

NEWS TODAY

PMO asks Union Ministry of Commerce to examine Model text of Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT)

- Exercise assumes significance as only 7 nations have accepted the existing model text, and most of the developed nations have expressed reservations on the text with regard to provisions like resolution of disputes.
- **BIT:** It is a **reciprocal agreement** for according **protection to investments** by nationals and companies of one State in another State.
- **Model text of BIT:** Union Cabinet adopted **new Model BIT text in 2015**, which replaced Indian Model BIT, 1993.
 - ⊖ Since then, **Model text 2015 is used** for (re)negotiations of BITs and investment chapters of FTAs/ Economic Partnership Agreements.
- **Key Features of Model BIT 2015:**
 - ⊖ **"Enterprise" based** definition of investment.
 - ⊖ **National Treatment:** Similar treatment as domestic investors.
 - ⊖ **Protection from expropriation** (limiting each country's ability to take over foreign investments in its territory).
 - ⊖ **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR):** Voluntary incorporation of internationally recognized standards of CSR by enterprises operating within territory of each Party.
 - ⊖ **Settlement of Disputes:** Exhaust local remedies before commencing international arbitration.
- **Issues with Model BIT 2015:** Skewed in favour of the Government's regulatory power, ambiguity in certain areas like duration of the enterprise, arbitrary period of 5 years to exhaust local remedies in dispute resolution, etc.

History of India's BITs

- **Post 1991 economic reforms and up to 2015**, India signed **BITs with 83 countries** (based on Indian Model BIT, 1993).
- **Since adoption of Model text of BIT 2015**, **Notices of Termination** of BITs based on 1993 Model were issued to **77 countries** (till Sep 2021).
- **Recently**, India has signed BIT with the UAE in Feb 2024.

European Union (EU) and India launched Expression of Interest for Electric Vehicle (EV) Battery Recycling startups

- It took place **under India-EU Trade and Technology Council (TTC)**, first announced by European Commission and India in 2022.
 - ⊖ Established in 2023, TTC is a **key forum to deepen strategic partnership** on trade and technology.
- **India, EU initiative for EV start-ups aims to enhance cooperation** between European and Indian Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) and start-ups in **clean and green technologies sector**.
- **Significance of EV Battery recycling**
 - ⊖ **Recover non-renewable materials** such as lithium, nickel, zinc etc.
 - ⊖ Environmental protection through **waste minimization**.
 - ⊖ **Reduces cost of new batteries** by promoting circular economy.
 - ⊖ Achieving recovery **targets of 90% by 2026-27 under Battery Waste Management Rules, 2022** etc.
 - ⊖ Battery recycling in India is expected to reach **\$300 billion during 2017-2030**.
- **Challenges in EV Battery recycling**
 - ⊖ Lack of battery disposal and recycling programme run by authorised agencies.
 - ◆ **Around 90% of India's used batteries** are either processed by unorganised sector or end up in landfills.
 - ⊖ **Lack of Standardised processes and infrastructure**.
 - ⊖ **Complexity of Battery chemistry and flammability** pose safety concerns.
 - ⊖ **High recycling cost** impacts economic viability of recycling unit.

India's Efforts

- **Battery Waste Management (Amendment) Rules, 2023**
 - ⊖ **Mandatory phase in targets have been set for using recycled material** in new battery products to finally achieve 20% by 2030-31, for both Portable and EV batteries.
 - ⊖ **Provides for transactable Extended Producer Responsibility certificates for producers** for environmentally sound management of waste batteries based on weight of battery processed.

Traders smuggle potent Greenhouse Gas (GHG) to Europe: Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) Investigation

- EIA's report titled 'More Chilling Than Ever' highlighted that illegal trade in HFCs into Europe is **fueled by ongoing demand for gases and high profits.**
- **About HFCs**
 - ⊕ HFCs are a group of compounds containing **carbon, fluorine and hydrogen** (unlike hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs), which also contain chlorine). They are colourless and odourless gases.
 - ⊕ HFCs contribute to **2.3% of global GHG emissions** and have an **average atmospheric lifetime of 15 years.**
 - ⊕ HFCs are entirely **human-made.** They are primarily produced for **use in refrigeration, air-conditioning,** insulating foams and aerosol propellants, with minor uses as solvents and for fire protection.
 - ⊕ They were developed as alternatives to chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and HCFCs that are being phased-out **under Montreal Protocol due to their ozone depletion.**
- **Impact of HFCs trade**
 - ⊕ **Worsens climate change.**
 - ◆ In 2021, EIA estimated that CO2 equivalency of illegally traded HFCs in European Union could be nearly 30 million tonnes.
 - ⊕ **Discourage private sector innovation** in developing technologies for new substances with lower Global Warming Potential.
- **Efforts taken in India:** India is committed to **phasing down HFCs in four steps starting from 2032,** aligning with Kigali Amendment.

Global Measures to reduce HFCs

- **Kigali amendment to Montreal Protocol** aims to phase-down production and consumption of HFCs.
- **F-gas (Fluorinated gases) Regulation** by EU in 2014, to phase down HFC.
- **Global Cooling Pledge** committed to support robust action through **Montreal Protocol Multilateral Fund** for early action to reduce HFC consumption.

Annual Land Use and Land Cover (LULC) Atlas of India

- Atlas, released by the **National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC),** aims to **systematically examine land utilization patterns** to offer invaluable insights into the evolving dynamics of our environment.
- **Key highlights of the Atlas**
 - ⊕ **Agriculture:** Over the past 17 years, **Kharif and Rabi cropland has expanded** by 46.06% and 35.23% respectively, as **fallow land diminished** by 45.19%.
 - ◆ **Double/ triple/ annual cropping areas have also increased** by 82.22%. (Double/ triple crop land are areas where crops are sown and harvested twice/ thrice in one crop year. Annual crop are perennial and grow throughout year such as sugarcane)
 - ◆ Since 2005, **shifting cultivation increased until 2016-17,** after which it witnessed a decline.
 - ⊕ **Water resources:** Indicated by minimum water body surface **showed an increase by 146 % since 2005.**
 - ⊕ **Built-up land:** Shows an increase with an overall growth of 30.77% since 2005.
 - ◆ **Built-up area** refers to an area with buildings, paved surfaces, commercial and industrial sites, and urban green areas.
 - ◆ **Wastelands (degraded and unproductive lands)** contributed significantly to built-up area expansion by 12.3%.
- **Reasons for changes in LULC:** Improved availability of farm inputs such as improved irrigation facilities, urbanization and infrastructure development, etc.

Hurun Research Institute released the "Global Unicorn Index 2024"

- Global Unicorn Index 2024 is a **ranking of the world's start-ups** founded in 2000s.
- **Key findings**
 - ⊕ In 2023, **India had 67 unicorn startups** (68 in 2022) and **placed third globally.**
 - ⊕ **USA led** with 703 unicorns, **followed by China** with 340.
 - ⊕ **India lacks unicorns in Aerospace or SpaceTech sector.**
- Unicorns are **privately held, venture-capital backed startups** that have reached a value of **\$1 billion.** Example, Swiggy, sports platform Dream11 etc.
 - ⊕ Term was first coined by **venture capitalist Aileen Lee** in 2013.
- **Factors behind decline of Unicorn**
 - ⊕ **Slow-down of Start-up ecosystem** in India, mainly due to lack of investment into startups.
 - ⊕ Founders from India produced **more offshore unicorns** than any other country, co-founding 109 unicorns outside of India.
 - ⊕ **Lack of prudent steps to ensure sustainability of business** has led to uncontrolled growth, characterized by rapid depletion of cash reserves.
- **Initiatives taken by India to promote start-ups**
 - ⊕ **Fund of Funds for Startups Scheme** to meet **funding needs** of startups.
 - ⊕ Startups incorporated **on or after 1st April 2016** can apply for income tax exemption.
 - ⊕ **National Start-up Award** to recognize, promote and offer exclusive handholding support to a diverse set of startups.

India's Start-up Ecosystem

- India has **3rd largest startup ecosystem** in world.
- 44 Indian startups achieved unicorn status in 2021.
- From 2015-22, there is **15 times increase in total funding** of startups and **9 times increase in number of investors.**

'Geospatial Modeling and Mapping of Soil Erosion in India' study published by IIT-Delhi

- Study provides **comprehensive national-scale assessment of soil erosion and sediment yield mapping** over India, and to enable the planning and implementation of soil conservation strategies.
- **Soil Erosion** is defined as the **accelerated removal of topsoil** from land surface through water, wind and tillage.
 - ⊕ It **occurs naturally under all climatic conditions**, but it is **significantly increased and accelerated by unsustainable human activities** through intensive agriculture, deforestation, improper land use changes, etc.
- **Key findings of the study**
 - ⊕ **Losses: Yearly potential soil loss** for India is calculated at 21 tonnes/ha/yr.
 - ◆ **>78 million hectares of agricultural land** in India experience an **average productivity loss of 8%**.
 - ⊕ **Vulnerability hotspots: Brahmaputra basin** has the **maximum potential soil erosion**, followed by the **Mahanadi and the Ganga basins**.
 - ◆ **~5% of geographical area**, covering significant portions of **Assam**, some portions of **Meghalaya**, and **Himachal Pradesh**, classified under **catastrophic erosion category (potential to damage roads, fences, and even buildings by creating deep gullies)**.
 - ⊕ **Factors for erosion: Rainfall intensity, combined with the topographic factor**, demonstrated the highest influence on soil erosion.
- **Concerns due to soil erosion:** Reduced productivity due to loss of fertile topsoil, sedimentation of water bodies, increased flooding and landslides, desertification, etc.

Initiatives to address Soil Erosion in India

- **Integrated Watershed Management Programme (IWMP):** To restore ecological balance by harnessing, conserving, and developing degraded natural resources such as soil, vegetative cover and water.
- **Integrated Wasteland Development Programme (IWDP):** For improving the productivity of waste & degraded lands.
- **Bonn challenge under UNCCD:** India to restore 26 million hectares of degraded and deforested land by 2030.

Also in News



Doctrine of Harmonious Construction

- While refusing to condone the delay, **Supreme Court laid down principles to provide harmonious construction** to Sections 3 and 5 of Limitation Act, 1963.
 - ⊕ Notion of Condonation of delay encompasses **discretionary power of a court to extend prescribed time limit for filing an appeal/application**.
- **About Doctrine of Harmonious Construction**
 - ⊕ It means that in case of conflict between two laws, their interpretation should be in a way in which **spirit and essence of both laws are maintained**, which is done by 'harmonising' laws.
 - ⊕ Its **origin** is traced back to first amendment made in judgment of **Shankari Prasad v. Union of India**.



START Programme

- Gujarat Council on Science and Technology (GUJCOST) designated as nodal centre for ISRO's **Space Science and Technology Awareness Training (START) Programme**.
- **About START**
 - ⊕ Offers an **introductory-level online training** to post-graduate and final-year undergraduate students of physical sciences and technology.
 - ⊕ **Covers domains of space science**, including Astronomy & Astrophysics, Heliophysics & Sun-Earth interaction, Instrumentation, and Aeronomy.
 - ⊕ Delivered by scientists from Indian academia and ISRO centres.



C-Dome

- Israel deployed **C-Dome defense system** for the first time.
- **About C-Dome**
 - ⊕ It is a **naval version of the Iron Dome air defense system** used to shield against advanced ballistic, aerial, and surface-to-surface threats.
 - ◆ **Iron Dome is a missile defense system** that can protect deployed and maneuvering forces, as well as civilian areas against a wide range of indirect and aerial threats.
 - ⊕ **Handles saturation attacks by engaging multiple targets** simultaneously, with **short reaction time**.
 - ⊕ Unlike Iron Dome which has its own radar, **C-Dome is integrated into the ship's radar to detect incoming targets**.



Karen Ethnic Community

- Guerrilla fighters from Myanmar's Karen ethnic minority claimed to be close to seizing control of a major trading town bordering Thailand.
- **About Karen Ethnic minority**
 - ⊕ Karen people are **indigenous to the Thailand-Burma border** region in Southeast Asia, primarily in Karen State of Myanmar.
 - ⊕ They trace their origins to the **Gobi Desert, Mongolia, or Tibet**.



TSAT-1A

- Tata Advanced Systems Ltd and Satellogic announced successful deployment of TSAT-1A into space.
- **About TSAT (Tata Satellite) -1A**
 - ⊕ It is India's first **indigenously developed and built satellite** capable of **sub-meter resolution optical imaging**.
 - ⊕ It is equipped with both **multispectral and hyperspectral imaging capabilities**.
 - ⊕ This technology allows TSAT-1A to **collect data across wide range of wavelengths** within electromagnetic spectrum, providing deeper understanding of land, water, and various natural resources.
 - ⊕ Data collected by satellite has potential to **drive progress in crucial sectors like Agriculture, Disaster Management, Urban Planning** and Environmental Monitoring.



Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI)

- FICCI celebrates its 97th Foundation Day.
- **FICCI**
 - ⊕ **Genesis:** A non-government, not-for-profit organisation established in 1927.
 - ⊕ **About:** FICCI is the **largest and oldest apex business organisation** in India.
 - ◆ It serves its members from Indian private and public corporate sectors and multinational companies.
 - ⊕ **HQ:** New Delhi.
 - ⊕ **Role:** FICCI articulates views and concerns of industry, influencing policy to encouraging debate, engaging with policy makers and civil society.
 - ◆ Established **Committee Against Smuggling and Counterfeiting Activities Destroying the Economy (CASCADE)** Forum in 2011.



Disclosure of assets by Election Candidates

- Supreme Court, while hearing an appeal on election petition, held that **election candidates have right to privacy** as regards to matters which are of no concern to voters or are irrelevant to candidature of public life.
- **Statutory provisions regarding declarations by Election candidates**
 - ⊕ **Section 33 of the Representation of People's Act (RPA), 1951:** Deals with nominations for election of candidates and presentation of valid information.
 - ⊕ **Section 36 of RPA, 1951:** Provides for scrutiny of nomination and empowers returning officer to reject nominations on grounds of any **defect of 'substantial character'**.



Telemedicine

- A Study finds that health sector cannot ignore Telemedicine's environmental benefits.
- **About Telemedicine**
 - ⊕ It involves using **Information and Communication Technologies** to deliver healthcare services, crucial when distance is a limiting factor.
 - ⊕ **Benefits**
 - ◆ In India, where healthcare access is limited, it **cuts travel expenses and vehicle emissions** in both rural and urban patients.
 - ◆ **Improves access to care** for people with disabilities.
 - ◆ **Minimizes risk of picking up an infection** at doctor's office.
 - ⊕ **Government Steps:** eSanjeevani- National Telemedicine Service of India, Tele-MANAS (Mental Health Assistance and Networking Across States) etc.

Personality in News



Mangal Pandey (1827 - 1857)

- Legendary Sepoy Mangal Pandey was remembered on his death anniversary.
- **About Mangal Pandey**
 - ⊕ He was a resident of **Ballia** (Uttar Pradesh).
 - ⊕ He joined **34th Bengal Native Infantry** of the British East India Company.
- **Key Contributions**
 - ⊕ Influenced by example of his compatriots in Behrampur, he refused to use **greased cartridges**
 - ⊕ Broke into **open mutiny on March 29, 1857**, at Barrackpore near Calcutta, which also ignited fire of **Revolt of 1857**.
- Later, he was court-martialed and hanged at Barrackpore on April 8, 1857.
- **Values:** Courage, Determination, Patriotism, Leadership, etc.

