

2020



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# CURRENT AFFAIRS

**INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

10<sup>th</sup> February - 15<sup>th</sup> February



BusinessLine



## 1. Agartala - Akhaura Rail Link

### Why in News?

Recently, the Central Government of India has announced that the rail **line to connect the Northeastern region with Bangladesh** will be ready by the end of 2021.

### Key Points

- The rail line between **Agartala in Tripura and Akhaura in Bangladesh** would pave the way for the first train to run from the northeastern region to Bangladesh.
- The railway link will connect **Gangasagar in Bangladesh to Nischintapur in India** and from Nischintapur to Agartala railway station.
- **Ministry for Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER)** will bear the cost of laying 5.46 km track on the Indian side while the cost of laying 10.6 km track on the Bangladesh side is being borne by the Ministry of External Affairs.
- The project will be implemented by IRCON.
- The railway project was conceptualized in 2010.
  - Later, both the countries had signed MoU on this railway project in 2013.

### IRCON International

- IRCON International Limited, formerly Indian Railway Construction Limited (IRCON), is an engineering and construction organisation, specialized in transport infrastructure.
- It was established in 1976, by the Government of India under the Comp. Act 1956.
- IRCON was registered as the Indian Railway Construction International Ltd., a wholly (100%) owned entity of the Ministry of Railways.
- Its primary charter was the construction of railway projects in India and abroad.

## 2. India - Sri Lanka Relations

### Why in News?

Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa visited India from 8<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> February 2020.

- He visited Kashi Vishwanath Temple in Varanasi, the Maha Bodhi temple in Bodh Gaya and Tirupati (Andhra Pradesh).

### India - Sri Lanka Relations

- **Tamil Issue:**
  - India expressed confidence in Sri Lanka to carry forward the process of reconciliation of Tamils in Sri Lanka.

- India has also requested to fulfil the aspirations of the Tamils for equality, justice, peace and respect in Sri Lanka.
- **Development in War Affected Areas:**
  - Sri Lanka has requested India to build more houses in the north and east.
    - The Indian Housing Project is the Government of India's flagship project of developmental assistance to Sri Lanka.
    - India has so far helped build 46,000 homes in the war-affected areas.
  - It has also requested to provide assistance for deep-sea fishing techniques which will help to create employment opportunities for people.
    - Both countries have agreed on certain practical arrangements to deal with the issue of bona fide fishermen of either side crossing the International Maritime Boundary Line.
- **Joint Marine Resources Management Authority:**
  - Sri Lanka has also proposed to set up a Joint Marine Resources Management Authority between two countries.
  - The proposed Authority is expected to find a lasting solution to the Palk Bay fisheries conflict.
    - The Palk Strait is a strait between the Tamil Nadu state of India and the Jaffna District of the Northern Province of Sri Lanka.
- **Debt Trap:**
  - They also discussed countering '**debt traps**' experienced by Sri Lanka.
    - Debt-trap diplomacy refers to the strategy used by China to lure or trap developing or underdeveloped countries like in Africa to borrow money to be used for much-needed infrastructure projects.
- **Indian Ocean Region:**
  - Both the countries agreed to provide close cooperation for peace and prosperity in the Indian Ocean Region and even in the Indo-Pacific region.
- **Terrorism:**
  - Both countries aimed to strengthen the contacts and cooperation between the counter-terrorism agencies of the two countries.

## Background

- India Sri Lanka's relationship is 2500 years old with significant cultural and political contacts.
- During the course of the civil war, India supported the right of the Government of Sri Lanka to act against terrorist forces.

- Sri Lanka is one of India's largest trading partners in SAARC.
- India and Sri Lanka conduct joint Military ( 'Mitra Shakti') and Naval exercise (SLINEX).
- Recently, the Chennai (India) - Jaffna (Sri Lanka) flight service has resumed after a gap of 41 years.
  - The flight operations were suspended during the decades-old civil war in Sri Lanka.

### 3. India - Portugal Boost Cooperation

#### Why in News?

Recently, India and Portugal signed 14 agreements during the state visit of Portugal's President to India. These agreements aimed to boost cooperation in a range of areas- maritime, intellectual property rights, aerospace and scientific research.

#### Key Points Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

- MOU for Cooperation for Setting Up a National Maritime Museum Heritage Complex in Lothal (Gujarat) between Portuguese Ministry of Defence and Indian Ministry of Shipping.
- MOU between Economic and Food Safety Authority (ASAE) and DPIIT, Ministry of Commerce or co-operation in the field of industrial and intellectual property rights
- Joint Declaration on India and Portugal Mobility Partnership
- MoU between We-Hub Telangana and PARKURBIS Covilha for Exchange of Women Start-up Entrepreneurs
- MOU between VEDA Defence and UA Vision for production of drones
- MOU between TERI-DEAKIN Centre, Gurugram and International Iberian Nanotechnology Laboratory (INL) Braga for co-operation in Nano-biotechnology

#### Portugal

- **Location:** Southwestern Europe, bordering the North Atlantic Ocean, west of Spain
- **Climate:** Maritime temperate; cool and rainy in the north, warmer and drier in the south.
- **Terrain:** the west-flowing Tagus River divides the country: the north is mountainous toward the interior, while the south is characterized by rolling plains

#### 4. **BIMSTEC Disaster Management Exercise - 2020**

##### **Why in News?**

Recently the 2<sup>nd</sup> **Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)** Disaster Management Exercise (DMEx) was conducted in Bhubaneswar, Odisha.

- The focus of the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of Exercise is on heritage structures' protection.
- The 1<sup>st</sup> edition of the BIMSTEC DMEx was also hosted by India in 2017.

##### **Key Points:**

- Delegates & rescue teams of five member nations of the BIMSTEC group participated in this exercise:
  - India
  - Bangladesh
  - Nepal
  - Sri Lanka
  - Myanmar
- Bhutan and Thailand are not participating in the exercise.
- Global institutions are also participating in the exercise:
  - **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)**
  - **International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG)**
    - It is a global network of more than 90 countries and deals with Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) related issues, aiming to establish minimum international standards for international coordination in earthquake response.
  - **International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration Cultural Property (ICCROM)**
    - It is an intergovernmental organisation which works with its members to promote the conservation of all forms of cultural heritage, in every region of the world.
- **Reasons for Focus on the Heritage Sites:**
  - In the backdrop of recent losses suffered in an earthquake in Nepal (2015), damages to Heritage Sites in Gujarat earthquake (2001), the need was felt to protect the Heritage Sites during disasters and build the capacity of NDRF personnel.

##### **Bay of Bengal Initiatives for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC):**

- BIMSTEC is a sub-regional intergovernmental organisation that came into being in 1997 through the **Bangkok Declaration**.
- It is a 7 member grouping that links 5 countries from South Asia namely:
  - Bangladesh
  - India

- Sri Lanka
- Bhutan
- Nepal
- 2 countries from SouthEast Asia:
  - Myanmar
  - Thailand
- BIMSTEC not only connects South and South-East Asia, but also the ecology of the Himalayas and the Bay of Bengal.



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