mongolia, the meeting of the Joint Working Group took place for the first time since the pandemic.
- Both the countries reviewed the progress of various bilateral defense cooperation initiatives and identified measures to further enhance the existing areas of cooperation.
- Both sides reviewed the progress of various bilateral defence cooperation initiatives and expressed satisfaction at the efforts made in this direction despite the restrictions imposed by the COVID pandemic.

India -Mongolia Relation

- India established diplomatic relations with Mongolia **in 1955** and upgraded relations with Mongolia to a strategic partnership.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Mongolia in 2015 upgraded it to a "**strategic partnership**" and declared it as an essential component of the '**Act East Policy**'.
- Mongolia has publicly voiced its support for India's membership for a permanent seat on the **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)**.
- Both the countries are members of the **Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)** and the **World Trade Organization (WTO)**.

Mongolia

- It is located in **North Central Asia**.
- Capital: **Ulaanbaatar**
- Currency: **Tugrik**
- President: **Ukhnaagiin Khurelsukh**

10. Operation "DOST" (Feb. 10, 2023)

India is carrying out a **rescue operation named 'Operation Dost' with National Disaster Response Force personnel, essential items and medical equipment to help after the earthquake in Turkey.**

An overview of the news:

- **On February 6, 2023**, an earthquake **measuring 7.7 on the Richter scale affected Turkey and Syria**, causing massive devastation along with loss of life and damage to infrastructure in both countries.
- A field hospital has been set up by the Indian Army in Turkey's Hatay province under Operation Dost.
- **C17 Globemaster aircraft** of the Indian Air Force has been **put into operation**.
- Operation Dost is a symbol of the fact that India is a friend of Turkey, that is, both should strengthen their relations more.

Other operations carried out by the Government of India in the past:

Operation Ganga 2022

- It was operated by the Government of India to provide humanitarian aid and to evacuate Indian nationals from Ukraine amid the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Operation Dev Shakti 2021

- It was launched by the Indian Air Force and Air India to bring back Indians from Afghanistan after the Afghan capital Kabul was captured by the Taliban on 15 August 2021.

Vande Bharat mission

- In the year 2020, the Government of India launched 'Vande Bharat Mission' campaign to evacuate Indians trapped in other countries due to Coronavirus.

Operation Rahat 2015

- It was launched by the Indian Navy, Air Force and Air India to rescue and bring back Indian and foreign nationals from Yemen following the intervention of Saudi Arabia-led coalition forces in the Yemen Civil War.

Operation Maitri 2015

- This operation was launched by the Government of India after the 2015 earthquake in Nepal.