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1. India and Iran signed a 10-year contract recently for the operation of a terminal in Iran's Chabahar port?

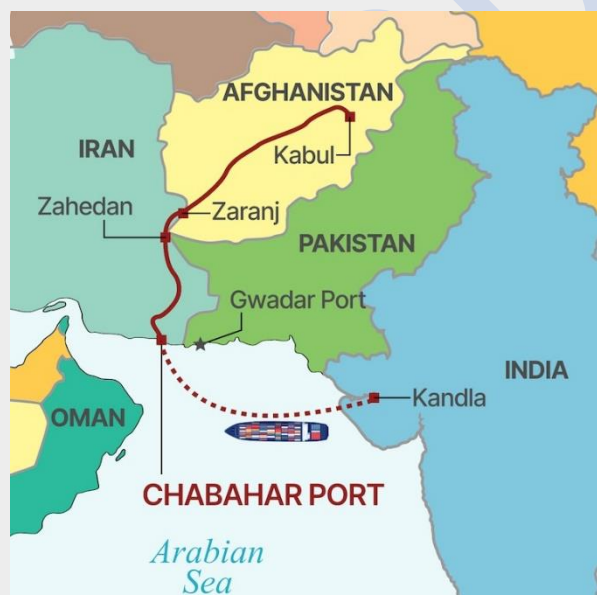
Why in News?

India and Iran signed a 10-year contract recently for the operation of a terminal at the strategically important Chabahar port in Iran.

Chabahar is a deep water port in Iran's Sistan-Baluchistan province, located 72 km west of Pakistan's Gwadar port. It is the Iranian port that is the closest to India, and is located in the open sea, providing easy and secure access for large cargo ships.

Union Minister for Shipping, Ports and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal witnessed the signing of the contract between India Ports Global Ltd (IPGL) and Ports & Maritime Organisation of Iran (PMO) in Tehran.

IPGL will invest approximately \$120 million to equip and operate the port for the duration of the contract, and the two sides will further extend their cooperation in Chabahar thereafter. India has also offered a credit window in rupees equivalent to \$250 million for mutually identified projects to improve infrastructure related to the port.



Slow start to project

Modern Chabahar came into being in the 1970s. In January 2003, President Khatami and then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee signed off on an ambitious roadmap of strategic cooperation. Among the key projects the two countries agreed on was Chabahar, which held the potential to link South Asia with the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Europe.

Progress after 2015

While India spent about \$100 million to construct a 218-km road from Delaram in western Afghanistan to Zaranj on the Iran-Afghan border to link with Chabahar, the port

project itself progressed at a glacial pace. But things started to change in 2015 after talks between Iran and the P-5+1 bore fruit.

The attitude of the Donald Trump administration towards Iran complicated matters after 2017, but India appeared determined to stay the course. New Delhi managed to get a waiver from the US for the Chabahar project, citing access to Afghanistan as a reason.

India's approach also stemmed from the fact that China was aggressively pursuing President Xi Jinping's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative for massive infrastructure development across large parts of Asia and Africa.

Developments in recent years

India has so far supplied six mobile harbour cranes (two of 140-tonne and four of 100-tonne capacity) and other equipment worth \$25 million.

IPGL has been operating Chabahar port through its wholly owned subsidiary, India Ports Global Chabahar Free Zone (IPGCFZ), since December 24, 2018.

The port has also facilitated the supply of humanitarian assistance, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. Till date, a total of 2.5 million tonnes of wheat and 2,000 tonnes of pulses have been trans-shipped from India to Afghanistan through Chabahar port. In 2021, India supplied 40,000 litres of the environment friendly pesticide (malathion) through the port to Iran to fight locust attacks.

Chabahar and INSTC

With the operationalisation of the long-term investment, Chabahar could potentially become an important hub to connect India with the landlocked countries of Central Asia and Afghanistan. However, to better realise its commercial and strategic potential, the development of the port must be integrated with the larger connectivity project of the International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC).



The INSTC, which was initiated by Russia, India, and Iran, is a multi-modal transportation route envisaged to link the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea via Iran, and onward to northern Europe via St Petersburg in Russia.

The INSTC envisages the movement of goods from Mumbai to Bandar Abbas in Iran by sea; from Bandar Abbas to Bandar-e-Anzali, an Iranian port on the Caspian Sea, by road; from Bandar-e-Anzali to Astrakhan, a Caspian port in the Russian Federation by ship across the Caspian Sea; and onward to other parts of the Russian Federation and Europe by rail.

However, the war in Ukraine and the destruction of Europe's relationship with Russia has since complicated the future of this project.

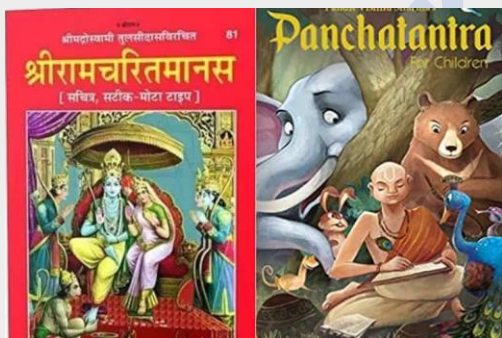
Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations

Source: Indian Express

2. Three Indian literary works included in UNESCO's Memory of the World Regional Register: What is their significance?

Why in News?

Three Indian literary works, Ramcharitmanas, Panchatantra, and Sahṛdayaloka-Locana, were added to UNESCO's Memory of the World Asia-Pacific Regional Register during the tenth meeting of the Memory of the World Committee for Asia and the Pacific (MOWCAP), held earlier this week in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.



What is the significance of the works?

The inclusion of the three works in the register highlights the significance of preserving and celebrating diverse narratives and artistic expressions that shape our shared humanity. These literary works have transcended time and place, leaving an indelible mark on readers and artists both within and outside India.

The three texts were picked due to their enduring worldwide appeal. For instance, the Ramayana and Ramcharitmanas are read in not only India but also in other Southeast Asian countries such as Cambodia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia.

The Panchatantra fables were zeroed in owing to their universal moral values. The 15th-century Sahṛdayaloka-Locana, by Kashmiri scholars Acharya

Anandvardhan and Abhinavagupta, was chosen because of its aesthetics.

This is the first time since the MOWCAP was formed in 2004 that India has sent any nominations, and all three sent by the country have been accepted.



What is the MoW register?

UNESCO's MOW programme is an international cooperation strategy aimed at safeguarding, protecting, and facilitating access to and the use of documentary heritage, especially heritage that is rare and endangered. According to its charter, UNESCO launched the initiative in 1992 "to guard against collective amnesia" by calling upon the preservation of invaluable archive holdings and library collections all over the world and ensuring their wide dissemination.

The programme recognises documentary heritage of international, regional and national significance, maintains registers of it, and awards a logo to identified collections. It facilitates preservation and access without discrimination. It campaigns to raise awareness of the documentary heritage to alert governments, the general public, businesses and commerce to preservation needs and to raise funds.

Inscription on the register affirms the significance of the documentary heritage, makes it better known, and allows for greater access to it, thereby facilitating research, education, entertainment, and preservation over time.

What are the other items on the list?

There are 494 inscriptions on the International MoW Register, as of May 2023, according to the UNESCO website. However, the MoW register operates on regional levels as well. The Memory of the World Asia-Pacific Committee (MOWCAP) — which has now included the three Indian texts — celebrates Asia-Pacific achievements in genealogy, literature, and science. Along with the three Indian items on the list, the Member States inscribed 20 items during the 2024 cycle, at the tenth General Meeting in Ulaanbaatar.

Since it was established in 1998, the MOWCAP Regional Register has inscribed 65 items from Asia-Pacific countries.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains paper II; International Organisations

Source: Indian Express

3. What the draft Digital Competition Bill proposes, why Big Tech opposes it

Introduction

Taking a leaf out of the European regulatory handbook, India has proposed a new digital



competition law that could stop tech giants like Google, Facebook, and Amazon from self-preferencing their own services, or using data gathered from one company to benefit another group company.

The draft law, called the Digital Competition Bill, 2024, also has provisions to set presumptive norms to curb anti-competitive practices before they actually

take place, and promises to impose heavy penalties — which could amount to billions of

dollars — for violations. If this were to go in force, it could require big tech companies to make fundamental changes to their various platforms.

The proposal is similar to the EU's Digital Markets Act (DMA), which went into complete effect earlier this year, and requires large tech firms like Alphabet, Amazon and Apple to open their services, and not favour their own at the expense of rivals. The law came in on the back of a long history of anti-competitive practices by these companies.

The Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA), which is handling the draft, has called for comments.

Key proposals of the draft digital competition Bill

1. Predictive regulation

Due to the complex world of digital markets, which are ever-growing with increasing interlinkages between various offerings made by a single company, regulating for market abuse after it takes place (as in an ex-post framework) is not optimal. Instead, a forward-looking, preventive, and presumptive law (an ex-ante framework), which foresees the potential harms that can arise out of antitrust issues and prescribes pre-determined no-go areas is perhaps the way forward. This is one of the foremost proposals in the draft Bill.

Currently, India follows an ex post antitrust framework under the Competition Act, 2002. One of the biggest criticisms of the law has been that regulating after the incidence of market abuse involves delays — by the time the offending company has been penalized.

2. Significant entities

The Bill proposes that for certain "core digital services" like search engines, and social media sites, the Competition Commission of India (CCI) should designate companies as "Systematically Significant Digital Enterprise (SSDE)" depending on various quantitative and qualitative parameters such as turnover, user base, market influence etc.

Entities that don't fall under these parameters can still be designated as SSDEs if the CCI believes that they have a significant presence in any given core digital service. Entities which are designated as SSDEs, have been prohibited from engaging in practices such as self-preferencing, anti-steering, and restricting third party applications. If they violate these requirements, they can be fined up to 10% of their global turnover.

3. Associate Digital Enterprises

Understanding the role that data collected by one company of a major technology group can play in benefitting other group companies, the Bill proposes to designate associate digital enterprises (ADEs).

If an entity of a group is determined to be an associate entity, they would have the same obligations as SSDEs depending on the level of their involvement with the core digital service offered by the main company. Illustratively, if one were to look at Google Search and how it steers direction data to Google Maps, the latter can theoretically be deemed an ADE. Same would apply to YouTube too, depending on the level of data sharing that happens between

the core Google Search and how that plays out in the recommendations that YouTube makes to users.

Criticism of the draft

There has been resistance to this Bill.

1. For big tech companies, an ex-ante framework with its strict prescriptive norms could lead to significant compliance burden, and shift focus from innovation and research to ensuring that companies do not presumptively engage in an anti-competitive practice. As a result, the tech giants are calling for the current competition law to be strengthened rather than moving towards an ex-ante framework.

2. If the law were to go into effect as is, it would mean that a company like Apple will have to allow iPhone users to be able to download apps from a third-party app store, over Apple's own store — something that the company has lobbied against vehemently. While Android's relatively open nature over iOS allows such 'sideloading' of apps, Google too has advocated against it, primarily claiming that apps that are downloaded from outside their stores can have potential security ramifications.

3. Companies are also understood to be concerned about the broad definition — both quantitative and qualitative — of who a significant platform could be. Unlike EU's DMA which specifically names the 'gatekeeper' entities, that decision in India's draft law has been left to the discretion of the CCI. Companies believe that could lead to arbitrary decision making, which could potentially also impact start-ups. Companies are claiming that if they have to make the changes to their platform and cut down on data sharing, that could also impact smaller businesses who rely on their platforms to reach a big target audience.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Source: Indian Express