Editorial of the Day – 29.01.2026

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1. Mature and pragmatic - On India-EU FTA – (TH)

General Studies 2 - International Relation **Topic -** Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

The India-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA) 2026

Introduction

The conclusion of the India-EU FTA in January 2026 marks a historic shift from defensive trade protectionism to "interest-based bargaining." Covering a combined market of 2 billion people and nearly 25% of global GDP, this "mother of all deals" reflects India's maturity in negotiating as an equal with the world's most powerful rules-based economic bloc.

1. Key Trade Concessions & Liberalization

Asymmetric Advantage - EU Offer - Immediate tariff elimination on 99.5% of Indian exports.
India Offer - Tariff concessions on 97.5% of EU exports, preserving policy space for domestic industry.
Immediate Gains for India - Zero-duty access for labour-intensive sectors like textiles (down from 12%), leather, footwear, gems & jewellery, and marine products.
Industrial Inputs - Drastic cuts in Indian duties on EU machinery (up to 44% to 0%), chemicals, and pharmaceuticals will lower production costs for Indian manufacturers.

2. Sectoral Breakthroughs - Quota-Based Solutions

Instead of blanket cuts, the deal uses innovative Tariff Rate Quotas (TRQs) to balance market access with domestic protection -
Automobiles - Tariffs on EU luxury cars slashed from 110% to 10% for a quota of 250,000 units. Protects Indian mass-market producers while allowing high-tech European competition.
Wines & Spirits - Premium wine duties reduced from 150% to 20-30%. Spirits cut to 40% and Beer to 50%, shielding low-priced domestic segments.

3. Strategic Safeguards

Agriculture & Dairy - India successfully excluded sensitive sectors (dairy, cereals, poultry) to protect **farmer livelihoods** and rural food security.
EU Protections - The EU maintained protections on sensitive agri-lines like beef, sugar, and rice.
Intellectual Property - Balances strong protection for EU trademarks with India's right to produce **generic medicines** (safeguarding against patent evergreening).

4. Geoeconomic & Strategic Significance

Beyond Trade - Accompanied by parallel pacts on Mobility, Defence, and Technology, signaling a shift toward strategic interdependence.
Global Positioning - Positions India as a reliable alternative to China-centric supply chains amid rising global protectionism.
Industrial Upgrading - Exposure to strict EU standards (SPS/TBT) acts as a "push" for Indian firms to upgrade quality and technology.
Professional Mobility - Eased visa norms for Indian professionals (IT, business services) and students, addressing the EU's shrinking workforce.

5. Key Challenges & The Way Forward

The CBAM Hurdle - The EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) remains a challenge as it was kept outside the FTA's direct scope. However, any future concessions given by the EU to third countries will automatically apply to India.

Regulatory Compliance - Indian MSMEs must rapidly adopt EU environmental and labour standards to avoid non-tariff barriers.

Ratification Speed - With the threat of U.S. trade volatility, both sides must fast-track domestic approvals (27 EU nations) to ensure implementation within 2026.

Conclusion

The India-EU FTA is a mature and pragmatic roadmap that delivers deep market access without compromising core national interests. It transforms India from a passive recipient of global trade rules into a proactive architect of them.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/mature-and-pragmatic-on-india-eu-fta/article70562156.ece#google_vignette

2. Can the right environment make animals 'smarter'? Expert Explains the larger lessons from a brush-wielding bovine – (IE)

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Ecological Intelligence - The Silent Workforce of Nature

Introduction

The ongoing crisis in the Aravalli Range highlights a fundamental flaw in modern development - the failure to recognize "Ecological Intelligence." This concept views nature not as a resource to be extracted, but as an integrated system of "silent workers"—from ancient mountains to tiny ants—that sustain human civilization.

1. The Aravalli Range - India's Ecological Shield

Geological Sentinel - One of the world's oldest fold mountain systems, predating the Himalayas.

Desertification Barrier - Acts as a physical wall preventing the expansion of the Thar Desert into the Indo-Gangetic plains.

Water Reservoir - Critical for groundwater recharge in water-stressed regions like Delhi-NCR, Haryana, and Rajasthan.

Biodiversity Hub - Serves as a vital corridor for wildlife (e.g., leopards) and native flora.

Current Threats - Rampant mining, urban encroachment, and the dilution of environmental protection norms.

2. Nature's Invisible Workforce

The stability of our environment depends on the uncompensated "labor" of non-human species -

Trees as "Ecological Republics" - Functions as a micro-ecosystem supporting fungi, insects, and birds. Regulates local climate (Carbon sequestration) and enhances rainfall infiltration.

Ants as "Ecosystem Engineers" - Aerate the soil and recycle nutrients. Crucial for seed dispersal and maintaining soil fertility.

Birds as "Ecological Indicators" - Provide pest control and pollination. Their presence or absence is a primary signal of the health of an ecosystem.

3. Interconnectedness - Science Meets Philosophy

Modern Ecology - Validates the "Food Web" and "Nutrient Cycle" as empirical proof that no species exists in isolation.

Ancient Wisdom - Aligns with Indian philosophies like Advaita Vedanta and Buddhist "Interbeing," which reject the divide between humans and nature.

Habitat Fragmentation - Infrastructure projects (roads/mines) break these connections, leading to a collapse of ecological resilience.

4. The Human Cost of Alienation

Ecological Amnesia - Modern urban life creates a "manufactured disconnection" from the land, leading us to ignore the ecological memory stored in aquifers and soil.
Reactive Governance - Nature is often only valued *after* a disaster (floods/droughts) occurs, rather than being protected as a custodian of life.
GDP vs. Ecology - Formal economics fails to account for ecosystem services, treating environmental extraction as "growth" and replenishment as "cost."

5. The Way Forward

To transition from an exploitative model to one of Ecological Stewardship, India must -
Strengthen Legal Frameworks - Grant stricter protection to "Eco-Sensitive Zones" like the Aravallis.
Value Ecosystem Services - Integrate "Green Accounting" into national economic planning.
Restore Landscapes - Focus on native reforestation and the protection of wildlife corridors.
Listen to Nature - Move toward a development model that respects ecological limits and traditional wisdom.

Conclusion

The environmental crisis is not just a technical problem but a spiritual and cognitive one. Sustainable survival depends on recognizing that humans are part of a larger ecological network. Protecting the Aravallis is not just about saving rocks and trees; it is about securing the "infrastructure of life" itself.
Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-sci-tech/can-the-right-environment-make-animals-smarter-10495842/