

# NEWS TODAY

## INDIA, ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS (ASEAN) REVIEW STRATEGIC TIES

- At an ASEAN-India virtual meeting **both sides reviewed status of ASEAN-India strategic partnership in several areas** including maritime cooperation, connectivity, education & capacity building and people-to-people contacts.
  - India-ASEAN region together **comprise one-fourth of global population, and their combined GDP is estimated at USD 3.8 trillion.**
- Progress in implementation of the ASEAN-India plan of action (2016-2020) was also reviewed and a **new plan of action was adopted for the next five years.** Key points of Action plan includes:
  - Political cooperation by strengthening existing mechanisms** for consultation and cooperation.
  - Enhance economic cooperation** through capacity building and technical assistance programmes.
  - Strengthening Security cooperation, promoting physical connectivity** by completing India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway.
  - Promote freedom of navigation, unimpeded commerce, and resolution of disputes** by peaceful means.
- Other issues discussed:** ways to strengthen cooperation to fight COVID-19 pandemic, exchanged views on important regional and international developments etc.
- This meeting at a came time when **both India and ASEAN are engaged in territorial dispute with China.** However, it is not immediately known whether these issues figured in the deliberations or not.



## SINGAPORE CONVENTION ON MEDIATION COMES INTO FORCE

- The Convention, **also known as United Nations (UN) Convention on International Settlement Agreements Resulting from Mediation**, is the first UN treaty to be named after Singapore.
- Convention **applies to international settlement agreements resulting from mediation**, concluded by parties to resolve a commercial dispute.
  - It will allow businesses **to seek enforcement of a mediated settlement agreement across borders** by applying directly to courts of countries that have signed and ratified the treaty.
  - Currently, **Convention has 53 signatories, including India, China, and US.**
- Significance of the Convention**
  - It will **facilitate international trade and commerce** by enabling disputing parties to easily enforce and invoke settlement agreements across borders.
  - Businesses will benefit from **mediation as an additional dispute resolution (ADR) option** to litigation and arbitration in settling cross-border disputes.
  - It helps to **save time and legal costs** of companies.
- Benefits for India:** will boost ease of doing business credentials by enabling swift mediated settlements, provide a positive signal to foreign investors about India's commitment to adhere to international practice on ADR.

Alternative Dispute Resolution refers to any **means of settling disputes outside of the courtroom.** ADR typically includes negotiation, conciliation, mediation, and arbitration.

○ **Negotiation:** A non-binding procedure in which discussions between the parties are initiated without the intervention of any third party with the object of arriving at a negotiated settlement to the dispute.

○ **Mediation:** In mediation, an impartial person called a "Mediator" helps the parties try to reach a mutually acceptable resolution of the dispute.

○ **Arbitration:** In this dispute is submitted to an arbitral tribunal which makes a decision (an "award") on the dispute that is mostly binding on the parties.

○ **Conciliation:** A non-binding procedure in which an impartial third party, the conciliator, assists the parties to a dispute in reaching a mutually satisfactory agreed settlement of the dispute.

## PEACE TALKS BETWEEN AFGHAN GOVERNMENT AND TALIBAN STARTED IN QATAR

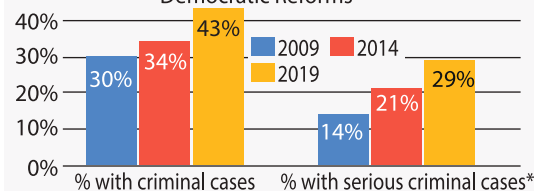
- Talks **follow February 29, 2020 US-Taliban agreement** that bypassed Afghanistan government and set out a timetable for withdrawal of foreign forces, in exchange for counter-terrorism guarantees from Taliban.
  - The talks **were delayed due to difference over a prisoner exchange** made as part of US-Taliban agreement.
- Significance of Peace talk**
  - To end the 20 years of war that has killed more than 1,60,000 people.
  - To determine political future of Afghanistan after US withdrawal.
  - To maintain gains made for gender justice and social equality since 2001.
- India participated in inaugural session** of negotiations and conveyed that any peace process:
  - Must be **Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled.**
  - Respect national sovereignty and territorial integrity of Afghanistan.
  - Preserve **interests of minorities, women and vulnerable sections** of society.
  - Address issue of violence** across the country and its neighbourhood.
- India's concerns:** Pakistan playing to install Taliban as its proxy in Kabul, as Taliban has links with terrorist groups that target India and Indian interests in Afghanistan, extension of China Pakistan Economic Corridor to Afghanistan etc.

## ELECTION COMMISSION (EC) INSTRUCTIONS CONCERNING PUBLICITY OF CRIMINAL ANTECEDENTS BY CANDIDATES

- Existing guidelines need every candidate to **declare their criminal antecedents three times before an election**, in a national daily and two regional language newspapers.
  - Candidates and parties **time advertisements in such a way that this gets least public attention.**
- Under new guidelines, **declaration will have to spread over three rounds of publicity** beginning with soon after filing nomination and ending towards end of campaign period.
  - It will help **voters in exercising their choices in a more informed manner.**
- In March 2020, **EC announced a new self-declaration format for political parties** to ensure that they make public details of criminal antecedents of every candidate and explain reasons for their selection.
  - It **follows a Supreme Court order and earlier EC instructions** on the matter issued in 2018 and 2019.
- Impact of criminalization:** undermines sanctity of Parliament, Loss of public faith in Judicial machinery, culture of muscle and money power in politics etc.
- Legal provisions**
  - Article 102(1) and 191(1)** disqualifies an MPs and an MLAs respectively on certain grounds.
  - Section 8 of Representation of People Act, 1951**, bans convicted politicians. But those facing trial are free to contest elections.

### Under the scanner

Close to **43% winners** of the 2019 Lok Sabha polls have criminal cases against them, according to the Association for Democratic Reforms



\* rape, murder, kidnapping, crimes against women, etc

# CABINET APPROVED AMENDMENTS TO 3 LABOUR CODES

- Union cabinet **approved amendments to the labour codes on social security, industrial relations, and occupational safety and health**, which could include pension and medical benefits to gig workers.
- Last year, government decided to **condense the 44 labour laws into four codes** as part of labour reforms. (see table)
  - > One of them - the **code on wages has already been passed** by parliament.
  - > Remaining **three codes were sent to a Standing Committee** and have now been now approved by the Cabinet.
- The codes aim at **simplification, amalgamation and rationalisation** of Central Labour Laws.

Labour code	What it subsumes	Certain Provisions on which amendments are done	Implications
<b>Labour Code on Industrial Relations</b>	⊙ Subsumes Trade Union Act, 1926; Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946; Industrial Disputes Act, 1947	⊙ <b>Hiring and firing laws eased.</b> ⊙ <b>Legal backing for fixed-term employment.</b> ⊙ Norms tightened for forming unions.	⊙ Easier to hire and fire thus <b>encouraging employment.</b> ⊙ Fixed-term employment <b>will create more jobs.</b>
<b>Labour Code on Social Security &amp; Welfare</b>	⊙ <b>Subsumes 9 Labour Acts</b> like: Employees' Compensation Act, 1923, Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, etc.	⊙ Proposes <b>social security for gig and platform workers.</b> ⊙ National social security board will be setup.	⊙ Will benefit 40crore organised workers. ⊙ Will open up EPFO and ESIC for individuals.
<b>Labour Code on Occupational Safety, Health &amp; Working Conditions</b>	⊙ <b>Subsumes 13 Labour Acts</b> like: Factories Act, 1948, Plantation Labour Act, 1951, Mines Act, 1952 etc.	⊙ <b>Uniform provision</b> for women, fixed-term and contract workers. ⊙ <b>Special provisions for certain classes of establishments</b> such as factories, mines, dock workers, and constructions workers	⊙ Will ensure uniform health and safety conditions for all. ⊙ <b>Work hours for different classes of establishment and employees</b> will be notified by the central or state government.

## ALSO IN NEWS

<b>Hybrid Warfare</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It refers to <b>use of unconventional methods as part of a multi-domain war fighting</b> approach that aims to disrupt and disable an opponent's actions <b>without engaging in open hostilities.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Russia's approach to Ukraine is an example of this form of warfare.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Through targeted cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns and espionage, hybrid warfare <b>seeks to incite social discord, disrupt economic activities, undermine institutions, and discredit political leadership and the intelligentsia.</b></li> </ul>
<b>Competition Commission of India (CCI)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCI <b>dismissed allegations of abuse of dominance against Amazon</b> in online fashion retail space, finding that company is not dominant in the relevant market.</li> <li>• CCI is a statutory body <b>established under the Competition Act, 2002</b> for administration, implementation and enforcement of the Act.</li> <li>• <b>Duty of CCI</b> is to eliminate practices having adverse effect on competition, promote and sustain competition, protect interests of consumers and ensure freedom of trade in Indian markets.</li> <li>• CCI consists of <b>a Chairperson and 6 Members</b> appointed by Central Government.</li> </ul>
<b>Nathu La border trade</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tension between India and China at Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Ladakh is affecting business through Nathu La.                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; <b>Nathu La connects the state of Sikkim with China's Tibet Autonomous Region.</b></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Trade route <b>popularly known as the old silk route</b> resumed in 2006, after it was closed since the Indo-China war in 1962.                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Old Silk Route used to connect Lhasa in Tibet via the Jelep La Pass to India.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Trading activity takes place for six months</b> (May to November) and only registered traders are allowed to buy and sell.</li> </ul>
<b>Project 17A</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project 17 A involves <b>the construction of seven warships.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Project 17 A class stealth frigates are being <b>built using indigenously developed steel</b> and fitted with weapons and sensors along with Integrated Platform Management System.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The frigates are being <b>developed by Mazagon Dock Limited, Mumbai, and Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers, Kolkata.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; First frigate under the project INS Nilgiri was launched in 2019.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Methane hydrate reserve at Krishna-Godavari (KG) basin</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A study by Agharkar Research Institute, Pune <b>finds massive methane hydrate deposits of biogenic origin in KG basin</b> and near the coast of Andaman and Mahanadi                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Methane hydrate is <b>formed when hydrogen-bonded water and methane gas come into contact at high pressures and low temperatures in oceans.</b></li> <li>&gt; It is estimated that one cubic meter of methane hydrate contains 160-180 cubic meters of methane.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• It is estimated that Methane present in Methane hydrates in KG Basin is <b>twice that of all fossil fuel reserves available worldwide.</b></li> </ul>

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