



13 January, 2024

India-US Trade Policy Meeting

Context: On January 12, 2024, the 14th Ministerial-level meeting of the Trade Policy Forum (TPF) between India and the United States took place in New Delhi.

➤ Significance of TPF:

- Emphasized the importance of the Trade Policy Forum (TPF) in strengthening bilateral trade ties and overall economic relationship.
- Acknowledged the continuous growth in India-US bilateral trade, exceeding \$200 billion in 2023 despite global trade challenges.
- Expressed mutual desire to further enhance engagement for increased and diversified bilateral trade.

➤ Progress Since 13th TPF:

- Reviewed significant advancements in addressing concerns impacting bilateral trade since the 13th TPF in January 2023.
- Highlighted the resolution of longstanding trade disputes at the World Trade Organization (WTO) and understandings on market access.
- Recognized achievements during Prime Minister Modi's visit to the U.S. and President Biden's visit to India for the G20 Summit in 2023.

➤ Areas of Cooperation:

- Agreed to pursue enhanced engagement in critical areas like critical minerals, customs, trade facilitation, supply chains, and high-tech products.
- Commitment to develop a forward-looking roadmap for cooperation and establish a foundation for future joint initiatives.

➤ G20 and Global Trade Issues:

- Congratulated India on hosting the G20 Summit and welcomed positive outcomes in the G20 Trade and Investment Working Group.
- Agreed to support the implementation of High-Level Principles on Digitalization of Trade Documents.
- Emphasized the G20 as a valuable platform for constructive dialogue and cooperation on global trade issues.

➤ Bilateral Trade Concerns:

- Highlighted progress in TPF Working Groups on various trade issues.
- Established a pathway for mutual recognition of conformity assessment results to reduce compliance costs.
- Welcomed the finalization of the Turtle Excluder Device (TED) design to minimize the impact on sea turtle populations.

➤ Intellectual Property:

- Appreciated ongoing engagement on intellectual property (IP) in the TPF IP Working Group.
- Discussed issues such as modernizing patent systems, protection for geographical indications, and trade secrets.
- Committed to continuing discussions on IP matters.

➤ Agriculture:

- Acknowledged pending work for early finalization of market access for certain agricultural products.

- Expressed interest in enhancing dialogue on food and agricultural trade issues in 2024.

➤ Services:

- Acknowledged constructive engagement of the Services Working Group.
- Discussed digital trade, Social Security totalization agreement, and India's Digital Personal Data Protection Act (DPDPA).
- Emphasized the potential of digital trade to spur economic growth and innovation.

➤ Resilient Trade:

- Welcomed continued engagement on best practices for customs and trade facilitation.
- Committed to transparent regulatory practices and policies, including online accessibility and public consultations.
- Highlighted the importance of eliminating forced labor in global supply chains.

➤ Way Forward:

- Directed TPF Working Groups to reconvene quarterly.
- Instructed senior officials to hold an in-person inter-session TPF meeting by mid-2024.
- Planned to reconvene the TPF at the Ministerial level before the end of 2024.

Pradhan Mantri Anusuchit Jaati Abhuyday Yojana

Context: The Scheme found mention in News.

➤ Scheme Integration:

- PM-AJAY is a consolidated scheme, implemented since 2021-22, merging three centrally sponsored schemes: Pradhan Mantri Adarsh Gram Yojana (PMAGY), Special Central Assistance to Scheduled Castes Sub Plan (SCA to SCSP), and Babu Jagjivan Ram Chhatrawas Yojana (BJRCY).

➤ Objective:

- Aimed at reducing poverty in Scheduled Caste (SC) communities by generating additional employment opportunities through skill development, income-generating schemes, and infrastructure initiatives.
- Seeks to improve socio-economic development indicators in SC-dominated villages.

➤ Components of the Scheme:

- Development of SC-dominated villages into "Adarsh Gram."
- Grants-in-aid for district/state-level projects for the socio-economic betterment of SCs.
- Construction of hostels in higher educational institutions and schools funded by the Centre/State/UT Governments.

➤ Adarsh Gram Component (Erstwhile PMAGY):

- Focus on integrated development of SC majority villages.
- Objectives include providing adequate infrastructure and improving socio-economic indicators.
- Monitorable indicators span ten domains such as drinking water, sanitation, education, health, and livelihood development.

Face to Face Centres





13 January, 2024

- **Achievement (2023-24):** Declaration of 1834 villages as Adarsh Grams.
- **Grants-in-aid for District/State-level Projects (Erstwhile SCA to SCSP):**
 - Supports comprehensive livelihood projects, skill development, asset creation, and infrastructure development for SCs.
 - Special provisions allocate funds for viable income-generating schemes for SC women and infrastructure development.
 - **Achievement (2023-24):** Approval of perspective plans for 17 states.
- **Hostel Component (Erstwhile BJRCY):**
 - Aims to reduce dropout rates among SC students by providing quality education.
 - Implemented through state governments, UT administrations, and central/state universities/institutions.
 - Central assistance for construction varies based on regions.
- **Recent Changes (Since 2021-22):**
 - 100% central assistance for boys' hostels (previously cost-sharing with states).
 - Implementation through the PMAJAY portal with online proposal submissions.
 - **Achievement (2023-24):** Sanctioning of 15 new hostels.
- **Factual Data:**
 - Under Adarsh Gram Component, a total of 1834 villages declared as Adarsh Grams during FY2023-24.
 - A total of 15 new hostels sanctioned under the Hostel component of the scheme.
 - Perspective plans for 17 states approved under the Grants-in-aid component during the current financial year.

Humboldt Enigma

- **Biodiversity Exploration Through Centuries:**
 - Historically, explorers and naturalists have sought to understand the concentration of biodiversity and its variations across different regions.
 - Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) made significant contributions, recording observations across geography, geology, meteorology, and biology during his explorations.
- **Humboldt's Observations on Mountains:**
 - Humboldt recorded plant distribution on a mountain during his exploration in South America.
 - He identified a relationship between temperature, altitude, humidity, and species occurrence, exemplified by Chimborazo mountain in Ecuador.
- **Humboldt's Enigma and Modern Biogeography:**
 - Modern biogeographers revisit Humboldt's observations and propose "Humboldt's enigma" regarding the biodiversity of mountain regions.

- The enigma questions why mountains, particularly outside the tropics, exhibit high biodiversity contrary to expectations.
- **Tropical Areas and Primary Productivity:**
 - Tropical areas receive more solar energy, leading to greater primary productivity and biodiversity.
 - Humboldt's enigma challenges the notion that only tropical areas contain highly biodiverse regions, highlighting mountains as exceptions.
- **Drivers of Mountain Biodiversity:**
 - Geological processes, such as uplifts, create new habitats (cradles) for species.
 - Climatologically stable mountains act as "museums," accumulating species over time.
 - Coastal tropical sky islands, like the Shola Sky Islands in the Western Ghats, illustrate the persistence of old lineages.
- **Geological Heterogeneity and Biodiversity:**
 - Mountains with high geological heterogeneity exhibit greater biodiversity.
 - Unique habitat patches, influenced by soil types linked to geological composition, promote diversification.
- **Eastern Himalaya as a Case Study:**
 - The eastern Himalaya showcases high biodiversity driven by climate dissimilarity and geological heterogeneity.
 - Evolutionary history, including bird dispersal, contributes to increased diversity in this mountain region.
- **Factors Driving Diversification:**
 - Multiple factors, including climate dissimilarity, geological heterogeneity, and evolutionary history, contribute to diversification.
 - Fine data on species distribution, particularly in less-studied regions like the Eastern Ghats, are crucial for a comprehensive understanding.
- **Need for Further Research:**
 - The lack of fine data on species occurrence is a limitation in explaining biodiversity patterns.
 - Ongoing national programs in India, such as the National Mission on Himalayan Studies and National Mission on Biodiversity and Human Wellbeing, aim to address research gaps.
- **Call for Strengthened Research Efforts:**
 - Emphasis on the need for more research, especially using modern tools like genetics, to understand true biodiversity.
 - Recognition of gaps in scientific understanding, with a call to strengthen national programs and support basic research on diversity.
- **Mountain Biodiversity as Global Puzzle:**
 - Humboldt's enigma is viewed as one of many puzzles in understanding mountain biodiversity.
 - Acknowledgment that studying biodiversity in our backyards provides valuable insights into global challenges related to climate and landscape change.

Face to Face Centres





NEWS IN BETWEEN THE LINES

Kalaram Temple



Recently, the Prime Minister of India visited the Kalaram Mandir situated in Nasik district of Maharashtra.

About Kalaram Temple:

- The Kalaram temple derives its name from a **black statue of the Lord -Kala Ram** translates literally to "**Black Ram**".
- Kalaram Temple is **situated on the banks of the Godavari river** in Panchvati area of Maharashtra.
- The name Panchavati comes from the existence of **five banyan trees** in the area.
- According to the epic, **Lord Ram, Sita and Lakshman set up a hut here** as the presence of five banyan trees made this spot auspicious and they spent the **first few years of their 14-year exile in Dandakaranya**.
- The temple is also the site of a land mark agitation led by **Babasaheb Ambedkar**, demanding temple entry **rights for Dalits more than 90 years ago**.
- In **1930, BR Ambedkar** and the Marathi teacher and social activist Pandurang Sadashiv Sane, known as Sane Guruji, led an agitation to demand access for Dalits to Hindu temples.
- The temple was built in **1792** with the efforts of one **Sardar Rangarao Odhekar**.

Akash Missile



Recently, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) conducted a successful flight test of the new generation Akash surface-to-air missile (SAM) from the Integrated Test Range (ITR), Chandipur, off the coast of Odisha.

About Akash Missile:

- The Akash missile is a **short to medium range surface-to-air missile** system.
- This missile system is operational with the **Indian Army** and the **Indian Air Force**.
- It can target aircraft up to **45 km (28 mi) away**.
- It can **neutralize aerial targets** like fighter jets, cruise missiles, air-to-surface missiles and ballistic missiles.
- The Akash missile system includes, a **launcher**, a **set of missiles**, a **control center**, a **built-in mission guidance** system, **C4I** (command, control communication and intelligence) centers, **Ground equipment** and a radar named **Rajendra** that accompanies each of the missile batteries.
- The flight-test was conducted against a high-speed, unmanned aerial target at a very low altitude.

Vembanad Lake



Recently, the experts at the International Research and Training Centre for Below Sea Level Farming (IRTCBSF), Kuttanad, have warned that the de-silting will disturb key blue carbon deposits in Vembanad Lake.

About Vembanad Lake:

- Vembanad Lake is the longest lake in India and the largest lake in Kerala.
- It is separated from the **Arabian Sea** by a narrow barrier island
- It is also known as **Vembanad Kayal, Vembanad Kol, Punnamada Lake** (in Kuttanad) and **Kochi Lake** (in Kochi).
- The **Pamba, Achankovil, Manimala, Meenachil** and **Muvattupuzha** rivers flow into the lake.
- The lake is a wetland of international significance, recognized by the **Ramsar Convention in 2002**.
- The **Kumarakom Bird Sanctuary** is also located on the east coast of the lake.
- The lake, acting as **India's largest mud regulator**, bifurcates into two sections, with one containing freshwater from rivers and the other featuring **perennial brackish** water.

The Himalayan Wolf



Recently, the Himalayan Wolf underwent its first-ever assessment on the IUCN Red List.

About the Himalayan Wolf:

- The Himalayan wolf (**Canis lupus chanco**), also known as the Tibetan wolf, is a **prominent lupine predator** found across the Himalayas.
- It is **genetically distinct from gray wolves** found in **Europe** and **North America**.
- It lives in the highest mountains in **Nepal, Tibet, Ladakh, Spiti Valley, Uttarakhand** and **Sikkim**.
- It is **heavily dependent on domestic prey**, such as yak, Dzo cow, goat and sheep.
- It has been classified as '**Vulnerable**' under **C2a(ii)** based on a population estimate of 2,275-3,792 mature individuals.

Face to Face Centres





13 January, 2024

Place in News

Cape Verde

Recently, the World Health Organization (WHO) has certified Cabo Verde (also known as Cape Verde) as a malaria-free country, becoming the third country to acquire the status in the global health organisation's African region.



Cape Verde (Capital: Praia)

Location: The Republic of Cabo Verde, also known as Cape Verde, is an island country in West Africa, located in the central Atlantic Ocean.

Physical Features:

- **Santiago**, a southern island group of the Cape Verde is the **largest and most populated island**.
- **Pico do Fogo**, the **largest active volcano**, **erupted in 2014**, with an impressive caldera and interior cone.
- The island is **composed of igneous rocks, volcanic structures** and pyroclastic debris.

Official Language: Portuguese is the official language of Cape Verde.

Independence: Cape Verde gained independence from Portugal on **July 5, 1975**.

POINTS TO PONDER

- Who has the authority to grant pardons, suspend, remit, reprieves, respites, or commute the sentence according to Article 72 of the Indian Constitution? - **President of India**
- Whose powers under Article 161 are similar to those granted to the President under Article 72, but limited to matters within the executive power of the state? - **Governor**
- When was the National Clean Air Program (NCAP) launched by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)? - **2019**
- Who collaborated with the Geological Survey of India (GSI) to develop the prototype regional Landslide Early Warning System (LEWS) under the LANDSLIP project? - **British Geological Survey (BGS)**
- Which ancient system of religious philosophy did Swami Vivekananda popularize? - **Vedanta**

Face to Face Centres

