# India and New Zealand announce Landmark Free Trade Agreement (FTA)

It is one of India's fastest-concluded FTAs after signing six Free Trade Agreements in the last five years, the latest being with Oman.

> FTA is an agreement between two or more countries where the countries agree on certain obligations that affect trade in goods and services, and protections for investors and intellectual property rights, etc.

### **Salient Features of FTA**

- Zero-Duty Market Access: Eliminates customs duty on 100% of Indian exports, significantly enhancing trade competitiveness.
- Healthcare & Traditional Medicine Cooperation: First-ever Annex on Health and Traditional Medicine Services signed by New
- Agricultural Value Chain Integration: Agricultural Productivity Partnership to improve farm productivity and integrate farmers into global value chains.

### Why are FTA's important for India?

- Export Market Diversification: FTAs reduces over-dependence on traditional markets like the USA (recently imposed 50% tariff on goods from India).
- ▶ Long-Term Investment Boost: New Zealand has committed to invest USD 20 billion over 15 years.
- ▶ MSME Integration: FTAs link Indian MSMEs to global value chains, boosting exports and employment.
- ➤ Skilled Mobility: E.g., India-New Zealand FTA provides temporary employment entry visas for up to 5,000 professionals at any given time, spanning sectors such as IT, engineering, etc.
- ▶ Improved Competitiveness: Zero or low tariffs help Indian goods compete effectively.
- Strategic Partnerships: FTAs strengthen economic diplomacy and India's geopolitical influence.
- **Other:** Export-Led Growth, etc.

### India- New Zealand Bi-lateral Trade New Zealand is India's second largest trading partner in OCEANIA Merchandise Merchandise Service Trade Export **Export** USD 634 million USD 1.3 billion USD 711 million (2024-25)(2024-25)(2024-25)13% 🕇 49% 32% (Over the year) (Over the year) (Over the year)

# 30th anniversary of The Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA) 1996 celebrated

The PESA Act extends the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) to the tribal-dominated Fifth Schedule Areas (under Article 244).

- PRIs were given constitutional status via 73rd Amendment (1993) to establish local governance structures at the village, block, and district levels, except the Schedule Areas of following 10 states:
  - Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan and Telangana.

### **Salient Features of PESA Act**

- Gram Sabha Empowerment: Mandatory consent of Gram Sabha for local resource management such as land acquisition, development projects, minor forest produce, minor minerals, etc.
- **Powers:** Gram Sabhas and Panchayats can prohibit or regulate the sale and consumption of any intoxicant, land protection & alienation, village market management, Money-lending Control, etc.
- Preservation of Culture: It recognizes and protects the unique traditional governance systems, customary laws, and cultural identity of tribal communities.
- Legal Supremacy: PESA overrides standard constitutional rules and state legislature laws.

As the PESA Act marks three decades, it remains an underrealized framework for tribal self-governance due to absence of a mandatory timeline for rule-making, dominance of bureaucratic structures over Gram Sabhas, and lack of devolution of funds, functions and functionaries.

Initiatives taken to strengthen PESA Act, 1996

- ▶ PESA-GPDP Portal: The PESA-Gram Panchayat Development Plan Portal was launched (September 2024) to facilitate the planning and monitoring of development activities and resource allocation.
- Institutional Support: The Ministry of Panchayati Raj has established a dedicated PESA Cell and is setting up Centres of Excellence in central universities (e.g., Indira Gandhi National Tribal University) to institutionalize capacity-building.
- ▶ Linguistic Outreach: Training manuals have been translated into regional languages (Telugu, Marathi, etc.) and tribal languages like Santhali, Gondi, Bhili, and Mundari.







# Financial Fraud Risk Indicator (FRI) prevented ₹660 Crore Cyber Fraud Losses

FRI was introduced by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) to combat cyber fraud and financial crime.

### **About Financial Fraud Risk Indicator (FRI)**

- ➤ A risk-assessment tool to identify mobile numbers potentially involved in
- It is a multi- dimensional analytical tool developed as part of the Digital Intelligence Platform (DIP).
- ▶ Mechanism: Classification of numbers into risk categories: Medium, High, or Very High, using inputs from banks, telecom service providers, law-enforcement agencies, and citizen reports.
- ▶ Utility: Enables banks and financial institutions to generate early alerts, apply enhanced due diligence and prevent fraudulent transactions.

### About Digital Intelligence Platform (DIP)

- A secure, real-time data-sharing platform connecting telecom operators, banks, fintech entities and government agencies.
- Coverage: Onboarding of a large number of financial institutions for coordinated cyber fraud detection.
  - ⊕ It has about 1000+ organizations that include central security agencies, 36 State/UT Police, banks, financial institutions, Social media platforms like WhatsApp, etc.
- Utility: Faster intelligence exchange to detect and disrupt misuse of telecom identifiers.

### Other Key Initiatives taken to prevent Cyber Fraud

- **Legal Initiatives:** E.g., Information Technology Act, 2000
- Institutional Initiatives: E.g., Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C): Central platform under MHA for coordination, investigation support, and capacity building against cybercrime.
  - → I4C has launched Citizen Financial Cyber Fraud Reporting and Management System.
- > Sanchar Sarrthi Initiative: Empowers mobile subscribers and increase awareness with features like Chakshu (Report Suspected Fraud Communications).
- **Other:** Samanvaya Platform (strengthens cyber fraud investigations by providing analytics-based interstate linkages of criminals and crimes), etc.





### 🖒 PIG BUTCHERING

Pig Butchering is a scam where victims are lured into fake relationships or job offers. Once trust is built, scammers defraud them through fake investments or financial requests.

PHANTOM HACKING

Phantom hacking is a cyber scam where fraudsters impersonate government or tech support officials and falsely claim that a victim's device or bank account has been hacked, tricking them into transferring money to a "safe" account - which is actually controlled by the scammer.



INSTANT LOAN APPS
Online instant Online instant loan scams trick users with quick loan offers via apps, then exploit their data and harass them for repayment through blackmail or threats - often without ever disbursing the promised loan.









# NITI Aayog Releases Report on 'Internationalisation of Higher Education in India'

A central pillar of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, internationalisation focuses on transforming India's domestic higher education ecosystem into a globally integrated system via;

- > Enhanced international students and faculty ratio in Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs),
- Presence of local campuses of top global institutions in India,
- **Expansion of Indian HEIs** outside India, etc.

Why India needs internationalisation of its higher education?

- Outward remittances: Increased by over 2,000% in a decade, reaching nearly USD 3.4 billion in 2023-24 (~ 53% of India's Union higher education budget).
- **▶** Democratization of Quality: 97% of Indian student in domestic institutions can avail high-quality, world-class education that aligns with global standards.
- Global Readiness: By embedding international benchmarks, faculty exchanges, and global curricula into Indian campuses, the country can prepare its massive workforce to be "world-ready" and competitive in the global talent pool.

## Challenges in Internationalisation of **Indian Higher Education**



# Resource Constraints

Limited capacity of Indian HEIs to raise budget for expansion.



### **Brain Drain**

High percentage of top-tier Indian graduates choose to settle abroad, limiting domestic knowledge base.



# Infrastructure Gaps

E.g. less than 15% of Indian HEIs currently meet international expectations for campus facilities, housing, and safety protocols.



# Regulatory Bottlenecks

E.g. Complicated visa procedures, documentation burdens, and a lack of a fast-track academic visa category.

Other: Countering brain drain, harnessing the diaspora, improving the global rankings (e.g. higher international student and faculty ratios), soft power projection (e.g. offshore campuses like IIT Delhi in Abu Dhabi), etc.

### Policy Recommendations by NITI Aayog

- **▶ Governance:** Establish an Inter-Ministerial Task Force and designate Country Centres of Excellence (CoEs) in 54 Central Universities to serve as nodal points for specific nations.
- Regulation: Revise the NIRF criteria to include internationalization metrics and simplify the visa documents.
- > Finance: Launch the Bharat Vidya Kosh (a \$10 billion sovereign research fund) and the Vishwa Bandhu flagship scholarship to attract global researchers and master's students.
- > Branding & Outreach: Develop the Bharat ki AAN (Alumni Ambassador Network) to engage successful Indian-origin alumni as global brand ambassadors and revamp the "Study in India" portal into a one-stop digital solution.
- Curriculum & Culture: Integrate Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) with global academic standards and mandate industryrelevant internships and reflective writing modules in degree programmes.

### **Also In News**



### **Electoral Trusts**

Recently, Election Commission released Annual Report of contributions received by the trust and donations given to political parties for the FY 2024-25,

### **About Electoral Trusts**

- **▶ Electoral Trusts Scheme, 2013** provides for establishing Electoral Trusts (registered under the Companies Act).
- They receive donations from individuals, companies, etc. and distribute them to registered political parties.
- Objective: They aim to enhance transparency and accountability in political funding.
- Mandate: By law, trusts must distribute 95% of total contributions received within a financial year to registered political parties.
- **Regulation:** They are required to report to the **Election Commission** contributions from individuals and companies, and are governed by the Income Tax Act 1961.
- **Disclosure**: Donors and amounts must be mandatorily reported, ensuring traceability.



### **Personality Rights**

Recently, Delhi High Court passed an interim injunction order protecting the personality rights of a famous actor.

### **About Personality Rights**

- Personality rights refer to the right of an individual to control the unauthorized use of their personal attributes like Name, Image, voice, Likeness and Distinctive expressions or traits. These rights include both commercial and non-commercial aspects.
  - Personality rights are not expressly mentioned in any statute
- Components of Personality Rights: Right to publicity (protected)

under Trademarks Act, 1999 and Copyright Act, 1957) and Right to privacy (provided under Article 21 of the Constitution and K.S. Puttaswamy Case, 2017).











# United Nations Convention on Negotiable Cargo Documents (Accra Convention), 2025

Recently, the UN General Assembly adopted the resolution supporting the United Nations Convention on Negotiable Cargo Documents (Accra Convention), 2025.

- ▶ Negotiable Cargo Documents (NCDs) are documents (both in paper and digital format) that represent goods in transit, and confer rights over goods to the holder which are transferrable.
  About Accra Convention, 2025
- Objective: Establishes a uniform legal framework for NCDs and extends benefits of negotiable documents beyond maritime transport to multimodal transport (train, truck, plane, or ship).
  - It allows cargo to be sold, rerouted, or used as collateral for financing while it is mid-journey.
- ▶ Legal Effect: NCDs have the same legal effect as physical delivery of goods.
- Significance: facilitates trade finance, digitalisation of global trade, etc.



### Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980

The Supreme Court held that forest lands cannot be used for non-forestry purposes, including agriculture, as per the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980.

### About the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980

- **Objective:** Conservation of forests and regulation of forest land use for non-forest purposes.
- **Coverage:** Reserved forests, protected forests, and government-recorded forest land.
- ▶ Approval Requirement: State Government or other authority requires prior approval from the Central Government is required for the reservation or diversion of forest land.
- ▶ Advisory Committee: Provides for the establishment of an Advisory Committee by the Central Government to advise on granting approval for the use of forest land and on other matters related to forest conservation.



### **SIRT6 Enzyme**

Researchers have identified a critical molecular mechanism involving the enzyme SIRT6 that regulates brain aging and neurodegeneration. About SIRT6 Enzyme

- SIRT6 or Sirtuin 6 enzyme is a longevity-linked enzyme that acts as an active metabolic switch and gatekeeper for tryptophan metabolism.
  - Tryptophan is an essential amino acid used in producing cellular energy or generating neurotransmitters like serotonin and melatonin, which regulate mood, sleep, and neural stability.
- > Function:
  - When SIRT6 activity is intact, tryptophan is properly distributed between pathways that generate energy and those that produce serotonin and melatonin.
  - When SIRT6 activity declines, during aging, it disturbs the tryptophan metabolism and generates byproducts that are toxic to nerve cells.



### Composite Leading Indicator (CLI)

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in its latest **State of the Economy report** highlighted utility of proposed **Composite Leading Indicator for Gross Value Added (GVA)- Manufacturing** for India.

**About Composite Leading Indicator for GVA** 

- Frequency: Quarterly
- Objectives: To anticipate shifts in the sector's business cycle and strengthen short-term economic assessment.
- ▶ Indicators: Set of variables capturing domestic demand, inflation dynamics, survey-based sentiments, industrial credit flows, uncertainty metrics, and global macroeconomic trends.





## **Direct Firing Sight Navigation System**

India and France signed an agreement to jointly produce the **Direct** Firing Sight Navigation System in India, which includes.

- SIGMA 30N Navigation System, enabling autonomous artillery engagement without GPS, and
- CM3-MR Direct Firing Sight, designed to enhance artillery and anti-drone accuracy.

### **Key Features of Direct Firing Sight Navigation System**

- **Autonomy:** Functions **independently of GPS**, ensuring operational reliability in heavily jammed electronic warfare environments.
- ➤ Versatility: Integrates seamlessly with diverse hardware, from heavy artillery and radars to mobile air defense systems.
- **Direct-Fire:** Utilizes **advanced thermal and optical sights** for immediate engagement of visible targets, including drones.





























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