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DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

The Hindu & The Indian express

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India, Qatar likely to finalise terms of reference for FTA in early October

Saptaparno Ghosh
NEW DELHI

India is likely to finalise terms of reference for a free trade agreement (FTA) with Qatar in the first week of October, a government source said on Monday. The source added that Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal may visit the Gulf country to finalise the same on October 6.

The possibility of a comprehensive economic partnership agreement (CEPA) with Doha was first announced in February during the Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani's visit to India. The two sides sought to double their bilateral trade by 2030.

Doha accounts for 1.22% of India's total trade. In FY 2024-25, India exported goods worth about \$1.68 billion, whilst it imports totalled \$12.47 billion. Qatar's key exports to India include liquefied natural gas (LNG), liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), chemicals and petrochemicals and aluminium articles, among other things.

Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal may visit the Gulf country to finalise the same on October 6

Expanding the number of FTA partners has emerged as an imperative for New Delhi in response to U.S. President Donald Trump-induced tariff regime.

Washington instituted a 50% tariff on Indian products inclusive of a 25% penalty for buying Russian oil. For perspective, trade with the North American country accounted for 11.4% of India's overall trade in FY 2024-25.

Talks progressing well
Enumerating progress about the trade agreement with the European Union, the source stated that talks were progressing well with a delegation of the European Union already in New Delhi. Mr. Goyal is expected to meet the trade commissioner for EU Maroš Šefčovič on Friday as part of the 13th round of talks.

India, Qatar likely to finalise terms of reference for FTA in early October

Source: The Hindu | Page 13

GS Paper Tags: GS2 (International Relations), GS3 (Economy)

What are Terms of Reference (ToR) in an FTA?

Definition: Terms of Reference are the preliminary framework or guiding principles for negotiations of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

Purpose:

- Outline the scope of discussions (e.g., goods, services, investment, IPR, e-commerce).
- Set timelines and negotiation modalities.
- Define sectoral sensitivities (what will be included/excluded).
- Establish institutional mechanisms for dispute resolution and monitoring.

Qatar: Key Trade Partner

Major Exporter of LNG & LPG:

One of the world's leading suppliers of liquefied natural gas (LNG).

Also a significant exporter of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), petrochemicals, aluminium, and related products.

India's Energy Security: India relies heavily on Qatari LNG for its energy needs.





Bilateral Trade:

- FY 2024-25: India exported \$1.68 billion worth of goods.
- Imports from Qatar: \$12.47 billion (mostly LNG & LPG).
- Doha accounts for 1.22% of India's total trade.

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

Members: Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman.

Founded: 1981.

Significance:

- Regional bloc for economic, political, and security cooperation.
- India has been engaging with GCC as a group for trade deals and energy security.
- GCC countries are among India's largest energy suppliers and important trading partners.



1

Which of the following is **not** a member of 'Gulf Cooperation Council'?

- (a) Iran
- (b) Saudi Arabia
- (c) Oman
- (d) Kuwait

PYQ 2016

2

Consider the following statements :

Statement-I :

India accounts for 3.2% of global export of goods.

Statement-II :

Many local companies and some foreign companies operating in India have taken advantage of India's 'Production-linked Incentive' scheme.

Which one of the following is correct in respect of the above statements?

- (a) Both Statement-I and Statement-II are correct and Statement-II is the correct explanation for Statement-I
- (b) Both Statement-I and Statement-II are correct and Statement-II is not the correct explanation for Statement-I
- (c) Statement-I is correct but Statement-II is incorrect
- (d) Statement-I is incorrect but Statement-II is correct

PYQ 2023

Israeli Finance Minister visits India, signs bilateral investment treaty

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

Days after Israel intensified its ongoing military operation in Gaza Strip, India hosted Israeli Minister of Finance Bezalel Smotrich, who held talks with his Indian counterpart, Nirmala Sitharaman, and signed a **Bilateral Investment Agreement** here on Monday. Mr. Smotrich is leading a delegation of Israeli officials that includes the Chief Economist of the Israeli Ministry of Finance, Shmuel Abramzon.

"The agreement we signed expresses our shared vision for innovative and secure economic development. This is a strategic step that will open new doors for both Israeli and Indian investors, strengthen Israeli exports, and provide businesses on both sides with certainty and tools to develop in the world's fastest-growing markets. India is a growing economic powerhouse, and cooperation with it is a tremendous opportunity for the State of Israel," said Mr. Smotrich



Trade boost: Bezalel Smotrich and Nirmala Sitharaman during the signing ceremony in New Delhi on Monday. PIB/PTI

after signing the agreement with Ms. Sitharaman.

Mr. Smotrich's arrival in India coincided with the launch of a new phase of Israeli military campaign in the Gaza Strip as the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) are trying to evacuate the Gaza City in order to create a sanitised zone, which has million-plus civilians facing serious issues like bombing raids and starvation.

Significant outreach

Mr. Smotrich's visit to India is a sign of significant outreach by Israel as he was banned by the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand,

Norway and Canada in June this year.

The Ministry of External Affairs is yet to respond to a query from *The Hindu* about the visit but highly placed Israeli sources said that Israel is in the process of throwing open new sectors of its economy, especially the construction sector, which will generate investment and employment opportunities for Indians. Israel, which started the current military campaign after the October 7, 2023 attack by Hamas, has hired a large number of Indian blue collar workers in the last two years.

Mr. Smotrich also met Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal, who in a message said, "Our discussions focused on further strengthening trade and investment ties between our nations."

New model

"A new Bilateral Investment Agreement signed by Israel's Minister of Finance Bezalel Smotrich and India's Finance Minister will facilitate reciprocal investments between investors from both countries. Israel is the first OECD [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development] member state with which India has signed this strategic agreement, in accordance with India's new model for investment treaties," said the Israeli Ministry of Finance. Mr. Smotrich announced that the Israeli Ministry of Finance is examining the possibility of opening a representation office in India.

The Israeli Ministry further said that the new agreement will replace the previous agreement that was signed in 1996.

Israeli Finance Minister visits India, signs bilateral investment treaty

Source: The Hindu Page No.: 10

Subject: GS2 – International Relations

Context

- Israel's Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich visited India and signed a Bilateral Investment Agreement with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.
- The visit came amidst ongoing military operations in Gaza by Israel.
- The agreement marks a step towards deepening India-Israel economic cooperation, especially in trade, investment, and technology.
- Israel is the first OECD country with which India has signed a new model Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT).

India-Israel Relationship

1. Historical Background

- India formally recognized Israel in 1950 and established full diplomatic relations in 1992.
- Relations have steadily grown in defense, agriculture, water management, and technology.

2. Strategic Partnership

- Declared in 2017 during PM Narendra Modi's visit to Israel.
- Focus on security, innovation, and economic cooperation.

3. Defense & Security

- Israel is among the top defense suppliers to India (missiles, UAVs, radar systems).
- Joint projects include Barak-8 missile system.

4. Agriculture & Water

- Indo-Israel Agricultural Project (IIAP): Demonstration farms and water-efficient irrigation.
- Collaboration in desalination and water management technologies.

5. Trade & Economy

- Bilateral trade (excluding defense) rose from \$200 million in 1992 to over \$10 billion (2022–23).
- Areas: diamonds, pharmaceuticals, IT, electronics, fertilizers.

6. People-to-People Ties

- Tourism, cultural exchanges, and growing Indian Jewish diaspora links.

India's 2016 Model Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT)

Background

- India signed several BITs in the 1990s and early 2000s to attract foreign investment.
 - However, multiple Investor–State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) cases were filed against India (e.g., Vodafone, Cairn Energy).
 - To safeguard regulatory space while balancing investor protection, India adopted a new Model BIT in 2016.

OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development)

- An intergovernmental economic organisation, founded in 1961, headquartered in Paris, France.
 - **Objective:** Promote economic growth, stability, free trade, and improved living standards.
 - **Members:** 38 countries (mostly high-income economies, democracies).



3

The term “two-state solution” is sometimes mentioned in the news in the context of the affairs of

- (a) China
- (b) Israel
- (c) Iraq
- (d) Yemen

PYQ 2018



Centre panel gives nod to assess impact of rock phosphate mine on bustard habitat

NIKHIL GHANEKAR

NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 8

THE UNION environment ministry's expert appraisal committee (EAC) for the non-coal mining sector has given its nod to carry out an environment impact assessment (EIA) study for Birmania Rock Phosphate mine proposed over 400 hectares in the potential Great Indian Bustard (GIB) area in Jaisalmer, Rajasthan, as per ministry documents.

The proposal came from the central public sector enterprise, FCI Aravali Gypsum and Minerals India Ltd. Rock phosphate is mined to make phosphate fertilizers.

The proposed mining lease area falls within the potential GIB conservation zone and is lo-

cated approximately 36 km from the 'GIB Arc', as per submissions made to the EAC. While granting a preliminary permission to carry out an EIA study, the ministry directed the government company to also assess the presence of the bird in the lease area.

The EAC said that since the mine site falls in the potential zone for the bustard conservation, the project proponent "should engage a national institute of repute to determine the presence of GIB within the lease area or nearby and submit an action plan for its conservation and management."

The nod for an EIA study, which is procedurally known as grant of terms of reference, spells out what should be the scope of the study. This involves studying various environmental param-



The proposed mining lease area falls within the potential GIB conservation zone. File

eters and the project's potential impact on air, water, groundwater, ecology, and wildlife. The EIA is then used for scrutinising the project to either clear or reject the proposal.

The Supreme Court is hear-

ing a writ petition filed by retired bureaucrat MK Ranjitsinh, seeking conservation and protection of Great Indian Bustard in Rajasthan and Gujarat. As part of the ongoing case, the Supreme Court accepted the classification of the critically endangered bird's habitat into three different zones — priority areas, additional important areas and potential areas — based on their value for long-term conservation.

Potential areas are large open landscapes where the bird might thrive. Jaisalmer in western Rajasthan is the most important home to the bird, whose numbers are estimated to be below 150. These areas have also been used to balance the conservation needs of the bustard with the growing renewable energy

(wind and solar) projects.

The EAC also said that the project proponent should comply with the Supreme Court's orders on the issue and submit a compliance report at the time of environmental appraisal. Further, it said that "blasting studies should be conducted incorporating effects on local fauna and habitats of Great Indian Bustard."

Wildlife biologist Sumit Dookia, faculty at Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, Delhi, and Honorary Scientific Advisor to the ERDS Foundation, which works on community-led bustard conservation in Rajasthan said that based on the mine location submitted to the EAC, the presence of the endangered bird was recorded by community volunteers back in 2012-13.



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Centre panel gives nod to assess impact of rock phosphate mine on bustard habitat

The Indian Express, Page 7

Prelims: Environment

Context

- EAC cleared an EIA study for Birmania Rock Phosphate mine (400 ha) in Jaisalmer, Rajasthan.
- Area lies in potential Great Indian Bustard (GIB) conservation zone.
- Concern: mining may affect the critically endangered bird's habitat.
- SC also monitoring GIB protection and powerline issues.

Great Indian Bustard (GIB)

- Scientific name: *Ardeotis nigriceps*
- IUCN: Critically Endangered | WPA 1972: Schedule I | CITES: Appendix I
- Population: <150, mostly in Rajasthan
- Habitat: Arid/semi-arid grasslands of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka
- Threats: Habitat loss, powerline collisions, mining, infrastructure
- Conservation: National Bustard Recovery Programme, SC orders on underground powerlines, breeding centres in Jaisalmer & Kutch

4

Which one of the following groups of animals belongs to the category of endangered species?

- (a) Great Indian Bustard, Musk Deer, Red Panda and Asiatic Wild Ass
- (b) Kashmir Stag, Cheetal, Blue Bull and Great Indian Bustard
- (c) Snow Leopard, Swamp Deer, Rhesus Monkey and Saras (Crane)
- (d) Lion-tailed Macaque, Blue Bull, Hanuman Langur and Cheetal

PYQ 2012



SHOT AGAINST TUMOUR

Russian scientists have announced a cancer vaccine that uses mRNA. But it would be premature to call it a breakthrough

A MONTH AFTER US Health Secretary Robert Kennedy pulled the plug on federal funding for mRNA vaccine research, news from another part of the world has sparked curiosity, and caution, about the possibilities of the technology that trains the immune system to fight diseases. Russian scientists have announced that Enteromix — a cancer vaccine that uses mRNA technology — has shown 100 per cent efficacy in clinical trials. The shots have shown significant results in shrinking tumours and slowing their growth, and have reportedly been found safe for repeated use. The vaccines, which can be tailored for personalised use, will be first deployed against colorectal cancer, one of the most common malignancies. Vaccines against aggressive skin and brain cancers are reportedly in the pipeline.

Despite recent advances, cancer remains one of the most feared diseases, and is often associated with uncertain, long, painful and expensive treatments. While the announcement by Russian scientists no doubt offers hope, there is enough reason to temper optimism with caution. The trials were reportedly conducted on fewer than 50 volunteers. Experts reason that tests need to be conducted on larger groups to ascertain the therapy's efficacy across a broader and diverse section of people. This is especially important for vaccines that are tailored according to the idiosyncrasies of individual immune systems. It would also be premature to call the Russian discovery a breakthrough because the results of the trials on Enteromix are yet to be published in a peer-reviewed journal.

That said, the Russian venture is not the only mRNA cancer vaccine that has shown encouraging results against the dreaded disease. Research on the technology in different parts of the world has shown promise in treating and preventing cancers that have often been difficult to address — they include breast cancer, cancers of the pancreas, kidney, and lungs, lymphoma, and difficult brain tumours. Such research dates back to more than a decade. The studies received a fillip after the battle against the coronavirus during the Covid pandemic threw the spotlight on mRNA, the messenger RNA or the molecule that carries the cell's instruction on making proteins. Historically, it has taken decades to develop vaccines. But the research, manufacture, and deployment of Covid shots, less than two years into the pandemic, confirmed the hypothesis of a section of scientists that mRNA technology is well-suited for fast vaccine development on a global scale. With US regulators restricting mRNA vaccines, scientists fear that cancer research in the country could suffer. Scientists and anyone with an interest in cancer will be keenly watching how Enteromix fares in the coming months.

Shot Against Tumour

Source: The Indian Express Page No: 10 (Editorial)

GS Paper Tags: GS2 (Health), GS3 (Science & Tech, Biotechnology)

Context of the Article

- Russian scientists announced Enteromix, a cancer vaccine using mRNA technology, which reportedly showed 100% efficacy in early trials.
- It has shown promise in shrinking tumours, especially colorectal cancer, and further vaccines are in the pipeline for skin and brain cancers.
- However, experts caution against calling it a breakthrough since:
 - The trials were small (fewer than 50 volunteers).
 - Results are yet to be published in a peer-reviewed journal.
- The article highlights both the promise and limitations of mRNA-based cancer research, while also noting that the Covid-19 pandemic accelerated global interest in mRNA vaccines.

mRNA Vaccines

Definition: mRNA (messenger RNA) vaccines use a synthetic mRNA sequence that instructs human cells to produce a protein (antigen) which triggers an immune response.



5

How They Work:

1. mRNA is introduced into the body.
2. Cells produce the target protein (like spike protein in Covid vaccines or tumour-related proteins).
3. Immune system recognises it as foreign → produces antibodies + activates T-cells.
4. Provides protection if the real pathogen (or cancerous cells) appear.

Advantages:

- Faster development compared to traditional vaccines.
- Can be personalised (tailored to individual immune responses).
- No risk of infection since no live virus is used.

Limitations:

- Requires stringent storage conditions (cold chain).
- Long-term safety and efficacy against cancers still uncertain.
- Expensive and complex manufacturing.

In the context of vaccines manufactured to prevent COVID-19 pandemic, consider the following statements :

1. The Serum Institute of India produced COVID-19 vaccine named Covishield using mRNA platform.
2. Sputnik V vaccine is manufactured using vector based platform.
3. COVAXIN is an inactivated pathogen based vaccine.

Which of the statements given above are correct ?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

PYQ 2022

Graft and gag: why social media ban triggered Nepal's GenZ

YASHEE & YUBARAJ GHIMIRE
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 8

AT LEAST 19 people were killed and many more injured in Nepal on Monday after law enforcement agencies acted against thousands of "GenZ protesters", many in their school uniforms, who had gathered to protest against the government's ban on social media platforms.

Police baton charged the protesters after some of them entered the Parliament complex in Kathmandu. Large parts of the capital have been put under curfew.

Organisers of the unprecedented street mobilisation had asked political parties and their youth wings to stay away from the protest. While the ban on social media was the trigger, the unrest has been simmering for some time now.

Ban on social media

Nepal's government has sought to regulate big Internet companies for more than a

year, citing a rise in cyber crimes, fake news, and misleading content. Last month, armed with an order from the country's top court, the government gave the companies a deadline to register with the authorities, name a grievance handler, and agree to remove posts flagged by the government.

Twenty-six social media platforms that failed to register by the deadline were banned last week — among them, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, X, and YouTube. Among the platforms that registered with the government and escaped the ban are TikTok, Viber, WeTalk, Nimbuzz and Poppo Live. TikTok had been banned in

2023, but it was allowed to resume after it reached an agreement with the government.

Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli said on Sunday that his party was not against social media, "but what cannot be accepted is those doing business in Nepal, making money, and yet not complying with the law", *PTI* reported. The government has said the platforms can resume as soon as they comply with orders.

Critics have accused the government of trying to police self-expression, muzzle criticism, and curb press freedom. Many in Nepal's tourism-powered economy rely on social media for their businesses. For expats, social media is a way to stay in touch with their country and families.

Gag on GenZ voices

There are larger reasons for the frustration of GenZ — most prominently widespread corruption, and the refusal of politicians to submit to accountability and investigation.

Before the ban, young people had been posting about the corruption of the ruling class and about "Nepo Babies" to attack entrenched privilege. 'Nepo Babies' had been trending online, people were posting pictures of younger members of prominent families, and demanding to know how their lavish lifestyles were funded.

The social media ban has deprived the youth of platforms to express their frustration and disappointment, and triggered anger and suspicion. Sudhan Gurung, the



Protestors outside Parliament building in Kathmandu on Monday. AP

chairperson of Hami Nepal, the group that organised Monday's protest, said it was "a response to government actions and corruption", according to *The Kathmandu Post*.

In fact, the few younger leaders who have come to prominence in the past few years owe their rise to social media to a significant degree.

Among them are Kathmandu mayor Balendra Shah, a former rapper in his 30s, who

has expressed his support for the GenZ protesters (under 28 years of age), and Rashtriya Swatantra Party chief Rabi Lamichhane, a former TV anchor and former Deputy PM.

The Oli government is also working on legislation to regulate social media — including making certain 'likes' and posts offences, and requiring social media platforms to delete "objectionable posts" and reveal the details of users writing or reposting such content.

Politicians' corruption

There is significant anger among the people at political leaders, almost all of whom face allegations of corruption, taking power by turns ever since Nepal became a democratic republic in 2008.

Power has been rotating among Oli, Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda of the Maoist Centre, and five-time PM Sher Bahadur Deuba in alliances that are frequently made and unmade.

Protests had broken out in March too, with many protesters demanding a return to monarchy, saying the experiment to make Nepal a republic had failed.

It has been a practice since 2006 to grant immunity to politicians against investigation if a "policy decision", which is essentially a decision by the cabinet, is taken to that effect.

Oli faces a contempt case for violating a Supreme Court order against converting a tea estate into commercial plots.

Three other former PMs, Madhav Nepal (2009-11), Baburam Bhattarai (2011-13), and Khil Raj Regmi (2013-14), are accused in scams to give government land to private persons.

Complaints are pending against three-time PM Prachanda for allegedly making billions by diverting money meant for Maoist guerrillas when they were kept in UN-monitored cantonments during the peace process that began in late 2006.

Deuba is accused of taking illegal commissions in the purchase of aircraft, and his wife Arzu Rana Deuba, currently the foreign affairs minister, has often faced questions in Parliament about her alleged role in fraudulently turning Nepali citizens into Bhutanese nationals on paper, and sending them to the US as "refugees".

Mains Enrichment

Graft and gag: why social media ban triggered Nepal's GenZ

Source: The Indian Express Page No: 13

Context: Nepal's social media ban sparked GenZ-led protests against corruption, censorship, and lack of accountability, highlighting governance failures and youth assertion.

Usage:

- **GS2: Freedom of speech, democratic accountability, governance challenges.**
- **GS4: Ethical governance, corruption, youth role in ensuring integrity.**
- **PSIR (Optional): Legitimacy crisis, civil society movements, democratic backsliding in South Asia.**
- **Sociology (Optional): Youth movements, social media as an agent of social change, protest culture, generational conflict.**