3rd June, 2022

NEWS JUICE

Intelligent Compilation from The Hindu, Indian Express & others along with News Background

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What is News Juice?

BY PREPMATE
1. The European Union’s ban on Russian oil

Relevant for GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues

As part of the sixth package of sanctions since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the European Union member states on May 30 reached an agreement to ban 90% of Russian crude oil imports by the end of the year. The partial embargo, worked out following extended negotiations in Brussels, exempts pipeline oil in order to bypass Hungary’s objections to the ban.

What was the original proposal of the oil embargo?
The proposal to completely phase out Russian crude and refined products from EU territory within a time frame of six to eight months was first mooted by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in early May. Addressing European lawmakers, she sought a “complete import ban on all Russian oil, seaborne and pipeline crude and refined.” It needed the agreement of all the 27 EU member states in order to be implemented.

What was the rationale behind such a move?
The Russian economy is heavily dependent on energy exports, with the EU paying billions of dollars every month to Russia for its crude and refined products. The EU wants to block this massive revenue inflow, as repeatedly pointed out by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, is akin to Europeans bankrolling Russia’s war. The EU has been attempting, ever since the Ukraine invasion, to build consensus on ways to hurt Russia economically so that it is forced to roll back its military offensive. The most obvious route was to stop buying Russian energy, which isn’t easy given European households’ dependence on Russian oil and gas. However, in the context of two long term EU objectives — reducing fossil fuel dependence in favour of renewables, and eliminating dependence on Russian energy for greater strategic autonomy and energy security — member states agreed to make a start by phasing out Russian oil.

What are the terms of the ‘compromise deal’ that has been agreed upon?
The main departure from the original proposal is the “temporary exemption” from the oil embargo for countries that import Russian crude via pipeline. In other words, EU leaders have, in principle, agreed to ban all seaborne imports of Russian crude, which account for two-thirds of EU’s oil imports from Russia. However, with Germany and Poland pledging to phase out even their pipeline imports from Russia by the end of the year, the embargo would eliminate 90% of Russian oil imports. The remaining 10% that’s been allowed represents a free pass for Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Bulgaria to continue imports via the Druzhba pipeline, the world’s largest oil pipeline network. Additionally, Hungary has obtained a guarantee that it could even import seaborne Russian oil in case of a disruption to their pipeline supplies.

This was deemed a legitimate concession since the pipelines do pass through the war zone in Ukraine.

Why was exemption given for pipeline imports?
The exemption for pipeline imports — essentially at the behest of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban — was made on the logic that landlocked countries (Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia) that are heavily dependent on Russian pipeline oil do not have a ready option to switch to alternative sources in the absence of ports. While Hungary imports 65% of its oil via pipeline from Russia, 50% of the Czech Republic’s oil imports are Russian, while Slovakia gets 100% of its oil from Russia. Bulgaria, which gets 60% of its oil from Russia, is not landlocked. But its refineries at present are only equipped to process Russian crude.

Until it invests in infrastructure to be able to process non-Russian crude delivered to its ports, it wants to be able to continue importing Russian oil via pipeline and has accordingly claimed the exemption.

Do the exemptions dilute the embargo?

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EU leaders have countered this criticism by pointing out that even a partial (90%) embargo on Russian oil represents tremendous progress in terms of weaning EU off Russian oil — something that was unthinkable even a few months ago given the magnitude of Europe’s dependence on Russian energy imports.

Secondly, they have reiterated that even the exemption for pipeline imports is not permanent and will be revisited soon. However, no timeline has been specified for a total ban on pipeline imports.

Are there other elements in the sixth package of sanctions?
Apart from the oil embargo, the sixth package of sanctions also contains other tough measures against Russia. These include cutting off Sberbank, Russia’s largest bank that holds one-third of Russian banking assets, from the SWIFT messaging system; a ban on three Russian-owned broadcasting networks from the EU; sanctions on individuals responsible for war crimes in Ukraine; and a ban on EU-based firms offering insurance, financing, brokering or any other technical services related to the transport of oil to Russian ships — a measure aimed at curbing Russia’s ability to divert its oil to non-EU destinations.

How will the sanctions affect Russia?
Analysts calculate that a two-thirds cut in Europe’s imports of Russian oil would mean a reduction of 1.2-1.5 million barrels a day in oil, and one million barrels in refined products, which might cause Russia an annual loss in revenue of $10 billion. Given Russia’s limited storage infrastructure, the cutback in demand would force Russia to find other markets. Since that won’t be easy, Russia might have to cut production by 20-30%, say industry experts. So far, Asian importers, especially India, have absorbed some of the excess inventory at discounted prices. But it remains unclear if the embargo would have any impact on Russian military operations in Ukraine.

How will the sanctions affect Europe?
It is likely to further fuel inflation in Europe, where many countries are already facing a cost-of-living crisis. EU leaders have tried to balance contradictory pressures — of having to take decisive action against a military aggressor on European soil, but without causing too much pain to its citizens. But European lifestyles have tended to take cheap Russian energy for granted, and if inflation peaks further, the EU runs the risk of losing public support for harsh sanctions.

What about import of Russian gas?
Compared to Russian oil, Europe’s dependence on Russian gas is much greater, and this embargo leaves the import of Russian gas — which accounts of 40% of Europe’s natural gas imports — untouched. In other words, Europe will continue to pay Russia for gas imports. But since crude is more expensive than natural gas, the oil ban is expected to hurt Russian revenues.

How has India responded to these developments?
India ramped up purchases of Russian crude at discounted prices in the months following the Russian invasion, and this policy is expected to continue. The announcement of the EU ban caused an immediate surge in oil prices, and as Europe seeks alternate sources – from West Asia, Africa and elsewhere — for its oil needs, prices are expected to stay high. In this context, with Russia reportedly offering discounts of $30-35 per barrel, India has found it convenient to make the most of the cheap Russian crude on offer.

Source: The Hindu

2. Understanding gun control legislation of different countries

Relevant for GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues

The U.S. recently witnessed two episodes of mass shootings in a span of 11 days that killed more than 30 people including elementary school children. In 2020, it had witnessed 24,576 homicides, of which approximately 79%, or 19,384 incidents, involved the use of a firearm.
**What do gun laws in the U.S. say?**
The Second Amendment of the U.S. constitution, which states that “the right of the people to keep and bear Arms shall not be infringed”, is often attributed as the root cause of all firearm-related violence. The U.S. Supreme Court previously held that the amendment protects the right to “keep and bear arms” for self-defence, while federal courts argue of a potential infringement if federal, state and local firearm regulations circumvent this right.

**How are Arms regulated in Canada?**
Canada introduced legislation to amend its Firearms Act on Monday. It is proposing to institute a ‘national freeze’ on handguns — preventing sale, purchase, transfer and import of handguns into Canada. The legislation is of particular significance because handguns were used in 49% of all firearm-related homicides in 2020. Possessing a fully-automatic weapon, unless registered before 1978, is illegal in Canada. Gun licences are valid for five years and accorded to individuals at least 18 years of age upon completing the Canadian Firearms Safety Course. Vetting is undertaken to ensure that applicants do not have a history of violence, are suffering from mental illnesses or were previously barred from the process. The proposed legislation would revoke licences from holders deemed to be a danger to themselves or others, (by means of partner violence, gender-based violence, among others). It is mandatory for individuals and businesses to update records before transferring ownership of non-restricted items. In 2020, firearm-related homicides constituted 39% of all homicides in the country.

**How do gun laws work in Japan?**
Acquiring a gun in Japan is particularly difficult — one has to present a series of documents, establish their ‘needs’, undertake an approximately month-long training on handling and safety, pass a scrutiny of criminal records and medical health, and then an exam to prove eligibility. Buying a weapon too requires a separate certification (from the dealer) mentioning the desired model.

Applicants must be 18 years, not suffering from mental illnesses, not having a license revoked less than five years ago, not dependent on alcohol or narcotic substances, and have a fixed residence.

Any violation is punishable with an imprisonment for a period up to three years, which could extend up to five years or more along with a fine of 10 million yen if done for “purpose of profit”. The Council on Foreign Relation states that “some analysts link Japan’s aversion to firearms with its demilitarisation in the aftermath of World War II. Others say that because the overall crime rate in the country is so low, most Japanese see no need for firearms”.

**How is it in New Zealand?**
The turnaround in gun-law legislation in the country came in 2019 following the mass shootings that took place at two mosques in Christchurch.

The legislation now requires firearms dealers to provide licence numbers of all its employees at a facility, including those not directly involved in handling any arms but having access to the premises.

It is now also mandatory for all weaponry to have an identification number. In case a dealer receives an item without the same, they are required to have them stamped or engraved within 30 days of receipt. Applicants must be at least 16 years of age and undertake training in handling and storing firearms, and pass an exam. The vetting process requires the applicant to furnish contact details of known people to ascertain that she/he is a ‘fit and proper person’. In addition, if an applicant has resided overseas for six months or more in the past 10 years, she/he would have to provision a criminal history check from each country.

**What about India?**
Gun licence applicants in India must be at least 21 years and not convicted of any offence involving violence, of ‘unsound mind’ or a threat to public safety and peace. Upon receiving an application, the licensing
authority (i.e., the Home Ministry), asks the officer in-charge of the nearest police station to submit a report about the applicant after thorough vetting.

The Arms Act amended in 2019 reduces the number of firearms that an individual can procure from three to two.

Indian laws are particularly elaborate in dealing with sale and unlawful trade of weapons. It also enlists specific provisions on curtailing the use of licensed weapons to ensure social harmony. No entity is permitted to sell or transfer any firearm which does not bear the name of the maker, manufacturer's number or any other visible or stamped identification mark. Any act of conversion (such as shortening the barrel of a firearm or converting an imitation firearm into a firearm) or unlawful import-export is punishable with an imprisonment term of seven years, which may extend to life imprisonment and be liable to monetary fines.

Source: The Hindu

3. Supreme Court order on Puri Heritage Corridor today, what is the case?

Relevant for GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Polity & Governance

On Thursday, the Supreme Court reserved its orders on petitions against excavation and construction work by the Odisha government along the Puri Jagannath temple as part of the Puri Heritage Corridor Project. A Bench comprising Justices B R Gavai and Hima Kohli is set to pronounce its orders on Friday.

What is the Puri Heritage Corridor case about?
The case in the Supreme Court comes at a time when the Orissa High Court is already hearing a plea against construction by the state government along the 800-year-old Puri Jagannath temple. Puri residents had moved the High Court alleging that the structural safety of the temple could be in jeopardy if land around the temple were dug up. The District Court in Puri is also hearing cases seeking to stop the construction.

Last week, a High Court Bench comprising Chief Justice S Muralidhar and R K Pattnaik had asked the state government to file an affidavit before June 20 and had listed the case for hearing on June 22. The court had earlier also asked the Archeological Survey of India (ASI) to file an affidavit before the court and even conduct a joint inspection along with the state government.

The ASI then told the court that the state government had no requisite permission for the project.

Following the ASI’s affidavit, different petitioners (not the ones before the High Court) have moved the Supreme Court. The SC is examining whether such an appeal through a Special Leave Petition can be permitted before hearing the plea on merits.

What is the construction in question?
Conceived in 2016, the ambitious Puri Heritage Corridor Project has become the centre of a political slugfest between the BJP and the BJD-ruled state government. It involves redevelopment of Puri into a heritage site at a cost of Rs 3,200 crore. The construction has been taken up by the Odisha Bridge and Construction Corporation (OBCC) under the state’s Works Department, while Tata Projects is running it on the ground.

The project includes 22 schemes redeveloping major portions of the temple town. The first phase of work, the cost of which is estimated at Rs 800 crore, began in February 2020. Following this, the Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA) approved the architectural design plan of the project.

The project includes redevelopment of the Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA) building; a Srimandir reception centre (capacity 600); Jagannath Cultural Centre including Raghunandan Library; integrated command and control centre; Badadanda heritage streetscape; improvement of Srimandir
amenities; Sri Setu; Jagannath Ballav pilgrim centre; multilevel car parking; municipal market development; Swargadwar development; Pramod Udyan; Gurukulam; Mahodadhi market; beachfront development; Puri lake; Musa river revival plan; Atharnala; and housing for sevayats.

What is the ASI's role in this?
The 12th-century temple is a centrally protected monument, with the ASI as its custodian. As per the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (Amendment and Validation) Act, the National Monuments Authority (NMA) grants approval for construction and mandates that a heritage impact assessment study must be carried out before developmental work around any monument of archaeological importance with a built-up area over 5,000 square metres. The Jagannath temple is spread over 43,301.36 square metres.

The NMA, which functions under the Union Ministry of Culture, was set up for the protection and preservation of monuments and sites through management of the prohibited and regulated area around the centrally protected monuments.

And what has it said about the project?
On September 4, 2021, the NMA had issued a no objection certificate (NOC) to the state government for the construction of a cloakroom, a shelter pavilion, three toilets, an electrical room and a pavement within the prohibited 75-metre zone. The NMA’s approval was based on the understanding that public amenities do not come under the definition of construction and that the project would be carried out under ASI supervision.

However, after a joint inspection, ASI Director General V Vidyavathi flagged concerns on the project before the High Court. The affidavit filed on May 9 said that there was a possibility that the archaeological remains at the heritage site being destroyed due to the excavation work for the corridor.

On February 21, the ASI also wrote to the state government to review the the project for the development around the Puri Srimandir. “One point of discussion was the proposed reception centre which is at a distance of 75 metres from the temple (part falls under the prohibited area). The building is proposed to be used to hold devotees before they proceed to the main complex. Given that this would be very essential, it was decided that the state government would consider options to slightly move the building beyond 100 metres,” the ASI wrote. It added that moving the building beyond 100 metres would be good in the interest of security of the temple.

How has the state responded?
Advocate General Ashok Kumar Parija relied on the NOC granted by the NMA, arguing that the project has not strayed from the parameters on which the approval was granted. He also sought an opportunity to file a detailed response to the ASI’s affidavit, which the court granted.

The state government has also cited a 2019 verdict by Justice Arun Mishra which highlighted the lack of facilities and mismanagement of the Puri temple premises. In one of the several directions, the SC had also directed that “the ASI shall forthwith clear the plan for construction of sheds/permanent structures which is absolutely necessary”.

On what ground is the project being opposed in the Supreme Court?
The petitioners have contended that the project has “no valid permission” while the Odisha government has insisted that it has. Appearing for the petitioners, senior advocate Mahalakshmi Pavan contended that the construction was happening in violation of Section 20A of the Ancient Monuments Act that sets a minimum of 100 metres within which construction around a protected monument is prohibited, except in exceptional circumstances with the permission of the central government or the ASI Director General.

For the state, Advocate General Ashok Kumar Parija argued that the activities currently being carried out, which are for building public conveniences such as wash rooms, cannot be termed construction within the...
meaning of the Act. He referred to the NOC from the NMA and added that "we are not doing one thing beyond this".

**Source: The Indian Express**

### 4. Gecko found in Andhra, Odisha turns out to be a new species

**Relevant for GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment & Biodiversity**

![An uncollected live specimen of *Eublepharis pictus*. (Pic: Zeeshan A Mirza)](image)

A gecko found in Visakhapatnam in 2017, then thought to belong to a known species, has now been identified as a member of a new species. The species, *Eublepharis pictus*, also known as the Painted Leopard Gecko, has been described in the journal *Evolutionary Systematics*.

Researchers Zeeshan A Mirza (National Centre for Biological Sciences, Bengaluru) and C Gnaneswar of (Madras Crocodile Bank Trust) had initially identified the specimen, which they had found dead in a water tank, as an East Indian Leopard Gecko (*Eublepharis hardwickii*). Now, a phylogenetic study and morphological comparisons have distinguished it as a new species, which appears to be common in the forests of Andhra Pradesh and Odisha.

The gecko genus *Eublepharis* now has 7 species. Before *Eublepharis pictus*, Mirza had also previously described *Eublepharis satpuraensis*. “The new species differs from all members of the genus *Eublepharis* except for *E hardwickii*. Geographically the two species appear to be separated by the Brahmani River,” Mirza and Gnaneswar wrote in their paper.

*E hardwickii* has been recorded from several places in West Bengal, Jharkhand, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh. While noting that the new species is distributed across Odisha and Andhra Pradesh, the researchers wrote. “We here refrain from providing accurate locations of the species to ensure protection from illegal collection for the pet trade.”

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The species occurs outside protected areas. The authors pointed out that most leopard geckos are killed when encountered, and called for raising awareness about the fact that the species is actually harmless. “Based on IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) conservation prioritization criteria we propose to list E pictus... and E hardwickii as Near Threatened (NT) pending further information on local population estimates, especially in protected areas,” the researchers wrote.

Source: The Indian Express

5. What is sologamy or ‘self-marriage’?

Relevant for GS Prelims & Mains Paper I; Social Issues

A 24-year-old Vadodara woman, Kshama Bindu, announced that she would marry herself later this month, in what she described as an “act of self-love”. The wedding, being seen as one of the first instances of self-marriage or “sologamy” in the country, is slated for June 11.

What is sologamy?
Sologamy is the act of marrying oneself in a public ceremony, also referred to as self-marriage or autogamy. While such a marriage has no legal sanction or status, the symbolic ceremony is used by many as an act to emphasize their self-love and independence.

When did the trend begin?
It can be traced back to Linda Baker, a dental hygienist from the US, who married herself in 1993. It is widely considered the first publicized act of self-marriage which was attended by around 75 of Baker’s friends, where the bride said “I do” to honour herself in sickness and in health until the day she’s not there.

A sologamy divorce was also reported last year when a Brazilian model, Cris Galera (33), announced she was ending her solo-marriage after just 90 days as she had fallen in love with someone else.

What kind of ceremonies does self-marriage involve?
There are no rules or social norms. They can be similar to traditional two-people weddings, or not. Since the trend picked up, service providers too have come up in different corners of the world to help their self-marrying clients.

“Marry Yourself” in Canada offers consulting and wedding photography, while IMarriedMe.com in San Francisco offers sologamy ceremony kits, including wedding band and vows. In Kyoto, Cerca Travel offers a two-day self-wedding package.

Announcing her plans to marry herself, Bindu said that she will have a wedding complete with all rituals like pheras and applying sindoor.

Why is the trend finding resonance across the globe?
Alexandra Gill, the founder of Marry Yourself Vancouver, told CBC News, “Today, for the first time in history, women can afford to live on their own, build their careers, buy their homes, create their own lives, have children if they choose. Our mothers and grandmothers didn’t have this option...The idea of sologamy could involve the practice of self-marriage, but it’s also turning the stigma of the sad, lonely spinster on its head. Women are tired of being told they’re failures if they haven’t married by a certain expiry date.”

In her book ‘Quirkyalone’, author and life coach Sasha Cagen writes: “The common theme in most of the stories (about self-marriage) that I hear is a commitment to take care of oneself as one hopes or imagines that a lover would. Women also frame self-matrimony as a unique solution to the problem of women sacrificing their own needs in a relationship. Marry yourself first, they say, before marrying anyone else.”
How is sologamy seen in popular culture?
Self-marriages have featured on popular TV shows like Sex and the City, Glee and Doctor Who. In a 2003 episode of Sex and the City, Carrie Bradshaw was shown wedding herself, with a USA Today report later saying that to some this fictional character is the "godmother of sologamy".

Source: The Indian Express

6. Who are the Tamagotchi Generation, the digital children of the future?

Relevant for GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

A new book has predicted that by the third quarter of this century, parents will have the choice of having digital offspring. Which means that if you are in your teens now, you may look forward to playing with a grandchild who will exist only in the immersive digital world of the metaverse.

This will be the 'Tamagotchi Generation', says British behavioural psychologist and user experience (UX) professional Catriona Campbell, author of 'AI By Design: A Plan for Living With Artificial Intelligence' (CRC Press, 2022).

"Virtual children may seem like a giant leap from where we are now, but within 50 years technology will have advanced to such an extent that babies which exist in the metaverse are indistinct from those in the real world," Campbell writes. "As the metaverse evolves, I can see virtual children becoming an accepted and fully embraced part of society in much of the developed world."

Why ‘Tamagotchi’ kids?
The name comes from the digital pet created by the Japanese toy manufacturer Bandai, which was a global rage in the 1990s and early years of this century. As of last year, more than 80 million Tamagotchi toys had been sold worldwide.

The toy is an egg-shaped video game the size of a keychain, which has a screen and buttons. Once the pet is activated, an egg appears on the screen, and hatches into a pet for the player to raise. The pets feel hungry, happy, sick, and want to go to the toilet etc., and the player can care as much or as little for the pet as they desire. What the pet grows up to be depends on how it has been trained and raised by the player.

What will the kids look like?
Today's technology is unrecognisable from the time when the Tamagotchi toy was developed, and according to Campbell the virtual children of the future can be built to look like their parents, and will be able to provide a range of emotional responses. This, according to an article in The Guardian, will include speech, "which will range from 'googoo gaga' to backchat, as they grow older".

You will have to put on a virtual reality headset to bring the child to life — and a report in The Telegraph quoted Campbell as suggesting that wearing "high-tech gloves able to deliver tactile feedback" while handling the Tamagotchi kid "might reproduce the physical sensations of cuddling, feeding and playing with one’s offspring".

A report in The Mail Online quoted Campbell as saying parents would be able to interact with their digital kids in digital environments such as a park, swimming pool or living room. “They will also be able to choose how quickly the children grow up, if at all, and can share conversations and listen to a baby’s coo and giggle as part of the vision for the futuristic technology,” the Mail Online report said.

But what’s wrong with real kids?
There is nothing wrong — the Tamagotchis will just be the metaverse version for those who might want them. And the metaverse is seen as the inevitable future of the Internet.
However, Campbell has mentioned what she sees as specific advantages to preferring a virtual kid to a real one — among them, the fact that they will cost virtually nothing to bring up, they will consume very little resources in a world that is already bursting at the seams and where the spectre of food shortages looms large, and they will have a tiny environmental footprint from beginning to end.

The Telegraph report quoted a 2020 YouGov study into why couples chose not to have children found that nearly 1 in 10 are concerned about overpopulation, and another 10 per cent are worried about the cost of raising a child.

“Make no mistake that this development, should it indeed take place, is a technological game-changer which, if managed correctly, could help us solve some of today’s most pressing issues, including overpopulation,” the Mail Online report quoted Campbell as saying.

All of this sounds so fantastical and improbable.

It may not be. The Internet and mobile phones also sounded like bizarre ideas to many when they were first proposed. Tech experts have repeatedly predicted that the metaverse and Internet of Things, powered by advanced telecoms networks of the future, will change almost every aspect of the ways in which we live and work.

So far as digital babies go, a proof of principle is already in existence. Several years ago, the Laboratory for Animate Technologies at the University of Auckland said it was working on “an interactive animated virtual infant prototype” called BabyX, a “computer-generated psychobiological simulation...incorporating computational models of the basic neural systems that are involved in interactive behaviour and learning”.

The New Zealand company Soul Machines, led by AI researcher Dr Mark Sagar (who worked on the special visual effects of Hollywood films ‘King Kong’, ‘Avatar’, and ‘Rise of the Planet of the Apes’), has since pioneered research into progressing human-machine collaboration, and built BabyX with her own digital brain which, according to the company, “autonomously animates BabyX in real-time, creating a natural interaction between human and machine”.

Source: The Indian Express

7. Why is the Israel-UAE trade pact more than just another international deal?

Relevant for GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues

Israel and the United Arab Emirates signed a historic trade agreement on May 31 with an aim to do trade worth more than $10 billion annually. The UAE is now the first country in the Arab world to have a free trade agreement with Israel.

The deal comes two years after the then US President Donald Trump first brokered the process of normalisation of ties between Israel and the UAE, Bahrain through the Abraham Accords in 2020.

What is the deal?

After the deal, tariffs will be removed or reduced on 96% of goods traded between the two countries. The UAE predicted the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement would boost annual bilateral trade to more than $10 billion within five years. Trade was already at $1.2 billion in 2021, according to the Israeli data.

“Our agreement will accelerate growth, create jobs and lead to a new era of peace, stability, and prosperity across the region,” the Emirati trade minister, Thani al-Zeyoudi, said on Twitter.
The UAE has of late engaged in talks for similar accords with Indonesia and South Korea. It signed an agreement with India in February that eliminated duties on goods which account for 90% of India’s exports to the UAE by value.

**How must the deal be viewed given the Gulf region’s history?**
The relations among countries in the region, particularly the Gulf, are shaped by multiple, complex factors – geopolitics over the control of oil and other valuable resources, rivalry between Sunni-majority Saudi Arabia and Shia-majority Iran, and the Israel-Palestine conflict.

The Israel-Palestine conflict has always cast a shadow on how nations in the region deal with Israel. However, there have been attempts at establishing peace. The 1993 Oslo Accord, signed by the leaders of Palestine and Israel in the US with the cooperation of Norway, was a landmark moment. Though it did not achieve success in ending the conflict, it led to a kind of thaw in relations between Israel and MENA (Middle East and North African) countries in both official and unofficial ways. Jordan signed its peace deal with Israel in 1994.

In a 2021 report by the Brookings Institute titled ‘The emergence of GCC-Israel relations in a changing Middle East’, it was noted how this still did not result in a domino effect because of the Arab world’s historic support for Palestine.

It noted that in 2002, Saudi Arabia led the Arab Peace Initiative, which outlined the principle of first establishing a Palestinian state and then normalising relations between the Arab world and Israel. But even in Saudi Arabia, this view is expected to soften due to the presence of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

The Brookings report also says as per Abu Dhabi’s Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, “The principal threats to the UAE and its allies are an expansionist Iran and transnational political Islamists.” Israel is seen as a formidable regional power that shares these views, so a better ties with it makes strategic sense. The promise of being closer to “the US strategic orbit” is an important factor too.

What has been noted by many is the speed with which that pact has been inked, coming just two years after Israel and UAE established official relations. The trade deal, observers say, points towards the changing priorities of Arab nations, and their willingness to engage with Israel despite the outstanding issues.

**How sustainable are these ties?**
Trade and cooperation has been growing, even as the UAE has simultaneously been critical of Israel’s actions towards Palestinians. In the summer of 2021, shortly after violence erupted in the Gaza Strip, Israel’s Foreign Minister visited the UAE in June to inaugurate the country’s embassy despite the UAE condemning the eviction of Palestinians by Israeli authorities in the lead-up to the violence.

Al-aqsa Mosque has been a flashpoint often, with violence breaking out this year as well. The UAE foreign ministry on Monday again condemned “storming” of the Al-aqsa compound in Jerusalem by “extremist settlers under the protection of Israeli forces”, and then on Tuesday signed the deal with Israel.

**Source: The Indian Express**
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