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1.As per the Supreme Court's order, the Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA) has directed Karnataka to release 2.5 TMC of water to Tamil Nadu in May from the Cauvery River.

(i) The 50th meeting of the Cauvery Water Management Authority was held at its office in Delhi in a hybrid mode (both online and in-person) to discuss the release of water to Tamil Nadu.

(ii) Officials from the Water Resources Departments of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, and Puducherry were invited to participate, and representatives from all these states attended the meeting.

(iii) The meeting was conducted to ensure that Karnataka releases water to Tamil Nadu as mandated by the Supreme Court in the Cauvery dispute.

(iv) The meeting was chaired by CWMA Chairman S.K. Haldar. From Tamil Nadu's side, State representative and Water Resources Department Secretary Jayakanthan, along with R. Subramanian, head of the Cauvery Technical Cell and Inter-State Water Division, participated via video conference from the Chennai Secretariat. During the meeting, Tamil Nadu emphasized the following:

- As of 28.04.2026, the storage level in the Mettur Dam is 42.397 TMC. Water is being released at 1503 cubic feet per second (cusecs) for drinking, industrial use, and environmental flow.
- In the current irrigation year (2025–2026), from June 1, 2025, to April 27, 2026, Tamil Nadu received 326.945 TMC of water at Biligundlu, against the stipulated 174.500 TMC, including surplus flows.
- Karnataka argued that the surplus water released should also be counted. Tamil Nadu rejected this, stating that water released by Karnataka due to inability to store it cannot be claimed as its contribution.
- Considering the storage levels in Karnataka's reservoirs, Tamil Nadu insisted that Karnataka must ensure the release of 2.5 TMC of environmental flow in May, as per the Supreme Court's order, at Biligundlu.

Following this, the CWMA directed Karnataka to release 2.5 TMC (thousand million cubic feet) of water to Tamil Nadu in May.

- 1 TMC equals the quantity of water released at 11,574 cubic feet per second continuously for 24 hours.

(v) Background:

- In 2018, the Supreme Court delivered its verdict on the Cauvery water-sharing dispute between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. It specified the monthly quantum of water to be released by Karnataka to Tamil Nadu.
- To implement this verdict and monitor water sharing, the Court established two bodies:
  - Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA)
  - Cauvery Water Regulation Committee (CWRC)
- These bodies periodically meet and issue directions based on the Supreme Court's ruling regarding the sharing of Cauvery River water.

2. On the occasion of the 250th anniversary of American Independence, King Charles III addressed a joint session of the United States Congress. He described the relationship between United States and United

Kingdom as one of the most important in human history. He also emphasized that the United States should avoid isolation in global affairs and remain actively engaged.

3. China has announced that it will grant full tariff exemptions on certain imports, up to a specified limit, for 20 additional African countries with which it maintains stable diplomatic relations.

(i) This tariff concession will come into effect from Friday (May 1) and will remain in force for two years until April 30, 2028.

(ii) Earlier, in December 2024, China had extended this benefit only to 33 least-developed African countries. Now, the scheme has been expanded to include 20 more African nations that were not previously on the list.

(iii) At the same time, a quota (limit) will be set for goods exported from Africa to China. Zero tariff will apply only to goods within this quota.

(iv) If exports exceed the specified limit, normal tariffs will be imposed on the additional goods, as clarified by China's customs tariff authority.

(v) "Golden Key for Development":

A spokesperson from China's foreign ministry, Lin Jian, stated that a total of 53 African countries will benefit from this scheme. He added that it will enable high-quality African products to directly reach Chinese households. At the same time, Chinese investments and industrial growth in Africa are expected to increase. Overall, he described the initiative as a "golden key" for Africa's trade prosperity and industrial development.

(vi) According to 2025 data, total trade between China and Africa reached $348 billion, with China exporting $225 billion and Africa exporting $123 billion. It is expected that this new tariff exemption will help reduce the trade imbalance.

4. Excavation work at a human mass grave discovered in the Semmani area of Jaffna has resumed following a court order.

(i) The Semmani issue first drew attention in the 1990s, when the conflict between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and Sri Lankan Government forces was at its peak. In 1998, 15 skeletons were discovered in this area.

(ii) In February last year, during routine maintenance work in the same area, additional skeletal remains were unearthed. The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka stated that these likely belong to individuals who were unlawfully killed during the war period.

(iii) Subsequently, excavation work began in May under judicial supervision. A total of 240 human skeletons were identified and recovered. However, the work was halted last September due to a lack of funds.

(iv) Now, after an allocation of 2.1 million Sri Lankan rupees, the Court has ordered the resumption of the work after about seven months. Representatives from the European Union and countries such as France, Germany, Italy, and Romania have been permitted to observe the process.

(v) As the 30-year civil war ended in 2009, the emerging evidence is now drawing international attention.

5. Vijay Anand will assume charge as the new Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of City Union Bank, headquartered in Kumbakonam, from May 1.

(i) This leadership change comes as the tenure of the current MD & CEO, N. Kamakodi, who has significantly contributed to the bank's growth over the past 15 years, comes to an end. Vijay Anand joined the bank as Executive President in 2023 and was promoted to Executive Director last year.

6. Parag Agrawal, former CEO of Twitter (now X Corp), founded the AI company Parallel Web Systems, which has now reached a valuation of $2 billion.

(i) The company achieved this milestone after raising $100 million in a recent funding round from leading global investment firms.

(ii) Founded in August last year, the company focuses on building foundational infrastructure for autonomous AI agents. Its primary goal is to enable systems that can browse the internet and gather information far faster and more accurately than humans. Notably, its "Long Horizon" AI technology is designed to handle complex, time-consuming tasks seamlessly in the background.

7. At the IBSF World Billiards Championship held in Ireland, India's Sourav Kothari defeated fellow Indian and 19-time champion Pankaj Advani by 1,133–477 points to retain his title.

8. The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has proposed amendments to vehicle emission norms to expand the use of ethanol blending and alternative fuels.

(i) These changes aim to promote the use of blended fuels and clean biofuels across all types of vehicles.

(ii) The draft amendments to the Central Motor Vehicles Rules, 1989 propose wider adoption of fuels such as E85 (85% ethanol blended with petrol), E100 (vehicles running almost entirely on ethanol), B100 (100% renewable biodiesel), and hydrogen-CNG blends.

(iii) A 30-day period has been provided for stakeholders, including individuals and organizations, to submit their feedback on these proposed changes.

(iv) It is worth noting that India already uses petrol blended with 20% ethanol, as part of efforts to develop cleaner fuels, reduce dependence on crude oil imports, and lower carbon emissions.

9. Analysis of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) recently signed between India and New Zealand

(i) Context and Strategic Necessity

- Following changes in the United States' administration, the structure of the World Trade Organization (WTO) has weakened, making it essential for India to secure bilateral agreements to protect its economic interests.
- India has already signed more than 20 Free Trade Agreements with nations and regions including Mauritius, UAE, Oman, Britain, the EU, and Australia.
- Trade between India and New Zealand increased by 49% in 2024–25, reaching $1.3 billion, yet India's share in New Zealand's total imports remains low at 1.84%. The new deal aims to double the trade volume within the next five years.

(ii) Specific Benefits to India

The agreement opens significant doors for Indian exporters and skilled professionals:

- Duty-Free Access: New Zealand has agreed to provide 100% import duty exemption for all Indian exports.
- Tax Removals:
    - A 10% tax has been removed on Indian readymade garments, leather goods, footwear, and engineering spare parts.
    - A 5% tax was eliminated for Indian pharmaceuticals, electronic devices, and value-added agricultural products.
    - Duties on ceramics and motor vehicle parts have also been removed.
- Professional and Student Migration:
    - Under a temporary entry visa, 5,000 Indian professionals in sectors like Information Technology are allowed to stay and work in New Zealand for three years.
    - Opportunities have been specifically created for AYUSH doctors, Indian culinary experts, and music teachers to work in New Zealand.
    - Indian students studying in New Zealand are now permitted to work 20 hours part-time per week.

(iii) Specific Benefits to New Zealand

New Zealand gains access to one of the world's largest consumer bases and diversifies its economic partnerships:

- Market Access: New Zealand now has direct access to India's 140-crore population, specifically targeting the massive middle-class consumer segment.
- Duty Reductions: India has removed 95% of the import duties previously placed on New Zealand's wool, coal, alcoholic beverages, avocados, and berries.
- Service Sector Expansion: New Zealand can now participate in 118 different service sectors in India, including tourism, education, and computer technology.
- Technological Exchange: The deal allows New Zealand to export its advanced technology in agriculture and manufacturing sectors to India.
- Reducing China Dependency: The deal is a strategic move for New Zealand to reduce its heavy economic dependency on China by strengthening ties with India's rapidly growing economy.

(iv) Safeguards and Economic Security

- Protection of Indian Farmers: To protect local interests, India has not provided any tax concessions to New Zealand on sensitive agricultural items such as dairy products, onions, sugar, spices, cooking oil, and rubber.
- Investment Potential: With New Zealand having an international investment capacity of $422 billion, the sources suggest that even a 10% investment in India would mark the agreement as a massive success.

This agreement is a victory for both nations, providing New Zealand with a vital market alternative to China and offering India a path to becoming a global hub for services and manufacturing.