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GS 2: POLITY, GOVERNANCE, SOCIAL JUSTICE, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS/INSTITUTIONS

1. India, Italy unveil five-year strategic action plan

Context: India and Italy unveiled an ambitious five-year strategic action plan outlining specific initiatives in key sectors of defence, trade, clean energy and connectivity following extensive talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Italian counterpart Giorgia Meloni. The action plan 2025-29 identified 10 specific pillars for advancing bilateral engagement that included economic cooperation and investments, energy transition, space, defence, security, migration and mobility, and people-to-people exchanges. The two countries will pursue collaborations, programmes and initiatives in areas of trade, investment, science and technology, new and emerging technologies, clean energy, space, defence, connectivity and people-to-people linkages under the joint action plan.

India-Italy relations

- **About:** Italy and India share multifaceted relationships and common interests along with numerous challenges in the Indo-Mediterranean Sea highlighting why Italy holds significant importance for India's global aspirations.
- **Significance:** As a G7 member and a key player in the European Union, Italy serves as India's gateway to European markets and policy-making circles. Italy's geopolitical position in the Mediterranean and its influence within the European Union make it a vital strategic partner for India. The recent joint defence initiatives between the two nations underscore the deepening trust and cooperation in security matters.

Maritime cooperation - Enhancing naval exercises and information sharing in the Indo-Pacific region.

Counter-terrorism efforts - Collaborating on intelligence and security measures to combat global threats.

Defence - Co-development of military hardware and cybersecurity solutions.

- **Economic Ties and Trade Volume:** Bilateral trade has shown resilience even in challenging times, with both countries recognising the untapped potential. Italian investments in India's manufacturing sector, particularly in automotive and textiles, have been significant. Conversely, Indian IT firms are finding fertile ground in Italy's digitalisation drive. Italy is India's **4th largest trading** partner in the EU after Germany, Belgium and Netherlands. Bilateral trade in **2022-23 crossed US\$ 14.253** billion with our exports at US\$ 8.691 billion. Italy ranks **17th in terms of FDI** inflows into India during April 2000 to March 2023 with a US \$ 3.5 bn (DGFT data). The top sectors attracting FDI – Automobile (29.8%), Trading (17.1%), Industrial Machinery (5.6%), Services (5.1%), Electrical Equipment (4.6%).
- **Concerns and Challenges:** India and Italy, despite having a historical relationship dating back to the Roman era, have faced several challenges primarily centred around trade, investment, and defence cooperation. These include:
 - *Trade imbalance* - India has a significant trade surplus with Italy, which has led to concerns in Italy.
 - *Tariff barriers* - Both countries have imposed tariffs on certain products, hindering trade growth.
 - *Bureaucracy* - India's complex bureaucratic procedures can deter Italian investors.
 - *Regulatory challenges* - Italian companies may face difficulties navigating India's regulatory environment.
- **Measures needed:** While the Italy-India relationship is on an upward trajectory, it is not without its challenges. Trade barriers, competing interests in certain sectors, and occasional cultural misunderstandings pose obstacles. However, these challenges also present opportunities for deeper engagement and understanding.
- **Way forward:** The elevation of bilateral relations to a Strategic Partnership marked a new chapter in diplomatic ties. Both nations have found common ground on global issues such as climate change, counterterrorism, and reform of multilateral institutions. As India continues its ascent on the global stage, its relationship with Italy takes on new significance. From being partners in addressing.

- **Overview:** India and Italy outlined their vision for deepening bilateral cooperation in the Joint Strategic Action Plan 2025-29. The document covers various key sectors, including defence, trade, energy and space. This Action Plan was issued after a meeting between PM Modi and his Italian counterpart Giorgia Meloni on the sidelines of G20 summit in Brazil.
- **Italy-India Joint Strategic Action Plan 2025-2029:**
 - Economic Cooperation* - Both countries agreed to boost trade & investment in sectors like green technologies, pharmaceuticals, etc through Joint Commission for Economic Cooperation & Working Group on Food Processing.
 - Connectivity* - They agreed to cooperate on India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEEC), a strategic initiative aimed at enhancing connectivity & trade between India, Middle East, and Europe.
 - Science and Technology* - They agreed on expanding cooperation in critical technologies like artificial intelligence & digitalization, with implementation of 2025-27 Executive Programme for Scientific & Technological Cooperation.
 - Energy Transition* - Both countries agreed on organizing “Tech Summits” & strengthening alliances like Global Biofuels Alliance & International Solar Alliance.
 - Defence cooperation* - They decided to hold annual Joint Defence Consultative (JDC) meetings & Joint Staff Talks (JST) to improve coordination in defence matters.

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2. India, U.K. to re-launch trade talks in new year

Context: India and the U.K. have decided to re-launch discussions to conclude a ‘free trade’ deal in the new year, following the election of a new Labour government in the U.K. The announcement of the imminent resumption of talks, which began in 2022 during the Boris Johnson Conservative government, was announced by U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer, following a bilateral meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Rio de Janeiro, on the fringes of the G20 Summit. The U.K. is seeking to deepen cooperation in areas that include education, security, technology and climate change.

India-UK relations

- **About:** India and the UK enjoy a modern partnership bound by strong historical ties and a shared membership in the Commonwealth. The two countries collaborate extensively across a wide range of areas and are working to establish a comprehensive strategic partnership by 2030.
- **Geopolitical Cooperation:** UK supports India’s proposal for permanent membership of the UNSC. The UK is also an important interlocutor for India in the EU, G8, G20 and global forums. India-UK political cooperation deepens through institutions and fora such as India-UK Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Dialogue, India-UK JWG on Counter Terrorism and India-UK Foreign Office Consultations.
- **Economic Cooperation:** After the establishment of Joint Economic and Trade Committee (JETCO) in 2005, the India-UK economic relations has further deepened.
- **Defence and Security:** India and the UK signed the Defence and International Security Partnership (DISP) in November 2015. It provides a strategic roadmap and direction to the evolving India-UK Defence Relations. At present, some 70 companies in the UK supply goods for aircraft and related equipment besides supporting platforms like the Jaguar, Mirage and Kiran aircraft.
- **Nuclear Cooperation:** India and UK have signed a Civil Nuclear Cooperation Declaration in 2010 for the promotion and facilitation of cooperation in the nuclear field. In 2015, a Nuclear Collaboration

Agreement was signed between the two countries as part of a comprehensive package of collaboration on energy and climate change.

- **Education:** India and UK have been closely collaborating in the field of Education. This is evident in the following cases-
 - a. The launch of 'UKEIRI Mobility Programme: Study in India' in 2019. Under this Britain's universities collaborate with Indian partners and send UK students to India.
 - b. UK is among the favoured destinations for Indian students to pursue higher education, with around 50000 Indian students currently studying in UK.
- **Climate and Environment:** India-UK Green Growth Equity Fund has been established, which helps in the mobilisation of institutional investments in the renewable energy, waste management, electric mobility and environment sub-sectors in India.
- **Cultural Cooperation:** India and UK have signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Cultural Cooperation in 2010. The Nehru Centre (TNC), established in 1992 in London, is the cultural outreach of the High Commission of India in UK.
- **Diaspora Collaboration:** Around 1.5 million people of Indian origin live in Britain. Indian diasporas are making significant contributions to the British Society. The representation of people from Indian Origin has increased in the British Parliament. The outgoing PM of UK was also of the Indian Origin.

Key points

- **Overview:** India-UK FTA is being negotiated under India's FTA 2.0 approach. The India-UK FTA will serve as a template for India-EU FTA (EU is India's second-largest trade partner). India's earlier FTAs with ASEAN and Japan yielded moderate results for India. India has taken its learnings from its earlier approach to FTAs and has come up with a new FTA 2.0 approach.
- **Challenges of India's Earlier FTAs:** *Uneven distribution of gains* - The margin of preference (actual tariff cuts) given by India to its FTA partners in the old FTAs were higher than the margin of preference given by partner countries.
India's low FTA utilisation - India's FTA utilisation remained very low at around 25 per cent. On the other hand, developed countries utilise the FTAs to the maximum (~ 70–80 per cent).
- **Way Forward:** India's Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with the United Arab Emirates and the Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA) with Australia are both part of India's FTA 2.0 approach. India's exports to both countries have shown a significant increase just a few months after the conclusion of the CEPA, and remarkable FTA utilisation statistics have also been reported.
For ex- Development of Trade infrastructure- Govt must take efforts to give a boost to trade infrastructure, set up fast track dispute settlement mechanism and digitise trade procedures.

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3. Jaishankar, Wang discuss resuming Mansarovar Yatra flights

Context: A month after India and China agreed to disengage at two friction points along the Line of Actual Control leading to a meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping in Russia, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and his Chinese counterpart Wangi Yi discussed the next steps in India-China relations that include resumption of the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra pilgrimage, data sharing on trans-border rivers, direct flights between India and China and media exchanges. The Chinese readout

of the meeting said the two sides are planning to commemorate the 75th anniversary of India-China diplomatic ties and hold events in both countries.

Key points

- The Link Road is named as the Kailash-Mansarovar Yatra Route under which the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) achieved road connectivity from Dharchula (Pithoragarh, Uttarakhand) to Lipulekh.
 - Lipulekh Pass also known as Lipu-Lekh Pass/Qiangla or Tri-Corner is a high-altitude mountain pass situated in the western Himalayas with a height of 5,334 metre or 17,500 feet.
 - It is an international mountain pass between India, China and Nepal.
- The road was made under directions of the China Study Group (CSG) and is funded by Indo-China Border Road (ICBR).
- It was approved by the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) in 2005.
- **Advantages:** It is the shortest and cheapest route with just one-fifth distance of road travel as compared to other old routes. The other route is via Sikkim. There is no air travel involved, and most of the travel (84%) is in India and only 16% in China compared to other routes where 80% road travel is in China. Except for a 5-km trek, whole travel will be on vehicles reducing the 5-day trek to 2- days road travel.
- **Significance of Kailash mansarover:** To Hindus it is the earthly embodiment of the dominant mountain of heaven, Meru, and the residence of Lord Shiva and his consort Goddess Parvati. The Kailash range's supreme peak lies in the Chinese-occupied Tibet at the height of 6,675 meters. The pilgrimage to Kailash and to the sacred Mansarovar lake that lies 30 km to its south, is run exclusively by a government organization, the Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigam (KMVN).

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4. If diamonds and pencils are made of carbon, how is it that pencils can write?

Context: While using a pencil, the core of the pencil slides on the paper. In the process, the carbon atoms are forced to slide on the atoms of the paper. While using a diamond on paper, the atoms of the material are so tightly bound they have absolutely no interest in leaving. Each pencil has a black-grey core surrounded by wood. When you sharpen the pencil, the core becomes more exposed, and the pencil can write better. The "lead" of a pencil is made from a mixture of graphite, a soft, opaque, gray to black mineral, and clay. The clay strengthens and makes the graphite more durable.

Key points

- **Role of Carbon:** Pencil cores are made of carbon, too, but a different form called graphite. The carbon atoms in graphite are arranged in sheets, like slices of bread in a sandwich. Each layer contains carbon atoms connected to each other with three bonds — that's a very strong bond. However, the bonds between sheets are weak. Each layer in this arrangement is called graphene.
- **Diamonds:** When carbon atoms are arranged and stacked in different ways, they have completely different properties. If the carbon atoms arrange themselves in the form of an Egyptian pyramid-like structure, they form a diamond. Diamonds are shiny, transparent, and the hardest material known in nature.

- **Discovery of Graphene:** Scientists conducted an experiment, where they stuck cellophane tape on graphite and then ripped it off. When they looked at the tape under a microscope, they found thin layers of carbon stuck to it, i.e. graphene.

