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ANIMAL WELFARE BOARD OF INDIA (AWBI)

The central government plans to change the Animal Welfare Board's old guidelines to make them more relevant in the current scenario as well as ensure their effective implementation as part of efforts to prevent cruelty towards animals.

- It is a **statutory body** set up in 1962 in accordance with Section 4 of the **Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1960.**
- It was started under the **stewardship of Late Smt. Rukmini Devi Arundale**, a well-known humanitarian.
- The **mandate** of the Board is to **promote animal welfare** in general and to **protect animals from** being **subjected to unnecessary pain o**r suffering, in particular.
- **Headquarters: Ballabhgarh in Haryana**
- It **advises state and central governments** on the issues related to animal welfare, including cruelty meted out to animals.
- The AWBI **periodically addresses the letters to the State Governments** and UTs regarding the complaints received and requests them to take necessary action against the offenders as per law.
- AWBI also **gives financial assistance** and other assistance **to Animal Welfare Organisations** functioning in any local area, to impart education in relation to the humane treatment of animals and so on.
- **Membership:**
  - The Board consists of **28 Members.**
  - The term of office of Members is for a period of 3 years.
  - Several **government organisations**, along with **animal rights activists** and **parliamentarians**, are represented on the Board.

WHO FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON TOBACCO CONTROL

Recently, the World Health Organization celebrated the 20th anniversary of the entry into force of its Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC).

- It is the first international treaty negotiated under the auspices of the **World Health Organization**

- It was adopted by the World Health Assembly on 21 May 2003 and entered into force on 27 February 2005.

- There are currently **181 Parties to the Convention.**

- It was developed by countries in response to the **globalization of the tobacco epidemic.**

- It aims to tackle some of the causes of that epidemic, including complex factors with cross -border effects, such as trade liberalization and direct foreign investment, tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship beyond national borders, and illicit trade in tobacco products.

- of India ratified the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) **in 2004.**

- It provides for various measures to reduce the **demand as well as supply of tobacco.**

- It provides a framework for tobacco control measures to be implemented at the national, regional and international levels. This includes actions to:
  - **Protect public health policies** from commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry.
  - **Adopt price and tax measures** to reduce the demand for tobacco.
  - **Protect people** from exposure to tobacco smoke
  - **Regulate the contents** of tobacco products
  - **Regulate tobacco product** disclosures
  - **Regulate the packaging and labeling** of tobacco products

GENERAL ANTI AVOIDANCE RULES

Income tax authorities may now be able to issue reassessment notices under General Anti Avoidance Rules (GAAR) under the new proposal under the Income Tax Bill 2025.

- It is an **anti-tax avoidance law** in India to curb tax evasion and avoid tax leaks.
- It came into effect on **1st April 2017.** The GAAR provisions come under the **Income Tax Act, 1961.**
- It is specifically aimed at **cutting revenue losses** that happen to the government due to aggressive tax avoidance measures practiced by companies.
- It is meant to apply to transactions that are prima facie legal, but result in tax reduction.
- Under current rules, reassessment notices where the under-reported income is Rs ₹50 lakh or more, have to be issued within **5 years and 3 months** from the end of the assessment year.
- GAAR provisions give wide powers to tax authorities to treat any arrangement or a transaction as an 'impermissible avoidance arrangement' (IAA) and re-compute income and consequent tax implications.

BLOOD MOON

A total lunar eclipse, or blood moon, will light up the sky on March 14 and will be visible in most parts of the world.

- It happens when Earth's moon is in a **total lunar eclipse.**
- **How it occurs?**
  - A blood moon occur when **Earth comes directly between the Sun and the moon**.

- o A process called Rayleigh scattering causes the moon to appear red instead of dark.
- o This happens because **shorter-wavelength light** (blue) is scattered, while longer-wavelength red light passes through the Earth's atmosphere, making the moon appear red.
- o During totality, "the entire Moon falls within the darkest part of Earth's shadow, called the **umbra**.
- o When the Moon is within the umbra, it appears **red-orange**." This colour shift is what earns the event its nickname, the "**blood moon.**"

- Depending on external factors such as atmospheric conditions and light pollution, the moon, during a blood moon phase, may appear red, orange, or copper-coloured.
- This year's phenomenon will occur during daytime in India, thus won't be visible in the country but will be visible in America, Western Europe, Western Africa, and the North and South Atlantic Ocean.
- This total lunar eclipse marks its return after nearly three years—the last one occurring in 2022.

WHY INDIA-EU PARTNERSHIP MATTERS

- A high-level delegation of **22 out of 27 European Commissioners**, led by **European Commission (EC) President Ursula von der Leyen**, visited **New Delhi** for a two-day visit.
- This visit, the first of its kind, underscores the deepening engagement between **India and the European Union (EU)** across multiple sectors, including trade, technology, green energy, and defence.
- The visit coincided with meetings of the **India-EU Trade and Technology Council (TTC)**, bilateral discussions between Indian ministers and EU Commissioners, and a leaders' summit, all aimed at fostering greater cooperation and investments.

Key Areas of India-EU Cooperation:

- **Trade and Investments**
  - India and the EU have been negotiating a **Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** for over **15 years**, with discussions resuming in **2021**.
  - The EU remains **India's largest trading partner in goods**, with trade increasing by **90% over the past decade**.

- **Technology and Digital Cooperation**
  - The **India-EU TTC**, launched in **2022**, focuses on:
    - Digital and Strategic Technologies
    - Clean and Green Technologies
    - Trade, Investments, and Resilient Supply Chains

- **Green Energy Cooperation**
  - Joint efforts are underway to establish a green hydrogen ecosystem in India by 2030.
  - These initiatives support India's **Net-Zero by 2070** goal and the EU's carbon neutrality targets.

- **Defence and Space Collaboration**
  - **First India-EU Joint Naval Exercise:** Held in October 2023 in the Gulf of Guinea.
  - **Space Cooperation:**
    - ISRO launched EU's PROBA-3 mission in December 2024.
    - India-EU collaboration on Chandrayaan-3, Aditya-L1, and Gaganyaan missions.

- **People-to-People Ties**
  - The Indian diaspora in the EU includes a significant number of **students, professionals, and researchers**.
  - **Erasmus Scholarships:** Over **6,000 Indian students** have received **Erasmus scholarships** in the past two decades.

SUPREME COURT STAYS LOKPAL ORDER ON CORRUPTION COMPLAINT AGAINST HIGH COURT JUDGE

The Supreme Court recently stayed a Lokpal order that had taken cognizance of a corruption complaint against an unnamed High Court (HC) judge. **The Lokpal bench**, led by former SC judge A M Khanwilkar, **asserted its authority** to hear such cases under **the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013**.

However, the SC found this development **highly concerning and halted the proceedings**. The next hearing is scheduled for March 18.

Supreme Court's Rationale Behind Staying Lokpal Order:

- **Judicial independence:** The SC has always balanced criticism of judges with the need to safeguard judicial independence.
- **Concerns over executive overreach:** Since the Lokpal is **a statutory body** under the executive, allowing it to hear complaints against judges could set a precedent that **threatens judicial autonomy.**
- **Precedence of established procedures:** The SC noted that accepting the Lokpal's ruling could **bypass** established procedures for investigating complaints against judges.

The Lokpal Case Against the HC Judge:

- **Allegations against the judge:**
  - **Two complaints** were filed against an HC judge for allegedly influencing judicial proceedings in suits involving a private company.
  - The complainant alleged that the company was the **judge's former client** when he was an advocate.
- **Interpretation of the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013:**
  - The Act applies to **public servants** within and outside India.
  - Section 14 defines public servants, but **does not explicitly include judges**.
- **Differentiation between SC and HC judges:**

- o In a separate case, the Lokpal ruled that it **cannot hear cases against SC judges**, as the SC was established under **Article 124** of the Constitution and not an Act of Parliament.
- o However, the Lokpal argued that HC judges fall under its jurisdiction since several High Courts were established under **the High Courts Act, 1861**, and **the Government of India Act, 1935**.

- **Referral to the CJI:**
  - o Despite asserting its jurisdiction, the Lokpal recognized the need for caution, given the **K Veeraswami precedent**.
  - o Before proceeding with an investigation, the Lokpal decided to refer the complaint to the CJI for guidance.

Conclusion:

The Supreme Court's intervention underscores concern over **potential executive overreach** and the **protection of judicial independence**.

The case also highlights ongoing **legal ambiguities** regarding the jurisdiction of the Lokpal over the judiciary.

The SC's final ruling will have significant implications for the accountability mechanisms of higher judiciary officials in India.

INITIATIVE LAUNCHED TO STANDARDISE AND STREAMLINE OPERATIONS OF INDIA'S MAJOR PORTS

Union Minister Shri Sarbananda Sonowal launched major initiatives under the Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways (MoPSW) to modernize India's maritime infrastructure, enhance its global trade presence, and promote sustainability.

These initiatives focus on improving port efficiency, upgrading facilities, integrating Indian ports with global trade networks, and enhancing cargo handling capacities. Emphasis was also placed on adopting green technologies and eco-friendly port operations.

Key Maritime Initiatives launched

- The Union Minister of Ports, Shipping & Waterways launched a series of major initiatives of the Ministry of Ports, Shipping & Waterways (MoPSW).

- These initiatives were launched during a stakeholders meeting to discuss on various possibilities from the major announcements made in the Union Budget for the Maritime sector.

- **One Nation-One Port Process (ONOP): Standardizing Port Operations**
  - ONOP was launched to standardize port operations across India's major ports.
  - The initiative aims to eliminate inconsistencies in documentation, reduce inefficiencies, lower costs, and minimize operational delays.
  - The Ministry has streamlined documentation, cutting container operation documents by 33% (from 143 to 96) and bulk cargo documents by 29% (from 150 to 106).

- **Sagar Ankalan - Logistics Port Performance Index (LPPI): Enhancing Competitiveness**
  - The Sagar Ankalan LPPI was introduced to assess port performance and improve operational efficiency.
  - It evaluates key metrics like cargo handling, turnaround time, berth idle time, and ship berth-day output.
  - By benchmarking performance and fostering a culture of transparency and efficiency, LPPI aligns with the Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047 and strengthens India's global trade presence.

- **Bharat Global Ports Consortium: Expanding Trade Reach**
  - The Bharat Global Ports Consortium was launched to boost India's maritime trade by integrating IPGL (operations), SDCL (finance), and IPRCL (infrastructure development).

India Maritime Week 2025: Showcasing Maritime Growth

- India will host the India Maritime Week from October 27-31, 2025, in Mumbai.

- The event will highlight India's '**Maritime Virasat'** (Heritage) and '**Maritime Vikaas'** (Development), featuring the 4th Global Maritime India Summit (GMIS) and the 2nd edition of Sagarmanthan.

- It will attract representatives from 100 countries and 100,000 delegates.

Revitalizing India's Shipbuilding Sector

- Discussions focused on financial support for Indian shipyards, including:
    - ₹25,000 crore Maritime Development Fund for long-term financing.
    - Recognition of large ships as infrastructure, unlocking investment opportunities.
    - Shipbuilding clusters to enhance competitiveness and technology adoption.
    - Customs duty exemption extension for shipbuilding inputs for 10 years.
    - Extension of tonnage tax regime to inland vessels to promote river transport.
    - The Ship Breaking Credit Note Scheme to boost ship recycling.

Vision for India's Blue Economy

- The Union Minister emphasized that India's Blue Economy is vital for jobs, trade, sustainability, and economic growth. He reiterated the government's commitment to:
    - Making India a **top 10 shipbuilding nation by 2030**.
    - Creating a world-class, efficient, and future-ready maritime ecosystem.
    - Strengthening India's position as a global maritime powerhouse.

- These measures aim to enhance financial accessibility, support shipbuilding, and improve India's competitiveness in the maritime sector.