

Eco Sensitive zone

- The Supreme Court directed that every protected forest, national park and wildlife sanctuary across the country should have a mandatory eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) of a minimum one km starting from their demarcated boundaries
- Environment Ministry guidelines show that the purpose of declaring ESZs around national parks, forests and sanctuaries is to create some kind of a “shock absorber” for the protected areas.
- These zones would act as a transition zone from areas of high protection to those involving lesser protection.
- The judgment, by Justice Bose, observed that the government should not confine its role to that of a “facilitator” of economic activities for the “immediate upliftment of the fortunes of the State”.
- The State also has to act as a trustee for the benefit of the general public in relation to the natural resources so that sustainable development could be achieved in the long term.
- “Such a role of the State is more relevant today, than, possibly, at any point of time in history with the threat of climate catastrophe resulting from global warming looming large,”

Eco -Sensitive Zones

- Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZs) are also known as Ecologically Fragile Areas (EFAs).
- Eco-sensitive zones are areas notified by the MoEFCC around Protected Areas, National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries.
- The purpose of declaring ESZs is to create some kind of “shock absorbers” to the protected areas by regulating and managing the activities around such areas.
- As per the National Board for Wildlife NBWL, the delineation of eco-sensitive zones have to be site-specific, and the activities should be regulative in nature and not prohibitive unless required.
- The basic aim is to regulate certain activities around National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries to minimize the negative impacts of such activities on the fragile ecosystem encompassing the protected areas.
- They also act as a transition zone from areas of high protection to areas involving lesser protection.

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Competes act

- With the reappearance of Indian mangoes in the U.S. market, after

the November 2021 U.S. India Trade Policy Forum (TPF) helped overcome a pandemic-induced hiatus in mango trade

- For the U.S., exporting ethanol and an associated animal feed ingredient, called DDGS (Distillers' Dried Grains with Soluble) to India in the agricultural goods category is important
- As far as ethanol trade is concerned, the U.S. official said they were aware that India had "some sensitives" given it has domestic ethanol producers, and that the U.S. could find a way to supplement these sources, to help with renewable energy goals, even if that meant not fully liberalising the market for ethanol.
- India amended the National Policy on Biofuels in May to advance the 20% ethanol blending target in petrol by five years, to 2025-26.
- The amended policy also allows the greater use of feedstock for biofuels. For India, the export of carabeef (water buffalo meat) to the U.S., as well as table grapes are among the
- The resumption of Indian wild caught shrimp exports to the U.S. is also an agricultural priority area
- U.S. law prohibits the import of wild caught shrimp and its derivative

products if protected sea turtle species are harmed in the process.

- One way around this is to use Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs) while fishing for shrimp; India views this as a technical barrier to trade.
- On the U.S. side, greater access to the Indian market for medical devices, as well as digital trade, remain priorities, the U.S. official said.
- India wants to be reinstated as a beneficiary of the U.S.'s preferential market access programme the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP).
- India was taken out of the GSP programme by former U.S. President Donald Trump, in June 2019, for not opening up its markets enough

(COMPETES) Act

- The United States has unveiled the ambitious America Creating Opportunities for Manufacturing, Pre-Eminence in Technology, and Economic Strength (COMPETES) Act, 2022, which proposes to open up new vistas for talented individuals from across the world with a new start-up visa.
- It aims to make the supply chains stronger and reinvigorate the innovation engine of the country's economy to outcompete China and

the rest of the world for decades to come.

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Higher education

- In India too, the burden of tuition fees in professional courses is becoming unbearable.
- Besides, it is causing a serious concern of reducing quality professional education to a commodity rather than the noble service that it ought to be.
- Educational loans, even with government collateral guarantee, are no answer, as the mounting debt of educational loans will cripple the economy of development and public welfare.
- What we need is a university system that fosters an environment of learning in which world-quality education can be provided without taxing learners with the burden of tuition fees.
- In Denmark, however, tuition fees were introduced for international students from outside the European Union and the European Economic Area, in 2006. Sweden followed suit in 2011.
- Only Finland, Norway, Iceland, and Germany do not charge international students tuition fees.
- This ensures that students receive quality education in the streams that they desire rather than pursuing streams that allow them to earn highly so as to repay their student debt.
- All Nordic countries have a strong legacy of equality, extending to equal opportunities in the education system.
- The Nordic countries have measures in place to promote gender equality and assist students from lower socioeconomic categories to gain access to higher education.
- Education is a noble service and an investment to charter a bright future for humanity.
- If students pay for education, they would be forced to earn from the degrees they acquire.
- The profession then becomes a privilege to earn rather than a privilege to serve and excel, as it ought to have been.

The Nordic model

- The Nordic countries Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden provide free higher education to their people, and overseas students were able to study for free until recently.

- There is a strong case for reviving philanthropy and community support for higher education in India.
- Corporates, generous alumni, and people at large can join in to create strong philanthropic support for higher education and make quality education tuition free.
- The government, for its part, should be generous enough to declare such philanthropic donations to the cause of higher education and research tax-free, now that the treasury is full of funds from the ever-growing list of income tax and the Goods and Services Tax (GST) payers.

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India's delegation in Afghanistan

- India's decision to send a diplomatic delegation to Kabul to meet with Taliban officials shows a marked difference from the policy New Delhi took in the 1990s when the Sunni Islamist group was in power in Afghanistan.
- Back then, India had taken a policy of disengagement with Kabul and supported anti-Taliban militias.
- But this time, Afghanistan's internal situation and the regional dynamics seem to be different, prompting many neighbouring countries to adopt a more constructive line towards the Taliban regime, despite their differences with the group's extremism.
- India shuttered its embassy in Kabul in August 2021, days before the Taliban takeover, but has maintained a line of communication with them.
- New Delhi sent humanitarian assistance, including wheat, COVID-19 vaccines and winter clothes, to Afghanistan when the country was facing a near-total economic collapse
- The MEA has said that the visit is only to help coordinate India's humanitarian assistance for the Afghanistan people.
- While it could be true, the visit would also pave the way for better understanding and engagement given the bad blood in the past.
- India has three main concerns when it comes to the Taliban's return to Afghanistan.
- One, India has made investments worth billions of dollars in the past 20 years. It would want to protect these investments and retain the Afghan people's goodwill.
- Two, when the Taliban were in power in the 1990s, Afghanistan became a safe haven for anti-India

terrorist groups. India also saw a sharp rise in violence in Kashmir during the Mujahedeen-Taliban reigns of Afghanistan.

- New Delhi would not like history to repeat itself and would want commitments from the Taliban that they would not offer support for anti-India groups.
- Three, the Taliban remaining a Pakistani satellite forever is not in India's strategic interest. New Delhi cannot pursue any of these objectives if it does not engage with the Taliban.

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