

CURRENT AFFAIRS

UPSC CSE 2026



DAILY CURRENT
AFFAIRS NOTES

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FTAs for a start

- According to the **World Trade Organization**, India has entered into **20 regional or free trade agreements (FTAs)**.
- This count excludes recent pacts with the **United Kingdom** and the **European Free Trade Association (EFTA)**.
- Negotiations** are under way with the **United States**, **European Union**, **Canada** and the **Southern African Customs Union**. **FTAs with ASEAN, Japan and South Korea have tilted the trade balance against India**.
- The **trade deficit with ASEAN** widened from about **\$10 billion in 2017** to nearly **\$44 billion by 2023**.
- A similar pattern holds for Japan, where **imports of high-value, capital-intensive goods** grew faster than **exports**.
- Reasons are **structural and policy-driven**, including weak negotiation of **quality standards, certifications, rules of origin** and **non-tariff barriers**.
- Many **FTAs** were not **custom-designed** to reflect **India's sectoral strengths** and lacked **robust industry consultations**.
- The **government** did too little to **popularise FTAs domestically**, while partner countries used **preferential margins** fully.
- A **review of ASEAN, Japan and Korea FTAs** has brought **course correction**. This is reflected in **India-UAE CEPA**, where **non-oil trade** touched about **\$100 billion in FY25**.

The Indian Ocean as cradle of a new blue economy

- The **Indian Ocean**, home to **one-third of humanity**, is one of the most **climate-vulnerable basins** on earth.
- India's Blue Ocean Strategy** should rest on **three pillars: stewardship of the commons, resilience, and inclusive growth**.
- The strategy strengthens **ocean observation networks**, improves **early warning systems**, and **technology transfer** to **small island developing states** and **African coastal nations**.
- At the **Blue Economy and Finance Forum (BEFF) in Monaco**, stakeholders highlighted a **\$25 billion pipeline** of ocean investments and announced **\$8.7 billion in new commitments**.
- Finance in Common Ocean Coalition** announced **annual pledges of \$7.5 billion** from **20 public development banks**.
- The **Development Bank of Latin America** doubled its **blue economy target to \$2.5 billion by 2030**.
- At **COP30 in Belém**, the **One Ocean Partnership** committed to mobilise **\$20 billion for ocean action by 2030**.
- IUU fishing, coral reef degradation, and intensifying storm surges** erode **livelihoods** and undermine **social stability**.
- Addressing these threats requires a shift from **traditional maritime security** to **security through sustainability**.
- India's SAGAR doctrine** was articulated by **PM Modi in Mauritius (2015)**.
- With **UNOC3 (Nice)**, **COP30 (Belém)**, and the **BBNJ Agreement** entering into force, **2026** is shaping up as a **pivotal year for ocean governance**.
- India's readiness to ratify the BBNJ Agreement** offers an opportunity to advance **green shipping corridors, blue bonds, marine technology transfer, and ocean-based carbon dioxide removal**.

5,000 ex-servicemen to fill Railway pointsmen posts

- Facing an **acute manpower crunch**, **Indian Railways** has decided to recruit **ex-servicemen as pointsmen** across its **network**.
- The **Railway Board** approved the engagement of **5,058 ex-servicemen** on a **contractual basis** as an **interim measure**.
- This arrangement will continue **until regular candidates** are recruited through the **Railway Recruitment Cells**.
- A **circular** directed **General Managers of all zonal railways** to recruit ex-servicemen through **Ex-Servicemen Welfare Boards** under **Central and State governments**.
- A **pointsman** is responsible for **manual operation of track switches (points)** and **signals** to guide trains safely through **yards and junctions**.
- The **All India Railwaymen Federation (AIRF)** is the **largest federation of employees' unions** in the railways. Allowing staff on short-term contracts to operate critical safety systems is a **threat to safety**.

VPN providers told to block sites 'leaking' Indians' data

- In **2022**, the **Computer Emergency Response Team, India (CERT-In)** published **directions** requiring **VPN providers** to **maintain logs of Indian users**.
- VPN providers**, which market services to **avoid online tracking, refused to comply** with the request.
- Large paid **VPN firms** such as **ExpressVPN** and **NordVPN** shifted their "India" servers to **Singapore**.

- These firms bought **Internet Protocol (IP)** blocks associated with India while serving traffic from Singapore.

Union Cabinet allows export of coal

- Paving the way for further **coal exports**, the **Union Cabinet** approved a **policy** allowing **coal** acquired through **auctioning** to be utilised for **any industrial use and export**.
- The **current policy** allows coal to be used only for **cement, steel, sponge iron and aluminium** via **auctions**.
- The **Policy for Auction of Coal Linkage for Seamless, Efficient and Transparent Utilisation of coal (CoalSETU)** will allow **guaranteed supply deals (coal linkages)** obtained via auctions to be used for **captive consumption, export, or any other purpose** (including **coal washing**). The policy excludes resale in India.