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1. Indian Railways to start 'Bharat Gaurav Deluxe AC Tourist Train' between Ayodhya to Janakpur (Jan. 14, 2023)

Indian Railways to start 'Bharat Gaurav Deluxe AC Tourist Train' between Ayodhya to Janakpur
Indian Railways is going to run Bharat Gaurav Deluxe AC tourist train "Shri Ram-Janaki Yatra: Ayodhya to Janakpur", which will cover two most important pilgrimage sites of neighbouring India and Nepal, Ayodhya and Janakpur.

- The initiative aims to strengthen bilateral relations between India and Nepal and promote cultural ties between the two countries.
- This train will be operated by Railway's PSU - IRCTC.
- The state-of-the-art Bharat Gaurav Deluxe AC Tourist Train will depart from **Delhi on 17th February, 2023** for a 7 days all inclusive tour.
- The train will cover Ayodhya and Janakpur Dham (Nepal) as well as pilgrimage and heritage sites at Nandigram, Sitamarhi, Varanasi and Prayag.
- This tourist train can carry 156 tourists and will have 4 first AC coaches, 2 second AC coaches, a well-equipped pantry car and two rail restaurants.
- **Indo-Nepal Bharat Gaurav Tourist Train**
- **The first Indo-Nepal Bharat Gaurav tourism train was flagged off from Safdarjung Railway Station in Delhi in June 2022.**
- 500 Indian tourists travelled in this train.
- This unique idea was conceptualised by the Ministry of Railways.
- This train returned to Delhi after covering a distance of about 8000 kms in a journey of 18 days.
- The Bharat Gaurav train was run with the theme '**Dekho Apna Desh**'.

2. India, Panama sign agreement on cooperation in training diplomats (Jan. 10, 2023)

India, Panama sign agreement on cooperation in training diplomats

External Affairs Minister **Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar** signed an MoU to enhance cooperation in the training of diplomats during his bilateral meeting with Panamanian Foreign Minister **Janaina Tevane Mencomo in Indore.**

An overview of the news

- The agreement was signed during the visit of the Foreign Minister of Panama to participate in the **17th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas** Conference.

- The visit of the Panamanian Foreign Minister to India comes more than a month after the
- two sides held the **2nd Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) in Panama City** on November 23, 2022.
 - During the consultations, both sides comprehensively reviewed their bilateral relations covering issues such as trade and investment, pharmaceuticals, capacity building, space cooperation and consular.
 - Both countries also discussed cooperation in **multilateral fora**.
 - Both countries agreed to hold the next round of consultations at a mutually convenient date in **New Delhi**.

About Panama

- Panama is the southernmost nation in **Central America**.
- The country is known for the Panama Canal, a man-made waterway that opened in 1914. This canal passes through the country, connecting the **Caribbean Sea (Atlantic) with the Pacific Ocean**.
- Capital - **Panama City**
- Currency - **Balboa**
- President - **Laurentino Cortizo**

3. India & France hold 36th Strategic Dialogue in New Delhi (Jan. 5, 2023)

India and France held the **36th Strategic Dialogue** in New Delhi on 5 January. The two sides discussed a wide range of bilateral and global issues.

An overview of the news

- National Security Advisor **Ajit Doval** led the Indian delegation while the French delegation was led by **Emmanuel Bonne**, Diplomatic Advisor to the French President.
- The last edition of the Strategic Dialogue was to be held in **Paris in November 2021**.

India, France bilateral relations

- France is the first country with which India started a strategic dialogue after its **1998 nuclear tests**.
- Bilateral trade with France has reached **US\$ 10.75 billion** in the last decade and is showing a steady increase.
- Both sides recognized the importance of discussing the **India-EU Trade and Investment Agreement**.

- There are around **1,000 French companies** present in India while over a hundred Indian businesses have established a presence in France.
- **In 2005**, an agreement was signed to build **six Scorpene submarines** in India with the help of France.
- There has been an agreement between the Government of France and India for **36 Rafale aircraft**.

About France

- President: **Emmanuel Macron**
- Prime minister: **Élisabeth Borne**
- Capital: **Paris**
- Currency : **euro**

4. India, Austria to sign 5 agreements (Jan. 2, 2023)

External Affairs Minister **S Jaishankar** said that **India and Austria** will sign five agreements on January 2, 2023 and two of them are in the interest of the Indian community living in Austria.

Important facts

- The two agreements would be in the **interest of the Indian community**.
- There is an agreement on '**Migration and Mobility**' for people who want to work in Austria and who want to come to India for business, or who come here as students and professionals.
- Another agreement is on the '**Working Holiday**' program that will enable Indian students in Austria to work for 6 months.
- S Jaishankar is on an official visit to Austria where he held a meeting with Austrian Foreign Minister **Alexander Schallenberg**.
- This is the first India-Austria EAM-level visit in the **last 27 years** which is taking place in 2023 against the backdrop of 75 years of diplomatic relations.

About Austria

- It is a largely mountainous landlocked country of **south-central Europe**.
- Chancellor: **Karl Nehammer**
- President: **Alexander Van der Bellen**
- Capital: **Vienna**

- Currency : **euro**
- Official Language : **German**

5. India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement comes into force (Dec. 29, 2022)

India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement comes into force

India, Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement comes into force from 29 December, 2022.

Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA)

- India and Australia signed the Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA) on the **2nd of April 2022**.
- ECTA is the **first trade agreement of India with a developed country** after more than a decade.
- The agreement covers cooperation in the entire gamut of bilateral economic and commercial relations between the two friendly countries.
- This will benefit **labour-intensive sectors** of India such as gems and jewellery, textiles, leather, furniture, food and agriculture products, engineering products and medical devices.
- On the other hand, India has granted preferential access to Australia on more than **70 per cent of its tariff lines**, mainly in raw materials.
- As a result of this agreement, 10 lakh jobs are expected to be created in the country.

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, aluminium oxide, liquified natural gas, manganese ore, aluminium waste, pigments, lentils, etc.

6. India, Poland hold 10th round of Foreign Office Consultations in Warsaw (Dec. 13, 2022)

India, Poland hold 10th round of Foreign Office Consultations

India and Poland held the **10th round of Foreign Office Consultations in Warsaw** on December 12.

Important facts

- During the meeting, the two sides discussed regional and international issues, including developments in the Indo-Pacific, India's neighbourhood, the Ukraine conflict, cooperation in multilateral fora including the United Nations, and United Nations Security Council reforms.
- During the meeting, India and Poland identified agriculture, food processing, information technology and green transformation as areas of interest to further enhance bilateral ties.
- Both sides expressed satisfaction at the discussions at the **sixth round of the India-Poland Joint Commission Meeting on Economic Cooperation** to be held in October 2022.
- The Indian side in the meeting was led by **Sanjay Verma**, Secretary (West), Ministry of External Affairs.
- Both countries agreed to hold the next round of Foreign Office Consultations on mutually convenient dates in **New Delhi**.

Bilateral Trade

- The two nations noted the potential of bilateral trade and investment ties.
- According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the bilateral trade between India and Poland has witnessed steady growth in recent years and it stood at **USD 4.3 billion in 2021**.
- Indian companies have invested over **USD 3 billion** in Poland while Polish investments in India stand at USD 700 million.

About Poland

- Prime Minister - **Mateusz Morawiecki**
- President - **Andrzej Duda**
- Capital - **Warsaw**
- Currency - **Polish zloty**

7. 18th Joint Working Group meet between India, Bangladesh on security, border management (Dec. 6, 2022)

18th Joint Working Group meet between India, Bangladesh on security

A two-day **18th Joint Working Group (JWG)** meeting on security and border management between **India and Bangladesh** started on 5 December in **Delhi**.

Important facts

- Both sides will discuss strengthening the bilateral mechanism to deal with the menace of terrorism and extremism in all its forms.
- Both sides will also discuss issues to develop mechanisms to further hasten the process of verification of nationality, and status of prisoners lodged in jails of either country.
- The Indian delegation for the JWG meeting is being led by **Piyush Goyal**, Additional Secretary in the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).
- An Additional Secretary level officer is also heading the group of eight-member Bangladeshi delegation which will discuss the issues of common concern of the two neighbouring countries that **share a 4,096 km border**.
- This Additional Secretary level meeting is related to the preparation in advance for the Home Secretary level talks between India and Bangladesh.
- The **17th Home Secretary level talks** between India and Bangladesh and the meeting of the Joint Working Group between the two countries were held in **Dhaka on November 16-17, 2015** to discuss the security and border management-related issues.
- The Indian delegation was led by the then Union Home Secretary **Rajiv Mehrishi** and the Bangladesh delegation was led by the then Senior Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, **Dr Md. Mozammel Haque Khan**.

8. Dr Jitendra Singh led the Indian delegation at the Abu Dhabi Space Debate (Dec. 5, 2022)

Dr Jitendra Singh led the Indian delegation at the Abu Dhabi Space Debate

Dr Jitendra Singh, Minister of State for Atomic Energy and Space, led the Indian delegation to the **Abu Dhabi Space Debate**, which began in the United Arab Emirates on 5 December. He addressed the inaugural session along with Israeli **President Isaac Herzog**.

Important facts

- In this two-day international meeting, Dr. Jitendra Singh participated in the Ministerial level meeting on '**Role of Foreign Policy in Enabling Space Diplomacy and International Cooperation**'.

- He also discussed ways to strengthen bilateral space cooperation with **Sarah Al Amiri**, UAE Minister of State for Advanced Technology and Chairperson of the UAE Space Agency.
- During the conversation, Dr. Singh also discussed the **joint startup venture** between India and UAE on cutting edge and emerging space technology.
- The Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) and the UAE Space Agency (UAESA) signed an MoU in 2016 regarding cooperation in the exploration and **uses of outer space for peaceful purposes**.
- UAE's first nanosatellite- 'Nayif-1' was launched by PSLV from Sriharikota to collect environmental space data.

UAE's achievements in the space sector

- The UAE is an emerging space power and has made rapid progress in the last 25 years of its space journey.
- In July 2020, the UAE sent its **Mars mission** into space named '**Hope Probe**', which entered Mars orbit in February 2021.
- The UAE is the **first Arab country** and the **sixth country in the world** to achieve this feat.
- UAE is planning to launch **Rasheed Rover or Emirates Lunar Mission** soon.
- In September 2019, **Hanzala Al Mansoori** from the United Arab Emirates became the **first astronaut** to go into space when he went to the International Space Station (ISS) for eight days via a Russian spacecraft from **Kazakhstan**.
- This year, another astronaut from the United Arab Emirates was selected to travel to the ISS aboard NASA's crew rotation flight, **SpaceX Crew-6**, for a period of six months.

About UAE

- Capital : **Abu Dhabi**
- Currency: **Emirati Dirham**
- President : **Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan**

9. India and Gulf Cooperation Council to resume FTA talks (Nov. 25, 2022)

resume FTA talks

India's Industry and Trade Minister **Piyush Goyal** said on 24 November that India and the **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)** have agreed to resume talks on a **free trade agreement**.

Important facts

- Both sides have agreed to expedite the necessary legal and technical requirements for the formal resumption of FTA negotiations.
- The FTA will be a comprehensive economic partnership that will cover different aspects of trade.
- Goyal said the GCC is currently **India's largest trading partner bloc** with bilateral trade expected to exceed USD 154 billion in the financial year 2021-22.
- bilateral trade in services between India and the GCC was worth 14 billion US dollars in the last financial year.
- GCC countries contribute almost 35 per cent of the country's oil imports and 70 per cent of gas imports.

About Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) :

- It is a political and economic alliance of six Middle Eastern countries—**Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman.**
- It was established in **Riyadh, Saudi Arabia**, in May 1981.
- Its aim is to achieve coordination, cooperation and integration and Arab regional unity among these countries.
- The GCC member states have a total GDP of over USD 3.464 trillion and a total population of 54 million.

10. Army Chief General Manoj Pandey received guard of honour at Les Invalides in Paris (Nov. 18, 2022)

Army Chief General Manoj Pandey received

Army Chief **General Manoj Pande** who is on a four-day visit to **France**, received a **Guard of Honour** at the **Les Invalides in Paris** on 17 November, 2022.

Important facts

- General Manoj Pande held talks with his French counterpart **General Pierre Schille** and discussed issues of mutual interest during his visit to the European country.
- The Chief of Army Staff is on a visit to France from 14 to 17 November.
- Gen Pande left for France on November 14 on a four-day visit with an aim to further strengthen the "**bond of trust**" between the Indian and French armies amid the rapidly evolving security matrix and geopolitical situation.
- General Pande held extensive talks with the top military brass of France including the Chief of the Defence Staff, the Chief of the Army Staff and the Commander of the Land Combat Forces.

About France

- France is located on the **western edge of Europe**
- Prime minister: **Élisabeth Borne**
- President: **Emmanuel Macron**
- Capital: **Paris**
- Currency: **euro**