

NEWS TODAY

Sweden has officially become the 32nd member of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization)

➤ **Russia's invasion of Ukraine** in 2022 led Sweden along with Finland to apply for NATO membership.

⊕ In 2023, **Finland became the 31st NATO member**, followed by Sweden, making entire **Nordic region the part of NATO**.

➤ **Significance of NATO expansion:** Comprehensive defence capabilities, strategic influence over Baltic Sea and robust defence industry.

➤ NATO is a **transatlantic political and military alliance** established by the **North Atlantic Treaty (Washington Treaty), 1949**.

⊕ **Headquarters:** Brussels, Belgium

⊕ **Original purposes:** Deterring Soviet expansionism, forbidding the revival of nationalist militarism in Europe, and European political integration.

⊕ **Important NATO policies:**

◆ **Article 5:** It establishes a **system of collective defense**, stating that an attack against one member country is considered an attack against all member countries.

◆ **Article 10:** NATO membership is **open to any other European state** which can further Treaty principles and to **contribute to security of North Atlantic area**.

⊕ **12 Founding member countries:** Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, UK and USA.

◆ Since 1949, NATO's membership has **increased from 12 to 32 countries** through **10 rounds of enlargement**.

◆ **Countries aspiring for NATO membership:** Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia and Ukraine.



Indian Official delegation held talks with Afghan Authorities

➤ Delegation on a visit to Afghanistan discussed India's **humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan** and **use of Chabahar port (Iran) by Afghan traders**.

➤ **India – Afghan relations post-Taliban takeover (Aug 2021)**

⊕ **Technical Mission in Kabul:** Opened in June 2022, to facilitate and coordinate India's humanitarian assistance endeavors.

⊕ **Education:** India has continued **Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) scholarship scheme** for Afghan students.

⊕ **Trade & Commerce:** Ongoing unhindered including through Chabahar port.

➤ **Challenges**

⊕ **Ideological differences:** Extremist religious ideology of Taliban is at odds with India's democratic and secular values, which results in India's recognition dilemma of current Afghan regime.

⊕ **Humanitarian concerns:** Particularly women's rights and access to education and healthcare.

⊕ **Limited engagement:** Recent closure of Afghan Embassy in Delhi, strained relations over denial of visas to Afghan students, etc.

⊕ **Regional geopolitics:** Pakistan's desire to acquire strategic depth in Afghan without controlling territories.

➤ **Way Forward**

⊕ **Diplomatic pragmatism:** Engage Taliban both bilaterally and as part of regional grouping like SAARC, SCO, etc., to protect India's security and strategic interests.

⊕ **People-to-People contact:** India should continue to host Afghan students and capitalize on its strong goodwill among Afghan people.

Significance of Peace and Stability in Afghanistan for India

➤ **Regional connectivity:** Afghanistan is considered as gateway to Central Asian Region.

➤ **Energy and resources:** Stability in Afghanistan could pave way for TAPI pipeline.

➤ **Security:** Stable Afghanistan is essential to combat Pakistan-based terrorist groups.

Draft IRDAI (Protection of Policyholders' Interests and Allied Matters of Insurers) Regulations, 2024 released

- Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) framed these regulations in exercise of powers under **Insurance Act, 1938 and IRDA Act, 1999**.
- **Key highlights of regulation:**
 - ⊕ It brings together **8 separate regulations** into a unified and comprehensive framework.
 - ⊕ **Objective:** To ensure that the interests of **policyholders are protected** and insurers and distribution channel fulfil their obligations towards policyholders.
 - ⊕ **Key measures for protection of interest of policyholders:**
 - ◆ The **free-look period** (period for returning policy without any penalties) shall be 30 days from date of receipt of policy document.
 - ◆ For life insurance, compulsory gathering of **nominee information** at proposal stage.
 - ◆ Policies to be offered in **electronic format** with measures for safeguarding data privacy.
 - ◆ Insurers shall **prevent mis-selling** and unfair business practices.
 - ◆ Every insurer shall have a **system for registering and disposing of grievances** in each of its offices.
- **Challenges to insurance sector from policyholders' perspective include:**
 - ⊕ **Low insurance penetration** (4.2%) and insurance density (\$91).
 - ⊕ **Delays** in processing of claim settlement.
 - ⊕ **High premiums** with 18% GST on insurance premium.
 - ⊕ **Mis-selling** of products with lack of awareness and knowledge of coverage.

Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI)

- Statutory body formed under **IRDA Act, 1999**.
- **Purpose:** Overall supervision and development of the Insurance sector in India.
- **Key objectives:** Protecting the interest of policyholders, Speedy and orderly growth of the insurance industry, Speedy settlement of genuine claims.
- IRDAI is taking steps like **Bima Sugam, Bima Vahak and Bima Vistaar** amongst other to fulfil its vision of '**Insurance for All**' by 2047.

Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) signed between India and European Free Trade Association (EFTA)

- Agreement comprises of 14 chapters with main focus on market access related to goods, rules of origin, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, investment promotion, Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), etc.
- **Key highlights**
 - ⊕ EFTA **committed to promote investments**, with aim to increase **stock of foreign direct investments** by USD 100 billion (excluding Foreign Portfolio Investment) in India in next 15 years.
 - ⊕ For the **first-time in history of FTAs, legal commitment** made about promoting **target-oriented investment and creation of jobs**.
 - ⊕ EFTA's **market access offer covers 100% of non-agri products** and **tariff concession on Processed Agricultural Products (PAP)**.
 - ⊕ **Commitments related to IPR** in TEPA are at TRIPS level.
 - ⊕ **Services offered from EFTA** include better access through digital delivery of Services, commercial presence, and improved commitments and certainty for entry and temporary stay of key personnel.
 - ⊕ Provisions for **Mutual Recognition Agreements in Professional Services** like nursing, chartered accountants, architects etc.
- **Significance of TEPA**
 - ⊕ Foster **transparency, efficiency, simplification, harmonization and consistency of trade procedures**.
 - ⊕ Empower Indian **exporters' access to specialized inputs and create conducive trade and investment environment**.
 - ⊕ Give impetus to **"Make in India"** and **Atmanirbhar Bharat** in sectors such as Manufacturing, Machinery, Pharmaceuticals, etc.

European Free Trade Association (EFTA)

- An **intergovernmental organization** for promotion and intensification of free trade.
- **Present members: Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland.**
 - ⊕ These countries are **not part of the European Union (EU)**.
- Founded by **Stockholm Convention in 1960** with its **7 founding members** (Austria, Denmark, Great Britain, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and Switzerland).

Rajya Sabha's role part of Basic Structure of Constitution: Supreme Court (SC)

- In **Sita Soren vs. UoI Case**, noting the role of Rajya Sabha as part of Basic Structure, SC declared that **Rajya Sabha (RS) elections are within the remit of Article 194(2)**.
 - ⊕ **Article 194(2)** deals with Powers, Privileges, etc., of members of Legislature of a State.
 - ⊕ **Basic Structure doctrine** holds that certain fundamental features of the Constitution cannot be amended or abrogated by Parliament.
- **Rajya Sabha (Council of States)** is the upper House of Parliament, constituted under **Article 79 and 80**, represents state's interests in Parliament.
- **Significance of RS**
 - ⊕ **Check on hasty and ill-conceived legislation:** Providing an opportunity for scrutiny of legislative business.
 - ⊕ **Federal bicameralism:** Acts as conduit for States furthering principle of democratic decentralization and cooperative federalism.
 - ⊕ **Special powers:** Legislation by Parliament on State subjects listed under Schedule VII (Article 249), creation of new All India Services (Article 312), etc.
- **Issues with RS**
 - ⊕ **Representation:** Removal of State domicile criteria, in 2003, for election to RS adversely affects representation of States.
 - ⊕ **Legislative:** Bypassing of RS (e.g., Aadhaar Act passed as Money Bill), etc.
 - ⊕ **Accountability of Union Executive:** Instruments such as 'No-Confidence motion', 'Adjournment motion', etc., are not available with RS.

Recommendations related to RS [Punchhi Commission (2010)]

- **Equal representation of States in RS**, irrespective of population size.
- **Parliament should restore territorial link** between RS members and the State that they represent.

S.R. Bommai judgement (1994) by nine judge bench of Supreme Court (SC) completes 30 years

- It laid down the **scope of Article 356** of the Constitution and defined **certain restrictions** on its use.
 - ⊕ Under Article 356, **President's Rule can be imposed** on any state **on the grounds of the failure of the constitutional machinery**.
 - ⊕ Proclamation for President's Rule **must be approved** by both houses of Parliament **within two months, or it ceases to exist**.
 - ⊕ Further, such proclamation requires **approval every six months** for continuance.
- **Background of the case:**
 - ⊕ In 1989, Karnataka Governor had recommended to the President to impose President's Rule **after withdrawal of support to ruling party by 19 MLAs**.
 - ⊕ The case went to SC, which **also reviewed** similar cases in **Meghalaya, Nagaland, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh**.
- **Key Highlights of the judgement**
 - ⊕ **President's power to dismiss a state government is not absolute and subject to judicial review** on grounds of illegality, malafide, extraneous considerations, abuse of power, or fraud.
 - ◆ It overruled **State of Rajasthan Vs Union of India (1977)** judgement.
 - ⊕ **President can dissolve the state legislative assembly only after approval of proclamation by the Parliament**.
 - ◆ Till then, **state Legislative Assembly** can be suspended.
 - ⊕ **Suspended government would be automatically reinstated**, if parliamentary approval is not obtained within 2 months.

Significance of the Judgement

- **Checks the power of the Governor** in a state.
- **Upheld Federalism** by drawing a redline for centre-state relationships.
- **The Assembly floor is made the testing ground for the majority** of a government.

Also in News



Sabroom Land Port (SLP)

- PM inaugurated **Sabroom Landport in Tripura** located **along India-Bangladesh international border**.
- **About SLP**
 - ⊕ It is **connected to Chittagong port** of Bangladesh through **Maitree Bridge on River Feni**.
 - ⊕ It will facilitate **movement of passengers and cargo between India and Bangladesh**.
- **Land Ports**
 - ⊕ These are **areas on international border** including portions of national highways, State highways, etc., **notified as land customs station or immigration check post**, with **facilities for clearance and transport of passengers and goods** across the borders.
 - ⊕ Currently, there are **11 Land Ports operational in India** (excluding SLP).



Gorsam Kora Festival

- Recently, Gorsam Kora festival was concluded in the Tawang district of Arunachal Pradesh.
- **About Gorsam Kora festival**
 - ⊕ An **annual festival** held at **Gorsam Chorten**, a 93 feet tall Stupa, built during 13th Century CE by a **local monk- Lama Pradhar**.
 - ⊕ Theme(2024): **'Zero Waste Festival'**
 - ⊕ Organized by **local community of Zemithang in collaboration with civil authorities**.
 - ◆ Zemithang Valley holds historical significance as **14th Dalai Lama found refuge upon his escape from Tibet in 1959**.
 - ⊕ **Devotees including Bhutanese nationals** visit during the festival to observe virtuous occasion during **last day of first month of Lunar calendar**.



Golden langur

- According to latest survey, there are around 7,396 Golden langurs in India.
- **About Golden langur**
 - ⊖ **Protection Status:**
 - ◆ IUCN: Endangered
 - ◆ CITES: Appendix I
 - ◆ **Wildlife Protection Act:** Schedule-I
 - ⊖ **Characteristics:**
 - ◆ Belong to a large group of Old World monkeys called the **colobines** (leaf-eating primates having a ruminant-like multi-chambered stomach).
 - ◆ **Coat colour varies seasonally** becoming cream colored in summer and dark golden in winter.
 - ◆ They are **diurnal** and **arboreal** in nature and live in troops (3-15).
 - ⊖ **Habitat:** Endemic to subtropical and temperate broadleaf forests in **Assam (Brahmaputra River Valley)** and **Bhutan**.



Sea Defenders-2024

- 'Sea Defenders-2024' is a maritime security exercise between the **Indian Coast Guard (ICG) & United States Coast Guard (USCG)**, which recently culminated at Port Blair (Andaman and Nicobar Islands).



Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Treaty

- Blue Leaders High-Level Event on BBNJ urged nations to ratify **BBNJ Treaty**.
 - ⊖ Treaty will come into force after ratification by at least 60 countries but out of 88 signatories, only two have ratified it so far.
 - ⊖ **India is yet to sign the treaty.**
- **BBNJ or High Seas Treaty** was adopted in 2023.
 - ⊖ It is **international legally binding instrument** under **UNCLOS** on **conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (High Seas)**.
 - ⊖ It sets up a procedure to establish large-scale marine protected areas in high seas, sharing benefits from marine genetic resources, and transfer of marine technology.



Parthenogenesis

- Scientists have genetically modified a fruit fly to reproduce asexually through Parthenogenesis.
- **About Parthenogenesis (PG)**
 - ⊖ It is an **asexual reproduction** in which a **female can produce an embryo without fertilizing an egg with sperm**.
 - ⊖ **Two forms of Natural PG**
 - ◆ **Automixis:** It, **observed mostly in sharks, slightly shuffles mother's DNA** to produce children who are close to but not identical clones of mother.
 - ◆ **Apomixis:** A type of **genetic copy-and-paste** where offspring generated are genetically identical clones of their parents. **Plants are more prone to this type of parthenogenesis.**



Sela Tunnel

- Prime Minister inaugurated **strategically important Sela tunnel in Arunachal Pradesh**.
- **About Sela tunnel**
 - ⊖ Constructed on road connecting **Tezpur (Assam) to Tawang in West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh by Border Road Organization**.
 - ⊖ Constructed using **New Austrian Tunnelling Method (NATM)**.
 - ◆ NATM is a support method to stabilize tunnel perimeter with the help of sprayed concrete and other support and uses regular monitoring to control stability of tunnel.
 - ⊖ **World's longest bi-lane tunnel (~1.5 kms)** to provide all-weather connectivity at an altitude above 13,000 ft.



Multiprotocol Label Switching (MPLS) router

- India's **fastest and indigenously developed Multiprotocol Label Switching (MPLS) router** launched in Bengaluru.
 - ⊖ It has been developed by **Nivetti Systems of Bengaluru** in collaboration with the **Department of Telecom and CDOT**.
 - ⊖ Router has a **capacity of 2.4 terabits per second (tbps)**, and runs on **India's first indigenous network operating system, Nivetti NiOS**.
- **MPLS** is a telecommunications routing technique that **guides data between nodes using labels instead of network addresses**.
- Its main function is to **speed up network connections** by sending packets along predetermined network paths.

Personality in news



Lachit Borphukan (1622 - 1672)

- Prime Minister unveiled 125-foot-high statue of famous **General of Royal Army of Ahom Kingdom of Assam Lachit Borphukan**.
- **About Lachit Borphukan**
 - ⊖ Born in **Charaideo district of Assam**.
 - ⊖ United and brought together the **tribal forces of Assam**.
 - ⊖ Defeated Mughal Army in **Battle of Saraighat (1671)**.
- **Recognition**
 - ⊖ **National Defence Academy (NDA)** gives **Lachit Barphukan Gold Medal** to best cadet since 1999.
 - ⊖ **Lachit Divas (Lachit Day)** celebrated in Assam every year on **November 24**.
 - ⊖ Prime Minister released the book - '**Lachit Borphukan - Assam's Hero who Halted the Mughals**' in 2022.
- **Values:** Patriotism, Inspirational Leadership, Courage and fearlessness, etc.

